

Copper River Prince William Sound Salmon Harvest Task Force
DRAFT Spring 2022 Meeting Minutes
April 20th | 2:00 p.m.
Cordova Center meeting room

Minutes taken from the meeting audio recording, available [here](#) or at www.cdfu.org/shtf-meeting.

1. Call to Order (1:30)
 - a. Meeting was called to order by Chair Dennis Zadra.

2. Roll Call (2:02)

Alaska Department of Fish and Game: Jeremy Botz, Heather Scannell
Cordova District Fishermen United, Gillnet Division: Darin Gillman
Cordova District Fishermen United, Seine Division: Mike Mickelson
Copper River/Prince William Sound Marketing Association: Thea Thomas
Copper River/Prince William Sound Advisory Committee: John Renner
Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation: Steven Hilton
Valdez Fisheries Development Association: Mike Wells (Zoom)
OBI Seafoods: Ben Kirk
Trident Seafoods: Leo Vargas
Copper River Seafoods: *not present*
Silver Bay Seafoods: *not present*
Peter Pan Seafoods: *not present*
Native Village of Eyak: John Whissel

3. Approve Meeting Agenda (4:50)
 - a. Amendment: move VFDA and PWSAC updates ahead of ADF&G presentations
 - b. Amendment: move public comment period to follow business at end of the meeting

Motion to approve the agenda with amendments. Renner/second Mickelson. Motion carries.

4. Approve Minutes (7:29)

Motion to approve the Fall 2021 Salmon Harvest Task Force meeting minutes. Renner/second Mickelson. Motion carries.

5. Updates and Reports (8:02)
 - a. **PWSAC 2022 Pre-Season Report - Steve Hilton (8:45)**

PWSAC did a review of brood numbers that was completed in winter 2020/2021. Brood requests were revised for 2021 to account for lower female percentages in fecundity and increased sea life relations at AFK, Cannery Creek and WNH. Odd and even differences were found for almost all species. Brood goals were shared for species at the hatcheries.

2022 Outmigration: incubation went smoothly and continues with normal survival rates at the hatcheries. Phytoplankton has been rising at varying levels across PWS since April. 2022 releases will happen in May-June. Whale monitoring is gaining at all sites. Final brood year release numbers will be available in June. Mid-point return and pre-season revenue goals were shared. Cost recovery for chum is anticipated for June 1 with pink management after July 20. PWSAC will continue to provide regular in-season announcements about revenue goals and cost recovery efforts.

Capital projects are in final stages of completion: Main Bay - upgraded wastewater treatment plant, replacement of buildings and electrical upgrades, saltwater supply system installation, and new dock that was delayed from last year to next year because of supply chain. Cannery Creek - new creek fishway passage barriers, replacement of water system and plumbing projects. Across other sites - incinerators, refurbishings, rolling stocks, main engine rebuilds. Supply chain and costs are a continual challenge.

b. VFDA Update - Mike Wells (17:00)

Highlights from the spring pre-season report and forecast in the meeting materials were shared. A high wind event last year washed ~\$8M fry out prior to release which affected expectations. No noticeable humpback predation last year. Very little mortality was observed during the rearing process.

Return forecast methods were changed in 2019 to get better considerations on data. 2022 forecast numbers and revenue goals were shared, as was an update about outmigration successes. Winter conditions were good for incubation, with average water temperatures.

Upcoming and current capital projects include weir pad improvements, concrete work, bunkhouse renovations, design of coho building replacement, structural upgrades to original steel incubation building.

c. 2022 ADF&G Salmon Forecast - Jenny Morella (30:40)

The forecast was released in January and available online and its model methods were explained. Forecasts, escapement and commercial harvest goals for Copper River and PWS salmon species were reviewed.

d. 2022 ADF&G Gillnet Management Outlook - Jeremy Botz (38:45)

The gillnet management outlook was shared. Below average sockeye runs are expected. Copper River escapements were missed for two years, and runs have been weak, which is setting the tone for a conservative start to season. Sonar deployment is anticipated for May 7, depending on shore ice conditions. Anticipated management of subdistricts and species were discussed.

e. 2022 ADF&G Upriver Management Outlook - Mark Somerville (54:30)

The overall disposition of Copper River fish was discussed. Sockeye run disposition of the last 20 years was presented. Harvest distributions were presented for what is past the sonar. It was presented that sonar passage is predicting the harvest, with more fish passing indicating a larger harvest.

Possible causes for PWSAC shortfalls were addressed, considering variables of personal, subsistence and commercial use and harvests. Hatchery fish are not being overharvested, but data indicates they are likely dying before the Upper Gulkana. Fry-to-smolt survival may be decreased to the point of affecting returns. Smolt-to-adult marine survival may be having a huge effect on returns. Aerial surveys indicate wildstock spawners have decreased enough to be affecting egg take success. Solutions are slow to come.

A hatchery database on brood fitness and genetic analysis is being started to help answer questions about marine survival. Tributary spawn seems more successful lower in the river now swimming less distance upstream, which might be speaking to fish energy toward musculature and less toward eggs. Beaver dams are a challenge and continually cleared for wildstock and brood stock potential.

Clarification questions were fielded and answered (1:20:54).

f. 2022 ADF&G Seine Management Outlook - Heather Scannell (1:39:45)

Most plans are to be very consistent in management with last year, just to a lesser extent given the salmon forecast. Season will open Thursday, June 2 at AFK / Chalmers with a 48 hour opener. A 3-period per week schedule of one 36 and two 48s is expected. Will expand area based on Jeremy Botz's management actions or recommendations from PWSAC.

Pink fishing in eastern district will likely not start until VFDA cost recovery is complete or near complete. The goal is to keep everyone dispersed as much as possible, with a buffer to chums.

Late July will depend on PWSAC and wildstock performance. The hope is for 2-3 broad area openers per week but this could change on escape performance.

Clarification questions were fielded and answered (1:43:18).

g. 2022 Herring Stock Assessment Update - Jenny Morella (1:44:46)

Background was shared, beginning with how ADF&G funding for the PWS Herring Program comes from Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. Biomass is calculated by University of Washington.

Spawning distribution is currently increasing in mile days and areas since 2018. Dominant age class is 6 year old, consistent with statewide. To see stability we need to see ample recruitment of younger age classes to replace the 6 year old class. Kayak Island biomass is not considered in the threshold for commercial fishery consideration with PWS. Thanks were shared to those who have helped with samples.

Clarification questions were fielded and answered (1:55:08). 2022 looks to be ahead of 2021 total season estimate, and biomass may become enough for consideration.

6. New Business (1:56:00)

a. Video presentation by John Renner from Youtube July 6, 2018 showing an example of charter operator for personal use fishermen on the Copper River.

b. Gillnet Issues and Recommendations (2:03:00)

i. Recommendation from CDFU Gillnet Division: to hold the first three sockeye openers to gauge run strength on the Copper River and compare it to the prediction for the possibility of liberalizing management more.

ii. Recommendation from CDFU Gillnet Division: to eliminate subsistence and personal use permits that can be printed from home, to increase accountability and limit the possibility of accidental or purposeful over-harvesting of the targeted resource.

iii. Recommendation from CDFU Gillnet Division: for more time and area to harvest Coghill sockeye salmon surpluses in the Esther Subdistrict and Granite bay subdistricts.

1. Jeremy Botz said he is looking for feedback and advice of what those corridors might look like, where historically we've shown we are effective in harvesting Coghill sockeye. Potential areas were discussed.

- iv. **Recommendation from Copper River Prince William Sound Advisory Council**; that the Upper Copper River management would manage with intention to achieve BEG.
- v. **Recommendation from Copper River Prince William Sound Advisory Council**; that the Upper Copper River management would manage with intention to achieve broodstock for the Gulkana hatchery.
- vi. **Recommendation from Copper River Prince William Sound Advisory Council**; that ADF&G manage with the EO authority to shut down sport and subsistence harvest when it interferes with PWSAC cost recovery at Main Bay hatchery.
- vii. **Recommendation from Native Village of Eyak**; to discontinue use of the expanded inside closure on the Copper River District during subsistence openers.

In light of the length of meeting time it was decided to provide a written resolution list at the end of the meeting, rather than vote recommendations one by one.

- c. Seine Issues and Recommendations (2:25:30)
 - i. **Recommendation from CDFU Seine Division**; for a change in Coghill management to (a) use the EO authority when necessary to protect the fragile resource system, and to (b) ensure opening the district for Seine when the counter is overtaken by pinks or when sockeye escapement will exceed upper bounds of escapement goals.
 - ii. **Recommendation from CDFU Seine Division**; to switch from a 6am to 8am opening time on a set date of August 15th and maintain fleet opportunities with 14 hour openers.
 - iii. **Recommendation from CDFU Seine Division**; to mitigate wasted resources in Orca Inlet subdistrict by opening regulatory closed waters by EO when a harvestable surplus exists.
 - iv. **Recommendation from CDFU Seine Division**; to include the Cape Puget area in management decisions for the Elrington subdistrict, to allow timely cost recoveries and broodstock collections.

- v. **Recommendation from CDFU Seine Division: to open districts concurrently to disperse the fleet.**
- vi. **Recommendation from CDFU Seine Division: to adopt a more consistent and historical schedule of openings in AFK and Port Chalmers during years in which Coghill sockeye abundance is not a concern.**
- vii. **Recommendation from CDFU Seine Division: to continue to assist in the marker replacement program, and develop a list of priority markers.**

d. Other Issues and Recommendations (2:29:10)

- i. **Recommendation from Copper River Prince William Sound Advisory Council: that ADF&G hire a shellfish biologist dedicated to PWS fisheries and located in Cordova.**

7. Public Comment (2:31:00)

- a. Clyde Montgomery - on gillnetters being monitored
- b. Robert Beedle - on Main Bay closures
- c. Phyllis Shirron - on early openers and market impact
- d. Mike ? - on 2021 Esther lessons

8. Salmon Harvest Task Force Remarks (2:43:55)

- a. Thanks were noted by many members, especially to ADF&G for their presentations and presence in Cordova.
- b. The Chair noted for the record that Peter Pan was represented during a portion of the meeting on the Zoom.
- c. Steve Hilton with PWSAC shared that the 2022 goal for cost r4-20-22 recovery at Main Bay is 30% of what it was in 2021 and wishes everyone a good season.
- d. John Renner with CRPWSAC suggested creating a new and different management system for the Copper River to keep us from being a disenfranchised group and lost cause.
- e. Thea Thomas with CRPWSMA introduced the new CDFU Executive Director, Jess Rude.

9. Determine next meeting date

- a. October or November, to hopefully be timed with the PWSAC fall meeting tentatively on October 4.

Motion to adjourn. Renner/second Mickelson. Motion carries.