



# KUSKOKWIM RIVER

## INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION

OUR RIVER, OUR PEOPLE, OUR FISH

P.O. Box 190 Bethel, AK 99559-0190 | (907) 545-7388 | info@kritfc.org | kuskosalmon.org

September 1, 2023

Mr. Jon Kurland  
Regional Administrator  
Alaska Regional Office, National Marine Fisheries Service  
PO Box 21668  
709 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99802

### **Re: Cooperating Agency Request for EIS for Minimizing Non-Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery**

Dear Administrator Kurland:

The Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) requests designation as a cooperating agency pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the [Minimization of Non-Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery](#).

KRITFC is making this request under the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)'s regulations implementing NEPA. The CEQ regulations define a cooperating agency as "any Federal agency (and a State, Tribal, or local agency with agreement of the lead agency) other than a lead agency that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in a proposal (or a reasonable alternative) for legislation or other major Federal action that may significantly affect the quality of the human environment."

KRITFC qualifies as a cooperating agency under this definition as a Tribal consortium with authorizing resolutions from 27 Federally recognized Member Tribes throughout the Kuskokwim drainage to act on their behalf in fisheries management, research, and monitoring using the best available Indigenous Knowledge and Western science. Additionally, since 2016, via authorization of a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Section 804 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), KRITFC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) at Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR) have collaboratively managed Kuskokwim salmon stocks. The 2023 season marks the eighth consecutive season of collaborative management, and the first that spanned the Chinook, chum, and coho salmon runs due to concerns for the protection of all three species and the prioritization of rural subsistence harvests as mandated by Title VIII of ANILCA.

TELIDA | NIKOLAI | TAKOTNA | MCGRATH | LIME VILLAGE | STONY RIVER | SLEETMUTE | RED DEVIL  
GEORGETOWN | CROOKED CREEK | NAPAIMUTE | CHUATHBALUK | ANIAK | UPPER KALSKAG | LOWER KALSKAG | TULUKSAK  
AKIAK | AKIACHAK | KWETHLUK | BETHEL | OSCARVILLE | NAPASKIAK | NAPAKIAK | KASIGLUK | ATMAUTLUAK  
NUNAPITCHUK | TUNTUTULIAK | EEK | QUINHAGAK | KONGIGANAK | KWIGILLINGOK | KIPNUK | CHEFORNAK

KRITFC does not currently have a similar MOU or co-stewardship agreement with NOAA Fisheries, despite its government-to-government relationship with the agency. Nonetheless, KRITFC's role as a cooperative salmon management partner with FWS gives its Executive Council, In-Season Managers, Member Tribes, and staff specific experience in the development of management plans based on precautionary, adaptive, and collaborative management—principles KRITFC hopes to carry into a cooperative agency partnership with NOAA Fisheries.

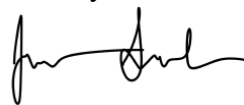
Minimizing non-Chinook salmon bycatch, over 99% of which is chum salmon, is of utmost importance to KRITFC's Member Tribes. In the past four seasons, Kuskokwim chum salmon stocks have declined up to 97% in some tributaries with devastating effects to salmon-dependent Indigenous communities and ecosystems. While bycatch is one of many factors cumulatively contributing to Kuskokwim and Western Alaskan salmon declines, it is one over which our management bodies, including NOAA Fisheries and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), have control. Furthermore, the development of non-Chinook salmon bycatch management measures would benefit from the direct engagement, knowledge, expertise, and experience of salmon-dependent Indigenous communities whose well-being and way of life are at stake with proposed Federal action.

As a cooperating agency, KRITFC asks:

- For its appointed staff and/or Executive Council to be involved in all meetings (virtual and in-person), emails, and negotiations about the non-Chinook salmon EIS, including at the agency-level.
- To co-develop timelines and progress goals for the EIS and NEPA process, which should include sufficient time to review any documents developed with its Executive Council and legal team.
- To lead contributions on EIS sections about impacts to salmon-dependent subsistence communities, and to work with regional Tribal partners to develop these for the wider Western Alaska region.
- To coordinate with NOAA Fisheries and Council staff to organize in-region community meetings as a part of the formal scoping process.
- To have dedicated time to present on the Kuskokwim and Western Alaska salmon situation, and developments in this NEPA process, during NOAA Fisheries and Council staff presentations at Council meetings when non-Chinook salmon bycatch management or this EIS is on its agenda.

Thank you for considering this request. Please contact Kevin Whitworth, Executive Director, at 907-524-3088 or [kevinwhitworth@kritfc.org](mailto:kevinwhitworth@kritfc.org) if you have any questions. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Samuelson  
Chair, KRITFC

CC:

Amilee Wilson, Tribal Relations Coordinator, NMFS Alaska Region  
Bridget Mansfield, NEPA Coordinator, NMFS Alaska Region  
Kevin Whitworth, Executive Director, KRITFC