



2023 Winter Regional Advisory Council Meeting Packet

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This summary is compiled in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

2023 Yukon River Salmon Season Forecasts

The official outlook will not be finalized until spring; however, preliminary Chinook and Chum salmon forecasts are for run sizes below escapement goals. The Chinook Salmon drainage wide forecast is for a range of 62,000 to 104,000 with a midpoint forecast of 82,000 fish. A Chinook Salmon run of this size is not expected to meet escapement goals. Additionally, Canadian-origin Chinook Salmon are forecasted to be below the Interim Management Escapement goal of 42,500 to 55,000 fish.

The preliminary summer Chum Salmon forecast is for a run size of 557,000 fish with a range of 280,000 to 900,000 fish. Although the upper half of the forecast is within the drainage wide escapement goal range of 500,000 to 1.2 million summer Chum Salmon, managers are uncertain what effects the extreme water temperatures seen in 2019 had on this year's expected 4-year-old age class.

The preliminary fall Chum Salmon forecast is for a run size of 251,000 fish with a range of 112,000 to 602,000 fish. The drainage wide escapement goal for fall Chum Salmon is 300,000 to 600,000 fish. Like the summer Chum Salmon run, managers are uncertain regarding the strength of this year's returning 4-year-old component. Unless the run comes in near the upper end of the forecast, a run of this size is unlikely to meet escapement goals including the 70,000 to 104,000 Canadian Interim Management Escapement Goal.

The Coho Salmon run is forecasted to be below the average of 222,000 fish.

2023 Fishing Expectations

Based on recent trends and this year's forecasts, fishers should expect limited salmon fishing opportunities and likely closures, especially early in the season. If the runs continue to be poor, salmon fishing may be closed all season and fishers should plan to harvest other species with non-salmon gear, similar to last year. Managers will be watching the lower Yukon test fishery, Pilot Station sonar, and listening to local fishers to assess the strength of the incoming salmon

runs. If runs come in better than anticipated, fishing opportunities will be implemented based on the amount of surplus available.

Tribal Consultation, Public Outreach, and Upcoming Meetings.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will continue to offer government-to-government Tribal Consultation meetings. Pre-season Tribal Consultation meetings will be held for each district during the month of May or at the request of any Yukon River Tribal Government, and we encourage Tribal leaders to participate in these meetings.

The outlook and management strategy will be discussed in depth this spring at the following meetings: Yukon River Panel April 1-5, the Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission (YRITFC) preseason meeting, and the Yukon River Drainage Fishermen's Association (YRDFFA) Board meeting April 17 and 18, and public preseason fishermen's meeting April 19 and 20.

An Outlook flier presenting the finalized pre-season management strategy will be mailed to all Yukon River households sometime in early May and will likely be released as a cooperative ADF&G and Service Advisory Announcement. Additionally, inseason assessment data and management actions will be discussed weekly on the Tuesday YRDFFA teleconferences, shared on the ADF&G Facebook page, and through regular advisory announcements. Daily test fish counts and fishery announcements can be found on ADF&G's toll-free hotline, 1-866-479-7387.

Throughout the season management staff are available by phone or email.

Ichthyophonus Study

Fishers in Subdistricts 5-A, 5-B, and 5-C reported an increase in *Ichthyophonus* during the 2020 and 2021 seasons, leading to a multi-agency collaboration to investigate the impacts of disease on Yukon River Chinook salmon. Unfortunately, this research requires that approximately 180 Chinook Salmon be sacrificed from each sampling location. In 2023, sampling will occur at Pilot Station sonar, the Rapids, Fort Yukon and Eagle sonar. Some may feel that sacrificing Chinook Salmon for a study is unacceptable when subsistence fishers are being restricted.

The USFWS and ADF&G is looking for your feedback and support for *Ichthyophonus* sampling during the next few seasons. Included is an informational flyer on this study that outlines the ongoing work and how sacrificed fish will be distributed to the community for subsistence use.

To reduce the harvest of fish drainage-wide for research purposes, and to focus on other research projects, the Lower Yukon Chinook Set Net Test Fishery in Emmonak will not be run, which will reduce the take of Chinook by, on average, about 150 fish. In concert with the *Ichthyophonus* investigation, a Chinook tagging study will be operated in the lower river by ADF&G. Live Chinook will be tagged with a radio tag and tracked up river in order to test if in river mortality is occurring, and where. A flier about this project will also be provided.

The managers would like to acknowledge the very serious hardship the last few seasons has caused Yukon River families. We would also like to thank Yukon River fishers for their input and feedback during these difficult years, and commend those Tribes and communities that took steps to provide fishing gear, freezers, and came up with creative solutions to compensate for loss of salmon meals. Yukon fishers have shown incredible resiliency in adapting to the changing environment and changing salmon run sizes.