



Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee  
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**June 12, 2017**

Honourable Dominic LeBlanc  
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and Canadian Coast Guard  
200 Kent Street  
Station 15N100  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E6

Dear Minister LeBlanc:

**Re: 2017 YUKON RIVER SALMON MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ALLOCATION**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee (YSSC) is providing the following recommendations pertaining to the management and allocation of Yukon River salmon.

The *Umbrella Final Agreement* (UFA), section 16.7.17. 12 states, after Consultation with affected Yukon First Nations, the YSSC **shall** make recommendations to the Minister on allocation, in amount and by area, of Salmon to users. It further states the YSSC may make recommendations to the Minister on the need for, and a position on, inter-jurisdiction agreements affecting the use of Yukon salmon resources and on the content and timing of Salmon Harvesting and management plans.

Our recommendations have been developed based on extensive meetings, consultations and engagement sessions with First Nations, commercial, recreational and domestic fishery participants as well as members of the Yukon public.

We are pleased management authorities in Alaska have been actively managing Chinook salmon runs in-season over the last three years. Our goal is to continue to work with all governments to meet our escapement and spawning requirements and to start rebuilding run sizes including the quality (age, sex ratio and size) of the run over the longer term.

### **Mainstem Yukon River - Chinook Salmon:**

The 2017 pre-season forecast jointly developed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) identifies the return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon to be between 70,000 and 97,000. This is considered a weak run size and well below the long-term historical average of 150,000.

In April 2017, the International Yukon River Panel (established pursuant to the *Pacific Salmon Treaty - Yukon River Salmon Agreement*) re-confirmed the Interim Management Escapement Goal (IMEG) at 42,500 to 55,000. This is the bilaterally recommended number (range) of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon that U.S. and Canada have committed to reach their spawning grounds to sustain future returns. The Yukon River Panel also recommended the Parties adopt a conservative approach to management of Chinook salmon during the 2017 season in response to the sustained decline of this stock over the past decade.

For the past two years, Canada has promoted the use of a midpoint of the range as the bilateral escapement goal (i.e. 48,750). The development of the mid-point escapement goal was a result of extensive domestic consultation which identified a variety of uses. Given the level of uncertainty and inability to manage to the last fish, it is not considered good fishery management practices to aim for the bottom of the goal. Changes to the Chinook salmon matrix are referenced in DFO's 2015 Integrated Fisheries Management Plan.

***Recommendation #1: Given the pre-season forecast for a weak return, the following fishery actions be implemented in advance of the arrival of Chinook salmon into Canadian waters:***

<b>Commercial fishery</b>	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Domestic fishery</b>	<b>Closed</b>
<b>Recreational fishery</b>	<b>Retention varied to 0</b>
<b>First Nation subsistence fishery</b>	<b>Allocation available (limited initial effort)</b>

**Allocation to the other fisheries should not be considered until the upper end of the escapement goal is reached and there is a full allocation to First Nations fishery.**



This recommendation has taken into consideration the following Chinook Salmon Matrix that was also used in 2016.

**RED ZONE:**

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

**YELLOW ZONE:**

- 42,500 – 48,750
  - Harvest for First Nations to be less than 10% of historical catch levels.
- 48,750– 55,000
  - Harvest for First Nations to be 10% to 90% of historical catch levels, which varies with abundance within zone.

The allowable catch allocation is subject to international harvest sharing provisions.

**GREEN ZONE:**

- >55,000
- Full unrestricted First Nation subsistence fishery, the allowable catch for recreational, domestic and commercial fisheries may be determined based on run abundance and international harvest sharing provisions and long-term conservation objectives.

In addition to the matrix the following in-season fishery management principles were also considered by the YSSC in arriving at it's 2017 allocation recommendation.

1. Enabling a sufficient number of Chinook salmon to reach their spawning grounds in Canada be maintained as a top priority. The minimum number is considered to be within, or beyond, the escapement goal range established by the Yukon River Panel for the 2017 season.
2. In-season information on the quality of escapement (specifically sex ratio of returning salmon) should be considered in advance of making in-season fishery management decisions. Currently this metric is identified as a long-term historical ratio of males to females at approximately 55% males to 45% females.
3. A precautionary approach be adopted given uncertainty with in-season assessment information, concerns over continued low productivity (approximately a 1:1 ratio for the past 8 years due to low recruitment and/or survival rates) and the long term sustained decline of Canadian-origin stocks observed since the late 1990s. Fishery management decisions should be based on the best available information from downstream assessment sites in Alaska (i.e. Pilot and Eagle sonar monitoring programs) and longer-term conservation and stock recovery objectives.

4. Given the sustained low productivity and several years when spawning escapement objectives were not achieved, the development of a longer term Canadian management strategy for this stock is recommended. A number of First Nation Governments have already incorporated long-term objectives into local management approaches.
5. Where possible, harvest of Chinook salmon should be directed at smaller (younger) fish. This can be achieved through the use of smaller-mesh gill nets (i.e. 6" or less) or selective release of larger (older) fish from fish wheels and/or hook and line fisheries.

In light of the low predicted run size for 2017, ongoing period of poor productivity, and failure to meet spawning escapement targets in many years over the past decade, the YSSC recommends the First Nation fishery be initiated conservatively. This precautionary approach is intended to provide protection for migrating Chinook salmon early in the season until a robust estimate of the number and quality of the returns can be made. This approach is consistent with allocation practices over the past several years and voluntary conservation measures and harvest restrictions undertaken by many First Nations. As confidence in-season abundance improves, fishery management actions would proceed according to the management zones and principles provided.

***Recommendation #2: DFO closely monitor the in-season return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon and provide the YSSC with periodic updates on the estimated abundance of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon returning to the Yukon River as well as in-season information on management measures and potential interception rates in Alaska.***

**Further, regular in-season (weekly) management teleconference calls be administered by DFO to provide information to First Nation Government representatives.**

#### **Mainstem Yukon River - Fall Chum Salmon**

The 2017 pre-season forecast (jointly developed by DFO and ADF&G) identifies the return of Canadian-origin fall chum salmon to be between 350,000 and 425,000. This is considered to be a strong run size and well above the long-term historical average.

In April 2017, the International Yukon River Panel re-confirmed the Interim Management Escapement Goal (IMEG) at 70,000 to 104,000. Based on the pre-season forecast the YSSC believes that we will be in the green zone of the matrix.



**Recommendation #3: Until further consultations can be carried out with First Nation governments, stakeholders and the public, the YSSC recommends in-season management zones for Mainstem Yukon River fall Chum salmon remain 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 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 subsistence as well as a recreational, domestic and commercial fishery to be determined based on run abundance and international harvest sharing provision.**

**Porcupine River - Fall Chum Salmon**

The pre-season forecast for the Fishing Branch River (Porcupine Drainage) fall chum salmon run, between 56,000 to 68,000 fish, is considered to be a weak run. The spawning escapement target range is 22,000 to 49,000. Over the last 10 years, the average Vuntut Gwitchin harvest has been approximately 3,000 fall chum salmon. The Basic Needs Allocation identified in the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* is 6,000 fall Chum salmon. Though the escapement goal was met in 2016, it was not achieved in several prior years causing a concern about the sustainability of the resource and security of access to chum salmon for Vuntut Gwitchin subsistence fishery.

**Recommendation #4: Given the pre-season forecast for a weak return, the following fishery licensing actions be implemented in advance of the arrival of Chum salmon into Canadian waters.**

**Vuntut Gwitchin subsistence fishery: Allocation available**

In light of the very low run sizes and failure to meet conservation targets in recent years, the YSSC recommends the Vuntut Gwitchin fishery be initiated conservatively. This approach is intended to provide an opportunity for a modest subsistence harvest during the early part of the run until such time as a more robust in-season estimate may be derived from information collected through the Porcupine Chum salmon sonar assessment program. As confidence in in-season abundance improves, fishery management actions would proceed in accordance with abundance.

***Recommendation #5: The YSSC recommends that management of Porcupine River fall chum salmon be informed by in-season information derived from the sonar assessment project located just downstream of the community of Old Crow.***

#### **Porcupine River – Chinook Salmon**

Currently, information limitations preclude the development of a formal forecast or outlook for Chinook salmon returning to the Porcupine River in Canada. In the absence of stock specific information, the general outlook for Porcupine Chinook salmon is based on an extension of the mainstem Yukon River Chinook salmon outlook (i.e. a weak run with abundance similar in size to the 2016 return). However, the Porcupine River watershed is in a different eco-region than the Yukon River in Canada, which raises concerns that the Chinook population levels may not be concordant with those of the mainstem Yukon. Regardless, the YSSC understands that a total run size of 3,000 – 5,000 Chinook salmon is anticipated to return to the Porcupine River in 2017. Over the past 10 years the average Vuntut Gwitchin annual harvest has been approximately 275 Chinook salmon. The Basic Needs Allocation identified in the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* is 750 Chinook salmon.

***Recommendation #6: Given the pre-season forecast, the YSSC recommends the management approach for Chinook salmon in the Porcupine River at the beginning of the season be as follows:***

#### **Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation subsistence fishery: Allocation available**

In light of the low run sizes across the entire Yukon River drainage, the YSSC further recommends the Vuntut Gwitchin fishery be initiated in a conservative manner with harvest of Chinook salmon levels in recent years. This approach is intended to provide an opportunity for subsistence fishing during the early part of the run until such time as a more robust in-season estimate may be derived from information collected through the Porcupine River Chinook salmon sonar. As confidence in in-season abundance improves, fishery management actions would proceed in accordance with abundance.

***Recommendation #7: The YSSC recommends that Canada supports the establishment and continuation of the Porcupine River Sonar assessment project located just downstream of the community of Old Crow.***



### **Porcupine River – Coho Salmon**

Currently, information limitations preclude the development of a formal forecast or outlook for Coho salmon returning to the Porcupine River in Canada. In the absence of stock specific information, the general outlook for Porcupine River Coho salmon is based on the drainage-wide outlook which projects an average return in 2017. The Basic Needs Allocation identified in the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* is 900 Coho salmon.

***Recommendation #9: The YSSC recommends that the management approach for Coho salmon in the Porcupine River for the 2017 season be as follows:***

#### **Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation subsistence fishery: Allocation available**

### **Public Engagement**

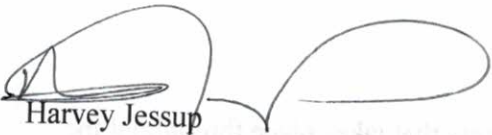
The development of these recommendations is an iterative process that takes place throughout the year that involves extensive public meetings, committee meetings, presentations, consultations, and written, email and online correspondence. In addition to the above-mentioned initiatives, the YSSC, with technical support from DFO, met with the following First Nation Governments, communities and Renewable Resources Councils in advance of providing the 2017 recommendations:

- Annual Bi-Lateral DFO / Yukon First Nations Fisheries Meeting
- Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) Leadership Meeting
- Ta'an Kwäch'än Council
- Teslin Tlingit Council/Natural Resources Department
- 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 Council and Lands/Natural Resources Department
- Dawson public meeting
- Carmacks Renewable Resources Council
- Mayo District Renewable Resources Council
- Vuntut Gwitchin Government
- Old Crow Community
- Nacho Nyak Dun Lands/Natural Resources Department
- Yukon River Panel

The YSSC will continue to engage in Yukon River salmon management during the 2017 season and commits to working with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Yukon First Nations Governments and other salmon stakeholders to achieve conservation objectives.

The YSSC will respect the confidentiality provisions outlined in section 16.8.0 of the *UFA*. Notwithstanding the time lines described in 16.8.0, the YSSC looks forward to your early response to our 2017 recommendations. Ideally in advance of the arrival of salmon into the Canadian portion of the Yukon River watershed (anticipated to occur on or before July 1).

Sincerely,



Harvey Jessup  
Chair, Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee

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

Cc. Nathan Millar – Manager, Treaties and Fisheries (Yukon River), Fisheries and Oceans Canada