



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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AFN and AVCP Request Yukon Fisheries Disaster Declaration from Commerce Secretary

In a September 17 letter to U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) joined the State of Alaska in requesting an immediate declaration of a fisheries disaster on the Yukon River for 2021.

Salmon returns along the Yukon River have been in decline for more than a decade, creating numerous hardships for the people and communities that heavily depend on this fishery resource. This decline has hit a level never seen before, bringing the salmon fishery on the Yukon River near collapse this season.

“We are hopeful Secretary Raimondo will find that these fisheries meet the requirements for a fishery disaster determination, as she did earlier this summer for four other fisheries,” said Julie Kitka, AFN President. “But make no mistake, this is a disaster, whether or not it’s officially declared as such. When communities and economies are built on the dependability of salmon stocks and those stocks go missing year after year, it’s a disaster and a crisis.”

The Yukon River salmon collapse means entire villages are unable to obtain the salmon they need to satisfy their basic food needs for the winter or to earn the cash needed from the small commercial fishery to purchase necessities to engage in other subsistence activities. The severity and magnitude of the loss of salmon have caused widespread panic across the many regions and communities along the Yukon River.

“Salmon have always been a staple of our diet and essential for the food security of the entire Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region,” said Vivian Korthuis, CEO of the Bethel-based Association of Village Council Presidents. “When our smokehouses are unused and our freezers unfilled, we have no choice but to turn to store-bought processed foods. This is expensive as it is unhealthy.”

The situation is compounded by high energy prices, the high costs of alternative sources of protein, and the supply chain disruption, costs, and risks associated with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to the request for a commercial and subsistence fisheries disaster declaration, AFN and AVCP requested that Commerce increase funding for research on

the lifecycle of salmon species in the ocean and the effects that changes to the ocean environment are having on salmon as they return to their spawning grounds in Alaska. AFN and AVCP additionally requested that Commerce partner with Alaska Native organizations to conduct such research and to fully incorporate traditional knowledge.

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About AFN:

Founded 55 years ago, AFN is the oldest and largest statewide Native organization in the state. Our membership includes 9 regional for-profit regional corporations and 166 village for-profit corporations established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), 12 regional not-for-profit Native organizations (or tribal consortia) that contract and compact to administer federal services in accordance with ISDEAA, and 169 federally recognized Alaska Native tribes. Our mission, among other things, is to advance and enhance the political voice of the Alaska Native community on issues of mutual concern.

About AVCP:

AVCP is a regional nonprofit tribal consortium comprised of the 56 federally recognized tribes of the YK Delta. The geographic boundaries of AVCP extend from the Yukon River Village of Russian Mission downstream to the Bering Sea coast, north up through Kotlik and south along the coastline to Platinum and then extending up the Kuskokwim River to Stony River, including Lime Village on the Stony River tributary. The area encompasses approximately 6.5 million acres, or 55,000 square miles, in Western Alaska.