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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
April 1, 2015

Federal Subsistence Management of Chinook Salmon:

Kuskokwim River:

The revised preliminary estimate for the 2014 total run of Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon is 135,749 fish, well below the 25-year average of 243,000 fish. The revised preliminary 2014 escapement estimate is 123,987 fish, which was near the drainage-wide escapement goal range of 65,000 to 120,000 fish. The escapement goal was met mainly because there was no directed Chinook salmon fishing during the entire 2014 subsistence salmon fishing season. However, an estimated 12,000 Chinook salmon were harvested incidentally. Normally, 70,000 to 80,000 fish are harvested by subsistence users when run size allows. Preliminary estimates indicate that the 2014 chum salmon run was below average and the 2014 coho salmon run was above average.

The 2015 Chinook salmon outlook for the Kuskokwim River is 96,000 to 163,000 fish. If the run returns near the low end of the forecast range, then there will not be enough Chinook salmon to provide for escapement and subsistence needs. Due to several consecutive years of well-below average Chinook salmon runs, conservation measures will again be warranted drainage-wide in 2015. It is likely that no directed Chinook salmon fishing will be allowed during part, if not all, of the 2015 salmon fishing season.

Yukon River:

The 2014 Chinook salmon forecast was for a run size from 64,000 to 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 harvest during the entire 2014 subsistence salmon fishing season. The preliminary estimate for the 2014 run is 137,500 fish, which is higher than the forecasted range, but still well below average.

For 2014, the U.S./Canada Yukon River Panel agreed to continue Interim Management Escapement Goals (IMEG) in Canada of 42,500 to 55,000 Chinook salmon. The preliminary

estimate for passage into Canada, based on cumulative passage at the Eagle Sonar Project and historical run timing, was 64,500 fish.

The 2015 outlook is scheduled to be released by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at the April 16, 2015, Yukon Panel meeting. It is likely that Chinook salmon fishing will be restricted again this year.

Special Action Requests to the Federal Subsistence Board:

In 2014 and in response to the anticipated poor return, the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) assumed management of the Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon subsistence fishery on Federal Conservation Units and limited participation to federally-qualified subsistence users. In addition, for the first time, a harvest allocation was implemented under section 804 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).

The Office of Subsistence Management has recently received several Special Action Requests from rural communities within the Yukon and Kuskokwim river drainages requesting that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) assume management of both the 2015 Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers salmon stocks. The Special Action Requests seek to limit the 2015 Kuskokwim and Yukon River Chinook salmon fisheries to federally-qualified subsistence users only, and to implement harvest allocation strategies of Chinook salmon among villages, communities, and federally-qualified subsistence users in the Kuskokwim and Yukon River drainages consistent with section 804 ANILCA.

Some requests received from both drainages ask that the Board assume management of other salmon stocks in addition to Chinook salmon. Requests for the Yukon River Drainage include conducting an ANILCA 804 analysis similar to the one completed in 2014 for the Kuskokwim River drainage.

These Special Action Requests will be discussed during the Board's work session on April 16, 2015, in the BLM Denali Room (222 W. 7th Avenue) in Anchorage.

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