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Poor runs of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon in 2010 and severe restrictions on fishing in Canada a major concern at biannual meeting of the international Yukon River Salmon Panel in Anchorage, Alaska.

The Yukon River Panel, established by the US/Canada Yukon River Salmon Agreement, met in Anchorage on December 6 through 9 to review the status of the 2010 salmon runs and the management actions utilized in 2010. The Panel also considered Restoration and Enhancement proposals for 2011.

Underscoring the poor return this year of Yukon River Chinook salmon into Canada was the large contingent of First Nations attending this year's December meeting of the Yukon River Panel. First Nation's representatives from Teslin, Old Crow, Dawson City, Pelly Crossing, Mayo, and Whitehorse, Yukon Territory testified at the Panel meeting. They voiced their concerns with the size of the Chinook salmon run, and also reiterated concerns with the quality of the fish returning in recent years, noting that the fish have been smaller than they were historically. A common message from all of the First Nations was: "We have not fished because we have not had the fish and we need to protect and conserve the fish for future generations. We are all hurting."

The 2010 run of Yukon River Chinook salmon stocks of Canadian origin came in below the forecast of 78,000-113,000 salmon. An estimated 33,000 Chinook salmon crossed the border into Canada in 2010, well below the border passage goal of between 42,500 to 55,000 Chinook salmon. As a result, the treaty obligation to Canada was not met in 2010. The poor border passage resulted in severe restrictions on fishing in Canada, with closures of the commercial, domestic, and sport fisheries and First Nations fisheries enacting voluntary restrictions.

The Panel review of the Chinook salmon run and fisheries found that not only was the run four days later than normal, but weaker than the expected average to below average run forecast. Going in to the season, conservation measures in place on the US side included no directed commercial fishing for Chinook salmon and a delay of the first commercial fishery for chum salmon. Inseason, high water and debris persisted in the middle and upper river of Alaska, causing poor fishing conditions for Chinook salmon that were expected to provide for more fish passage across the Canadian border. Given

the failure to meet Treaty obligations, US managers will continue work with Alaska stakeholders to develop a conservative management approach that includes additional focus on the beginning of the run which is comprised of a higher proportion of Canadian origin Chinook salmon.

The fall chum salmon run fared better, with a limited commercial harvest in the lower river and in the Tanana River drainage in Alaska, and commercial and domestic fisheries allowed in Canada. The spawning escapement of 106,861 fall chum into Canada exceeded the goal of 70,000 to 104,000 salmon. However, the escapement of fall chum in the Fishing Branch of the Porcupine River fell below the goal of 22,000 to 49,000 fall chum, with only 14,211 fall chum salmon counted at the Fishing Branch River weir.

The Panel held discussions on the need to work together to better understand the function of the ecosystem; the importance of restoring and protecting the spawning grounds; and the importance of working together to meet U.S. subsistence and Canadian First Nations harvest needs.

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.

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 2010, these projects included test fisheries and population monitoring projects in Mountain Village, Rampart-Rapids, and Ruby 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, Minto, 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 the escapement objectives set by the Panel. Important discussions on formulating a long range plan for guiding the R&E fund were also held.

At its spring meeting in March, the Panel will allocate \$US1 million for Restoration and Enhancement Fund projects in both Alaska and Yukon Territory and review specific escapement guidelines for the management of the Chinook and fall chum salmon stocks in 2011.

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