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Yukon River Federal Subsistence Fisheries - Preliminary Post Season Summary

The Chinook Salmon run was again among the lowest on record, and none of the established escapement goals for Chinook Salmon were met. The summer Chum Salmon run was the second smallest on record and failed to meet the drainage wide escapement goal and all tributary goals. No subsistence opportunities were provided for either species.

The fall Chum Salmon run is expected to be below the established escapement goals, and the mainstem Canadian origin fall Chum Salmon escapement is likely to again be one of the lowest on record. Complete Chum Salmon closures were in place for fall season. The Coho Salmon run was early and below average, but the largest it has been since 2020. Subsistence fishing with selective gear was provided for Coho Salmon for most of the fall season.

Throughout the salmon seasons, there was opportunity to harvest non-salmon species using non-salmon gear. Non-salmon 4-inch set gillnets were restricted during the season to reduce the incidental harvest of the salmon as they migrated through the river, but the other selective gears remained open 24 hours per day, seven days per week. In addition, 2025 was the first year that 6-inch gillnets were allowed in select non-salmon areas during fall season to increase non-salmon harvest opportunity.

Subsistence salmon fishing was closed for Chinook and Chum Salmon throughout the seasons, marking the sixth consecutive year of Chum Salmon gillnet closures and the fifth consecutive year of full closures for Chinook Salmon. Subsistence harvest estimates will not be available until after household surveys are completed and analyzed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), typically in December. However, Yukon households faced another year of very low harvest. This situation represents a loss of over 190,000 salmon for approximately 2,500 households in the region. We acknowledge the severe hardship these closures impose on subsistence households, affecting community food security, and cultural practices. Although Yukon residents valued the limited coho and non-salmon opportunities and the few hundred salmon donated to communities from the test fishery projects, these do not adequately address the subsistence, cultural, and spiritual needs of the Yukon River communities dependent on salmon.

For more information, please contact Yukon River Federal Subsistence Manager, Holly Carroll, via at holly_carroll@fws.gov or by phone at 907-351-3029.

Kuskokwim River Federal Subsistence Fisheries - Preliminary 2025 Post Season Summary

The 2025 season marks the 12th consecutive year of federal subsistence fisheries management of the Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon run within federal public waters of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, and the 11th consecutive year of cooperative management with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC). Chum and Coho Salmon were also under federal management this year due to the expectation of low returns and the need to conserve and provide a rural subsistence priority for subsistence users under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Title VIII. Federal management began on June 1 and ended August 7 to provide conservation and sustainable fishing opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users for Chinook, Chum and Coho Salmon within federal public waters.

During the 2025 season, the refuge management team worked closely with KRITFC and sought input and feedback from 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 their joint 2025 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 precautionary approach by utilizing in-season information, in addition to preseason forecasts, 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 to rebuild declined Pacific salmon stocks.
- Uphold federal mandates and responsibilities regarding conservation and protection of Pacific salmon stock diversity.

The cooperative management approach taken by the refuge and KRITFC focused on balancing Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon conservation with the continuation of customary and traditional subsistence uses. During times of uncertainty about Pacific salmon abundance, the following in-season stock assessment tools were used 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 Traditional Native Council and Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, which provides lower Kuskokwim in-season harvest estimates for each species of Pacific salmon following Federally announced subsistence fishing opportunities.

- Local and Traditional Knowledge that included run timing, abundance, and health of Pacific salmon.

These in-season monitoring tools provided information on run strength, salmon size, harvest effort and success. This information, combined with prior years of low productivity, and long-term subsistence needs, suggested that harvest restrictions were necessary to meet the drainage-wide Chinook Salmon escapement goal. While the June salmon harvest was relatively higher in 2025 than recent years, in season data indicated that harvest may be lower than needed to meet subsistence needs. Additional fishing hours took place later in the season to target abundant Sockeye Salmon and helped continue to offer subsistence fishing opportunities that helped fill subsistence needs.

For more information, please contact Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager, Spencer Rearden, via email at spencer_rearden@fws.gov or by phone at 907-621-6129.

Migratory Bird Update

There were several seabird die-off events July through August 2025, including: Kachemak Bay (kittiwakes and some marine mammals), St. George Island (mixed species including dead fur seals and sea lions), St. Paul Island (murres and fulmars), and Kodiak Island (shearwaters). As of September 2025, there is a public health alert for Kachemak Bay due to elevated levels of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning toxins detected in wild shellfish. Diagnostic updates and highly pathogenic avian influenza test results will be reported when they are available.