

Yukon Salmon Disaster 2000

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State restricts Yukon fishing

The Associated Press
 ANCHORAGE—The state Department of Fish and Game on Tuesday announced substance fishing restrictions on the Yukon River because of extremely poor king and chum salmon returns.

The move came a day before Gov. Tony Knowles scheduled an announcement on a possible disaster declaration for the region.

"The number of salmon arriving on the spawning grounds is unacceptably low throughout the Yukon River drainage," Tom Kiron, fish and game's Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim regional supervisor, said KUTV-TV.

The runs of king and chum salmon are the lowest since statehood, and both state and federal fish managers say there may not even be enough to meet escapement goals and provide brood stock for future years.

These people depend on these stocks for their subsistence, their livelihood, and other income sources out there are not great," said Tom Doyd, a federal subsistence manager. "And so we have to think both short-term and long-term in making these decisions."

The move to limit subsistence fishing was made by state biologists. From the village of Tazewell, roughly 150 miles north of Bethel, to the Canadian border, subsistence fishing is being limited to two 24-hour periods per week. Descendants from Davis, fishing will be allowed for just one 12-hour period per week, but fishing in those areas have already had a chance to meet their subsistence needs, according to officials. The rule goes into effect at 8 p.m. Wednesday.

Knowles declares fishery disaster for western rivers

By LA BODGER
Associated Press
 ANCHORAGE—Gov. Tony Knowles on Wednesday declared a state disaster emergency for parts of Western Alaska as a first step toward dealing with this year's dismal run of king and chum salmon.

It is the third time in the past four years that the governor has declared a fishery disaster in the state—substance fishing.

Now is the time for the Alaska family to come together to help a family member in distress," Knowles said in a news conference in Anchorage.

The declaration makes available \$1 million in state money, and cleared the way for the state to pursue much more in federal disaster assistance.

Marilyn Heiman, Alaska special assistant to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, said the White House was "very concerned" about the extremely low king and chum returns. She said the Clinton administration was waiting for specific reports from Knowles before allocating any emergency funds to Western Alaska.

In 1997 and 1998, the federal government provided more than \$15 million in emergency aid to Western Alaska fishermen.

Knowles' disaster declaration covers the entire Yukon River drainage and all of the Norton Sound, including the village of Kotzebue.

These regions have been hammered by king and chum returns that are only a small fraction of their historic norms. On the Yukon, the returns are the worst since statehood.

The fishery closure has not only hurt commercial fishermen, but also people who depend on subsistence fishing for their livelihood.

Subsistence fishing has been severely curtailed in all three regions in an attempt to increase the number of salmon reaching their spawning grounds.

This week state and federal managers are working on back on subsistence king fishing on the Yukon. Fisheries in the village of Kotzebue are limited to two 24-hour openings.

FAIRBANKS
Daily News-Miner
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 CHARLES L. GILBY
 PRESIDENT
 JULY 13, 2000
 PROTECTING YUKON RIVER SALMON
 Recent moves by Gov. Tony Knowles to protect the Yukon River's salmon fishery are late in coming, but are appreciated.

Knowles wants commercial chum fishery restricted

By MAUREEN CLARK
Associated Press Writer
 ANCHORAGE—Gov. Tony Knowles upped the ante Wednesday in an already bitter fishing dispute by calling for an end to the interception of Western Alaska chum salmon by Alaska Peninsula fishermen who are catching them in the Bering Sea.

The move is in response to the latest collapse of salmon runs in Western Alaska rivers.

At a news conference in Anchorage, Knowles said the interception of chum salmon by commercial fishermen threatens the subsistence and salmon escapement needs of Western Alaska.

"There has to be a dramatic action taken," said Knowles, who acknowledged that eradicating the harvest for Alaska Peninsula fishermen would be difficult and controversial.

Knowles said he had an obligation under the Alaska Constitution to manage the state's fisheries for sustained yield and said state statutes establish subsistence as the highest priority of any harvest.

Knowles has directed the Alaska Board of Fisheries to take action to stop the interception and has asked the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to take steps to reduce the bycatch of fish bound for Western Alaska rivers.

"It's going to make for some lively meetings," I know, Knowles said.

Knowles said the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers and on Norton Sound have, for years, argued that commercial fishermen in what's known as "Area M" were harvesting salmon bound for Western Alaska rivers.

The Area M fishermen harvest chum salmon as bycatch during their Area M sockeye fishery, but contend that they catch only a small portion of the total chum run. They say there are no ecological links between their fishery and the problems on the Yukon, Kuskokwim and Norton Sound.

During the past three years, Area M fishermen caught fewer than the 250,000 chum salmon allowed under a cap set by the Fish Board, said Bob Justman, administrator for the Aleutians East Borough.

Justman said Knowles' action would effectively shut down the Area M sockeye fishery and would have disastrous economic consequences for communities on the Aleutian Peninsula.

"It's shocked," Justman said. "This is the death knell for the local economy. We cannot survive without the Area M fishery."

It isn't possible for Area M fishermen to harvest salmon without catching chum, he said.

Area M fishermen blame the poor returns in Western Alaska rivers on the loss of brood stock.

FISHERY: Disaster

Continued from Page A-1
 The link to a coastal 10-year opening per week.

Last week, 600 tons and catch limits were imposed on Kuskokwim sockeye fishermen. In Norton Sound, the number of subsistence fishing permits has been reduced.

Knowles said the state will seek compromise for affected fishermen and communities to get them through the winter.

The governor spent two days last week traveling in western Alaska, and he said that he was seeking short of food and was a key factor in his decision.

"I am not sure in people's mind I never see before," Knowles said.

"We are fearful that the games they depend on... won't come back."

The emergency declaration has a number of longer term consequences as well.

Knowles said he wants to fund five years of salmon research, and provide more money for food assistance to subsistence fishermen. He also said he wants to create a fund to help rural high school students.

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Protecting Yukon River salmon

By MAUREEN CLARK
Associated Press Writer
 ANCHORAGE—Gov. Tony Knowles said he would like to see the Fish Board take strong action to curb chum fish stocks as "knows" request.

Knowles said there may be a number of cases for the capture of Western Alaska chum salmon. He called the movement action a first step in addressing the problem.

Knowles said he was also asking Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, for \$30 million over the next five years for a biological study to determine the causes for declines in salmon fisheries.

In addition, Knowles said it may be time to reduce production from the state's salmon hatcheries. There is evidence that hatchery fish compete with wild salmon for food while they are in the ocean, he said.

Knowles last month declared a state disaster emergency for sections of Western Alaska where king and chum salmon catches have been just a small fraction of their historic norms. Reduction of this year's fishery is the lowest since statehood.

The declaration makes state and federal subsistence inalienable rights of Western Alaska also suffered fishery disasters in 1997 and 1998.

Interior subsistence fishing closed as chum runs continue to plummet

By TIM MOHR
Staff Writer
 Villagers on the Tanana and Yukon rivers are being urged to stop subsistence fishing for their families and dog teams that winter for subsistence fishing on both rivers was closed Monday in response to what may be the worst fall chum salmon run in recent years.

"It's pretty much a worst-case scenario," said Dan Senneker, executive director of the Yukon River Fishermen's Association.

Subsistence fishing falls in the middle of the river with flows to 25 to 30 percent of their fall chum harvest," said Mary Kay, head of the subsistence division of the state Department of Fish and Game. "It is a disaster for the people who depend on it."

The fishing fall chum run is the final chapter in what has been a tragic story of subsistence on the Yukon and Tanana rivers. It follows dismal king and summer chum runs in those areas last year.

"This is just kind of a real heartbreaker," said Senneker. "In the middle of the Yukon River valley of Kotzebue, normally, we'd see the king and chum provide king returns with most of the fish they cut out over the winter and fall chum are used to fill in any shortfalls. This year, however, residents were lucky to catch half the usual number of kings. They were hoping a decent run of fall chum would help make up for the lack of kings and summer chum."

"Now we're wondering what we're going to do for our children," said Senneker.

Western Alaska subsistence fishing, including those in the Yukon River, was declared a disaster by Gov. Tony Knowles last month. It is the second time in three years the Yukon River salmon runs have been declared a disaster. So far, approximately \$20 million in state and federal money have been dedicated to helping fishermen cope with the fall chum run, though only a fraction of that amount has been distributed.

Fall chum are also the primary source of dog food for villagers who use the teams for trapping, hauling, firewood and water. Some subsistence fishing is required to feed the dogs.

Senneker said he hopes that the state will subsidize subsistence to feed their dogs, and that they will be able to get their dogs fed.

There are now approximately 100,000 dogs in the state.

Fight over fish

By WESLEY LOY
Staff Writer
 Gov. Tony Knowles, in declaring a salmon disaster emergency last month, proposed a raft of strong measures to curb the runs that help feed 30,000 people.

The governor's declaration closed Western Alaska rivers, which are the largest of their kind in the state.

POLLOCK RACE ENDS
 The fishing fishery is safer, some say, but not safer when it comes to the fish.

Salmon stocks have been secured for too long.

But to fishing interests in other parts of the state, some of the governor's proposals would be a disaster.

The Knowles administration is in the process of drafting letters to federal and state officials to request changes to the fishing fishery in the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers and the Norton Sound region.

In his July 19 disaster declaration speech, Knowles hit on some of the state's most contentious fisheries issues.

"I've promised a letter to the state Board of Fisheries asking it to move before next

Subsistence: Chum fishing closed

Continued from Page A-1
 It marks only the second time subsistence fishing for fall chum has been shut down on the Yukon River. The previous time was closed in the 1990s, when only 200,000 chum salmon were caught.

"This run is barely 100,000 chum salmon," said Senneker.

Senneker said that the fall chum run is the final chapter in what has been a tragic story of subsistence on the Yukon and Tanana rivers. It follows dismal king and summer chum runs in those areas last year.

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Industry hits Knowles' plan

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"We will send a letter to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which regulates commercial fishing in waters up to 200 miles off the coast, saying there must be a halt to the accidental catch of king and chum salmon by trophy-seeking predators and other bottomfish."

"I don't expect the state's Fish and Game commissioner to reduce or stop hatchery production of fish in Southeast and in Prince William Sound that might be competing in the ocean with wild chum from Western Alaska."

"I'm trying to get the state's Transportation Secretary Highway Slater and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright reporting back to Congress on the state's fisheries and subsistence, and a full accounting of possible lawsuits of migrating Alaska salmon in foreign fishing areas."

The governor also proposed other measures, including a search for hatchery or other pollution in Western Alaska, emergency money to help people pay for winter heating and fuel, a five-year research program to study ocean survival and freshwater productivity of salmon, and expanded building and education programs for Western Alaskans.

"I know some of these steps are going to be very controversial, but I feel on all Alaskans to bear the burden of conservation and in the process to protect the subsistence way of life," Knowles said.

Bob King, the governor's spokesman, said the state's constitution and statutes require Knowles to make fish conservation and subsistence top priorities. That means making tough choices to save Yukon, Kuskokwim and

THE BACK PAGE

KNOWLES: Plan attempts to boost salmon runs in Western Alaska

Continued from Page A-1
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State restricts Yukon fishing

The Associated Press

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The move came a day before Gov. Tony Knowles scheduled an announcement on a possible disaster declaration for the region.

"The number of salmon arriving on the spawning grounds is unacceptably low throughout the Yukon River drainage," Tom Kron, fish and game's Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim regional supervisor, told KTUU-TV.

The runs of king and chum salmon are the lowest since statehood, and both state and federal fish managers say there may not even be enough to meet escapement goals and provide brood stock for future years.

"These people depend on these stocks for their sustenance, their livelihood, and other income sources out there are not great," said Tom Boyd, a federal subsistence manager. "And so we have to think both short-term and long-term in making these decisions."

The move to limit subsistence fishing was made by state biologists. From the village of Anvik, roughly 150 miles north of Bethel, to the Canadian border, subsistence fishing is being limited to two 24-hour periods per week. Downstream from Anvik, fishing will be allowed for just one 12-hour period per week, but fishermen in those areas have already had a chance to meet their subsistence needs, according to state officials. The rules go into effect at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

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Knowles declares fishery disaster for western areas

By T.A. BADGER
Associated Press Writer

ANCHORAGE—Gov. Tony Knowles on Wednesday declared a state disaster emergency for parts of Western Alaska as a first step toward dealing with this year's dismal runs of king and chum salmon.

It is the third time in the past four years that the governor has declared a fishery disaster in the salmon-dependent region.

"Now is the time for the Alaska family to come together to help a family member in distress," Knowles said at a news conference in Anchorage.

The declaration makes available up to \$1 million in state money, and cleared the way for the state to pursue much more in federal

disaster assistance.

Marilyn Helman, Alaska special assistant to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, said the White House was "very concerned" about the extremely low king and chum returns. She said the Clinton administration was waiting for specific requests from Knowles before allocating any emergency funds to Western Alaska.

In 1997 and 1998, the federal government provided more than \$15 million in emergency aid to Western Alaska fishermen.

Wednesday's disaster declaration covers the entire Yukon River drainage, the entire Kuskokwim River drainage and all of Norton Sound.

Those regions have been hammered by

king and chum returns that are only a small fraction of their historic norms. On the Yukon, the returns are the worst since statehood.

The fishery collapse has not only hurt commercial fishermen, but also people fishing for subsistence food.

Subsistence fishing has been severely curtailed in all three regions in an attempt to increase the number of salmon reaching their spawning grounds.

This week state and federal managers severely cut back on subsistence king fishing on the Yukon. Upstream of the village of Anvik, fishermen are limited to two 24-hour open-

See FISHERY, Page A-5



Al Grillo/Associated Press photo

SALMON DISASTER—Myron Naneng, president of the Association of Village Councils, discusses how the poor salmon runs in Western Alaska are affecting Natives, during a news conference where Gov. Tony Knowles, left, signed a declaration of disaster. Will Mayo, adviser to the Knowles administration, listens.

Knowles wants commercial chum fishery restricted

By MAUREEN CLARK
Associated Press Writer

ANCHORAGE—Gov. Tony Knowles upped the ante Wednesday in an already bitter fishing dispute by calling for an end to the interception of Western Alaska chum salmon by Alaska Peninsula fishermen.

The move is in response to the latest collapse of salmon runs in Western Alaska rivers.

At a news conference in Anchorage, Knowles said the interception of chum salmon by commercial fishermen threatens the subsistence and salmon escapement needs of Western Alaska.

"There has to be dramatic action taken," said Knowles, who acknowledged that cutting the harvest for Alaska Peninsula fishermen would be difficult and controversial.

Knowles said he had an obligation under the Alaska Constitution to manage the state's fisheries for sustained yield and said state statutes establish subsistence as the highest priority of any harvest.

Knowles has directed the Alaska Board of Fisheries to take action to stop the interception and has asked the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to take steps to reduce the bycatch of fish bound for Western Alaska rivers.

"It's going to make for some lively meetings, I know," Knowles said.

Communities along the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers and on Norton Sound have, for years, argued that commercial fishermen in what's known as "Area M" were harvesting salmon bound for Western Alaska rivers.

The Area M fishermen harvest chum salmon as bycatch during their June sockeye fishery, but contend that they catch only a small portion of the total chum run. They say there are no conclusive links between their fishery and the problems on the Yukon, Kuskokwim and Norton Sound.

During the past three years, Area M fishermen caught fewer than the 250,000 chum salmon allowed under a cap set by the Fish Board, said Bob Juettner, administrator for the Aleutians East Borough.

Juettner said Knowles' action would effectively shut down the Area M sockeye fishery and would have disastrous economic consequences for communities on the Alaska Peninsula.

"I'm shocked," Juettner said. "This is the death knell for the local economy. We cannot survive without the June fishery."

It isn't possible for Area M fishermen to harvest sockeye without catching chums, Juettner said.

Area M fishermen blame the poor returns in Western Alaska on climatic changes in the ocean.

Myron Naneng, who heads the Bethel-based Association of Village Council Presidents, said he would wait to see if the Fish Board takes strong action to conserve fish stocks as Knowles requested.

Knowles said there may be a number of causes for the collapse of Western Alaska fisheries. He called the management action a first step in addressing the problem.

Knowles said he also was asking Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, for \$30 million over the next five years for a biological study to determine the reasons for declines in salmon fisheries.

In addition, Knowles said it may be time to reduce production from the state's salmon hatcheries. There is evidence that hatchery fish compete with wild salmon for food while they are in the ocean, he said.

Knowles last month declared a state disaster emergency for portions of Western Alaska where king and chum salmon returns have been just a small fraction of their historic norms. Returns this year on the Yukon River were the lowest since statehood.

The declaration makes state and federal disaster assistance available to area residents.

Western Alaska also suffered fishery disasters in 1997 and 1998.

FAIRBANKS

Daily News - Miner

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Publisher

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Managing Editor

BRIAN O'DONOGHUE
Editorial Page Editor

Aug 13 2000

Protecting Yukon River salmon

Recent moves by Gov. Tony Knowles to protect the Yukon River's salmon fishery are late in coming, but no less appreciated.

Alaska Peninsula fishermen are said to be reacting with shock to the governor's call for an end to the interception of Western Alaska chum salmon. How, they ask, is the Peninsula fleet supposed to avoid hauling in the chums long-collected as so-called bycatch of their sanctioned June sockeye harvest?

The reason this comes as a surprise is the state has for years done nothing to enforce the priority to which the Yukon's subsistence fishermen are legally entitled.

First preference for taking of fish and wildlife by individuals for their own use, rather than for sale, has been the law in Alaska since 1978.

Yet even as Western Alaska's salmon fisheries repeatedly failed, Bering Sea trawlers fishing for pollock and other species have reported an average bycatch of 42,000 king salmon and 57,000 chum salmon every year.

This June alone some 240,000 chum were collected as bycatch in the Peninsula's False Pass fishery.

Stock identification studies conducted in years past showed approximately half these fish originate in Northwest Alaska, including the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Norton Sound regions. The governor cited those findings last week as he called for the bycatch ban.

Despite the mounting evidence, the Alaska Board of Fish has balked at imposing the severe restrictions needed to ensure Western Alaska salmon are harvested closer to their rivers of origin, thus making management of those fisheries more precise.

The board majority justified its inaction observing that bycatch was not the main problem—larger environmental factors were at work.

The governor alluded to as much last week when he suggested reductions in Alaska hatchery production may also be needed to avoid overloading the ocean habitat shared with Western Alaska's wild salmon.

The collapse witnessed in the Yukon salmon fisheries shows the danger of deferring action until exact weights can be assigned to complex causal factors.

In the past, the howls of the powerful commercial fishing interests steered authorities away from their law's mandate; given the priority subsistence fisheries command, what can be done to protect them, must be done.

The governor is to be commended for finally moving beyond the academic debate and calling for action. Halting the damage the Peninsula bycatch wreaks upon Yukon salmon runs may not be the whole answer, but it's a long-overdue first step.

Members of the state Fish Board and the North Pacific Fishery Management Counsel need to quit appeasing commercial fishing interests and fulfill their duty to protect the Yukon's endangered subsistence fisheries.

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