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Weekly Copper River Salmon In-Season Teleconferences Thursday, June 27, 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

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.

Participants Identified (16 total):

- *AITRC Staff*: Deanna Kosbruk, Kelsey Stanbro, Karen Linnell, Hannah Bengtson, Bailey Roberts, Luke Duvall, and Jim Simon
- *WRST Staff*: Barbara Cellarius, Amber Cohen, Ben Pister
- *ADFG*: Mark Somerville, Klaus Wuttig
- *CRNA*: Sarah Sherwood, Vincent Komok
- *PWSSC*: Pete Rand
- *Public*: Lishaw Ann Lincoln, Tursy Smelcer

Introduction and Ground rules:

- **Deanna Kosbruk (AITRC)**: welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for calling in. "So just a reminder that this is an avenue for us to learn from one another and observe the changes, whether it be fish run, the erosion, or just listening from agencies and their reporting. So I'll hand it off to Barbara Cellarius with NPS."
- **Barbara Cellarius (WRST)** introduced herself, notified participants that the call was being recorded for summary notes, and reviewed the "ground rules" for the conversation.
 - Please put your phone or computer on mute when you're not speaking.
 - We ask that people be polite, respectful, and considerate of others, including not interrupting the person speaking. So please be patient and wait for your turn to speak. We'll give everyone who wishes an opportunity to talk before we have folks speak a second time.
 - When we can share observations, we ask folks to introduce themselves with their names and where they fish.

Agency Updates:

Mark Somerville, ADF&G Upper Copper/Upper Susitna Area Manager: I can go ahead. Mark Somerville, ADF&G Glennallen Area Manager. We issued an EO on Tuesday that we're closing King Salmon fishing in the subsistence fishery starting this Saturday. We will also require people to have state permits and to attend to their fish wheels closely. I realize it's a real pain, and know makes it difficult, especially for locals. But it's the only way we can ensure that we're going to get those Kings out of the fish wheels as quickly as possible if they get in caught there. And then dip netters, of course, can't retain Kings either. They'll have to release them. The King Salmon run is pretty shaky right now. We'll see where the final numbers come in. It's hard to get an accurate number in season, but basically, all the projections show us very, very close to that lower-bound escapement goal. And if we had not closed the fishery, we know for sure we would not have met it. We still may miss it, but at least now we've got a fighting chance. Then the sockeye run is doing pretty good. It dropped here on the sonar for a while, but today was a good day, and tomorrow will be a good day. So I don't see any issues with sockeye. They shouldn't be excessively prevalent this year. But we will have sockeye to fish throughout the season. That's my report.

Barbra Cellarius, WRST Cultural Anthropologist and Subsistence Coordinator: I'll go next. It's Barbara Cellarius with Wrangell St. Elias. We have good news from Tanada Creek. The Tanada Creek weir has finally been installed. We had some high water that got in the way of the installation earlier, but they finished putting the weir in yesterday. We still have federal subsistence permits available at the Slana Ranger Station, the Visitor Center, and the Copper Center station. We've gone out to McCarthy; we're doing permit events rather than having them available, permits available, all the time. But we have some events today and then also on July 11. And then the Wrangell St. Elias superintendent is the designated Federal Manager for the Copper River drainage. He has also received a request to exercise that authority to conserve Chinook Salmon. So, we're working through the guidance on evaluating the special action request. Thanks.

Pete Rand, PWSSC Research Ecologist: Pete Rand Prince William Sound Science Center, I don't have anything specific to report. I just want to encourage any subsistence users, if they do catch any of our fish that are radio-tagged, and you'll know by the antenna that's extending out of the mouth of the fish, I think Karen showed some images last week, to report any tagged fish that they see this year. And you can drop the tags off at the Glennallen Fish and Game office. Thanks

Kelsey Stanbro, AITRC Ecologist: Kelsey Stanbro, AITRC's ecologist. I just wanted to quickly give a full introduction of the fisheries technicians who are working for AITRC this year. For anyone who is fishing on the Copper, they will be collecting samples in Chitina and then from Tonsina to Gakona and Gakona to Slana. So essentially most of the Copper River. And if you are fishing, we'll post their number in the chat so that you can call them (907-259-3295). They're taking genetic samples for the state, which is very simple, non-invasive sampling. It's very quick. And then we're also taking health samples. And then hopefully we'll have some reports on some of our health assessments and later readings this year. But I just wanted to give them a chance to say their names so that you can put a face to their names. Bailey Roberts and Luke Duvall. (Both waved hello to attendees)

Karen Linnell, AITRC Executive Director: Karen Linnell, AITRC's Executive Director. Hello. I'm calling in from Anchorage, but I'm a bit concerned about the Chinook closures for subsistence users. This is stuff that we've been talking about with the commercial fishery being open, that type of thing. Again, commercial and personal use comes before subsistence uses. And I know that's how it happens getting upriver, but the priority by law is subsistence. And we need to make sure that we're not impacting subsistence users by overfishing in the other types of fisheries. Thank you.

Participant updates (subsistence users):

Chistochina to Gakona subsistence use area (including upper Copper River, Batzulnetas, Nebesna, Slana, Chistochina)

Karen Linnell, Chistochina Subsistence User: This is Karen again. Fishing has been rather slow in the Chistochina area. Just a few a day. I'm worried that we're not getting enough to feed our families. Thank you.

Gakona to Tonsina subsistence use area.

Lishaw Ann Lincoln, Gakona subsistence user: This is Lishaw Ann Lincoln. My co-worker was able to use a fish wheel two days ago and he got 30 fish up here, just around Gakona Village. And did you know that there is a person up here who's, who has land that they cannot access and they're trying to use an Ahtna permit to get over to their land and throw a fish wheel over there? They try to get through this back road here in Gakona Village. They can't access their land. It's just concerning to me. It was concerning to Charlene. It was a couple of weeks ago.

Karen Linnell to Lishaw Ann Lincoln: That's something to bring up to Ahtna Incorporated. You can talk to them or their land committee.

Vincent Komok, Tazlina (for CRNA) subsistence user: Yeah, our wheel has been pretty slow, but we're only operating our wheel approximately five hours a day, five to six hours a day. Total-wise, it's been about even, we've got 26 reds and 27 Kings total for the year so far. I believe we got it in on June 7th and then we didn't start the wheel until the 10th. Where we have our current fish wheel, because the current has changed, we are going to be relocating as soon as we get access to a new spot. We're going to be moving a little further north. I believe then our numbers will increase. Other than that, it's been pretty slow. The wheel is located at the end of Copperville Rd.

Deanna Kosbruk, Gulkana subsistence user: Okay, thanks. I'll do a quick report. So my name is Deanna, My parents have a fish wheel in Gulkana. Fishing has been pretty slow. I'd say there's been quite a bit of smaller fish that we've been catching in the wheel. I haven't asked for too many details on that.

Karen Linnell, Tazlina and Chistochina subsistence user: I had something for the Tazlina area. I've been helping my niece with her wheel. This week we got two Kings and about 14 reds. We had a King yesterday that was smaller than a Suslota fish. But it had the spots, it was really small, like a Jack King. So I guess we had three if you count that little one. We also got one that was, about 30 inches long. But yeah, I was surprised to see such a small King in the river. Even small for a Jack King. But fishing's been pretty slow there as well. We're moving it around and trying different locations for her until we figure out that river section there. That's all I had for Tazlina.

Tonsina to Chitina and Cordova subsistence use area.

Tursy Smelcer, a Kluti-Kaah and Chitina subsistence user: The lady, (a friend) lets me use her fish wheel. The first time I used my friend's fish wheel, I caught around 100. That was two weeks ago, three weeks ago when I first used it. And then this week I've got another friend down there that's got a wheel. And she brought me up 16 last week. And I've been talking to her every other day and she's only been catching 11. She says since the personal use has been going on really heavily there, her fish wheel slowed down a lot. That's an overnight catch of 11. So it's been really slow for her. And it's so slow she's keeping all the fish. I haven't gotten any fish for the last two weeks. So I'm kind of hoping for things to get a little brighter here. I heard there was a lot of fish escapement. So I'm not sure what's going on with that. Oh, she (my friend) said one morning she got up and she went to check her wheel and there were only maybe 14 in there. And some guy was sitting there dip netting, said he got 200 fish there. I'm going, what? And you only got 14? So I've got concerns about personal use fishing up there too. And I've always had a, stressing concern about them (personal use) overfishing. And I've been hearing rumors. I reported it to Ahtna. So we got Bonnie looking for them and checking it out. So Somerville should be getting some reports if he hasn't already. All right. Thank you.

Mark Somerville, Chitina subsistence user: So I've been trying to get down there all morning to fish. I still haven't made it with work and other stuff here. But I'll be down there this afternoon, to fish the wheel today and tomorrow. So I'll get a firsthand view. Mike Winters, my partner on the wheel, has been fishing it for the last week. And he doesn't fish the wheel very hard. He doesn't put it down very far. But he's been consistently... I think he's picked up probably about 40 sockeyes and just a couple of King Salmon. And he's happy with just a few days since he lives right there and doesn't need a lot of fish. But it's been picking up. Opposite of what Tursy was seeing here a little bit. I think our wheel's been picking up a little bit. And as far as the runs go, we've got that bulk of fish that came through the sonar. Should be pretty much in the middle of Chitina right now, moving upriver. I think it's... Unfortunately, I think it's going to be similar to last year. We're going to see this slow fishing now. Maybe start picking up the middle of July to the end of August, which isn't preferable for most people, fishing subsistence. As Tursy said, drying your fish and stuff becomes challenging with the bugs and stuff then. And then, Karen, you're right on. The kings are small this year. We've got a lot of small kings. And hearing that from different people and seeing it in the person. So far all the observations match up with what we're seeing in other fisheries too. So, that's it.

Closing remarks, follow-up, and concerns:

Deanna Kosbruk: I want to address Lishaw's comment about inviting Becky Schwanke in the chat. That would be great. Does anyone have contact information for her? We also have it listed on our social media and our website. So, you guys can forward it along to her as well. I don't see any problems with that.

Kelsey Stanbro: Yeah, Kelsey Stanbro, AITRC ecologist here. It's an open meeting. So, it would be great to invite as many subsistence fishers as we can to the meeting so that we can really cover the river and get full reports from everyone fishing on how their wheel is doing. As we saw with Tursy and Mark, they fish in similar areas and have different reports. So, it's great to get a more robust community of fishers here giving reports. So, thank you for asking that, Lishaw.

Barbara Cellarius And this is Barbara. I don't think I've sent the announcement out to my SRC people interested in the SRC meeting announcement, so I can do that.

Kelsey Stanbro: Yeah, seeing no additional comments or reports, that ends the teleconference for this week. Just a reminder that there will be no meeting on July 4th, and no teleconference because of the federal holiday. The next will be July 11th at 11 am, following the same Zoom link. And, yeah, like previously stated, if you can invite others who have information to share, that would be great.

Thanks all around and the call hung up.