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Copper River In-Season Salmon Teleconference Summary

Date: June 12, 2025

Next Teleconference: June 26, 2025

Season Wrap-Up: August 28, 2025

Meeting Purpose & Introductions

Deanna Kosbruk (AITRC) opened the meeting by welcoming participants and emphasizing the purpose: to share observations from subsistence users and receive updates from the agencies on fishery conditions and management. She introduced the AITRC staff team:

- Jim Simon – Deputy Director
- Trevor – Wildlife Technician
- Alex – Stream Restoration Biologist
- David Miller – Tribal Stewardship Project Coordinator

Barbara Cellarius (WRST) introduced herself and colleague Benjamin Pister, WRST's Team Lead for Research and Stewardship. Meeting ground rules were reviewed, emphasizing the importance of respectful communication and clear identification before speaking.

Other Participants:

OSM-

Kevin Foley
Brooke McDavid

Subsistence Users:

Dustin Slocum (NVC)

Agency Updates

ADF&G – Commercial Fishery (Copper River District)- Jeremy Botz

- The most recent commercial fishing period occurred on Monday, June 9.
 - Harvest totals:
 - ~25,000 sockeye
 - ~160 Chinook

- The fishery was conducted offshore, with a line drawn across the entire district to minimize Chinook salmon harvest.
 - This protective measure has also significantly reduced the sockeye harvest opportunity.

Sonar Counts (Miles Lake)

- **Recent sonar counts have risen sharply:**
 - ~25,000 fish per day recorded over the past two days.
- **Cumulative counts as of June 10:**
 - Sockeye: ~283,000, exceeding the current management objective of 228,000.
 - Large fish (likely Chinook): ~11,000 apportioned.

Lower Copper River Subsistence Fishing

- The federal dipnet fishery near 36 Mile (end of the road) has been productive recently.
 - Participants are reporting good numbers of sockeye being caught.
- The subsistence fishery in the Copper District has slowed down notably.
 - Most activity occurred earlier in the season (May–early June).
 - Lower effort expected in upcoming periods.

Upper River Fisheries Update – Tracy Hansen (ADF&G, Division of Sport Fish)

Personal Use Fishery – Chitina Subdistrict

- Opened on Sunday, June 11 at 6 PM.
- A full week of fishing time has been authorized via emergency order:
 - Open through Sunday, June 22, at midnight.
- No Chinook salmon retention is allowed in the personal use fishery until after July 1.

State Subsistence Fishery – Glenallen Subdistrict

- The fishery remains open.
- ~400 state subsistence permits issued as of the latest count.
- Reports from various areas indicate mixed success, with Chitina fish wheels especially impacted by low water levels.

Sport Fisheries

- **Sockeye:**
 - Klutina River is seeing consistent sockeye returns, and anglers are reporting steady catches.
 - River levels remain lower than average, though they've come up slightly over the past week.
- **Chinook (King Salmon):**
 - The Gulkana River is the only open sport fishery for Chinook at this time.
 - Effort is low, with a few kings caught between Sailor's Pit and the Richardson Highway bridge.
 - Kings are just beginning to appear at Sourdough, but numbers remain limited.
 - Sockeye are also present, but most anglers on the Gulkana are targeting kings.

Forecast and Management Outlook

- Chinook run appears weak, based on early data.
- ADF&G will review more days of data before making a formal in-season projection.
- If current trends continue, the Gulkana sport fishery for kings may be restricted early next week.

Wrangell–St. Elias National Park & Preserve (WRST)

Tanada Creek Weir Update – Benjamin Pister (WRST)

- The Tanada Creek Weir is currently up and operational, despite recent staffing transitions and a near-disaster incident on-site.

Incident Report – June 11:

- A dead tree fell on the weir while Benjamin Pister and Dan Gorze (AITRC) were present.
- Initially feared to be a significant setback, the team was able to cut and remove the tree using on-site tools.
- No structural damage was found beneath the tree, and the weir remains intact.

- The tree had previously supported tension cables, so some minor maintenance will be needed to restore those supports.
- The weir is currently allowing fish passage, and the video monitoring system is active.
- As of this update, no fish have been observed passing yet, but fish are expected to arrive soon, given accelerated upstream movement due to low water conditions.
- Barbara Cellarius had no additional updates at this time from the Wrangell St. Elias NPS.

Pete Rand (Cordova / PWSSC):

- Reminded participants to watch for sockeye with radio tags and to report tag numbers or recoveries.
 - Drop boxes located at the ADF&G Glennallen office and O'Brien Creek

Subsistence User Reports

- **Dustin Slocum (Chitina):**
 - Reported sporadic catches and very low water, impacting harvest success.
 - Approximately 20 sockeyes in the first two days of starting the wheel this past Monday.
- **Benjamin Pister (Personal Experience):**
 - **Dipnetting results:**
 - Saturday: 15 fish
 - Sunday: 10 fish
 - Tuesday: 11 fish
 - Noted that the river is starting to rise, improving fishing conditions.
- **Barbara Cellarius (Anecdotal Report):**
 - A friend in Silver Springs reported catching ~20 bright, good-sized fish overnight.
- **Kelsey Stanbro (Tazlina Community Wheel):**
 - Monday: 5 sockeye, 2 kings
 - Tuesday night: ~10 sockeye
 - Still, as of Wednesday, water levels are noticeably low.

Closing Remarks

- Deanna and Barbara encouraged broad participation in upcoming teleconferences.
- Reminder:

Next meeting: June 26, 2025

No Teleconference: June 19th, 2025

Season Wrap-Up Event: August 28, 2025

Participants were thanked for their continued involvement and asked to help **spread the word** about the teleconferences to support broader engagement among subsistence users.