

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

(February 14, 2013; Challenger Learning Center, Kenai, Alaska)

Call to Order: ~9:05 AM.

Adjourn: ~6:45 PM.

Members Present

Tom Kluberton (BOF)
Vince Webster (BOF)
Dennis Gease (Personal Use)
Robbie Williams (Set Gillnetter)
Ken Coleman (Set Gillnetting)
Kevin Delaney (Sport Fisher)
Ian Pitzman (Drift Gillnetter)
Jim Butler (Set Gillnetter)
Luther Anderson (Guided Marine Sport Fisher)
Andy Szczesny (Guided Sport Fisher)
Dwight Kramer (Sport Fisher)

Discussion

- Introductions
- Request to amend agenda to include how a board generated proposal will be set forth. Procedures, etc... Concerned about public participation. Board co-chair Kluberton will go over this later in the meeting.
- The department summarized the 2013 Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast. Memo can be found on website. 29,000 king salmon forecasted using standard method. Alternative method forecasted a smaller run of 24,000. Discussed run timing data in hand.....quarter point is July 12, midpoint is July 19. Without the benefit of knowing how the 2013 Kenai River early run or Cook Inlet wide early run king stocks will perform with this projection, the department would likely start the fishery with bait. An estimated inriver sport harvest on this size run would be approximately 3,700 king salmon through July 18. Marine rec fishery estimated harvest is approximately 600 fish and the personal use (PU) fishery estimated harvest is approximately 800 fish through July 18. The estimated ESSN harvest on Kenai king through July 18 would be approximately 2,500. Therefore, the tentative plan right now would be to start fisheries under standard regulations. This could change depending upon inseason information. Will write up expected harvest data analysis in memo format and post it online for public.
- Department addressed difficulty with projecting runs when they are abnormally late or early. Same difficulty exists with the sockeye salmon projections using the offshore test fish (OTF) boat/project.
- If harvests are large early would that tell the department that the run is larger than forecast? It could, but it could also mean it's early. Would it benefit the department to have the flexibility to manage for a later run? This is our plan now....we have the tools to slow the fishery down now. What does the task force want for tools and how should the department use them?

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

(February 14, 2013; Challenger Learning Center, Kenai, Alaska)

- Member Anderson member asked where the department got the 600 marine harvest estimates, and asked the department to rely on marine sport charter insight and real time information to help manage. The statewide harvest survey provides harvest information for the marine recreational fishery.
- Are there any other tools beside ESSN/sport CPUE and inriver netting to model run timing? What about that pilot study tagging kings in the inlet last year? It showed a spike later in July that indicated a later arriving run. The department's inriver netting project provides the most reliable run timing information for king salmon.
- Member Pitzman stated that his group does not have any proposals. Stated that as important as king salmon are, sockeye salmon are the most important to the area.
- Member Anderson acknowledges that both sockeye and kings are important. Discussed his proposal for the marine recreational fishery. July fishery is much smaller than May/June. Proposed a hard cap on late run king harvest in marine rec fishery. Proposed using tractor launches as harvest data gathering station. Member Kramer asked where Member Anderson got 22,000 fish trigger used in marine rec group proposal? It needlessly restricts the fishery when it's above maximum sustained yield (MSY). Member Anderson responded guided marine sport fishers wants to fish, and more eggs equals more fish. Member Pitzman had a question about the hard cap? Weather could push kings towards the beach randomly causing a large catch reaching limit sooner. Who supports this proposal from the charter group? July charter fishermen.
- Member Gease said his group has no proposals. 30+ thousand households participate in this PU fishery. His members are OK with no retention of king salmon when escapements are below 22,000. Concerned about windows still remaining in place. Weekend windows allow fish to be there when the people are. Discouraged that a lot of the ESSN ideas of limiting king harvest were not pursued more by task force that were mentioned at the first meeting including a modified fish trap. Thanked everyone for their work on this.
- Member Szczesny stated concern for department proposed SEG lower end of 15,000, when no escapement that low has ever occurred in the Kenai. His group supports Delaney's proposal. When king runs are closed it has a huge effect on economy. Participation in this fishery is declining. Guides number 301....down 100+ from 2006. Has concern accounting for kings behind sonar when we really don't know... kings between sonars would be 11,000, and then adding in more for kings that are passing behind sonar.
- Member Delaney thanked everyone. Presented his proposal via PowerPoint. Suggests low abundance be defined as a total run under approximately 35,000. Can't conduct all fisheries in a normal manner with runs under this number. New goal is substantially below range of current data. Suggests achieving 18,000 escapement due to uncertainty of sonar counts. Member Williams commented that there is not equal exploitation between ESSN and sport fishery. Delaney plan is better suited for regular BOF meeting; not the task force; closures to protect early run fish should not apply to ESSN restrictions; and doesn't think it's a fair trade off of paired restrictions. Member Delaney stated his proposal does not raise escapement goals. Sockeye goals were achieved last year,

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

(February 14, 2013; Challenger Learning Center, Kenai, Alaska)

sockeye sustainability not an issue last year. Achieved optimum escapement goal (OEG) easily. Member Coleman stated that the data used to develop new escapement goal for Kuskokwim king salmon not as good as the Kenai data. For years, have not fished until July 8 to let king salmon into the Kenai. Transitioning to DIDSON even though data is limited is the same thing commercial fishery dealt with when sockeye sonar transitioned to DIDSON from Bendix. Have not gone below goals based on this new model.

- Member Kramer amended his proposal from the original proposed at the January 14 meeting.
- Member Williams presented his proposal. Raise the lower end of the OEG from 11,000 to 12,000.
- Member Butler thanked Member Kramer for his short proposal. Can't make up harvest with the drift fleet when fish get by.
- Member Kramer explained that at some point we have to have faith in the department's analysis that these are good numbers and accurate goal recommendations. Baffles him that task force members are dispelling the department's data and proposed goals after all the work they did.
- Member Pitzman said he was willing to discuss lowering the lower bound of an OEG to below 15,000.
- Co-chair Webster described his history with OEG's in Bristol Bay. Have submitted proposals for OEG's before. Has never seen the BOF set an OEG below recommended sustainable escapement goal (SEG). Has never been done before to his knowledge. Said it would probably not get passed.
- During questioning, the department clarified that OEGs have been set below recommended SEGs for Nushagak and Yentna.
- Co-chair Kluberton described task force process on this. Ideally the task force will come to consensus on the different issues; task force recommendations and ideas will be brought before board. Will meet with Department of Law and ADF&G Regulations Specialist tomorrow to write up results of today to get decision documented and made available to public by Feb. 19 so public could comment by March 5 deadline for March 19 meeting. Can the board lower goal without going thru BOF process? No, would need to go through BOF process of creating OEG to change goals.
- Member Butler asked what is needed for recommending an OEG? Co-chair Webster said he will be looking at all the info, and said that in his experience, requesting an OEG lower than what is recommended by department has little chance of passing. Co-chair referenced the Sustainable Salmon Fisheries Policy checklist as a way of proceeding.
- Member Kramer asked if the public comment deadline could be delayed? No, but comments will be accepted after deadline, and seen as late comments. Will there be a board generated proposal? Originally this was an ACR, but it has changed to a board generated proposal. Only the full board can develop a board generated proposal at the statewide BOF meeting in March.

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

(February 14, 2013; Challenger Learning Center, Kenai, Alaska)

Public Comments

- Need more conservation of not just returning adults, but the entire life cycle of king salmon. Believes decline began in the 90's. What happens if runs come in lower than the numbers we're talking about?
- Didn't the Yentna River have an OEG lower than the SEG? Yes, and also in the Nushagak River drainage.
- Clarification on difference between Kuskokwim and Kenai escapement goals and how the goals were developed.
- Question about forecast modeling used for 2013 late run forecast. If lower productivity continues, no one may be fishing given the forecast and possible future runs.
- What is the BOF going to do to make sure the department follows the plan if it's changed? That these guys do their jobs? The BOF has no authority over the department.
- We want to continue to fish, especially on big runs. Wants flexibility for area biologists to manage runs.
- This ESSN fishery is very important to the local economy, and to the participants in it. We record every king salmon on our fish tickets.
- Please take into account the exploitation of Kenai kings by users into consideration when changing the plan. Suggests having another test fish line lower in inlet to detect a late arriving run or a pulse of fish that would let the ESSN fish.
- Management plans weren't followed. They should have been. No need to change plans now.
- Too much Monday morning quarterbacking on last year's run. The run was late. The department did what they thought was necessary at the time.

Lunch Break

Discussion

- Co-chair Kluberton asked to use member Kramer's proposal as a backbone or starting point. Agreed.
- Started with dates marking when decisions are made. Dates should not be binding. Member Delaney was ok with an if/by statement, but not binding department's hands by enforcing dates to when actions are taken. The term: by July 21st will be used as a starting point.
- Member Coleman put forth using an OEG of 13,000-30,000. Member Delaney does not agree with going below 15,000. Need a precautionary zone for managers to start restrictions before landing where the goal would be. Member Kramer explained this (13,000 fish lower end) gives managers a cushion, and let the ESSN fish during peak sockeye run dates. Member Delaney agrees with Kramer's proposal but limiting the beach to 24 hours limit for fishing in the precautionary zone only if it's above 15,000.
- Member Szczesny said the department will step down well before the 21st, and that he does not want to go below 15,000.

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

(February 14, 2013; Challenger Learning Center, Kenai, Alaska)

- Co-chair Kluberton described creating an OEG would be for providing cushion for a late run.....Asked if ADF&G or Dept. of Law knew of any other tool for hedging against a later run situation besides a reduced OEG.
- Member Coleman brought up the start date for the Kenai section, which opens later to allow a front loaded escapement.
- Member Williams described that sockeye harvests peak around July 20.
- Co-chair Kluberton explained his concern for proportion multiplier (Pmr)...the 1.28 multiplier. Has concern for the uncertainty of what proportion of fish are passing behind the sonar. The department explained how Pmr is estimated and that we don't know the full extent of the variability between years. Determined by comparing mark/recap pop estimates to sonar counts.
- Member Kramer asked the department how they would fish with limited hours on a small king run. Hard to tell, would need to estimate what the harvests would be.....and how the kings were doing. Would primarily fish flood tides.....8 hour periods. If there were no hour limitations, the department would probably fish more hours.
- What does adaptive management mean to the department? Windows still in place.....openings would be based on sockeye harvests, and managing for the bottom end of the sockeye goal. Don't know what number of sockeye harvested would be needed to continue fishing.
- Member Delaney asked member Kramer about regular periods when in this precautionary zone, whether or not they would be present as an option to use them or 24 hours. They wouldn't be instituted during this time, only EO hours to fish when sockeye are present. Member Kramer stated that this 2,000 king salmon cushion is not just for commercial fishermen to harvest so that everyone can continue to harvest fish.
- Member Szczesny commented on the 2,000 cushion not working, because it won't make any difference inseason. It's difficult to manage to a small range of fish. Does not want to go below 15,000.
- Member Pitzman explained that even just having two openings, it could make the season.
- Member Butler asked if the switch in goals is actually an increase. The department said that it was not a simple conversion so hard to say if the new goal is higher, lower or the same as the old TS-based goal.
- Co-chair Webster stepped in to moderate discussion and get things on track. Asked if there is a minimum escapement that the task force can agree on?
- Member Kramer asked why would you be restricted when projecting an escapement above MSY, the department manages to make 15,000 nothing else should be a consideration.
- Member Williams said why not bring OEG back down to 11,000, this provides yields similar to what the upper range does (i.e., 30,000)?? Sunsets after one year....
- #1: Co-chair Webster said to put both an OEG of 13,000 and keeping the SEG of 15,000; vote: 5 for 13,000....4 against 13,000, No consensus.

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

(February 14, 2013; Challenger Learning Center, Kenai, Alaska)

- #2: Co-chair Kluberton asked to separate catch and release into its own category as a step down. Member Delaney requests that when inriver goes no bait that a paired restriction in the ESSN take place.
- Member Coleman assumed this proposal was to create an SEG of 13,000 – 30,000.
- Member Pitzman asked if Member Delaney was interested in pairing restrictions that would limit time to the ESSN.....yes.
- Member Delaney will not support going below 15,000. Wants to pair restrictions.
- Co-chair Kluberton asked the set netters what would be a paired step down equal to inriver going to no bait?
- Member Kramer suggested using 36 hours as a starting point, as it's more than the two regular periods, and is during a low state of king runs.
- The department will make restrictions to the inriver users early to prevent closure of the fisheries.
- #3: Member Butler suggested on halving all available (depending on tier) ESSN hours if inriver fishery is restricted to no bait. Vote: 5 for, 4 against, No consensus.
- Co-chair Kluberton clarified that prior to July 21 if inriver is restricted, the ESSN fishery would be prosecuted normally.
- Member Delaney asked why we would want to increase ESSN hours in the third tier if king runs are low and we might close..... member Butler responded by saying this task force is trying to account for possible large sockeye runs during low king runs. The task force shouldn't make things so tight without flexibility so that all the fish get by the beach without a chance to fish.
- Member Delaney asked what would be the ESSN restriction pairing for inriver catch and release.
- Member Delaney against including the upper tier in halving of EO hours on a low king run.
- 36 hours cap for #3; Vote: 4 for, 5 against, No consensus.
- Catch and Release (CnR) restriction pairing suggested..... If CnR in river suggested no more than 24 hours regardless of tier.
- Member Kramer suggested a 12 hour period if CnR inriver for ESSN. Vote: No Vote
- Member Kramer suggested a 18 hour period if CnR inriver for ESSN. Vote: No Vote
- Member Anderson suggested that the marine rec fishery bait boundary be moved to the South Anchor River closure marker; Vote: 6 for, 3 against, No consensus.
- Should there be a pairing of restrictions when inriver goes to CnR; Vote: 5 for, 4 against, No consensus.
- Member Delaney suggested from August 1 to August 10 that king escapement drive ESSN hours. Restrictions on the ESSN should remain in place until August 10, unless king salmon escapements increase to some level between 15,000 and 30,000 fish.
- Member Coleman, there is already the 1% rule for closing the ESSN fishery in August. Continuing restrictions into August would create an undue burden on the ESSN.
- Co-chair Kluberton suggested August restrictions should revert back to the regular management plan; Vote: 5 for, 4 against, No consensus.

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

(February 14, 2013; Challenger Learning Center, Kenai, Alaska)

- Co-chair Kluberton, if at any time prior to Aug. 1 the department projects an escapement greater than 15,000, the restrictions shall end; Vote: 9 for, 0 against, Consensus.