

Alaska Board of Fisheries
TOKLAT FALL CHUM SALMON
Finding

At the Alaska Board of Fisheries scheduled meeting held in Bethel, Alaska to consider proposals for the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (A-Y-K Area) Areas at the KVNA Building from February 4 - 11, 1992, the board, among other actions, addressed conservation concerns of the Toklat Fall Chums. Actions taken at this meeting had built on the actions taken at the previous meeting where the A-Y-K Area finfish issues were addressed (1989/90) in Anchorage, AK.

I. CONSERVATION CONCERNS

The Board of Fisheries finds that there is a serious conservation problem regarding Toklat fall chums. The 1991 escapement of 13,200 was 60 percent below the goal of 33,000. Since 1986, escapement has averaged only 67 percent of the goal and has reached the goal only once.

The escapement objective of 33,000 is the minimum number of fall chums needed to maintain the stock at its historical level during the 1970's and early 1980's. The board considered department staff reports, including the "Fall Chum Salmon Stock Status and 1992 Return Projection," which described the conservation concerns associated with this salmon stock.

II. HISTORY OF THE BOARD OF FISHERIES AND DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME ACTIONS TO PROTECT TOKLAT FALL CHUM SALMON

The board considered reports from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game regarding management actions taken since 1982 to conserve and rebuild Yukon River fall chum salmon stocks. These actions have included time/area closures and reductions in harvest rates. A summary of these actions is attached.

1. As a result of these actions, fall chum salmon returns to the Sheenjek, Delta, and mainstem upper Tanana Rivers are healthy.
2. Fall chum salmon returns to the Toklat River and the Yukon River drainage in Canada have not responded to these management actions to the extent that escapement goals can be consistently achieved. Rebuilding plans for the Canadian stocks are included in the Yukon River treaty negotiations. Rebuilding plans for the Toklat stocks must be developed and implemented within the state of Alaska.

The actions have included time and area closures and reductions in harvest rates in the commercial fisheries. The board has not restricted opportunities for subsistence in any part of the Yukon River in the past except for actions in the Kantishna River which were taken for the purpose of addressing a serious conservation concern.

III. POSSIBLE MANAGEMENT ACTIONS NEEDED TO REBUILD TOKLAT RIVER FALL CHUM.

The Board of Fisheries discussed the extreme actions which may be necessary to conserve Toklat fall chum stocks. The board also discussed the difficulty of attempting to protect the Toklat River stock in fisheries in the lower and middle Yukon districts where the Toklat stock comprises only a small portion of the total harvest. Because of the impossibility of targeting of the Toklat River Fall Chum in the mixed stock fisheries, and the disruption of those fisheries that would result, the board focused its attention on those fishing districts and

subdistricts where the Toklat stock would be segregated from other fall chum stocks. The best information available to the department on stock identification does not separate the Toklat stock from other Tanana River fall chum stocks. Department staff reports indicated that the Tanana River fall chum stocks are thought to be largely segregated from other fall chum stocks in subdistricts 4C and 5A in the mainstem Yukon. In the lower Tanana River, Toklat and upper Tanana stocks are not segregated until the fish reach subdistrict 6B; the Kantishna River mouth is located near the upper end of subdistrict 6A.

The board recognized that in addition to commercial fishing restrictions, some subsistence fishermen might have to move their fishing camps to areas where stocks other than the Toklat could be harvested to provide for their subsistence requirements. In some cases this would mean that subsistence fishermen would have to shift their effort to the opposite shore and in other cases that the subsistence fishermen would need to move upriver. Possible actions for fishing districts where the Toklat stock group could be segregated from main river Yukon stocks included:

1. Kantishna subsistence fishermen would have to move to subdistrict 6B to fish Delta and mainstem upper Tanana stocks which are currently healthy.
2. In addition to commercial closures in District 6A, move lower Tanana River subdistrict 6A subsistence fisheries to subdistrict 6B where they would also fish on Delta and upper Tanana mainstem stocks which are currently healthy.
3. In addition to commercial closures in subdistricts 4C and 5A, move subdistrict 5A subsistence fishermen to subdistrict 5B and subdistrict 4C subsistence fishermen to subdistrict 4B, on the north side of the Yukon River, where they would harvest stocks bound for the Canadian mainstem, Fishing Branch River, Sheenjek River and Chandalar River spawning areas. Department tagging studies suggest that fish caught in subdistricts 4C and 5A are primarily bound for Tanana River spawning areas. Chandalar and Sheenjek stocks are considered healthy at this time. Canadian mainstem stocks are being rebuilt through cooperative efforts by Canada and Alaska as part of a twelve year stock rebuilding effort.
4. Continue Yukon River drainage fall chum stock rebuilding efforts. Districts 1, 2, and 3 and Subdistrict 4A fall chum fisheries operate on all fall chum stocks of the Yukon River drainage. In these areas the Toklat stock makes up a very small percentage of fall chum and is mixed with other stocks such that it is not manageable as a unit. The department has no ability with current information to segregate Toklat stocks from other stocks in these areas.

Department staff explained that continued use of lowered commercial fishing exploitation rates during the fall chum fishery in these lower Yukon fishing districts would continue in order to rebuild fall chum stocks throughout the drainage. These actions should benefit Toklat stock rebuilding efforts.

The Board of Fisheries was given the preliminary results of a four year stock identification study of Yukon River fall chum stocks by staff. This study indicates that the Toklat stock is indistinguishable from other Tanana River stocks with current technology. The timing of movement of Tanana River bound fish is variable from year to year in the lower river districts.

The board finds that it is not appropriate to take the above actions at this time for the following reasons:

1. Possible conservation concerns for other stocks if all subsistence fishing effort moved to remaining stocks.
2. Disruptive effect on subsistence users and uses in subdistricts 4B, 4C, 5A, 5B, 6A, and 6B due to changes in historical use patterns and areas. These actions would increase crowding and competition in areas where fishing sites are limited. Subsistence fishermen would incur the increased cost and inconvenience of having to build new fishing camps with provision for living as well as processing fish in addition to having to move gear.
3. The close relationship between subsistence and commercial fishing. The board heard testimony that the same individuals participate in both subsistence and commercial fisheries and that subsistence and commercial fishing is closely related in the Yukon River drainage. Small commercial fisheries on the Yukon River enable subsistence users to diversify their subsistence living opportunities. The small amount of cash earned in the commercial fishery allows subsistence users to buy gasoline and commercial fishing gear such as nets, boats and motors which are necessary in order to participate in subsistence fisheries. Disrupting commercial fishing activities also disrupts users ability to participate in the subsistence fishery.
4. Commercial fisheries will likely be closed during 1992 season. The board heard from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game that the fall chum returns for 1992 are expected to be poor throughout the Yukon River drainage, with the exception of the Upper Tanana. Therefore it is unlikely that commercial fisheries will open in districts 1 through 5 and 6A where fish from depleted stocks would be harvested.

IV. BOARD OF FISHERIES ACTIONS TO PROTECT TOKLAT FALL CHUM SALMON AND TO PROVIDE SUBSISTENCE FISHING OPPORTUNITY ON THE KANTISHNA RIVER DURING 1992.

1. The board continued the subsistence closure for fall chum salmon on the lower Kantishna and Toklat Rivers. This requires subsistence fishermen to move downstream to the mainstem of the Tanana River in order to harvest fall chums.

Fishermen in this area harvest largely Toklat River fall chum salmon. This closure protects a number of salmon which could only be saved in other downstream portions of the river by disrupting many users and impacting the harvest of other stocks. The board found that the small number of users in this area could move to the Tanana River and above the Kantishna River mouth to harvest fall chum salmon.

2. The board rejected a proposal which would have closed fishing for coho on the lower Kantishna and Toklat Rivers. In order to provide subsistence opportunities in the area the board allowed coho to be taken with fishwheels equipped with live boxes only, requiring that chum salmon be released alive within 24 hours.
3. The board charged the newly formed Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) to work within its membership, with Yukon River Advisory Committees and the department to develop management options

for rebuilding the depressed Toklat River fall chum stock while conserving and rebuilding other major fall chum stocks and minimizing the impact of management actions on subsistence and commercial fisheries.

The board also charged the association to assist the department to more specifically define subsistence requirements for fall chum and to provide more detailed subsistence harvest information in particular for subdistricts 4C and 5A.

In addition, the association is encouraged to reach consensus among its members with respect to modifications in their fisheries which will have as their objectives the rebuilding of depressed stocks and maintenance of healthy stocks. The long term goal of this rebuilding plan will be to provide for subsistence needs and also to rebuild stocks to a level at which the commercial fisheries may once again occur. One option might include adding subdistricts 4C and 5A to the Tanana River Management Plan.

Although the board agreed to defer any action on most allocative proposals for the Yukon River until the 1994 - 1995 board cycle in response to advisory committees and the association's request, fishermen are encouraged to petition the board for consideration of regulatory changes which would assist the board and the department rebuild the Toklat River stock prior to the 1993 season.

The board recognizes that the department has the regulatory authority under AS 16.05.060 to adjust, restrict or close commercial and subsistence fisheries as described in Section III of this finding to conserve and rebuild the Toklat River stock without additional board action. However, the department will report to the board during its 1992 - 1993 meeting cycle concerning management actions planned for the 1993 fishing season.

Attachment

Michael R. Martin
Mike Martin, Chair
Alaska Board of Fisheries

Approved in Anchorage: (yes/no/absent/abstain) (7/0/0/0/0)
Date: March 2, 1992