



Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee  
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June 18, 2015

The Honourable Gail Shea  
HOUSE OF COMMONS  
Minister, Fisheries and Oceans  
Parliament Buildings, Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Shea:

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE 2015 YUKON RIVER SALMON  
MANAGEMENT MATRIX AND ALLOCATION**

The Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee (YSSC) is providing the following recommendations for the 2015 allocation of Yukon River salmon to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) in accordance with the YSSC's authorities and responsibilities defined within the *Umbrella Final Agreement, 1993* (UFA) and subsequent to individual *Yukon First Nation Final Agreements*.

**Chinook Salmon:**

The 2015 pre-season forecast developed by the DFO and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) estimates the return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon at 59,000 to 70,000. This is considered a poor run and well below the long-term historical average.

In April of 2015, the International Yukon River Panel (established pursuant to the Pacific Salmon Treaty - Yukon River Salmon Agreement) re-confirmed the Interim Management Escapement Goal (IMEG) of 42,500 to 55,000 Canadian-origin Chinook salmon to the spawning grounds.

Domestically, the current Canadian-Origin mainstem Yukon River Chinook salmon in-season management matrix (management zone) states:

**RED ZONE:**

- <30,000
- all fisheries closed

**YELLOW ZONE:**

- 30,000 – 51,000
- First Nation fisheries only, with restriction likely

**GREEN ZONE:**

- >51,000
- all fisheries potentially open, managed in accordance with abundance and international harvest sharing provisions.

**Following extensive First Nation, stakeholder and public consultations, the YSSC recommends that the in-season management zones for Canadian-origin Chinook salmon be revised as follows:**

**RED ZONE:**

- <42,500
- No allocation available / fisheries closed

**YELLOW ZONE:**

- 42,500 – 55,000
- Allocation of Total Allowable Catch for First Nation Food Social Ceremonial (FSC) / subsistence fisheries determined based on run abundance and international harvest sharing provision. Harvest restrictions likely.

**GREEN ZONE:**

- >55,000
- Allocation of Total Allowable Catch for First Nation FSC / subsistence, recreational, domestic and commercial fisheries determined based on run abundance and international harvest sharing provision.

The above-mentioned management zones are recommended for implementation immediately and should be in effect for the 2015 summer season. The YSSC also strongly suggests that the following should be considered when managing these zones in-season:

- in-season information on the quality of escapement (specifically sex ratio of returning salmon) should be considered when making management decisions. Currently this metric is identified as a long-term historical ratio of males to females at approximately 55% males to 45% females.
- a precautionary approach should be adopted given uncertainty with in-season assessment information, concerns over productivity (recruitment and survival rates) and the sustained decline of Canadian-origin stocks observed in recent years. It is suggested that the run is

managed such that the target spawning escapement is the mid-point of the 42,500 – 55,000 spawning escapement goal (IMEG): 48,750.

Currently, the United States is managing the Alaskan portion of the Yukon River with a full closure of all directed harvest of Chinook salmon in order to provide protection for Canadian-origin Chinook salmon migrating to their spawning grounds. Although this management approach may be changed by U.S. management agencies based on in-season run assessment information, U.S. management at this time identifies that the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon by U.S. harvesters is at zero (0) under the provisions of the Yukon River Salmon Agreement.

It is the position of the YSSC that the priority allocation for Chinook salmon should be for conservation purposes to support the IMEG. As a result **the YSSC recommends at this point that the TAC for Yukon River Chinook salmon in Canada be varied to zero (0)** in advance of the arrival of adult salmon at the international border. This approach is intended to provide protection for migrating Chinook salmon until such time as a more robust in-season estimate may be derived from information collected through the Eagle Sonar assessment program.

The YSSC provides this recommendation under the authority of section 16.10.1 and 16.10.1.1 of the UFA whereby:

*16.10.1 - The Sub-Committee, pursuant to 16.7.17.12 (b), may recommend to the Minister the establishment, modification or removal of the Total Allowable Catch for salmon from time to time in a drainage basin, but shall do so only if required:*

*16.10.1.1 – for conservation, public health or public safety.*

Further, the YSSC recommends that DFO closely monitor the in-season return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon and immediately notify the YSSC should the number of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon projected to cross the international border exceed 42,500 and / or is likely to meet or exceed the recommended 48,750 management target. Should this occur, the YSSC is prepared to work closely with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Yukon First Nations to coordinate the allocation of any salmon available for harvest beyond spawning escapement requirements (with a first priority for any TAC provided for a First Nations subsistence harvest).

The YSSC respects that the recommendation to vary the TAC for Chinook salmon to zero (0) will result in significant hardship to Yukon River First Nations, and in this regard is only intended to achieve the IMEG specified under the provisions of the Yukon River Salmon Agreement and as required for stock conservation purposes.

### **Fall Chum Salmon:**

#### ***Mainstem Fall Chum:***

The YSSC understands that the mainstem Yukon River Fall Chum salmon run is projected to be above average between 236,000 and 294,000, with a projected border passage target of 146,240 to



164,800. Based on a spawning escapement target range of 70,000 to 104,000 Chum salmon, this would result in a Canadian TAC of approximately 42,240 to 60,800 for Canada. Based on the pre-season outlook we expect to be in the GREEN ZONE. The management zones for Chum salmon will be as follows:

RED ZONE:

- <40,000
- **No allocation available / all fisheries closed**

YELLOW ZONE:

- 40,000 – 73,000
- **Allocation of Total Allowable Catch for First Nation FSC / subsistence fisheries determined based on run abundance and international harvest sharing provision. Harvest restrictions likely.**

GREEN ZONE:

- >73,000
- **Allocation of Total Allowable Catch for First Nation FSC / subsistence, recreational, domestic and commercial fisheries determined based on run abundance and international harvest sharing provision.**

***Porcupine Fall Chum:***

The YSSC understands that the Porcupine River Fall Chum salmon run is projected (pre-season) to be below average at approximately 18,000 Chum salmon. Based on a spawning escapement target range of 22,000 to 49,000 Chum salmon, this would result in a Canadian TAC of zero. The average Vuntut Gwitchin harvest is approximately 3,500 Fall Chum salmon. Based on the pre-season outlook we expect to be in the RED ZONE.

**The YSSC concurs with the above listed harvest management plan for the mainstem and Porcupine River Yukon River fall chum and recommends the acceptance of this approach.**

The YSSC understands that pre-season forecasts will be adjusted based on in-season information with allocations adjusted accordingly. We expect DFO will consult with the YSSC as outlined in the UFA should the in-season salmon abundance and associated TAC change significantly from the pre-season forecasts, particularly if the change in abundance results in the potential move from one management zone to another.

**Public Engagement:**

This recommendation is made pursuant to Yukon First Nation Self-Government Agreements sections 16.7.17.12 and subsequently section 16.10.2. The development of these recommendations is an

iterative process that takes place throughout the year that involves significant public meetings, committee meetings, presentations, consultations, written, email and online correspondence.

In addition to the above-mentioned initiatives, the YSSC, with technical support from DFO, met with the following First Nation Governments, communities and Renewable Resource Councils in advance of providing the 2015 recommendations:

- Annual Bi-Lateral DFO / Yukon First Nations Fisheries Meeting
- Renewable Resources Council Annual General Workshop
- Teslin Tlingit Council Meeting
- Mayo Renewable Resources Council Meeting and Written Comments
- Northern Tutchone May Gathering (Pelly Crossing; includes Government representatives and citizens from Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun and Selkirk First Nation)
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Chief and Lands/Natural Resources Department
- First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun Meeting
- Mayo Renewable Resources Council Meeting
- Carmacks Renewable Resources Council Meeting with Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations representatives in attendance
- Carcross Tagish Renewable Resources Council Written Comments
- Dawson Renewable Resources Council Written Comments
- Vuntut Gwitchin Government Meeting
- North Yukon Renewable Resources Council Meeting and Written Comments
- Old Crow Community Meeting

The YSSC will continue to engage on the topic of Yukon River salmon management in-season and commits to working with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Yukon First Nations Governments and other salmon stakeholders on the management of salmon.

Sincerely,



Pauline Frost

Chair, Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee

Cc. Steve Gotch – Director, Yukon Transboundary Rivers Area, Fisheries and Oceans Canada