

## **Traditional ecological knowledge along the Yukon River**

**Abstract:** The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) conducted a study to collect and utilize traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) held by people living in the villages along the Yukon River as an attempt to better understand changing salmon runs. The study took place during the summers of 2001 and 2002. Twenty-nine participants were interviewed in the four Yukon River villages of Alakanuk, Saint Mary's, Holy Cross, and Nulato. We collected information on local observations of salmon lifecycles, abundance, environmental change and habitat.

Through this study we learned that participants are highly affected by the newly regulated subsistence schedule and that their detailed knowledge of their environment, gained through generations of local observations, assists them in understanding king salmon behavior. They attributed the changing salmon patterns, at least partly, to a natural cycle of highs and lows. Their recollection of diseased salmon was that they have only occurred recently. The size of the king salmon were reported as very similar to the past but the stocks of salmon (chums and kings) are more mixed than in the past. Different stocks of king salmon (i.e. 'white nose' and 'blue back') were described but they were not consistent for all the villages. Inter-village communication is still an important element of preparing for the arrival of the salmon but people are spending less time at fish camps. Participants described a variety of examples of TEK indicators they rely on for determining salmon arrival time, run strength and size. These TEK run projections could be compiled annually to assist managers in predicting how many salmon will return each year.

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