



United States Department of the Interior

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In Reply Refer to:
FWS/R7/FES

To: Diana Evans, Executive Director, North Pacific Fisheries Management Council
From: Peter Fasbender, Assistant Regional Director, Fisheries and Ecological Services
Date: October 7, 2026
Re: Yukon and Kuskokwim River Preliminary 2026 Post Season Summaries

Yukon River Federal Subsistence Fisheries – Preliminary 2026 Post Season Summary

The Chinook salmon run at Pilot Station sonar, operated by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), was estimated at approximately 104,000 fish; however, none of the established Chinook salmon escapement goals were met in the Yukon River drainage. Eagle sonar, jointly operated by ADF&G and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), estimated approximately 35,500 Canadian-origin Chinook salmon, well below the U.S./Canada rebuilding target of 71,000. However, it does represent the highest Canadian-origin Chinook salmon escapement since 2019.

The summer chum salmon run improved, in part because of an above-average component of 4-year-old fish based on age data from ADF&G projects in the Lower Yukon. Preliminary in-season drainage-wide escapement at Pilot Station sonar was slightly greater than 1 million fish, making it the largest run observed since 2019. The summer chum salmon run reconstruction model produced by ADF&G will be available this winter to account for harvest and escapement below Pilot Station sonar. Selective-gear subsistence harvest opportunities were provided for summer chum salmon with the live release of Chinook salmon required. The summer chum salmon opportunity was limited to federally qualified subsistence users in federal public waters of the Yukon River drainage to provide subsistence opportunities.

The fall chum salmon run was also better than expected because of an above-average component of 4-year-old fish. Based on in-season chum salmon genetics collected by ADF&G at Pilot Station sonar, and analyzed by USFWS, the fall chum salmon run was estimated at 912,000 fish. The fall chum salmon passage at Pilot Station sonar this year is the largest since 2017, a year that recorded one of the largest fall chum salmon runs on record. The fall chum salmon run is likely to meet all escapement goals within Alaska at both ADF&G and USFWS escapement projects. The proportion of Canadian-origin fall chum salmon passage (15 percent) at Pilot Station sonar was slightly higher than in recent years, but remains well below the historical average of 30%. Current in-season genetic projections indicate that the border escapement goal of 70,000 to 104,000 fish past Eagle sonar and Fishing Branch River escapement goal of 22,000 to 49,000 fish could be achieved. Although the fall chum salmon returning to Alaska did so in numbers

that provided subsistence opportunities in tributaries, the poor Canadian component led to mainstem closures for most of the season.

The coho salmon run was late and below average but was similar in size to the 2025 run, the estimated Pilot Station sonar passage was slightly above 100,000 fish. The coho run could support the subsistence harvest that was provided. The opportunity to harvest fall chum and coho salmon was limited to federally qualified subsistence users in federal public waters to provide subsistence opportunities until fishing restrictions were rescinded near the end of the salmon runs.

Throughout the salmon seasons, opportunities remained available to harvest nonsalmon species using nonsalmon gear. The use of 4-inch nonsalmon set gillnets was restricted to reduce the incidental harvest of salmon migrating through the river, while other selective gears remained open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition, 2026 was the second year that 6-inch gillnets were allowed in select nonsalmon areas during the fall season to increase nonsalmon harvest opportunities. The USFWS and ADF&G management teams coordinated all the actions related to Yukon River fisheries management. The Yukon River fishery actions taken reflect the work of the federal in-season management team with delegated authority by the Federal Subsistence Board.

Overall, Chinook salmon subsistence fishing remained closed, and chum salmon subsistence fishing was partially closed throughout the seasons. These restrictions marked the seventh consecutive year of severe chum salmon restrictions and gear limitations and the sixth consecutive year of complete Chinook salmon closures. Subsistence harvest estimates will not be available until ADF&G completes and analyzes household surveys, typically in December.

Although there were limited openers for subsistence fishing, Yukon households likely faced another year of harvest levels well below subsistence needs. We acknowledge the severe hardship that these closures and gear restrictions impose on subsistence households, including impacts on community food security and cultural practices. Although Yukon residents valued the limited salmon and nonsalmon opportunities, those opportunities did not adequately address the subsistence, cultural, and spiritual needs of Yukon River communities dependent on salmon. The management actions were necessary to protect weaker stocks and achieve escapement goals but did result in another year with heavy subsistence salmon restrictions.

For more information, please contact Keith Herron, Assistant Yukon River Federal Subsistence Manager, at keith_herron@fws.gov or 907-334-5391.

Kuskokwim River Federal Subsistence Fisheries - Preliminary 2026 Post Season Summary

During the 2026 season, the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR) team worked to strengthen coordination and consultation with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to manage Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon on the Kuskokwim River. The YDNWR and KRITFC developed a joint 2026 Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Strategy and Harvest Strategy as has been done since 2021. These strategies were developed according to the following guiding principles:

- Use a cautionary approach by utilizing in-season information to avoid overharvest of Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon within the Kuskokwim River watershed.
- Integrate meaningful local and traditional knowledge into the fisheries management decision-making process.
- Strive for continued customary and traditional subsistence harvest opportunities while balancing the need for adequate escapement.
- Uphold federal fisheries conservation and stock diversity mandate.

This cooperative management approach focused on balancing Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon conservation with the continuation of customary and traditional subsistence uses. During times of uncertainty, we use the following in-season stock assessment tools to readily adapt management decisions:

- ADF&G's Kuskokwim River sonar project, which is a direct salmon passage enumeration project.
- KRITFC's community-based harvest monitoring project, in coordination with Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC) and YDNWR, which provides harvest estimates for each species of salmon.
- Local and traditional knowledge that includes run timing, abundance, and health of salmon.

In-Season Subsistence Management

In May, the YDNWR manager issued Temporary Special Action 04-KSCS-26-01. This action was based on the provisions of Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and delegation of authority letter from the Federal Subsistence Board. Federal management for Chinook and Chum Salmon began on June 1 and ended July 13: We relinquished federal authority on the main stem Kuskokwim River once near 90 percent of the Chinook Salmon passed the lower river and the Chum Salmon run was determined to be adequate. However, Chinook Salmon harvest restrictions remained in place on the salmon spawning tributaries until Special Action 04-KSCS-26-01 expired on July 31, 2026.

On August 5th, cumulative coho salmon passage at the Kuskokwim sonar was around 43,000, well below the average passage of 106,500. ADF&G closed the portion of the Kuskokwim from the mouth to Aniak to the use of gillnets and for the retention of coho salmon until further notice. On August 11, an Emergency Special Action (04-SS-26-03) was issued to close the river effective August 12-September 15 to the harvest of coho salmon and the use of gillnets after the

realization that coho salmon were low in numbers. During the closure, three 12-hour set net fishing opportunities were announced with restricted mesh size to 4-inch or less mesh to allow federally qualified subsistence users to target white fish species that are abundant during this time.

Restricting the use of gillnets during June through September was intended to conserve Chinook, Chum and Coho Salmon. The sockeye salmon run has been considered high, which overlap with the Chinook and Chum Salmon runs. Therefore, we aimed to provide some harvest opportunities intended to target abundant Sockeye Salmon while minimizing impacts to other salmon species by using set nets. Additionally, alternative gear types including dip nets, beach seines, fish wheels, and rod and reel were allowed for federally qualified subsistence users to catch and keep all salmon species (resulting in low harvest) and to target abundant sockeye salmon during gill net closures. Each year, more subsistence users have participated in utilizing these alternative fishing strategies.

During the summer of 2026, we provided 216 hours of federal subsistence fishing opportunities (Table 1) before July 13: Due to the higher-than-expected returns of chum salmon, salmon management was rescinded back to the State of Alaska for the main Kuskokwim River before the original special action end-date of July 31. The Kuskokwim River was open to fishing after rescinding the special action. This year, June salmon harvest was relatively similar to previous years (since harvest monitoring started in 2018). Most salmon harvest occurred in June and fishing pressure was reduced in July. With reduced fishing pressure and abundant sockeye and chum salmon, we increased fishing opportunities in early July just prior to rescinding management.

Preliminary Post Season Run Estimates and Harvest

The following ADF&G sonar estimates are subject to change as further analyses may occur. Also, there is limited 2026 escapement data from the tributary weirs due to flooding events and therefore this data is not reported.

Chinook Salmon

The 2026 end of season estimated Chinook Salmon passage at the Kuskokwim River sonar was 95,878 compared to 120,491 in 2024 and 142,662 in 2023. The federal fisheries management team announced three drift net opportunities directed for Chinook Salmon in 2026 (Table 1). Chinook Salmon harvest rates were 12 percent lower than in the previous five-year average of 25,852.

Chum Salmon

Chum salmon numbers for 2026 were significantly higher than the previous two seasons. The end-of-season estimated passage at the Kuskokwim River sonar was 557,075 chum salmon compared to 159,622 in 2025 and 253,825 in 2024. The Kogrukluk River weir is the only monitoring site with an escapement goal for chum salmon, with a goal between 15,000 to 49,000.

In-season lower river harvest estimates indicated federally qualified subsistence users harvested at least 27,275 chum salmon (Table 1). Although this surpassed the five-year estimate of 10,683, recent year chum salmon numbers have been low and harvest was not close to meeting the amount necessary for subsistence.

Sockeye Salmon

The sockeye salmon run was lower than the 5-year average but still abundant to allow for fishing opportunities. These opportunities were mostly with the use of set nets. Sockeye salmon are viewed as bank-oriented travelers, thus the use of set nets connected to a bank allow for sockeye salmon harvest while avoiding Chinook and Chum Salmon migrating through deeper channels. The end of season estimated passage at the Kuskokwim River sonar was 498,159 sockeye salmon compared to 924,085 in 2025 and 695,724 in 2024. The Kogrukluk River weir is the only monitoring site with an escapement goal for sockeye salmon, with a goal between 4,400 to 17,000.

In-season lower river harvest estimates indicated federally qualified subsistence users harvested at least 26,968 sockeye salmon (Table 1), not counting harvest outside of announced set and drift gillnet opportunities on the mainstem (i.e. dip nets). This minimum estimate of harvest is higher than the 5-year average of 24,739.

Coho Salmon

The end-of-season 2026 estimated passage at the Kuskokwim River sonar was 163,983 coho salmon compared to 396,252 in 2025. The sonar operated until the end of July in 2024 and therefore the run estimate is incomplete. The Kogrukluk River weir is the only monitoring site with an escapement goal for coho salmon, with a goal between 13,000 to 28,000.

The extent of harvest of coho salmon is unknown but likely low due to restrictions early in the run and low numbers: The amounts necessary for subsistence was likely not close to being met. In season harvest estimates were not conducted when the Kuskokwim River was completely open.

We are thankful to the KRITFC and the ADF&G for providing data and consulting to help make informed decisions. We also appreciate the input from various Kuskokwim River tribes for their pre-season input. We continue to strive to improve our collaborative efforts and cooperation for the benefit of subsistence users.

For more information, please contact Spencer Rearden, Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta at spencer_rearden@fws.gov or 907-621-6129.

Table 1.

2026 Lower River Harvest Estimates (Tuntutuliak to Tuluksak) – KRITFC + ONC + USFWS Data								
Date	Length of Opener	Drift (D) and/or Set (S)	Number of Trips	Chinook Harvest	Chum Harvest	Sockeye Harvest	Coho Harvest	Total Salmon Harvest
6/2/2026	16 h	S	71S	154	0	0	0	154
6/5/2026	16 h	S	181S	221	9	6	0	235
6/9/2026	16 h	S	243S	694	267	177	0	1,138
6/12/2026	12 h	D/S	392D/91S	1,928	1,307	394	0	3,629
6/16/2026	12 h	D/S	524D/77S	6,202	3,873	2,444	0	12,519
6/22/2026	12 h	D/S	511D/95S	9,785	11,082	9,712	0	30,579
6/27/2026	24 h	S	215S	2,574	3,990	7,244	0	13,808
6/28/2026	24 h (c.)	S	50S	343	638	1,173	0	2,154
7/2/2026	24 h	S	88S	473	1,221	2,087	0	3,780
7/3/2026	24 h (c.)	S	35S	66	586	477	0	1,129
7/7/2026	24 h	S	70S	169	637	1,319	0	2,124
7/8/2026	24 h (c.)	S	-	-	-	-	-	-
7/10/2026	24 h	D/S	107D/18S	148	3,665	1,935	0	5,748
7/11/2026	24 h (c.)	D/S	-	-	-	-	-	-
8/29/2026	12 H	S	-	-	-	-	-	-
9/5/2026	12 H	S	-	-	-	-	-	-
9/12/2026	12 H	S	-	-	-	-	-	-
2026 Cumulative				22,757	27,275	26,968	0	76,997