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United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199



FWS\AFES

Agenda Item B-6: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report
October 1, 2014

Endangered Species Act Issues:

Short-tailed Albatross:

A short-tailed albatross was taken on September 7, 2014, in the hook-and-line groundfish fishery of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Management Area. A second albatross mortality was also observed, however the carcass was not retained. Identification of the second albatross is pending investigation. An information bulletin summarizing this event can be viewed at:
http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/cm/info_bulletins/bulletin.aspx?bulletin_id=9677

For further information, contact Ellen Lance, Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office, at Ellen_Lance@fws.gov, or (907) 271-1467.

Yellow-billed Loon:

The decision that listing of the yellow-billed loon is not warranted under the ESA was published in the Federal Register on October 1. There are two primary reasons that the Service has determined that listing of the yellow-billed loon is not warranted. First, new information resulting from efforts to better understand yellow-billed loon harvest in the Bering Strait-Norton Sound region indicates that only a small proportion of the total range-wide population is harvested annually and that harvest practices have not increased significantly, nor are they likely to do so in the future. Second, additional years of survey data on the Alaskan Arctic Coastal Plain show that the breeding population, which we believe to be representative of other breeding populations of the yellow-billed loon, is stable or slightly increasing, and likely reflects population level response to all threats, including harvest. Though the Service is not listing the yellow-billed loon, it remains a priority for us. Working with a variety of Alaska Native, State and Federal partners, we will continue to monitor and implement conservation measures for the yellow-billed loon in northern and western Alaska

For further information, contact Sarah Conn, Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office, at Sarah_Conn@fws.gov, or (907) 456-0499.

Federal Subsistence Management of Chinook Salmon:

Most returns of Alaskan Chinook salmon have been in low abundance in recent years and resulted in numerous fisheries restrictions and closures. This trend continued during 2014, including restrictions and closures of Federally managed subsistence fisheries. In conjunction with Alaska Department of Fish and Game managers, Federal managers took the following actions:

Kuskokwim River:

The 2014 Chinook salmon forecast was for a run of 94,000 fish (range of 71,000–117,000), which fell within the drainage-wide escapement goal range of 65,000–120,000. Due to this low run projection, the Chinook salmon fishery was restricted to Federally-qualified subsistence users in all waters under Federal subsistence management jurisdiction (Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge). However, there was no directed Chinook salmon fishing the entire season, except for 32 villages allowed to harvest a combined 1,000 fish under a Federal Social and Cultural permit. It is unknown if even the low end of the Chinook salmon escapement goal range (65,000) was met in 2014.

Yukon River:

The 2014 Chinook salmon forecast was for a run size from 64,000 - 121,000 fish, described as extremely poor and possibly the worst on record. Due to this low run projection, there was no directed Chinook salmon fishing the entire season. For 2014, the US/Canada Yukon River Panel agreed to continue Interim Management Escapement Goals (IMEG) in Canada of 42,500-55,000 Chinook salmon. The preliminary border passage for Canadian-origin Chinook salmon, based on cumulative passage at the Eagle sonar project and historical run timing, was approximately 64,522 fish through August 12, the last day of Chinook salmon enumeration at the project. As a result of considerable conservation efforts by subsistence fishermen, the 2014 Chinook salmon run has the potential to meet escapement goals and objectives, despite being below average in run size (preliminary count of 137,468 fish as of August 4, 2014).

Kenai River:

The State of Alaska's Kenai River and Kasilof River Early-run King Salmon Management Plan identifies an optimal escapement goal (OEG) of 5,300 - 9,000 Chinook salmon for the Kenai River. The final in-season sonar estimate of Chinook salmon passage into the Kenai River during the early-run was 5,311 Chinook salmon, which did not provide a harvestable surplus. The sport fishery for Chinook salmon throughout the Kenai River was closed by the Department of Fish and Game through Emergency Order starting on July 26 since projections at the time indicated that the Chinook salmon late-run sustainable escapement goal of 15,000–30,000 would likely not be achieved. Accordingly, on June 19 and July 14, 2014, Special Actions were issued to close subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon in all waters under Federal subsistence management jurisdiction in the Kenai River drainage downstream from the outlet of Skilak Lake, which remained in effect through August 17, 2014.

Karluk and Ayakulik Rivers:

The 2014 Chinook salmon returns to the Karluk and Ayakulik rivers on Kodiak Island were very poor with only 789 (goal 4,000-8,000) counted at the Ayakulik River weir and 1,182 (goal 3,000-7,000) at the Karluk River weir. The 2014 Chinook salmon escapement into the Ayakulik

River was by far the lowest in recent history. The 2014 Chinook salmon escapement into the Karluk River was the second lowest in recent history. In an effort to conserve Chinook salmon, a Special Action was issued for both rivers to prohibit the retention of Chinook salmon by Federally qualified subsistence fishermen beginning June 20.

Situk River:

The 2014 Chinook salmon return to the Situk River was poor with only 475 (goal 450-1,050) counted at the weir. This weir count is similar to the very poor returns in 2010-2012. Effective June 9, the retention of Chinook salmon by Federally qualified subsistence fishermen; and the use of gillnets and bait with rod and reel while subsistence fishing were prohibited.

For further information, contact George Pappas, Office of Subsistence Management, at George_Pappas@fws.gov, or (907) 786-3822.