

## Outreach Report Salmon Bycatch Reduction in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery

April 2015

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) is in the process of evaluating new measures to further reduce bycatch (Prohibited Species Catch) of Chinook and chum salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. In order to solicit review and comment of the alternatives from communities in western Alaska that may not otherwise be able to participate easily in the Council process, the Council initiated an outreach plan for this analysis that included a series of meetings with community or regional representatives in a broad range of western Alaskan communities. Consistent with previous efforts to most efficiently reach as many of the western Alaskan regions as possible, Council staff coordinated with the Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils (RACs)<sup>1</sup> to include the Council presentation in their regularly scheduled annual meetings. Council staff also worked with Kawerak Corporation (Nome, AK) to arrange a meeting in Nome. At least two NPFMC Council members accompanied one or two Council staff to each meeting.

The Council presentation was scheduled at the following community and RAC regular meetings:

<b>Nome Community Meeting</b>	January 22	Nome, AK
<b>Bristol Bay RAC</b>	February 24	Naknek, AK
<b>Yukon-Kuskokwim RAC</b>	February 25-26	Bethel, AK
<b>Eastern &amp; Western Interior RAC</b>	March 4	Fairbanks, AK

In addition to these meetings, the NPFMC hosted a statewide teleconference on January 29, 2015 wherein Council staff presented the same information that was presented to the RACs at their respective meetings. Council members did not participate in the statewide teleconference as presenters.

The purpose of these meetings was to provide information about the Council's current action to further reduce bycatch of Chinook and chum salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fishery; to answer questions from the RACs about both the current action, and the Council's policy decisions; and record comments about the current action and other Council issues for presentation to the Council. This report is the documentation of those questions and comments for the Council.

### **Kawerak Community meeting, January 22, Nome**

Approximately 30 people attended a meeting, hosted by Kawerak, in Nome. Council attendees included Dr. Diana Stram (staff, analyst), Steve MacLean (staff), David Long (Council member), and Simon Kineen (Council member). Dr. Stram presented information about the analysis and fielded questions from attendees. Attendees were concerned about the seasonality of Chinook and chum salmon bycatch, and whether allowing TAC to be transferred between seasons would exacerbate bycatch of one or both species. Residents were also concerned about the State of Alaska managed salmon fishery at Area M, and the likelihood of that fishery intercepting chum salmon bound for Norton Sound area rivers. Residents generally appreciated the alternatives to strengthen Incentive Plan Agreements and accountability at individual vessel levels, and encouraged the Council to ensure that salmon excluder devices were being used by all vessels in the pollock fishery. Residents were also very concerned about the Norton Sound

---

<sup>1</sup> Information on the Regional Advisory Councils is available at <http://www.doi.gov//subsistence/councils/index.cfm>

subsistence fisheries, recent subsistence closures, and the prospect of additional closures in the future if pollock fishing moved north with increasing water temperatures.

### **Statewide Teleconference, January 29**

On January 29 2015, the Council hosted a state-wide teleconference to present information about the analysis, and provide additional opportunity for the public to ask questions and provide comment. There were an unknown number of listeners on at least 62 unique numbers that called in (Appendix A). Dr. Stram presented the information while attendees followed the presentation, available from the NPFMC website, on their own. A total of 11 callers asked questions or provided comment. Callers stated their concern about continued commercial fishing while subsistence fisheries on western Alaska rivers are closed, and suggested that the pollock fishery should have the same salmon restrictions as subsistence fisheries. Callers also stated their concern that trawl fisheries had damaged marine habitat, and that might be contributing to the reduced number of Chinook salmon returning to western Alaskan rivers.

### **Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council, February 24, Naknek**

On February 24 2015, Ed Dersham, Roy Hyder, Dr. Diana Stram, and Steve MacLean attended the Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council meeting in Naknek, AK. The meeting was principally attended by RAC members, State and Federal agency staff, and a few public participants. The Bristol Bay RAC represents 31 subsistence communities in Bristol Bay. Dr. Stram provided the presentation to the RAC, Dr. Stram, Ed Dersham, and Roy Hyder answered questions from the RAC and public. The RAC appreciated that the Council attended the RAC meeting to speak to the RAC directly about an issue important to them. In general, the RAC was very supportive of efforts to continue to reduce bycatch of salmon, and Chinook salmon in particular. RAC members nearly all stated their support for required use of salmon excluders in trawl nets. Some RAC members were concerned that the Nushagak River was not included in the 3-river index, but understood that its inclusion would highly influence the index, and could potentially mask low run abundance in the other western Alaska systems, or trigger a “low” abundance designation if the Nushagak experienced a low return while other rivers did not. The Chairman of the RAC indicated her support for weekly closures if bycatch rates in the area are high. She recognized the immediacy of the response to high bycatch rates, but was concerned about displacing fishing effort to another area that may result in high bycatch of salmon destined for another river. Several RAC members stated that the Chinook runs in the Nushagak are very different than were seen five or more years ago. They stated that the runs are considerably smaller, but also that individual fish are smaller: the large fish are no longer seen in the river. Members also commented that the timing of returns to the Nushagak tend to be earlier than in other western Alaskan rivers and expressed concern that fishing earlier in the summer could disproportionately affect the Nushagak.

Public comment was provided by several Bristol Bay area community members. They generally supported a smaller overall bycatch cap and supposed that bycatch rates were low in recent years because the overall abundance of Chinook salmon was low in recent years. Public comments also expressed thanks to the Council for attending the RAC meeting personally.

### **Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Advisory Council, February 25-26, Bethel**

On February 25-26 2015, Dan Hull, Ed Dersham, Craig Cross, and Steve MacLean attended the Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Advisory Council meeting in Bethel, AK. The meeting was well attended, with up to 60 people in attendance for parts of the meeting. The Yukon-Kuskokwim RAC represents 40 villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta region. Steve MacLean provided the presentation to the RAC, and along with Mr. Hull, Mr. Dersham, and Mr. Cross answered questions from the RAC and the public. The RAC expressed appreciation that the Council members attended the RAC meeting,. One RAC member expressed his hope that the Council members understood the importance of Chinook salmon to the people

of the Y-K region. He stated that it is troubling to know that up to 60,000 Chinook salmon could be caught as bycatch when 5,000 Chinook would feed several villages. He then expressed his satisfaction that the Council was continuing to ensure that the pollock fleet did their share to conserve salmon resources since the residents of the area are doing their part in following the directives that restrict subsistence harvest. He further requested that Chinook salmon delivered to food banks be distributed amongst villages in the Y-K region. This was a sentiment that was shared several times by several RAC members. Other RAC members stated support for altering the pollock seasons to reduce the likelihood of Chinook salmon bycatch late in the B season.

One RAC member noted that the salmon fishery in the Kuskokwim Bay area has declined in recent years, and questioned whether there is significant salmon bycatch in the yellowfin sole fishery outside Kuskokwim Bay. In addition to concerns about Chinook and chum salmon bycatch, some RAC members were concerned about halibut, and perceived declines in abundance in the Nunivak Island and other areas. The vice chairman of the RAC suggested that a stand-alone meeting, perhaps an evening session during the RAC meeting, might be a better opportunity to allow full consideration of Council concerns.

#### **Eastern and Western Interior Regional Advisory Council, March 4, Fairbanks**

On March 4 2015, Bill Tweit, Nicole Kimball, Glenn Merrill, Dr. Diana Stram, and Steve MacLean attended the joint Eastern and Western Interior Regional Advisory Council meeting in Fairbanks, AK. The meeting was very well attended, with both Eastern and Western RACs and nearly 100 public attendees. Dr. Stram provided the presentation, and along with Mr. Tweit, Ms. Kimball, and Mr. Merrill answered questions from the RACs and attendees. The Chairman of the Joint RAC noted that a transcript will be prepared of the whole meeting and posted to the FWS Office of Subsistence Management website. At the time of this writing the transcript is not available.

Several joint RAC members expressed frustrations that while subsistence fishermen on the rivers are prohibited or restricted in their catch of Chinook salmon, no such restriction is evident for commercial fisheries in the Bering Sea. At least one RAC member noted that it is counterintuitive that the pollock fishery should discard Chinook salmon, which he referred to as “wanton waste”, while river citizens are forced to forgo high quality king salmon for the sake of low quality pollock.

Several RAC members expressed their support for mandating the use of salmon excluders in pollock trawls. RAC members were surprised that the effective season for pollock was 10 months, and suggested that the seasons should be shortened to reduce the time that Chinook salmon are caught as bycatch. Other suggestions included returning Chinook salmon caught as bycatch to villages along their rivers of origin as food donations.

One RAC member stated that allowing Chinook salmon bycatch in the pollock trawl fisheries, while subsistence fishing is restricted violates the MSA National Standards. He stated his belief that the caps implemented in Amendment 91 were not representative of the low biomass of Chinook salmon at the time, and is encouraged that the Council is considering reducing those caps. The Chair of the joint meeting recommended that while the NPFMC is suited to address the details of the options, Alternative 5 should be part of the final action.

A resolution, prepared by the Yukon River Delta Fisherman’s Association (YRDFA), was presented for the RACs’ consideration. A motion was made to adopt the resolution from YRDFA, which passed unopposed.

#### **Resolutions**

The Western Interior Regional Advisory Council submitted a letter, dated 19 March 2015, to Chairman Hull, in which they endorsed the resolution prepared by YR DFA. Both the letter and YR DFA motion are attached as Appendix B.

**Appendix A:  
 Audio Log: Statewide Teleconference  
 Reducing Salmon Bycatch in Bering Sea Pollock Fisheries  
 January 20, 2015**

**EventBuilder Conference Activity For 877-214-2906**

**Presenters: 3**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Caller #</b>	<b>Start Time</b>	<b>End Time</b>	<b>Duration</b>
	International	1/29/2015 12:37:29 PM	1/29/2015 12:37:56 PM	0 min
	907-271-2446	1/29/2015 1:47:59 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:34 PM	98 min
EM-Cherry	360-882-2017	1/29/2015 1:46:51 PM	1/29/2015 3:26:34 PM	100 min
<b>Presenter Duration</b>				<b>198 mins</b>

**Participants: 62**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Caller #</b>	<b>Start Time</b>	<b>End Time</b>	<b>Duration</b>
	503-314-4080	1/29/2015 12:37:14 PM	1/29/2015 12:37:56 PM	0 min
	360-362-2695	1/29/2015 12:56:22 PM	1/29/2015 1:09:34 PM	13 min
	360-362-2695	1/29/2015 1:10:11 PM	1/29/2015 1:10:23 PM	0 min
	971-544-7787	1/29/2015 1:47:49 PM	1/29/2015 1:48:13 PM	1 min
	360-362-2695	1/29/2015 1:10:53 PM	1/29/2015 1:52:16 PM	42 min
	907-832-5416	1/29/2015 2:04:00 PM	1/29/2015 2:04:29 PM	0 min
	206-556-3111	1/29/2015 2:02:50 PM	1/29/2015 2:04:40 PM	2 min
	206-915-2822	1/29/2015 2:04:38 PM	1/29/2015 2:12:44 PM	8 min
	907-279-6524	1/29/2015 2:05:57 PM	1/29/2015 2:15:10 PM	10 min
	541-265-9317	1/29/2015 2:02:11 PM	1/29/2015 2:16:26 PM	14 min
	206-282-2832	1/29/2015 2:01:52 PM	1/29/2015 2:18:40 PM	17 min
	907-468-4499	1/29/2015 1:56:49 PM	1/29/2015 2:34:59 PM	38 min
	907-581-1424	1/29/2015 2:08:50 PM	1/29/2015 2:37:10 PM	29 min
	907-949-1345	1/29/2015 2:02:08 PM	1/29/2015 2:49:37 PM	47 min
	907-586-7442	1/29/2015 2:01:32 PM	1/29/2015 2:51:29 PM	50 min
	907-786-3358	1/29/2015 2:59:25 PM	1/29/2015 2:59:53 PM	0 min
	907-786-3358	1/29/2015 3:00:45 PM	1/29/2015 3:02:17 PM	2 min
	503-230-1333	1/29/2015 2:02:07 PM	1/29/2015 3:03:07 PM	61 min
	907-765-7910	1/29/2015 2:29:48 PM	1/29/2015 3:03:40 PM	34 min
	907-789-6085	1/29/2015 2:02:34 PM	1/29/2015 3:08:36 PM	66 min
	907-757-2260	1/29/2015 2:59:37 PM	1/29/2015 3:10:01 PM	11 min
	907-267-2100	1/29/2015 1:59:20 PM	1/29/2015 3:11:11 PM	72 min
	907-543-7300	1/29/2015 2:32:07 PM	1/29/2015 3:21:03 PM	49 min
	360-592-4584	1/29/2015 2:04:28 PM	1/29/2015 3:22:08 PM	78 min
	907-832-5416	1/29/2015 2:05:29 PM	1/29/2015 3:24:27 PM	79 min
	907-279-6524	1/29/2015 3:16:03 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:09 PM	9 min
	907-765-2121	1/29/2015 2:02:04 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:09 PM	83 min
	907-274-7557	1/29/2015 2:02:05 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:10 PM	83 min
	907-457-5797	1/29/2015 3:14:38 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:10 PM	11 min
	907-644-8640	1/29/2015 2:10:45 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:13 PM	75 min

907-786-3885	1/29/2015 2:18:30 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:19 PM	67 min
360-303-1866	1/29/2015 3:22:04 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:22 PM	3 min
907-786-3674	1/29/2015 2:01:39 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:22 PM	84 min
206-526-4100	1/29/2015 2:15:58 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:25 PM	70 min
907-586-7416	1/29/2015 2:02:36 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:26 PM	83 min
503-258-7831	1/29/2015 1:49:28 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:27 PM	96 min
907-459-7200	1/29/2015 2:01:20 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:27 PM	84 min
907-267-2100	1/29/2015 1:59:50 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:28 PM	86 min
907-581-1211	1/29/2015 2:07:43 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:28 PM	78 min
907-581-1251	1/29/2015 3:11:58 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:28 PM	14 min
907-765-7910	1/29/2015 3:05:21 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:28 PM	20 min
907-786-3358	1/29/2015 3:05:32 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:28 PM	20 min
907-786-3564	1/29/2015 2:03:24 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:28 PM	82 min
907-565-4056	1/29/2015 2:31:15 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:29 PM	54 min
907-591-2528	1/29/2015 2:13:50 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:29 PM	72 min
907-238-3459	1/29/2015 2:43:47 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:30 PM	42 min
907-443-5352	1/29/2015 2:04:41 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:30 PM	81 min
907-789-6079	1/29/2015 2:20:47 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:30 PM	65 min
907-789-6087	1/29/2015 1:59:18 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:30 PM	86 min
206-526-4100	1/29/2015 2:03:05 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:31 PM	82 min
206-526-4100	1/29/2015 2:00:29 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:31 PM	85 min
706-273-6049	1/29/2015 2:19:23 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:32 PM	66 min
907-843-1455	1/29/2015 2:04:36 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:33 PM	81 min
907-317-1750	1/29/2015 2:01:59 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:36 PM	84 min
206-282-2599	1/29/2015 2:22:07 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:38 PM	63 min
907-267-2100	1/29/2015 2:03:51 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:41 PM	82 min
907-789-6084	1/29/2015 2:05:03 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:41 PM	80 min
907-591-2815	1/29/2015 2:16:44 PM	1/29/2015 3:25:46 PM	69 min
907-949-1345	1/29/2015 2:50:11 PM	1/29/2015 3:26:01 PM	36 min
907-757-6424	1/29/2015 2:02:56 PM	1/29/2015 3:26:06 PM	84 min
907-543-3131	1/29/2015 2:30:01 PM	1/29/2015 3:26:10 PM	56 min
		<b>Participant Duration</b>	<b>3039 mins</b>
		<b>Total Duration</b>	<b>3237 mins</b>

**Appendix B**  
**Western Interior Regional Advisory Council Letter and Resolution**

**Western Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council**  
**c/o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**  
**Office of Subsistence Management**  
**1011 East Tudor Road, MS 121**  
**Anchorage, Alaska 99503**  
**Phone: 907-786-3888 or 1-800-478-1456, Fax: 907-786-3898**  
**Toll Free: 1-800-478-1456**

WIRAC15009.MB

19 MAR 2015

Mr. Dan Hull, Chair  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
P.O. Box 100498  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Chairman Hull:

The Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) represents subsistence harvesters of fish and wildlife resources on Federal public lands and waters of the Western Interior Region of Alaska. The Council was established by the authority in Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Section 805 of ANILCA and the Council's charter recognize the Council's authority to initiate, review and evaluate proposals for regulations, policies, management plans, and other matters related to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on Federal public lands within the region. The council provides a forum for the expression of opinions and recommendations regarding any matter related to the subsistence uses of fish and wildlife within the region.

The Council held a public meeting in Fairbanks on March 3, 2015, regarding various subsistence issues. The Council heard recommendations from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association and reviewed a resolution titled "Reduction of Chinook and Chum Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery" (attached). This Council strongly endorses the resolution and the recommendations outlined in the document, identifying the preferred alternative 5, option 2 (60% reduction to the performance standard) and the suboption to apply the 60% reduction to the overall hard cap. Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, options 1-5, should be selected as well.

The Council continues to be very concerned with the issue of Chinook and chum salmon bycatch on the Bering Sea and its adverse effects on subsistence users who depend on this resource for nutritional and cultural survival in our region. In these times of severe Chinook Salmon decline, all sources of mortality must be reduced and all harvesters of salmon must equitably conserve.

We applaud the ongoing efforts to limit bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery, but urge the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) to take immediate action to set a



Dan Hull

2

voluntary limit on Chinook Salmon bycatch for 2015 to not exceed 20,000 fish, and take every action possible to completely eliminate all bycatch.

Thank you for the opportunity to dialogue with the NPFMC. We look forward to continuing discussions about the issues and concerns of subsistence users of the Western Interior Region. If you have questions about this report, please contact me via Melinda Burke, Subsistence Council Coordinator, with the Office of Subsistence Management at 1-800-478-1456 or, (907) 786-3885.

Sincerely,



Jack Reakoff  
Chair

Enclosure

cc: Federal Subsistence Board  
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Eugene R. Peltola, Jr., Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management  
Chuck Ardizzone, Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management  
Carl Johnson, Council Coordination Division Chief, Office of Subsistence Management  
Melinda Burke, Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management  
Donald Rivard, Fisheries Biologist, Office of Subsistence Management  
George Pappas, State Liaison, Office of Subsistence Management  
Jennifer Yuhas, Federal Liaison Team Leader, Alaska Department of Fish & Game  
Wayne Jenkins, Deputy Director, YRDFA  
Interagency Staff Committee  
Administrative Record

**TITLE: REDUCTION OF CHINOOK AND CHUM SALMON BYCATCH IN THE  
BERING SEA POLLOCK FISHERY**

**WHEREAS** Chinook salmon are the cornerstone for nutritional, cultural and economic survival in our region with chum salmon increasingly important for commercial fisheries and subsistence as Chinook salmon decline; and

**WHEREAS** dramatically low Chinook runs and harvests in recent years have caused severe impacts to the people in our villages and the Chinook stocks upon which they depend; and

**WHEREAS** for the first time in history, subsistence fisheries for Chinook salmon on the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers were completely closed in 2014; and

**WHEREAS** commercial Chinook salmon fisheries have been shut down for years on the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, and summer chum salmon fisheries have been limited to protect Chinook salmon; and

**WHEREAS** minimum amounts necessary for subsistence have not been met on the Yukon River since 2008 and on the Kuskokwim since 2011-2012; and

**WHEREAS** Chinook salmon federal commercial fishery disasters were declared for the Yukon River for 1997, 1998, 2000-2002 and 2009-2012 and for the Kuskokwim for 2011-2012; and

**WHEREAS** despite these restrictions the Yukon River Chinook salmon Canadian escapement goal has only been met in 4 out of the last 10 years and mean run size of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon (which comprise approximately 50% of the run) declined 45% for the period 1998-2010 compared to 1982-1997; and

**WHEREAS** the Bering Sea pollock fishery catches these same salmon as bycatch; catching over 122,000 wild Chinook salmon in 2007 and over 700,000 chum salmon in 2005; and

**WHEREAS** according to the best available scientific information, as much as 73% of the Chinook salmon taken as bycatch are of Western Alaska origin; and

**WHEREAS** the management measures adopted in April 2009 by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (the Council) provide for a 47,591 bycatch level in most years, with the potential for the fleet to reach 60,000 in two out of every seven years without consequence; and

**WHEREAS** although bycatch has remained well below the cap in recent years, the current management regime allows the potential for the pollock fleet to catch as many as 60,000 Chinook salmon as bycatch; and

**WHEREAS** in these times of severe Chinook salmon declines, all sources of mortality must be reduced and all harvesters of salmon must bear equitably in conserving Chinook salmon; and

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the \_\_\_\_\_ requests that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council take final action in April 2015 to reduce salmon bycatch. The preferred alternative must include Alternative 5, option 2 (60% reduction to the performance standard) and the suboption to apply the 60% reduction to the overall hard cap. Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, options 1-5, should be selected as well.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the \_\_\_\_\_ requests that the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock industry act immediately to set a voluntary limit on Chinook salmon bycatch for 2015 not to exceed 20,000 fish, and take every action possible to reduce bycatch towards zero.