



Craig Fleener
USA

Co-Chairs

Frank Quinn
Canada

Yukon River Panel 100 – 419 Range Road Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 3V1

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Yukon River Panel discussion focused on expected low return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon in 2011.

The Yukon River Panel, established by the US/Canada Yukon River Salmon Agreement, met in Whitehorse from March 21 through 24 to discuss 2011 salmon run outlooks and review interim escapement goals for Canadian origin Chinook and fall chum salmon. The Panel agreed to continue an interim Canadian escapement goal range adopted in 2010 of 42,500 to 55,000 Chinook salmon as evaluated by Eagle sonar. The Panel also agreed to continue an interim mainstem Canadian escapement goal range of 70,000 to 104,000 upper Yukon fall chum salmon. For the Fishing Branch River, a tributary of the Porcupine River, the Panel agreed to an interim escapement goal of 22,000-49,000 fall chum salmon for the next 3 years. In addition to these escapement goals, there is a commitment to pass enough Chinook and fall chum salmon across the border to meet harvest share agreements.

The expected low return of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon in 2011 generated much discussion. Based on data compiled by the Panel's Joint Technical Committee, the 2011 Chinook salmon run is anticipated to be below average to poor. The Panel review of the Chinook salmon run outlook found that conservation of these salmon stocks will require very conservative management measures in 2011 to ensure an adequate return of Chinook salmon into Canada. Fishery managers in Alaska are gathering input from local fishermen regarding salmon management strategies and options to assist in getting adequate numbers of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon to the spawning grounds. This is a challenging endeavor which is extremely important for sustaining future runs.

In addition to discussing biological and management issues, the Panel allocated over \$US 1 million for salmon and habitat Restoration and Enhancement Fund projects in both Alaska and the Yukon Territory. The Panel has allocated over \$US 8 million since 2002 to community-based projects, including stewardship projects, directly supporting the management and recovery of Yukon River salmon stocks originating in Canada. In 2011, these projects included test fisheries and population monitoring projects in Mountain Village, Rampart-Rapids, and Eagle in Alaska; and in communities within the Yukon drainage in Yukon Territory, both along the Yukon River Mainstem and tributaries, such as the Porcupine River. These communities include Dawson, Mayo, Old Crow, Teslin and Whitehorse.

Other restoration and enhancement projects involve the application of technologies to support fishery management. These projects include advanced genetic stock identification technology and salmon run counting techniques using sonar stations at the US-Canada border and within the Canadian portion of the system. All have assisted with monitoring escapement objectives set by the Panel.

A long range plan for guiding the R & E Fund was approved, following lengthy discussion. The Pacific Salmon Commission was selected as the administrator of the Yukon River Panel's R & E fund. The Pacific Salmon Commission currently administers the Northern and Southern funds of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Since signing of the Yukon Agreement in 2002, the Panel has set an example for cooperation in the sharing and management of international salmon stocks. The Panel, which operates under the umbrella of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, consists of 12 Alaska and Yukon Territory residents from throughout the Yukon River system, and is supported by regional advisors and scientists and managers from Canadian and United States agencies.

At its winter meeting in December, the Panel will review the status of the 2011 salmon runs and the management actions utilized in 2011. The Panel will also consider research proposals for 2012.

Contact: Craig Fleener 907-267-2228; Frank Quinn 867-393-6719