



Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission
Box 613
Glennallen, AK 99588
(907)822-4466

Wrangell St. Elias National Park Service
P.O. Box 439
Copper Center, AK 99573
(907)822-7236



Weekly Copper River Salmon In-Season Teleconferences Thursday, June 20, 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 (19 total):

- *AITRC Staff*: Karen Linnell, Kelsey Stanbro, Jim Simon, Hannah Bengtson
- *WRST Staff*: Barbara Cellarius, Dave Sarafin, Mark Miller, Amber Cohen
- *ADFG In-Season Manager*: Mark Somerville (Glennallen Area Office), Jeremy Botz (Prince William Sound Area Office)
- *CRNA*: Sarah Sherwood
- *CRWP*: Kate Morse
- *PWSSC*: Pete Rand
- *USDA*: Andrew Sanders
- *Public*: Lishaw Lincoln (Kluti Kaah), Linda Pete (Gakona), John Dye (Gulkana), Shelia Tyone (Kluti-Kaah), Anne Thomas (Chitina)

Introduction and Ground rules:

- **Karen Linnell (AITRC)**: welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending
- **Kelsey Stanbro (AITRC)**: 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 along with river conditions and other factors that may affect harvests and returns.
- **Barbara Cellarius (WRST)**: introduced herself 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.
 - 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.
 - There will be no In-Season call on July 4, 2024

Agency Updates:

Jeremy Botz, ADF&G Gillnet Area Management Biologist: The lower commercial 8-period openings have seen 7,800 Chinook and 545,000 sockeye salmon harvested, lower than the expected 763,000. In the first week of June, there was a 60-hour opening with three periods off in the peak time. Miles Lake sonar is now tracking ahead of in-river escapement goals; it is close to 60-70,000 fish. Water levels were low and colder later in the season than normal. Commercial tracking near projected and throttled back until good entry into the river, in-river peaked June 9th and still calculating effects of the restart.

Mark Somerville, ADF&G Upper Copper/Upper Susitna Area Manager: So to give you a quick update on where we're at. So Jeremy covered the commercial fisheries really well. The sonar numbers right now for sockeye, they have started off late. We had a spike and overall, I'm not too concerned with sockeye numbers now, as far as reaching the escapement goal. I don't think we'll have any concerns there. I don't see any restrictions coming for sockeye salmon in any of the fisheries. There were a few anomalies in the genetic samples taken from the commercial fishery. If the anomalies seen in the genetic sampling are true we may see a decrease in sonar numbers at the tail end of the run. Looking at mark-recapture from NVE (Native Village of Eyak) it looks like we are tracking near the lower end for Chinook numbers. We have put restrictions on the retention of Chinook salmon in the Personal-Use fisheries and cut retention in the Chinook Sports fisheries. If the numbers decrease, the likelihood is that we will announce further restrictions next week which could include closing the Chinook Sport fishery completely and possibly taking action on the Subsistence fishery. Decisions will be made on June 24th.

Jeremy Botz, ADF&G Gillnet Area Management Biologist: There are King (Chinook) restrictions in commercial fishing right now. We started out the season with expanded Chinook salmon inside closure and short-duration fishing periods. Currently, we are using the standard closure area.

Pete Rand, PWSSC Research Ecologist: We are working on a radio telemetry project this year. We are encouraging subsistence users to notify us if they catch tagged fish. Please report any catches of tagged fish to the Glennallen ADF&G office.

Participant updates (subsistence users):

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

Karen Linnell, Chistochina Subsistence User: Fishing's been rather slow in Chistochina. I think there was one fish wheel that got 47 fish in a day, only that one day, Sunday, I think. Otherwise, it's been two or three. Only that one day, Sunday. So, everyone else is getting two or three. I think maybe someone got 11 this morning. So very slow, not as many as we would like.

Karen Linnell to Mark Somerville: What are the genetic anomalies you previously referred to in the commercial fishery?

Mark Somerville to Karen Linnell: The Anomaly is in the very last samples taken in the Commercial fishery. It showed a very high, ~79% of the fish harvested were from the main bay hatchery in the sound, the Upper Prince William Sound Hatchery. I call it an anomaly because the data doesn't make sense with the way the fishery went. There could be several reasons for that. The fishery was primarily offshore for that period which could have created a higher percentage of Prince William Sound fish, the data does not match the sonar. The sonar should be way down based on the genetic data. The otolith data also does not show that high of hatchery fish in the fishery. It seems like there is something up with those genetic samples, which is why I call it an anomaly.

Karen Linnell to Mark Somerville: Are there new guides added to the Gulkana?

Mark Somerville to Karen Linnell: If a guide wants to go out of Sourdough and use a jetboat they would have to get a permit from BLM to work within the Wild and Scenic water area and the process for that is too long so that will limit new guides out there. We have seen a bump up of new raft guides up there, but we are not seeing the large number of people we were anticipating. Might be a little above the number we usually see, but just by 2-3 guides. No numbers, just my impression from the people I've talked to.

Karen Linnell to Mark Somerville: I was concerned because of the Chinook levels and glad there isn't a huge influx of new guides.

Mark Somerville to Karen Linnell: Most of the guides would have been jetboat guides, but the process of getting into the river is a bit onerous so we won't see a big influx of guides.

Karen Linnell, Chistochina Subsistence User: Batzulnetas will be putting their wheel in later this week.

Gakona to Tonsina subsistence use area.

Kelsey Stanbro, Tazlina subsistence user: I'm running a wheel in Tazlina. We are seeing single-digit and low numbers of fish when we check the wheel. In 3 days of running the wheel got ~24 fish and ~ 1/5 were Kings (Chinook).

Lucille Lincoln, Tazlina subsistence user: Our fishwheel is in Tazlina, and for the last few weeks it hasn't been very good. The most we have ever caught is 27. Yesterday we caught nine and they looked like they were farmed. We caught a King (Chinook) that was really, red like it was spawned out. The water has been up and down too. It is really slow compared to what we normally catch. The little fish really concerned us. We always catch a little bit of little ones, but there were an awful lot, almost like farm salmon. It is very concerning. We caught maybe 10 of them and put them back in the river. The really red salmon was very concerning. We have been subsistence fishing, it's our way of life, since the age of nine.

John Dye, Gulkana subsistence user, also runs wheel for CRNA: It's been pretty slow in Gulkana I will talk about Gulkana first, my personal one, 3 or 4 a day for the last week and a half I think the most we have caught is 12. The water has been up and down. Also, for CRNA's wheel in Tazlina, the wheel hasn't been in the water long. Tuesday this week we have gotten 12; 6 Sockeye and 6 Chinook.

Tonsina to Chitina and Cordova subsistence use area.

Mark Somerville, Chitina subsistence area: I have a wheel down in Chitina near the airport those wheels started late last week just because the water has been low and the wheels just started spinning, like everyone else harvest has been low, same sort of conditions people have been facing upriver. Just to let you know the big bunch that came through the sonar (40-60K) are just now hitting Chitina. Kings are probably going to be more prevalent because they travel faster, similar to what we saw last year, so hopefully, fishing will improve I don't know about Chisto but it should improve.

Pete Rand to Mark Somerville: We got an email from ADF&G's biologist Tracy Handson about unusually high water flow on the Tonsina and Klutina Rivers.

Mark Somerville to Pete Rand: Flows are up. I just drove over the Klutina it's a little on the high side and it fits with the weather we have been having. The Tazlina is a little lower than I expected. Tonsina has been high for about a week but I haven't been down in about a week. The Copper is high; it came up about a foot yesterday. Numbers haven't come out from NOAA yet I wouldn't be surprised if it came up about a foot. It is starting to affect dip netting and guys like Mark that do drop off might have to shut down.

Andrew Sanders, USDA Chugiak National Forest, Cordova subsistence user: I've been hearing from folks with the 48-hour required call-in. Water levels have been steadily rising in the Copper I think that coming down on the big push of 40-60K fish success has been dropping off. Here this year I just recently went through the last couple of years of harvest data and so far, this year is looking quite a bit like 2022 the 1st year of the fishery. Last year most of the harvest was a lot later in the season because people couldn't or at least partially because people couldn't get out to the end of the road where they like to fish. So, it will be interesting to see if we wind up seeing that later season harvest again this year or if it's just a mirror of 2022 again. Harvest 2 weeks ago, a week and a half, was about 14 fish a day, and coming back down since then with the water level rising in the river.

Mark Miller, Ecologist Wrangell-St. Elias NPS: A week ago or a couple of weeks ago there was an anecdotal report that a wheel in Tazlina was pulled out of the river because they caught too many fish. Can anyone on the call elaborate on that observation or correct my hearing?

Kelsey Stanbro to Mark Miller: When AITRC's technicians called Tazlina Hall the wheel had not come out of the water but was stopped because they were catching a lot. I would like to verify that with Marce because I heard that someone else was running the wheel at the time and met up with him. Let me add that they might have caught enough to feed the people, the Elders that they wanted to get fish to.

Jeremy Botz, ADF&G & Cordova subsistence user: I haven't personally participated, in the gill net subsistence, but the reports are good. The fishery has, basically, been open 3 days a week since the start of the season, concurrent with commercial Saturdays and then in lieu of commercial on those periods we took off. By in large the reports I'm getting is that, you know, successfully getting household limits, in general, distribution has run across the mouth of the river. There's been more on the east end this year so a little more challenging for small boats to get out and I think, it's been a bit more of a grind on the west end here for sure. For folks that don't have the ability to take a boat further east, it is more typically a commercial-style vessel that would be able to go out and assist those openers and fish those permits pretty productive fishery.

Closing remarks, follow-up, and concerns:

The next meeting is on June 27th over Zoom or in the AITRC building.

Karen Linnell: shared a picture of the radio trackers in the mouth of a salmon with a tag. The trackers can be returned to Glennallen ADF&G, and everyone should be reminded to call in the tag with the number and return the tags to ADF&G. One of the goals of the radio tags is to show how long it takes for the fish to get upriver.

Mark Somerville: Call in and give ADF&G the number on the tag. On a King, it will be on the back and is a smaller yellow tag.

Barbara Cellarius thanked everyone for calling in. If you know other subsistence fishers, you can call the AITRC office or email WRST_subsistance@NPS.gov. We can connect people with the call-in information.

Lishaw Lincoln mentioned that her mom, Tursy Smelcer said fishing is going well and she is working on fish right now.

Kelsey Stanbro let everyone know she had contacted the Tazlina Village Tribal Administrator and had followed up on the Tazlina wheel shutdown. It was one individual who signed up for the wheel and shut it down for one day; other than that it has been running the whole season.

Thanks all around and the call hung up.

