

# SPECIAL EDITION BOARD OF FISHERIES

Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association

## YUKON DRIFTER



Feb 2013

### **FIRST PULSE CLOSURE OF SUBSISTENCE FISHING NOW MANDATORY**

In what many feel is an exceptional action by the Board of Fisheries, it passed into regulation mandatory first pulse closure on the first run of king salmon entering the Yukon. This new regulation applies to both subsistence and commercial fishing. Both the Y-1 District and Y-2 District will not be allowed to fish on the first pulse of kings under any circumstances regardless of run size or strength. The Board's action dictates pulse protection to ADF&G management, a rather out of the ordinary move by the Board of Fisheries. During deliberations, Board of Fisheries members spoke strongly in advocating for stricter conservation measures on the Yukon Chinook run. The measure passed unanimously, with all six Board members voting in favor.

The proposal that generated this action by the Board of Fisheries, was sponsored by the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association as presented to the Board in Proposal 131 as stated: "to require pulse protection in the king salmon management plan." Jill Klein, Executive Director of YRDFA, the group backing the controversial proposal, stated that her Board had supported introducing the controversial proposition on a split vote that appeared to divide Lower and Upper River stakeholders.

Lower Yukon users groups opposed the plan as it will have a detrimental effect on families needing kings for subsistence. Bill Alstrom, representing tribal concerns from Yupitt of Andrefski testified against the proposal as well as Ragnar Alstrom, Executive Director of Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association. Several other residents representing villages on the Lower Yukon all expressed their opposition to the proposal. The major issue presented by Lower River supporters was the fact that the regulation forces the Department to close subsistence fishing regardless of run strength on the first pulse of kings. Several times it was pointed out that ADF&G already has emergency authority to issue closures and has used it three times in the past 4 years to protect the first pulse.

Furthermore, as adopted, the regulation allows ADF&G to

open upriver districts to fishing on the first pulse if the run is judged to be large enough.

Most upriver stakeholders spoke in favor of the proposal. Citing the low returns in recent years as well as ADF&G projection for 2013 king run to be similar and possibly worse than last year.

### **BEACH SEINES AND DIP NETS**

#### **NEW GEAR TYPES - LEGAL FOR COMMERCIAL FISHING**

In one of the more notable actions by the Board of Fisheries, in a proposal generated by the Board itself, a regulation to legalize dip nets and beach seines in the commercial fishery was passed. The Lower Yukon now has the first legal commercial dip net salmon fishery in the State.

With passage of Proposal 240, commercial gillnet permit holders can fish up to 4 dip nets per permit to harvest salmon, and it also legalizes the use of beach seine gear to harvest salmon.

Prior to deliberations this proposal was discussed at length in committee which was comprised of stakeholders and three of the Board members. Kwikpak presented the committee with a brief summary of the test fisheries they conducted with beach seines and dip nets. Most of the committee members were extremely interested in the success rate of this gear. Board members generated a considerable dialogue with the various user groups and agency staff. All the upriver representatives were in support of the proposal with a recommendation to the Board for adopting the proposal. Likewise Lower Yukon stakeholders all supported the proposal. Board members on the committee passed the proposal on to the full Board with a consensus to support.

During full Board deliberations on this proposal, concerns for all captured king salmon with these new gear types were addressed at length. Amendments to the proposal were added to address the live release back into the river of all incidentally harvested king salmon. ADF&G stated

# FISHERMEN

## ORDER GEAR EARLY

- 5 ½” Gillnets
- Dip Nets
- Beach Seines

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to carry other items.

they would oversee the new gear fisheries closely with the fleet and be onsite to monitor the harvesting. As well, the Board sought assurance from the processor side that they would be fully cooperative with ADF&G in regards to all aspects of the fishery utilizing the additional gear that is now allowed.

Proposal 240 passed with all Board members voting in favor.

Fishermen interested in this fishery are reminded that all crew members on board your boat during dip net openings as well as anyone assisting with beach seining must have valid crew member licenses. There will be legal gear descriptions and operation methods issued by ADF&G well in advance of the season on this new gear. Those wanted to participate are urged to call and discuss it with the manager at Kwikpak.

## NEW MESH SIZE FISHERY ADDED BY BOARD OF FISHERIES

### 5 ½” 30 MESH DEEP

With the emphasis on the need for conservation of king salmon, the Board of Fisheries added a new size mesh fishery for the Lower Yukon. With the intention of providing more fishing opportunity to the commercial fleet, the Board passed Proposal 133. This proposal will allow for a directed chum salmon commercial fishery with 5 ½” mesh nets limited to 30 mesh deep.

The proposal was backed by commercial stakeholders including Kwikpak Fisheries and several commercial fishermen groups throughout the drainage. Although most stakeholders expressed their view that the proposal

be adopted with deeper nets, Board members stated their reluctance due to a lack of data to show how effective 5 ½ inch gear would be at lowering the catch of incidental kings. Deliberations on the new fishery clearly showed the Board's commitment to safeguarding the king stocks. Several Board members brought up the importance of the commercial fishery to the villages on the Yukon, supporting the proposal as a possible option to allow some commercial fishing rather than a complete shutdown of the fishery. The Board felt the proposal would give ADF&G an option to allow the harvest of summer chum salmon. After much discussion, the Board showed it's intent to maintain the commercial fishery of the Yukon River with a unanimous vote to adopt the new fishery.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game stated that they will try and allow for special 5 ½” openings in accordance with the Board of Fisheries directive approach to conserving kings while still allowing for the commercial harvest of summer chums.

*Editors Note: This regulation DOES NOT change the legal gear size for the directed chum fishery. The Lower Yukon still has in regulation 6” by 50 mesh deep legal gear. This new regulation is viewed by ADF&G and Kwikpak Fisheries as additional fishery the Board implemented. The action taken by the Board is a very positive sign that the Lower River continues to have the support on the State of Alaska.*

## 5 ½ “ GEAR –

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN NOW?

With the passage by the Board of Fisheries of Proposal 133, every fishermen should be asking what does this mean now. As passed it reads as: “Allow for a directed chum salmon commercial fishery in Districts 1, 2, and 3 in the Yukon Area during times of king salmon conservation using 5 ½ - inch or smaller mesh size not exceeding 30 meshes in depth. This provides an additional mesh size option to allow opportunity to harvest summer chum salmon.”

First off, this DOES NOT change the legal size of gear for commercial fishing on the Lower Yukon. We still have our 6 inch 50 mesh deep nets as legal gear for fishing during regular openings. They have not changed or altered or made 6 inch gear illegal.

Basically they have created a new fishery for the Lower River commercial fleet. This 5 ½” gear fishery is to be used by ADF&G when there is a concern for conserving kings. It is based on data available that shows to some extent that 5 ½” by 30 mesh deep nets will catch considerably less king salmon than 6 “ deeper gear. Most fishermen agree that these smaller, shorter nets will catch considerably fewer kings. And as stated by the regulation this gear will only be used during times when king salmon need to be conserved.



Fishermen should look at this as a “SPECIAL FISHERY”. The Board of Fisheries created it so that we can still have a gillnet fishery that does not harm the king stocks.

Fishermen should carefully consider if they want to participate in the special openings with 5 ½” gear. It will mean that you will need to buy additional webbing. We expect prices on this size webbing to be a bit under \$300.

And even if fishermen do gear up for it, there is no guarantee that we will have special 5 ½” openings. It is optional for ADF&G to allow these special openings. The regulation states it is to be utilized “during times of king salmon conservation”. It may turn out that ADF&G doesn’t need to use it for conservation. Things are tough enough as it is in the Lower Yukon region. Fishermen need to consider these things for before investing in new gear.

Fishermen wanting gear or needing more information about this new fishery should call and talk with the manager of Kwipak about it before investing more money.

### **DIP NET CATCH RATES:** 100 FISH PER HOUR

Just how effective are dip nets? And is it even worth trying to commercial fish with dip net gear? And why us?

Kwipak Fisheries supported this new gear type. Given the fact that few fishermen supported it as a proposal going before the Board of Fisheries, we do need to explain our position. One thing that needs to be realized; considering the choice of a complete shutdown of commercial fishing due to king conservation, or some other way of fishing, is

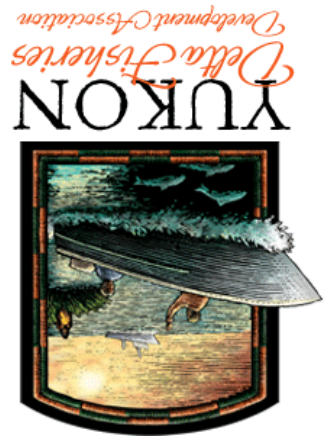


it better to fish dip nets than sitting on shore while thousands of chum salmon pass on through the Lower Yukon?

Granted not much is known about dip nets in our region. However, Kwipak oversaw several days of test fishing with dip nets during the 2012 season. Test fishing was conducted with different types of dip nets and methods in both Y-1 and Y-2. Actually the company produced some very positive results with them. At times we netted over 100 fish per hour. Keeping in mind we were just trying to determine if they would work at all. Clearly the testing was not done based on financial incentive or under pressure to produce fish. We were simply trying to establish whether they would work at all on the Yukon. Based on our test fishery, dip nets do in fact work. They have been used by Native Americans long before gillnets were invented.

Another factor fishermen should consider: About 800,000 salmon are harvested with dip nets every year in Alaska. Last year 600,000 salmon were caught by dip netters in the Kenai River alone, with another 200,000 fish landed in the Copper River with dip nets. There have been traditional tribal fisheries on the Columbia River where dip nets were used to harvest millions of pounds of salmon commercially. To this day there still are tribal dip net fisheries maintained in the Pacific Northwest.

For informational details, commercial type dip nets cost around \$150. The type that worked best were triangular shaped with netting made of small mesh gill net webbing. Legal descriptions as allowable gear include webbing of not more than 4 ½” and the widest part of the net frame or hoop cannot exceed 5 feet. Up to 4 dip nets can be fished by permit holder and crew members per boat.



YDFDA Corporate Office  
1016 West Sixth Ave, Ste 301  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
(907) 644-0326

## VIEWPOINT: THE FUTURE OF FISHING

The central issue of this past Board of Fisheries meeting was the status of king salmon runs in western Alaska. Norton Sound, the Kuskokwim, and the Yukon king runs all are at historic low levels. They are now at the point that subsistence needs can't even be met on these rivers. Through passage of several proposals the Board clearly demonstrated escapement needs have priority above all else. Conservation and protection are now the order of the day. The Board made it very clear that these king runs will be strictly managed and that they are committed to conserving and rebuilding the runs back to their historic levels.

Most fishermen have to be wondering if it is worth it anymore. With all these changes, is there any future to commercial fishing? First it was 7 ½ inch gear, now comes 5 ½ inch chum nets, dip nets, beach seines, and mandatory first pulse closure. All of these are Board of Fisheries actions and all passed for the sake of saving the king run. With all this happening in the past 3 years, it would be pretty easy to assume that they just don't like or want commercial fishing.

Actually, just the opposite is true. The take home message from this past Board of Fisheries meeting was that they ordered ADF&G to protect the king run. Period. At the same

time they directed Fish & Game to use a number of options to allow a commercial fishery on surplus stocks. Considering that the Board itself generated and passed the proposal to allow dip nets and beach seines on the Lower Yukon certainly demonstrated their attitude towards commercial fishing. They also gave us another mesh size to fish with that will allow *more* commercial fishing rather than less. It is very clear the Board understands how important commercial fishing is in western Alaska. They realize our economy is based around fishing. They know how important it is to the families in our communities. They passed these proposals as a directive to ADF&G to make sure our commercial fishery is maintained and protected. The Department now has tools that will enable them to allow more fishing on chum stocks and still conserve kings.

Fishermen need to understand how much we have gained out of this. The commercial fishery is going forward, we are progressing. We have less restrictions on our chum fishery. We have new gear types that no other salmon fishery in Alaska is allowed to use. We should embrace this as a progressive step in modernizing our fishery.