



Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee
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June 13, 2019

Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister, Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
200 Kent Street, Station 15N100
Ottawa On K1A 0E6
min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Dear Minister Wilkinson:

Re: Yukon River Salmon Pre-Season Management Plan and Allocation Recommendations for 2019

The Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee (YSSC) was established and mandated under Yukon First Nation Final Agreements (YFNFA) as the 'main instrument of salmon management in the Yukon'. YSSC **may** make recommendations to the Minister and Yukon First Nations (Section 16.7.17.11) 'on all matters related to Salmon, their habitats and management'. Section 16.7.17.12 of the YFNFA specifies that after consultation with affected Yukon First Nations (FN), the YSSC **shall** make recommendations to the Minister on allocations of salmon to users. With that in mind, please accept the following recommendations under section 16.8.1:

Recommendation #1 – No allocation to the public angling, domestic or commercial fishery for Yukon River Chinook

Based on the pre-season run estimate for Chinook, it is unlikely the Chinook abundance will allow for a full FN fishery. As the priority fishery, established under Final Agreements and an International Treaty, unless a full FN allocation is anticipated, no other fishery opportunities should be made available. Openings in licensed fisheries should only be considered if there is high certainty that the mid-point of the escapement range will be exceeded and a full allocation to the FN fishery will be met.

The public angling fishery traditionally had the smallest harvest of the licensed fisheries. However, the regulation managing this fishery is outdated and does not reflect modern fishery management. As such, this fishery should only receive an allocation if there are adequate controls to manage it and spawning escapement and FN fisheries are fully met.

Recommendation #2 – Continue with conservative harvests for Yukon River Chinook; open fisheries for Yukon River chum; and accept the management of Porcupine Chinook, chum, and coho on the basis of in-season data

A conservative harvest is prudent given the decreased abundance and data gaps for mainstem Chinook salmon. There is also uncertainty in the abundance data, especially early in the season, that justifies entering the season with a pre-cautionary approach (conservative harvest).

Mainstem Yukon Chinook are in a sustained period of low productivity, low abundance, and there are concerns over quality of escapement. While the spawning goal was met or exceeded in the last 5 years, there was a period when the spawning escapement goal was not met, or was just above the lower end of the spawning goal. The recovery of this stock has been hampered by decreased total run size since the late 90's and meeting or exceeding the spawning goal is essential to their long-term recovery. As such, harvest should be conservative to ensure adequate spawning escapement is achieved.

Mainstem chum salmon have been abundant in recent years and have supported all fisheries. Pre-season predictions are that the abundance will continue and the licensed fisheries opportunities may be satisfied. Subject to in-season data from the Eagle Sonar, licensed fisheries should be opened and managed to avoid incidental Chinook harvest.

Porcupine River salmon fisheries. There are no licensed commercial, domestic or angling salmon fisheries on the Porcupine River. All Canadian fisheries are conducted by the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) under their Porcupine River Community-based Salmon Management Plan. Populations of Porcupine River Chinook and chum salmon are enumerated at the Porcupine River sonar downstream of Old Crow. The sonar is a joint project of the VGFN and DFO. It provides in-season salmon abundance information to the VGFN. The VGFN are, therefore, in an excellent position to manage their Chinook and chum fisheries in a prudent manner. They do so in a much more rapidly changing climate than even southern Yukon. In recognition of this, the VGFN can factor the effects of climate change into their Salmon Management Plan. The very late migrating Porcupine coho are not enumerated and have supported a small fishery when river conditions allow. The VGFN are appreciative of the interest that DFO has initiated in future studies of coho and look forward to collaborating with the agency to determine more about this species.

Mainstem Yukon River First Nation salmon fisheries. YSSC will be recommending to Yukon First Nation Governments (YFNG) to manage their mainstem Chinook fisheries with a conservative harvest and recommend that DFO manage their licensed fisheries similarly. Subject to in-season information, we will encourage the use of chum salmon and recommend First Nations harvest this species to meet their needs.

Recommendation #3 – Use 6" or smaller mesh net size

YSSC will be recommending the use of 6" mesh size to YFNGs in their salmon fisheries. Most YFNGs have already implemented 6" mesh. As such, DFO should pursue regulation changes for the domestic and commercial fisheries to be limited to mesh 6" or smaller. For the 2019 season, if any domestic or commercial Chinook salmon fisheries are undertaken, mesh size should be added as a condition of licence.

The smaller mesh will capture fewer Chinook females and larger males, allowing for a selective harvest. This gear will result in larger, more productive Chinook females reaching the spawning grounds compared

to larger net mesh gear. This will assist in increasing the quality of escapement. It may also contribute to reversing the observed trends of decreased size at age. Selectively harvesting smaller, male Chinook should also help to increase productivity.

The 6" mesh in the chum fishery will also reduce catches of later running Chinook. This mesh size restriction should not limit chum fishers, as it is known as chum gear.

Recommendation #4 – Release of unharmed female Chinook

YSSC will recommend YFNG implement the voluntary release of unharmed female Chinook in their fisheries. Many YFNGs have already implemented this measure and as such, DFO should pursue regulation changes for the domestic and commercial fisheries. For 2019, it should be included as a condition of licence.

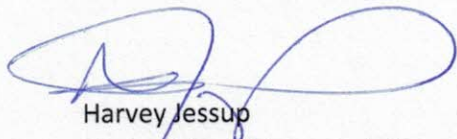
This will allow for a selective harvest of males with reduced female harvest, allowing for more females to reach the spawning grounds thus increasing the quality of escapement. This should help increase Chinook productivity over time.

In formulating our recommendations, YSSC participated in numerous meetings, activities, and engagements over the year with YFNG, Renewable Resources Councils, Non-Government Organizations, public and these meetings will be detailed in our annual report.

There is concern regarding the quality of escapement and as such, more than just salmon counts should be considered when determining the escapement goal. Factors affecting quality of escapement include size at age, sex ratios, health of salmon, water temperature and water flows. If factors affecting the quality of escapement are outside the normal range, YSSC may consider submitting additional recommendations in-season.

In closing, we want to thank you for your time and attention to these important recommendations and we look forward to receiving your response, ideally in advance of the arrival of salmon into the Canadian portion of the Yukon River watershed (usually around July 1). Should you require further information or clarification please contact Elizabeth MacDonald, Executive Director of the YSSC, at 867- 393- 6725.

Sincerely,



Harvey Jessup
Chair, Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee

CC: Steve Gotch, Area Director Yukon Transboundary River Area, DFO
Steve Smith, Manager Yukon River Treaties and Fisheries, DFO

