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**Weekly Copper River Salmon In-Season Teleconferences**  
**Thursday, July 18, 2024, 11 AM**

**Zoom meeting:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87998112979?pwd=aulvIcrVOfaBiS4W24MQrwlZQhcAxM.1>

**Meeting ID:** 879 9811 2979 **Passcode:** 380518

**Call in at** 1-719-358-4580

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**About:**

These calls aim to share and learn from others' observations about Copper River salmon harvests and returns during the fishing season, river conditions, and other factors that may affect harvests and returns.

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**Participants Identified (11 total):**

- *AITRC Staff:* Deanna Kosbruk, Jim Simon, Hannah Bengtson
- *WRST Staff:* Barbara Cellarius, Amber Cohen, Mark Miller, Dave Sarafin
- *ADFG In-Season Managers:* Mark Somerville (Glennallen Area Office), Jeremy Botz (Prince William Sound Area Office)
- *Public:* Faye Ewan (Kluti-Kaah), Fred Dahl (Chitina)

**Introduction and Ground rules:**

- Deanna Kosbruk welcomed everyone to the teleconference and thanked them for calling in and attending. She introduced herself and the staff that were in attendance.
- Deanna Kosbruk stated the purpose is to provide a venue for Copper River subsistence fishers to share and learn from others' observations about Copper River salmon harvests and returns during the fishing season, river conditions, and other factors that may affect harvests and returns.
- Barbara Cellarius introduced herself and the staff in attendance and reviewed the "ground rules" for the conversation.
  - Be polite, respectful, and considerate of others
  - Wait for your turn to speak
  - Introduce yourself with your name and where you fish as you start speaking
  - Be patient and don't interrupt even if you strongly disagree with what's being said.
  - Put your phone or computer on mute when you are not speaking
  - Everyone who wishes to speak will be allowed to do so before someone speaks for a second time.

## **Agency Updates:**

**Dave Sarafin, Fisheries Biologist Wrangell St. Elias National Park, and Preserve:** Dave Sarafin, fish biologist here at the Wrangell St. Elias Park. I put out weekly summaries that many of you have seen. That has been doing really well. I'm sure maybe Jeremy will touch on that too. But the big project I have been spending time on a lot is Tanada Creek Weir, I've got a crew out there. The counts are at about 1,500 to date, very similar to what we had last year, getting close to 150 to 200 the past day. The creek level is dropping quite low. It's still at a level that's allowing fish to enter the creek, but it could be affecting the passage rates. Whereas last year, we had water levels that were conducive for fish passage throughout the season. So, we'll see how it goes. Things are going well there with the crew and operations.

**Jeremy Botz, ADF&G Gillnet Area Management Biologist:** Thanks, Barbara. Jeremy again, so the commercial fishery for sockeye salmon is winding down. The harvest has been dropping pretty rapidly over the last few periods. We went from close to 150,000 fish harvested in the period that started on July 8 to about 34,000 sockeye in this last period. We're basically through the historical harvest timing forum for Chinook salmon at this point; we had 20 in this last period. We do catch, out of the area, Chinook that is just feeding in the marine waters there. So, it's tough to say what you know, one of those low-level harvest is even Copper River bound. We're starting to catch a few coho, close to a couple of 100 over the last couple of fishing periods. The cumulative harvest to date for the Copper River District commercial fishery is about 1.35 million sockeye and 1,800 Chinook salmon. The sockeye harvest indicates it's definitely an above-average, pretty strong, sockeye run this year. The Chinook salmon harvest is on the lower end and indicative of a smaller run; that's kind of it's been born out in-river with our in-river abundance indicators. Right now, at Miles Lake, we're still tracking above our minimum daily targets for the date the accumulative is up pretty close to the upper target for the date, well above the target at this point. So right now, we're at a total passage of about 845,000 salmon. It looks like we'll easily exceed 900,000, so it probably between 900,000 and a million by the time we cease operation would be my best guess at this point. I expect that commercial fishing efforts will continue to decline. Folks will take a break for the next couple of weeks, and then once the chum fishery starts to pick up, we'll start to get some effort back in the district to target chum salmon.

**Faye Ewan, Kluti-Kaah area subsistence user to Jeremy Botz:** I would like to know where the fish are at. If it's that many fish coming this way, how come nobody got any in? The fishwheels are getting no more than five to twenty fish. We used to get millions of fish coming this way. Now, since the commercial fisheries open, you close our Kings down, and now, the fish are not coming in. I fish. I know. I watched it from Chitina to Slana. The fish have a very low count, and I don't know why you guys keep the commercial fishing open. What you're going to do is starve our nation out. It's not right. I think it's time for you guys to start managing to try to see what is going on here because we know the scientific fact of what's happening. The fish are not passing Chitina, they are getting wiped out before they hit the Copper River. And something needs to be done about this legal stuff that you guys are doing by managing our fishing and our way of life and depleting our fishing. And when it gets to our home, and our kids are starving, that is not what you call good management. Thank you.

**Jeremy Botz responding to Faye Ewan:** So, I've got one more thing to add that I forgot that is somewhat related to Faye's comment, the hatchery contributions in the commercial harvest and the Gulkana hatchery sockeye salmon run have been tracking strong this year, around 100,000 Gulkana hatchery marked fish in the commercial harvest. And timing-wise, that coincides with this second spike in passage that we saw starting up in early July. So, I would think that we've got, you know, a pretty large contingent of Gulkana hatchery and Gulkana River stocks moving through they should be heading to the mainstream of the Gulkana here soon.

**Mark Somerville, ADF&G Upper Copper/Upper Susitna Area Manager:** Nothing much new. We saw another bunch of fish come through the sonar there at Miles Lake. That number is going to drop off here as we get towards the tail end of July and the sonar shuts down. I agree with Jeremy, there will probably be somewhere around 900,000 to a million fish in the river this year. It's an interesting dynamic with the high water that we had earlier in the season; a lot of fish were balled up below Woods Canyon. The rate of telemetry that we're doing now showed upwards of 200,000 to 300,000 fish sitting between Baird Canyon and Woods Canyon. It was really interesting to see. But once the water dropped, those fish did start moving. This confirmed the rate of telemetry from harvest records. I'm seeing catches come up in the fishwheels Copper Center area. I just talk with different people they're getting quite a number of fish in their wheels. My wheel down in Chitina is not doing particularly well. The wheel just below me is doing pretty good. So, I know the fish are moving through. Whether everybody's seeing those fish in their wheels, it's hard to say. The water levels are changing a bit, we just had a high-water event in Chitina the last two days that was driven by flows out of the Chitina River. The Copper didn't really rise. They had a couple, two, three feet rise in the canyon. Two days ago, shut down one of the charters, and the river dropped again yesterday, so we're back down to fishwheel levels and water levels the fish can move through. That's about all I have right now. I agree with Jeremy. It looks like a lot of potential for Gulkana River hatchery fish to come in here. I don't expect them to start showing up in the Chitina area now, I don't expect them to show up in fishwheels in the Copper Center, Tazlina area, until the first week or so of August. And then, throughout August, it'll just be building. I am really curious to see how that works out. Definitely could use a nice influx of fish into the Gulkana, something we haven't seen in quite a while, but it'd be good to see where those fish wind up. So far, early sockeye and the Gulkana have been pretty weak, but nice to see if these late sockeye do something out of the ordinary here that we haven't seen since about 2014, so that's my update.

**Faye Ewan to Mark Somerville:** I didn't get one king salmon this summer, so I'm very disappointed in the management. And I got eight reds in my freezer for this winter. And I hope you really feel good about it because a lot of people ask me for salmon, and I really feel bad because I have to tell them I have nothing, there's no fish. It's not right. It's time for you to meet with us and get a management that is going to be appropriate to feed all our people, but I see personal fishermen down in the Chitina wiping out the fishing industry. And that is not right. 35 fish, and then you open it up all the way for the end of the season. Mark. You know what? It's not right to see my kids hungry. I don't like it, especially when we got no king salmon to feed our kids, no strips, no can, and no food in my pantry here to feed my kids this winter. Do you think that is right? Of course not. You better give me your fish. Oh, what you guys kept I want to feed it in Copper Center. I want to feed my people. It's pretty sad. We get 10 fish we are hungry, no fish in their freezer. That's not right. That's not how the Copper River people and Ahtna people treat each other. I am very upset. Thank you.

**Deanna Kosbruk, AITRC:** This is Deanna. Thank you, Mark, and thank you, Jeremy, for your update, and thank you, Faye, for your comment and your questions. Pete Rand is usually on the call as well. He's from Prince William Sound Science Center. If you catch any fish with a tracker on it, call fish and game. Let them know. Give them the tracking number for his research and project. And yeah. So, if you catch any fish with a tracker on it, either call the Fish and Game Glennallen office or bring it in the tag number.

**Participant updates (subsistence users):**

*Batzulnetas, Nebesna, Slana, Chistochina to Gulkana subsistence use area.*

**Barbara Cellarius, WRST:** This is Barbara, and I'm actually up in Slana this week. I went down to the fishwheels that are behind the ranger station. There are a handful of wheels down there, and there was just one wheel fishing when I went down there. And I do not know if it's slow or if it's just people aren't coming down, but it did look like they're sort of looking like not a lot of effort this week when I've been up here.

*Gulkana to Tonsina to subsistence use area.*

**Faye Ewan, Kluti Kaah subsistence area user:** Good morning again. This is Faye Ewan again. I see three fishwheels in Copper Center, then two down here on the end of the corner there. I don't know. I never see any fish from anybody around here in Copper, so I don't know how many fish they're catching or what is being recorded. It seems like not very many. I don't see very many smokehouses in Copper Center being used. So that's my report. Thank you.

*Tonsina to Chitina and Cordova subsistence use area.*

**Mark Somerville, Chitina subsistence area user:** I don't have much to add. As I said, we're seeing some fish coming through down in the Chitina area. At least the flow changed by the airport where I fish. So, with the lower flow, the wheels are turning pretty slow, but they're still catching a few. Mine's catching a few fish. The wheels below me are pretty consistently catching fish. They're probably in 40 to 50 a day at least. And then a wheel just below that's doing about the same. When they run the wheel, they don't run the wheel all the time. And then I haven't heard much from other people down, down along the airport, that I can't get down to those wheels they're on private lands, but the ones above the bridge seem to be doing consistently well on top of that. So that's what I have for down there.

**Fred Dahl, Chitina subsistence area user:** Our wheel is being worked on by the maintenance department, and he's not in the office right now. I haven't seen many fish come out of it in the last couple of days because the youth are usually the ones putting it up and getting it ready, and there hasn't been much for them to do lately.

**Closing remarks, follow-up, and concerns:**

**Deanna Kosbruk, AITRC:** Opened the floor up to questions for area biologists or managers and comments.

**Faye Ewan, Kluti Kaah subsistence area user:** This is Faye Ewan again. All I can say is, for the fishing industry, they did pretty well. I read all the fishing numbers and how much money those people make in the Cordova commercial fishing and Copper River after they're done fishing us out of king salmon, they were wiped out. So, the subsistence personal users are paying the price of what they sold in Seattle, wherever they sell, market, their fish to, and we're paying the prices, like the Yukon Kuskokwim, another three years, you watch, you're going to see, they're going to close down fishing on the Copper River because there's going to be no more fish. And that's the truth, it's someday. The management is going to kill all of our wild food unless we step up and stop them. And there is a moratorium on king salmon. If I can't eat king salmon, commercial fishermen shouldn't be able to fish for king salmon. And what happened to the Constitution of Alaska? Title 12 unit, Section 12 says the natives would be the first in line to fish and hunt. What happened to that they don't even uphold your own constitution? Department of Fish and Game. This is your due process. You're supposed to uphold your Fiduciary Trust responsibility to the people, and we are a people of Ahtna Nation. Thank you.

**Deanna Kosbruk, AITRC:** Thank you, everyone. Any other discussion, questions, concerns, comments, hearing none and not seeing anybody unmuting. A reminder that next Thursday, July 25, we'll have our next weekly Copper River salmon in-season call. So please join us every week, every Thursday, until the end of August.

The next meeting is on July 25<sup>th</sup> over Zoom or in the AITRC building.

**Thanks all around, and the call ended.**