

August, 2022



Working together with Tribes to enhance sovereignty, self-sufficiency and Our Way of Life.

Yuput calillgutekluki elluarrluta yuuluallerkamtenun.

Let's Talk Fish

Here are a series of press releases over the last three months that demonstrates the services and advocacy AVCP provided towards protecting our people's subsistence way of life.

Association of Village Council Presidents News

Contact:

Gage Hoffman

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5/10/22



AVCP Natural Resources Strategic Planning Session

Protecting the natural resources Yup'ik people depend on is one of AVCP's primary priorities. Many of those efforts are led by the AVCP natural resources team led by Jennifer Hooper.

In late April, members of the AVCP leadership team spend two full days examining how our organization manages natural resources for the betterment of us all. The sessions allowed staff time to evaluate workflows, examine new opportunities for AVCP to increase our natural resources and subsistence advocacy efforts. Time was well spent listening and learning, prioritizing the region's natural resources needs for both now and into the future.

Vivian Korthuis: "The natural resource strategic planning session was extremely informative and useful on many levels. I am proud of the team's commitment to doing everything in our power to serve as good stewards of the environment which provides for our people. Our subsistence way of life is who we are-protecting our natural resources is fundamentally important to AVCP."



The meeting identified all the federal, state, and regional organizations AVCP partnership within the Y-K Delta and throughout Alaska.

The group spent a good deal of time discussing the pending salmon crisis and subsistence issues. 98-percent of households in our region fish for salmon and 70 percent harvest game each year.

Jennifer Hooper: “I came away from this strategic session with a renewed sense of excitement for the work AVCP does. I know the initiatives we are working on and those new initiatives we are considering will benefit our region. As the leader of AVCP’s natural resources team, I am committed to open communication with the people in our region-from village to village the AVCP natural resources efforts will be known.”

The strategic planning session was a part of AVCP’s commitment to excellence both in the short and long term.



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For additional information, please contact AVCP Communications Director, Gage Hoffman at 907-543-7308 or email at ghoffman@avcp.org

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.

May 24, 2022

Area M Seiners Association
P.O. Box 324
Sand Point, AK 99661

Delivered via email: areamseiners@gmail.com

Re: Request to stand-down during June 2022 openers to ensure escapement of AYK-bound chum salmon

Dear President Kiley Thompson:

In June 2010-12, the Area M purse seine fleet voluntarily forewent participation in the first commercial salmon opening of the season to prevent interception of chum stocks passing through the Alaska Peninsula region en route to natal streams in the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Region. Considering recent failures to meet minimal chum salmon escapement goals within the AYK Region, the loss of subsistence and commercial harvest of chum salmon on the Yukon River in 2021, and dire chum salmon harvest projections for 2022, the Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, together with the undersigned organizations, asks the Area M purse seine fleet to stand down during all June commercial salmon openers to prevent the interception of AYK-bound chum stocks.

High rates of AYK-bound chum salmon are intercepted in Area M's June salmon fishery, particularly within the Shumagin Islands and South Unimak districts. The Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Program (WASSIP) demonstrated that AYK-bound chum stocks comprised, on average, between 31.53% – 51.8% of the June commercial chum harvest between 2007 and 2009. WASSIP also confirmed that with respect to the South Unimak district, AYK-bound chum stocks were the most dominant group present in the June commercial harvest. Between 2007 and 2009, AYK-bound chum stocks comprised, on average, 42.4% - 82.93%, of the South Unimak district's June commercial chum harvest.

In 2021, the Yukon Area had no summer or fall subsistence or commercial chum harvest. Within the Kuskokwim drainage, less than 6,000 chum salmon were commercially harvested in 2021 and there was zero in-river commercial opportunity. In stark contrast, in June 2021 alone, the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June commercial fishery harvested 1,168,601 chum salmon, the highest chum salmon harvest in the history of the Area M fishery.

2021 also saw dire summer chum salmon escapement levels throughout the AYK Region. Kuskokwim drainage weirs documented the lowest chum escapement on record. The Yukon drainage is subject to a BEG of 500,000–1,200,000 summer chum; in 2021, the drainage-wide escapement was a mere 153,497 summer chum salmon. The Yukon River fall chum run is subject to an SEG of 300,000-600,000 fish and average 998,000 fish, but in 2021, that run totaled 102,000, almost 200,000 under the lower range of the SEG.


The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) 2022 pre-season estimate for Yukon Area chum returns does not inspire confidence that chum run strength will improve. Summer chum estimates forecast a far-below-average run of 162,000–542,000 fish. Fall chum run estimates forecast approximately 110,000 fish, well below the SEG range of 300,000–600,000 fish. If these forecasts hold, the 2022 summer and fall chum runs will not meet minimum drainage-wide escapement levels, and there will be no subsistence and commercial fisheries, further devastating local economies and compounding food insecurity throughout the AYK region.

The sustainability of future chum stocks depends upon achieving escapement goals in the AYK Region this year. If the Area M purse seine fleet does not stand down, the unmitigated harvest of AYK-bound chum salmon all but assures the crash of chum stocks and the destruction of economies and traditional subsistence lifestyles.

This coalition, made up of organizations with strong economic and cultural ties to our in-region fisheries, recognizes that standing down from June commercial openers is not without economic consequences. But the survival of the AYK region– and the existence of its chum runs – depends upon the recognition of how our collective actions affect one another. Area M's unmitigated interception of AYK-bound chum salmon stocks in the June salmon fishery will drive those stocks beyond recovery and endanger an entire region and peoples' ways of life.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,


Executive Director

cc: Governor Mike Dunleavy

Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang

Alaska Board of Fisheries Members:

Märit Carlson-Van Dort

Gerad Godfrey

Mike Heimbuch

John Jensen

McKenzie Mitchell

Israel Payton

John Wood




Vivian Korthuis, Chief Executive Officer
Association of Village Council Presidents




H. Robin Samuelson, Jr., Board Chair
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation



CALISTA CORPORATION
www.calistacorp.com

Andrew Guy
Andrew Guy, President
Calista Corporation



Eric Deakin
Eric Deakin, Chief Executive Officer
Coastal Village Region Fund



Mary David
Mary David for Melanie Bahnke, President
Kawerak, Inc.



Kevin Whitworth
Kevin Whitworth, Interim Executive Director
Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission



Janis Ivanoff
Janis Ivanoff, President & Chief Executive Officer
Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation



Serena Fitka
Serena Fitka, Executive Director
Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association

Association of Village Council Presidents News

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 6/7/22



AVCP Will Testify at Major Fishery Conference

All eyes will be on Sitka, Alaska this week as the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meets to discuss the devastating impacts of the salmon shortage in our region. Among those testifying to demand solutions will be Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) Chief Executive Office Vivian Korthuis and AVCP Director of Natural Resources Jennifer Hooper.

“Our region, our way of life is in crisis, and we need action from the council. Data from experts from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game shows that Western Alaska Chinook salmon runs in 2020 and 2021 are the lowest they have been in 30 years. 2022 projects the same dismal forecast. What your reports do not show are the families in Western Alaska who are worrying about putting away enough fish to feed their children throughout the winter and the parents and grandparents who are unable to pass their way of life down to their children and grandchildren.” says AVCP Chief Executive Officer Vivian Korthuis.

The week-long meeting will feature testimony from several stakeholders including Tribes, scientists, and fishery experts from the region.

“Now is the time for the answers and action”, says AVCP Director of Natural Resources Jennifer Hooper. Hooper adds, “we will be calling for Tribes to be engaged on a government-to-government basis, we expect Indigenous knowledge to be used in decision making and we want the immediate reduction of bycatch.”

AVCP is a leading voice of advocacy on matters of natural resources. Our people view subsistence as a foundational part of who we are and what connects generations.

The AVCP communication team is committed to following the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting from start to finish. Please follow the events at avcp.org by going to the newsroom under News & Events. Our coverage will include complete AVCP testimony and helpful informational stories.

For additional information, please contact AVCP Communications Director, Gage Hoffman at 907-543-7308 or email at ghoffman@avcp.org

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Association of Village Council Presidents News

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6/9/22



AVCP Director of Natural Resources Jennifer Hooper called for immediate action to combat the salmon shortage in our region. Today, Hooper provided the following testimony at the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in Sitka, Alaska.

Madam Chair and members of the Advisory Panel,

My name is Jennifer Hooper, and I am here speaking on behalf of the Association of Village Council Presidents. AVCP is the tribal consortium of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Western Alaska with 56 federally recognized Tribes. We work with our Tribes to provide services to the 27,000 residents of the region. Our comments today are on Salmon and agenda item D1.

AVCP has provided testimony to the Council in the past, urging action to reduce the levels of salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea to support stocks in Western Alaska a chance to recover. In 2021, we shared the critical importance of salmon to the communities in our region and described how in 2020 and again in 2021, our families on the Kuskokwim and Yukon were restricted from subsistence fishing. For those families on the Yukon River, the disastrous returns of Chinook salmon were compounded by the unprecedented record low return of summer chum and fall chum. The river was closed from ice-out for the entire season. There was no economic opportunity from very modest commercial fisheries but, even more critical, people were not able to harvest salmon for food. Families – parents and grandparents, children, and grandchildren – were denied the essential cultural and spiritual connection to the salmon. There was no opportunity to go to fish camp, no opportunity to teach and to learn the long-held ways and traditions of harvesting and processing salmon.

I would like to highlight a few tables in ADFG's WAK chum & Chinook salmon stock status report that summarize 2020 and 2021. What is the level of abundance for every single chum salmon stock listed from the Nushagak to Kotzebue Below average. What is the level of abundance for every single Chinook salmon stock from the Nushagak to Norton Sound Below average. What do you imagine the tables will say for 2022 in next year's report With the reports provided and knowing that the Yukon River is closed with no subsistence fishing projected and the Kuskokwim River closed with very limited subsistence fishing opportunities – a pretty good guess would be below average.

Who do these below average salmon stock abundances really fall on They fall on the shoulders of every single one of our fishing families. There is an overwhelming certainty of food insecurity for families in the YK Delta and throughout Western Alaska. We stated before that it was going to be agonizing to imagine the struggles our families were going to face when winter came ... compound that with another year of the same worries, the same anxieties, the same empty fish camps, and empty freezers. Just imagine what even a few more fish would mean.

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Recommendations to implement:

- Move to apply a lower cap on Chinook salmon and to set an effective cap on chum salmon. We recognize the importance of research and understanding how other things are affecting our returning salmon but, we don't have time to wait until we have all the answers – it is critical to reduce salmon bycatch now. We have advocated for zero bycatch before. It may not be palatable but, it must be the ultimate goal of everyone – any waste is unacceptable. We all know that mandates and incentives (and caps and closures) can be pretty motivating reasons for compliance and ingenuity.
- Utilize the thousands of years of knowledge and experience that we hold and bring us into your process. A true collaborative approach fosters consultation, includes Indigenous Knowledge, and invites participation and partnerships. Grant the respect and inclusion of tribes in your decision making. The foundations of our processes are holistic and center on preservation and safeguarding resources for those who will come after us.

A year ago, we stressed that any commercial fishery must be managed in a way that prioritizes the sustainability of the resource and factors in every level of impact they have on other things – whether it's the ecosystem, other fisheries, or the waste of bycatch. We respectfully request that you take action to support and forward these recommendations to the Council.

To close, I've mentioned these words before but, they still have such significance. An elder from our region once told us, "We don't have a word for "waste" in our language." He reminded us that "the fish are our inheritance...we have to do something to conserve, otherwise we are going to be the ones to tell stories to our grandchildren about the beautiful salmon we used to catch."

Thank you.

Association of Village Council Presidents News

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6/14/22



AVCP Chief Executive Officer Vivian Korthuis called for immediate action on behalf of tribes in the Y-K Delta to find solutions for the salmon shortage in our region. On June 12th, Korthuis provided the following testimony at the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in Sitka, Alaska.

Madam Chair and members of the Advisory Panel,

My name is Vivian Korthuis, and I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP). I will be speaking to agenda item D1, Salmon reports. Our tribal members are suffering from an unprecedented salmon crash and our tribes are demanding immediate action from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. I will briefly share three recommendations for finding solutions to this crisis.

AVCP is the largest tribal consortium in the Nation, with 56 federally recognized tribes as members. We are in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of Western Alaska. There are 48 villages spread along the Yukon River, Kuskokwim River, and Bering Sea Coast, making us an Arctic region. The Y-K Delta has approximately 27,000 residents, who are primarily Yup'ik, Cup'ik, and Athabascan. Subsistence is our Way of Life. 70% of households in the Y-K Delta harvest game, and 98% harvest fish. Salmon is the main fish our families rely on to feed us throughout the winter.

The reports provided to you and your experts from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game have shown that Western Alaska Chinook salmon runs in 2020 and 2021 are the lowest they've been in 30 years. 2022 projects the same dismal forecast. This should cause alarm bells to be going off all over the place. What your reports don't show are the families in Western Alaska who are worrying about putting away enough fish to feed their children throughout the winter and the parents and grandparents who are unable to pass their way of life down to their children and grandchildren.

It's ironic because salmon donations, the Sea Share program, and fishery disaster funds are like "band-aids" attempting to fix a much more harmful situation. Although these donations are extremely needed and appreciated, they are not the solutions we are seeking for the long run. Our tribes want solutions – not temporary measures. AVCP offers three recommendations for the Council to implement immediately:

1. Engage with Tribes on a government-to-government basis.

- Tribes deserve an equal voice in the decision-making process of this body. Currently, the only voices being represented and listened to are those of the State of Alaska and industry.
- Tribes need to be represented on all Council committees as well.

2. Use Indigenous Knowledge in decision making.

- We have managed our resources, including salmon, successfully for thousands of years. There is a wealth of knowledge passed down by our elders to today's subsistence fishers – over thousands of years – that can be shared with your researchers as we look for solutions to the current salmon crash.

Association of Village Council Presidents News



Continued...

- Western science alone has not provided solutions. We need to meaningfully seek and use Indigenous Knowledge when making decisions, and we will begin to find solutions that work.

3. Reduce Bycatch now.

- We cannot continue to wait for run reconstructions and bycatch impact analyses to be completed before this body takes action to reduce the thousands of salmon taken as bycatch each season.
- It is deeply unfair for those who rely on fishing the most to feed our families, and whose use has the least amount of impact on declining stocks, to be subjected to the strictest restrictions in the name of conservation.
- Meanwhile, the Council waits for more studies before taking action to reduce bycatch directly.
- This isn't right. The Council should take every action available at your disposal to reduce bycatch immediately.

In conclusion, I speak to you today with a high sense of urgency because we are talking about protecting our Way of Life. We don't want to have to tell our grandchildren or great-grandchildren "I remember when there used to be salmon here." 40 years ago, I was a first-year undergraduate student standing alongside the Connecticut River trying to understand how the Connecticut River had 200 prior years of no salmon running up to it's headwaters. I was shocked to say the least. To me, the best management practice that this body should prioritize is not letting 1,982 miles of the Yukon River, which is the 3rd largest river in the nation's, salmon die. It's shocking. This, to me, is unacceptable to any American. It is time for the Council to fulfill its obligation to balance conservation, economic, and social concerns with the intent of managing sustainable fisheries for the greatest benefit to the Nation – not just to the greatest benefit of industry.

Quyana!

AVCP is a leading voice of advocacy on matters of natural resources. Our people view subsistence as a foundational part of who we are and what connects generations.

Association of Village Council Presidents News

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6/15/22



AVCP Chief Executive Officer Provides Comments on Fishery Disaster Funding

The AVCP region is in line to receive millions of dollars in funding as a result of the 2020 and 2021 fishery failures. The United States Department of Commerce has allocated \$55,984,834 as a result of fishery failures in Norton Sound, the Yukon River, Kuskokwim River, Chignik, and Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries, for 2020 and 2021.

Association of Village Council Presidents Chief Executive Officer, Vivian Korthuis provided the following testimony at the June 15th Alaska Department of Fish and Game Federal Fishery Disaster Listening Session:

My name is Vivian Korthuis, and I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP). AVCP is the largest tribal consortium in the Nation. Our members are the 56 federally recognized tribes of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in 48 villages along the Yukon River, Kuskokwim River, and Bering Sea Coast. Our tribal members are suffering from an unprecedented salmon crash, which began in 2020 and accelerated to crisis levels in 2021. The crisis continues. I would like to thank Governor Dunleavy and his administration for submitting the 2020 and 2021 disaster requests on behalf of our affected communities, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Alaska Federation of Natives for hosting this listening session.

Some of the families hardest hit by the 2020 and 2021 disasters are our families in rural communities who depend on subsistence fishing to feed themselves and their children throughout the winter and where the cost of living is among the highest in the United States. Also, the families who depend on the small commercial fisheries in our region for cash to purchase necessities and engage in subsistence activities are suffering. Funding must be prioritized for our subsistence and small-scale commercial fishers.

Tribes and tribal organizations have extensive experience providing services in rural Alaska, including direct benefit payments to tribal members. Most recently, tribes distributed direct funding to tribal members through the CARES Act and ARPA. Tribes/Tribal Organizations should be considered as an option to directly distribute payments to affected tribal members.

We have managed our resources, including salmon, successfully for thousands of years. There is a wealth of knowledge passed down by our elders to today's subsistence fishers – over thousands of years. Western science alone has not provided solutions. If we meaningfully seek and use Indigenous Knowledge when making decisions, we will begin to find solutions that work. Disseminating and incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into future management plans must happen now. Funding should be made available to tribes and tribal organizations to facilitate bringing Western and Indigenous Knowledge together to find solutions.

In closing, I would like to remind us that – while these disaster payments are very important and urgently needed in our communities – even more urgent is the need to find a lasting solution to this crisis. I look forward to us continuing to work together as partners.

Quyana!

Association of Village Council Presidents News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 27, 2022



Association of Village Council Presidents Works to Protect Subsistence Fishing Rights and Applauds Federal District Court's Actions to Prevent the State of Alaska from Interfering with Rural Subsistence Fishing

Last month, the United States sued the State of Alaska for interfering with the implementation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act's (ANILCA) rural subsistence preference along the Kuskokwim River. The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), along with two federally qualified subsistence users from the Kuskokwim River, filed a motion to join the lawsuit in support of the United States. AVCP seeks to join the lawsuit as part of its ongoing efforts to protect the rights of its member Tribes and the region's residents and is proud to stand with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission on this issue. Our people depend upon salmon to feed our communities and our fish camps are where we pass our way of life down to our children and future grandchildren.

Western Alaska, including the Kuskokwim River, is experiencing a severe, multi-year, multi-species salmon crash. This crisis has been devastating for our families and communities in our region who rely on salmon for nutritional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing.

In 2021, the United States closed the Kuskokwim River fishery within the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in response to the ongoing salmon crash, but allowed limited openings only for local, federally qualified users to fish for salmon. This action was taken in an effort to conserve the salmon population for continued subsistence uses. However, the State of Alaska issued orders that purported to open the same stretch of the Kuskokwim River to fishing by all Alaskans, not just rural Alaska subsistence users. This caused confusion among residents of the region and interfered with the United States's attempts to provide the subsistence priority that is essential to Alaska Native physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence. The very same pattern is already repeating for this year's salmon season: the United States is providing limited openings only for federally qualified subsistence users and the State of Alaska planned to open its fisheries during the same times.

However, after oral arguments last week, the Federal District Court issued a preliminary injunction preventing the State from authorizing fishing on the Kuskokwim River within the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. The Court concluded that federally qualified subsistence users along the Kuskokwim River would be “irreparably harmed” if the State’s planned openers were allowed to take place. This important injunction will prevent the State of Alaska from unlawfully interfering with its implementation of ANILCA’s subsistence priority during this fishing season.

“The State’s actions are yet another blatant attack on the subsistence rights of Alaska Native peoples and we are heartened to see the Federal Court taking action to protect our rights. The State knows full well that its actions cause confusion for rural subsistence users and directly threaten their ability to provide salmon for their families and communities. Salmon are the foundation of our region’s cultures and way of life. We are dedicated to the protection of our way of life and are joining this lawsuit as the latest step in our ongoing efforts to address the salmon crisis facing our Tribes and communities.”

-Vivian Korthuis, CEO, AVCP

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Media Contact: Gage Hoffman, Association of Village Council Presidents, (907) 543-7308

Notes to Editor:

AVCP is the largest tribal consortium in the United States, with 56 federally recognized tribes as members across 48 villages. AVCP is located in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of Western Alaska. The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta has approximately 27,000 residents, who are primarily Yup’ik, Cup’ik, and Athabascan. Subsistence is our Way of Life. 70% of households in the Y-K Delta harvest game and 98% harvest fish. Salmon is the main fish our families rely on to feed us throughout the winter.

The lawsuit, United States v. Alaska et al., No. 1:22-cv-00054, is pending in the Federal District Court for the District of Alaska. AVCP’s motion to intervene has not yet been granted.

Association of Village Council Presidents News

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7/1/22



AVCP Executive Board Committed to Natural Resources Strategic Planning

Protecting the natural resources and supporting subsistence efforts which Yup'ik people depend on is one of AVCP's primary priorities. In June, the AVCP Executive Board met in a working session to continue to drive efforts to support the AVCP natural resources team led by Jennifer Hooper.



During the session, the Executive Board members were updated on efforts to potentially add staff to the natural resources team as part of the department's strategic plan. Driving awareness through communication in our region is a priority for the organization. AVCP leadership has been active in recent weeks testifying on natural resources matters and as part of increasing AVCP's voice on natural resource and subsistence issues.



Thaddeus Tikiun Jr. AVCP Chairperson: “The natural resource strategic planning meeting was very helpful. This was a great step in the process-this is an important issue for our region.”



The meeting outlined the federal, state, and regional organizations AVCP partnership within the YK-Delta and throughout Alaska.

Through surveying, the board members expressed an overwhelming interest in providing the necessary assets needed to help the natural resources team be successful now and for generations to come.



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