

**Building & Maintaining Public Support of Salmon Resource
Management**

R&M# 01-13

by

Jill Klein

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, Anchorage, Alaska

September, 2014

Project Proponent: Jill Klein, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association P.O. Box 100498,
Anchorage, AK 99510, Jill@yukonsalmon.org

Project Partners:

Dan Bergstrom and Stephanie Schmidt, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 333 Raspberry Rd,
Anchorage, AK 99518 Dan.bergstrom@alaska.gov, stephanie.schmidt@alaska.gov;
Fred Bue, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 101 12th Ave Room 110, Fairbanks AK 99701,
Fredrick_Bue@fws.gov

1. Introduction:

Summary:

This project funds the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFFA) to employ staff members that work on a variety of communications projects that build and maintain public support of, and meaningful participation in salmon resource management. The methods include an annual fisheries meeting that takes place along the Yukon River, paper newsletters mailed to Yukon River villages, electronic mailings sent to people with e-mail who are interested in Yukon River fisheries issues and events, social media such as the YRDFFA website, Twitter, hosting and/or participating in fisheries meetings such as the Yukon Advisory Group, in-season salmon management teleconferences, the annual Educational Exchange program and the development of educational materials and outreach pieces.

Objectives:

- a. To build and maintain public support of, and meaningful participation in, salmon resource management; and
- b. To perpetuate a dependable communications and education infrastructure that can be built upon every year.

2. Study Area: YRDFFA works with all Yukon River drainage villages.

3. Licenses and Permits: YRDFFA has the required business license to operate as a non-profit in Alaska.

4. Methods Include:

Operation:

Annual Fisheries Meeting

The annual fisheries meeting took place along the Yukon River in the village of Fort Yukon from February 10 – 13, 2014. The full YRDFFA delegation of board members and alternates were invited and most attended. State and federal fisheries agencies participated and gave presentations and YRDFFA staff conducted a survey to discuss the need for conservation. In total there were six resolutions passed on the topics of: Magnuson Stevens Act reauthorization, equality of fishing time on the Yukon River, international cooperation, the submission of an Administration for Native Americans proposal, opening summer chum fishing when Chinook salmon fishing is closed and thanking the community of Fort Yukon for hosting us.

YRDFFA Newsletters

Two paper newsletters were mailed out to Yukon River villages, one in January and one in May. Newsletters can be found on the YRDFA website at www.yukonsalmon.org.

Electronic mailings were sent to people with e-mail who are interested in Yukon River fisheries issues and events. YRDFA uses Vertical Response and this platform has a link to Twitter. Social media posts on Twitter were done on an opportunistic basis when there was information to share via social media.

In-Season Salmon Management Teleconferences

This year YRDFA held 14 in-season management teleconferences, every Tuesday in June, July, and August. The calls followed an agenda each week: opening with subsistence fishing reports; hearing from state and federal fisheries managers on their fishery assessments and management strategies; hearing from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Canada and Yukon fishers in the Canadian headwaters. These teleconferences are funded through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and the Yukon River Panel with supporting staff time from the Restoration and Management fund.

The important issues addressed this season during the teleconferences revolved mainly around the low Yukon River Chinook salmon runs and the conservative management strategies used in-season. Other topics include issues such as salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery and also the Magnuson Stevens Act reauthorization.

In-river Chinook salmon fisheries were managed conservatively and this was a major discussion point each week; how the run was coming in and when pulse closures would take place and what gear restrictions were in place. People were concerned about the restriction to 6-inch gear as many people did not have it and did not have time or money to purchase it.

People also wanted to harvest king salmon because it is so important to them and there were a lot of discussions around this. People in different districts requested additional fishing time so they could get king salmon for food and fish wheel fishermen also asked about relief for dog food because they usually catch incidental fish for their dogs while the wheels are turning and this year the wheels did not turn much due to the closures.

Others were concerned about how the information is shared from the teleconferences and YRDFA and others on the teleconferences assured the public that the concerns raised on the calls would be shared.

Magnuson Stevens Act:

Senator Begich's staff updated folks about the Magnuson Stevens Act reauthorization process – this act governs the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and management of the offshore fisheries. Senator Begich holds an important committee seat with responsibility for reauthorizing the act and they discussed priorities which the Alaska Native community are working on for this round of reauthorization include increasing representation on the Council, providing authority for bycatch fines, and requiring bycatch reduction. They supplied the teleconference participants with ways that they can stay involved in this process and give their input.

Salmon Bycatch on Teleconferences:

The purpose of the in-season salmon management calls is to talk about in-river fisheries management. But over the years, people have asked a lot of questions and made a lot of comments on the issue of salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea.

In order to address the need to discuss this important issue, two calls were dedicated to the topic; one at the beginning (the first call) and one towards the end of the season in August, where about half of the teleconference was dedicated to talking about salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. These special sessions on this topic helped to keep the remaining calls focused on in-season salmon management.

YR DFA staff participated in fisheries meetings to include the executive director attending the Yukon River Panel meeting in Whitehorse and the new deputy director also attending this meeting.

Yukon Advisory Group teleconferences (YAG)

YR DFA staff hosted the YAG teleconferences. Two YAG calls took place at the beginning of the fall season. One was scheduled and while on the call a second one was scheduled for the same time the following week. The calls were focused on the fall chum management plan and in-season decisions about when to begin fall fishing for subsistence and commercial harvest.

Educational Exchange Program

YR DFA staff participated in the Educational Exchange program. This trip took place in Canada from August 2–5, 2013. Paige Drobny of Spearfish Research guided the trip and supplied a summary of the trip.

John Lamont of Alakanuk, Fred Huntington of Galena and Stanley Ned of Allakaket met Paige Drobny at the Fairbanks Airport on August 2, 2013 for their departure to Dawson, which included a quick stop in Old Crow that everyone enjoyed and wished they could have had time to tour the village.

The group arrived in Dawson City at 11pm and was met by Dennis Zimmerman, director of the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee, who picked them up in an RV and they met up with several other people from the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee. The Education Exchange group came together the following morning for breakfast, were joined by other Canadian's concerned about Yukon fisheries issues and all participated in a very useful round-table discussion about salmon. The group then took a boat tour of Dawson's surrounding area with Tommy Taylor. They learned about old gold rush places, sat and shared tea and fry bread with Tommy and heard stories about salmon and the places where the participants were from. They found they had some similar relatives. The group then headed for the Yukon Salmon Inter-Tribal Watershed Council summit conference in Mayo. The group met up with Alexie Walters of Mountain Village who was the fourth participant on this trip. The group stayed at the campground for the night, had a bonfire and chatted with Dennis Zimmerman and Frank Thomas about Chinook salmon issues and possible solutions.

On the morning of August 4, the group held an agenda session at 10:45am and Dennis began by showing his video of the educational exchange from 2012. He then moderated a discussion with each of the current participants as well as adding three people from Canada that have been involved with Chinook salmon fishing for a long time. He asked the question, 'How has fishing for Chinook salmon changed in your lifetime, and what can we do to fix it?' This brought out some great discussion from the panel members and also from the audience. The group then traveled to Whitehorse via RV and stopped a couple of times on the way, first to check out the Five Fingers Rapids, a notorious spot on the Yukon River and second to hear about the Chinook salmon sport fishing issues at the Tatchun Creek Campground. The group arrived in Whitehorse around 7pm and went to dinner and then retired to the

campground for the evening. They had another bonfire at the campground and the participants talked over what they had seen and learned over the past couple of days.

The next morning the group participated in a roundtable discussion with the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee, several other stakeholders and some local media. This meeting highlighted the Educational Exchange and focused solely on solutions to the problems. At this point, everyone knows what the problem is but the solution has been elusive. This was a productive Chinook salmon meeting. The discussion was great and the message was united. The hope is to carry this meeting forward to the next meetings in April. After the participants sat down to answer some questions for the media, they went to visit the fish ladder in Whitehorse. They had just had their first Chinook salmon pass that morning and another was holding at the bottom of the ladder so it was great to see on the last day.

No separate educational materials and outreach pieces were created.

5. Results:

The objectives of the award are to build and maintain public support of, and meaningful participation in, salmon resource management; and to perpetuate a dependable communications and education infrastructure that can be built upon every year. The second objective is easier to measure, as there are specific activities that have been taking place on an annual basis due to this award and other awards that create the dependable communications infrastructure. There are meetings, teleconferences and newsletters that regularly go out to Yukon River fishing families. It is the content of these activities that leads to the first objective being accomplished. The first objective could be measured by the cooperation that is taking place among people from the Yukon River and with the state and federal fisheries managers. During the activities that take place, such as the in-person meetings and the teleconferences, YR DFA builds agendas that enable the state and federal fisheries managers and researchers to share information about the status of the salmon runs, salmon specific research taking place and the reason for the fisheries declines. We leave ample time for people to share their views and talk with each other. These regular exchanges among fishermen and others from the Yukon River, along with the state and federal fisheries managers, assists people to be supportive of the fisheries management taking place even though it is restrictive in nature and leads people to not be able to harvest the amount of fish they would like to.

We only sent out two newsletters instead of three. While we sent out one less newsletter than we usually do, for the most part the second objective was met. The second newsletter was longer in length to make up for the lack of a third newsletter. Do to staff turnover, there was more time needed to carry out the other tasks of this award and less time to publish a third newsletter.

6. Discussion:

There are many components to this project and all of them are continuously being carried out and evaluated in preparation for the task to be carried out again. This process has helped to meet the objective of maintaining a dependable communications and education infrastructure that can be built upon every year. Having the same activities on an annual basis has created stability for people from the Yukon River and for fisheries managers to rely on. There has also been a group of fishermen that have been consistently part of these projects. Their participation sometimes brings new people along who are newcomers. It is a little bit intimidating to younger people to participate in our process and they are busy working or taking care of families. The fishing activities are also taking place less than they used to, which has led to a decrease in participation perhaps in some of these communications projects.

There are areas to address and reflect on with each of the components of this program. We can work on improving participation, not only in terms of getting more people to attend events like the annual meeting, but getting more people to actively participate in the discussions that take place at these events by increasing the capacity of those sitting at the table. We also have a group of very knowledgeable people that get mixed in with people who do not regularly stay updated and are not as informed. This leads to an event where the new people need to be brought up to speed and this slows down the people that want to just delve into the issues. We also have people that are at very different places of understanding related to the issue of king salmon fisheries declines. We have a range of beliefs of what the problem really is and what is causing it and if it is a trend or if it is reversible or not. We also have a differing view by people who want to address the issue of who is sitting at the table and how discussions take place and whose right it is to tell people they can fish or not versus people who want to just talk about the fisheries issues and learn more so that they can give meaningful input. This range of viewpoints and perspectives makes progress seem painfully slow sometimes. In light of Chinook issues and the on-going conversation, an Inter-Tribal Fish Commission has formed and is in the process of developing themselves into an organization that will work from a tribal perspective on fisheries issues and management. The development is new to the fisheries work on the Yukon River and could be a new, river-wide forum that meets on an annual basis. YRDFA is watching these developments and will adapt its work, as needed, to accommodate the changes. Additionally, we have received some feedback from fisheries managers that perhaps a smaller group of fishermen from YRDFA, that could meet for one day in the cities of Anchorage or Fairbanks as part of the summer pre-season planning meeting might be a way to adapt to projected decreases in funding available for meetings.

In order to really know how successful we are in terms of building and maintaining public support of, and meaningful participation in salmon resource management, we would need to do a larger evaluation of our work and not just the individual evaluations we do of each specific component of the work. We have the newsletters, the YRDFA website, the in-season salmon management teleconferences, the Yukon Advisory Group, the Educational Exchange amid other venues and events in addition to the ones sponsored by this project. While it is challenging to gauge our work's impact, we know that we are one of the only groups, working for many years to have river-wide participation at discussions about salmon, where local people can give input to the fisheries managers about the decisions they are making. Conversely, this participation allows managers to get to know the folks their management most affects, explain management rationale and goals and increase positive participation in critically needed conservation choices by Yukon fishers. We believe our approach has been vital in getting the managers, fishers and other interested parties to work more collaboratively on fisheries issues the length of the Yukon River.

In light of the king salmon declines in Alaska, we have seen larger participation by the State of Alaska and the Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative to hold larger forums that go beyond the individual river system and include entire regions. When we go to this larger region or statewide scale, then our individual participation from the many Yukon River villages decreases. Not everyone can participate in the events and so we constantly have to ensure that we are continuing with the variety of outreach mechanisms to keep people informed.

YRDFA facilitated and provided support for the U.S. Yukon River Panel Section Advisory Group teleconferences as part of this project. We carry out this objective at the direction of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. We facilitate calls, take notes and distribute them. YAG improvements

include getting information from participants who cannot make the call so members and managers feel confident they will get the information they need on the topics they would like to discuss.

Education Exchange improvements are to focus on a smaller trip with pre-arranged presentations that cover agreed upon in advance topics that panel members, communications committee members and agencies feel are important to discuss.

7. Conclusion:

While this project has run successfully for many years, there are upcoming changes due to external factors of reduced funding, increased costs for travel and lodging for meetings, increased pressures and commitments by people in Yukon River villages and changes over time of the YR DFA staff structure. Possible adaptations to these changes include a cut to the paper newsletter and an annual meeting only, held in conjunction with other meetings in an urban hub of Alaska with just the minimum number of board members as required by the YR DFA by-laws, which are 15. YR DFA staff will continue to work with the YR DFA board members and the staff at the state and federal fisheries agencies to determine the best course of action.

8. Acknowledgements:

Funding for this project was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Yukon River Salmon Research and Management Fund.