

Copper Basin Land and Resource Managers Meeting

October 4, 2017

Next Meeting - March 7, 2018

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) – Mark Somerville

- Subsistence Fish reports are due October 30th. About 35% of reports are in – looking like harvest totals are down substantially.
- In 2012-2015, escapement equaled 1.2 million, this year the total is 700k. Projecting 65k for subsistence harvest, about ½ the five-year average.
- Kings harvest was projected to be 5K total for Copper River in 2017, but run was substantially better than projected and harvest will probably be around 20K.
- Pre-season restrictions were lifted during the season. Sport fishery went from closed to an annual limit of two fish with one per tributary. These restrictions remained in place for the rest of the season. Subsistence bag limits on fish wheels were rescinded and the bag limit of five king salmon taken with dip net was restored to five fish. The PU fishery was allowed to retain kings beginning the fourth week of the season. Commercial fisheries were restricted by time and area for entire season.
- Chitina: no data yet for personal use but expect numbers to be down. (140k and 165k in last several years, probably down to 120k this year).
- Gulkana: 3,338 king salmon were counted past the tower, a little below 3,600 average.
- The Board of Fisheries meets the first week of December in Valdez. Proposals are available online. Can comment online but being there in person is more effective. There are 12 proposals that directly affect the Copper River and local fisheries:
 - One proposal requests Copper River District salmon management plan increases the current Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) for sockeye salmon from 360-750K salmon to an Optimal Escapement Goal (OEG) of 700K-1.2MM. The Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee wants more fish to go to upriver fisheries, over a certain amount is bad for fishery (over-escapement). Less production for spawners—wears out system. Concern is result of this proposal would be chronic over-escaping. Fishery can't catch that many fish.
 - Copper River Fisheries Management plan. Every year ADF&G has to open a Batzelnets Emergency Order. Doesn't make sense to issue permits there, it is private land. Just leaving it open. ADF&G maintains a state fishery there because federal management of state navigable waters rules in flux. No EO/ eliminates paperwork that serves no function, does not change access or land status.
 - A local person proposes mandating live boxes on fish wheels or mandate closely attended. Board traditionally has not required this due to cost for some users to update wheels. EO authority this year, for example, made close attendance a requirement.
 - Prohibit the use of dip nets from a boat in the Copper River Glennallen sub district. Concern is they are too effective, affecting sockeye runs.
 - Modify season dates based on preseason harvest projection, put in by Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence Commission. Concern is in conservation; we want to make sure they can get kings to their spawning areas.

- 14-monofilament and gill net be prohibited because too hard on king salmon. It's not the net material but depth of the bag, so maybe change in dip net design or mesh size difference—also decrease the amount of time it takes to release a king without gilling.
- Require log books for charters (i.e. number of people and what they caught.) All of that info is already in the permit, so it's a duplication. Want to do logs for subsistence too, brings up the issue: Should you charter within a subsistence fishery, anyway? Subsistence intended to be passing on traditions...no guidance on guiding.
- Extend the Chitina area downstream to the Uranatina River, mostly access by boats—ADF&G expects people will want to cross Haley Creek, and therefore more issues could arise with Chitina and Ahtna, Inc.
- If a commercial fishery is closed for 13 or more consecutive days, ADF&G must reduce the maximum harvest level in the Chitina Personal use fishery from 100-150,000 down to 50,000 salmon. The Chitina Dip net Association would like this rule rescinded. The rule and mandated change have no biological basis and is strictly an allocation issue.
- To have another subsistence fishery at the mouth of the Copper, 30 fish only during commercial opener, very restrictive in the flats and open ocean to be open May 1 to Nov. 30. Biggest concern is gill netters and commercial fisherman will use big boats, larger scale fishing for subsistence even when not commercial season.
- Sport fish regulation change proposed for Gulkana River near Paxson. Different fishing seasons for sockeye once imposed there to protect specific socks of sockeye but too complex and most people don't fish for them up there anyway. Proposal is to close those fisheries to sport fishing for sockeye from the Middle Fork to Paxson to Summit Lake, will affect very few people.
- Entire Upper Copper is confusing because of the different watershed that meet along the Denali highway corridor, some single hook, no bait, to protect wild rainbow trout, but this currently extended into the MacLaren, upper Susitna drainages where there is no rainbow trout. Can use bait and treble hooks in the Tangles, in Seven mile, fine, if a mile this way cant. This proposal would simplify regulations.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) –Heidi Hatcher

- Preliminary harvest reports in Unit 13 as of 10/3/17:
 - Moose: 182 bulls through community hunt. General season hunt reports are still being coded.
 - Caribou: Total harvest between Tier 1, Community Hunt, and Draw hunt permits (14,446 permits):
 - Bulls: 1,935
 - Cows: 1,747
 - Total: 3,685
 - ADF&G extended the fall caribou season for all state hunts (from Sept 20 to Sept 30) to maximize harvest while there will still animals in the Unit.
- In March there was a Board of Game meeting in Glennallen to focus on the Community Hunt. Changes to the Community hunt and tier I caribou hunt will be reflected in the Subsistence Hunt Supplements that are currently being printed and will be available online soon.

- ADF&G deployed 13 collars on cow moose in Unit 13B to add to collar pool and increase sample size for tracking twinning rates. Also conducted moose browse survey in 13B in March
- Participated in several outreach and education activities this summer, including:
 - Career Day at the Glennallen High School
 - Becoming an Outdoors Woman Introduction to Archery Workshop: offered a workshop in April and one in July
 - Hunter Education certification field day in May
 - Archery workshop with the youth from Gakona and Gulkana villages in July
 - Becoming an Outdoors Woman Interior Summer Workshop in August
 - Published the Nelchina Caribou News to disseminate more information about the herd and caribou hunting
 - Patrolled multiple days on the Denali Highway during the hunting season to make contact with hunters, erect additional signs for the Clearwater Creek Controlled Use Area, and help clarify hunting regulations and motorized/non-motorized restrictions for confused hunters.
- ADF&G has been working more closely with the National Park Service by helping them conduct a census and composition survey on the Mentasta Caribou herd, and also assisting with a bison DNA biopsy project on the Copper River herd.
- Operational plans for Moose, Wolves, and Sheep for our area are being finalized now. There's a separate plan for each species. These plans outline our management goals, objectives, and planned activities for the next five years.
- ADF&G is currently gearing up to conduct our annual fall composition survey and management captures to deploy additional radio collars on caribou and then will be conducting moose surveys as soon as we get snow.
- There is a Board of Game meeting coming up for statewide regulations. Proposal books are available online or in print. Written comments are due by October 27th for this meeting, which will be held in Anchorage on November 10-17, 2017. There will be the opportunity to provide oral testimony in person at the meeting as well.
- There is another Board of Game meeting coming up for our area; it will be held in Dillingham on February 16-23, 2018. Written comments for these proposals are due online by February 2nd, 2018, and oral testimony can be given in person at the meeting.

Bureau of Land Management Branch of Pipeline Monitoring – Steve Weeks

- Focusing on safety at project sites using industry standards.
- This year will be continuing right-of-way surveillance
- Project at Gunnysack Creek, north of Summit Lake. Don't have much info on current projects yet.
- Klutina River Project: buried a lot of things to keep bank from eroding and to protect the pipeline crossing.

Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) – Ben Bobowski

- WRST completed tribal consultation for backcountry wilderness stewardship plan, and after working through that information, decided they will most likely need to re-scope some parts of the plan due to diversity of perspectives.
- Hiring Freeze: WRST released some local hire job announcements in August. Still waiting on the cert list for 3 of those positions.
- Research news: WRST is now interested in pupping grounds for harbor seals as areas are used commonly by cruise ships. Three year study monitored movements by harbor seal pups from June 9 - July 6, 2016. All pups were captured in Disenchantment Bay near Yakutat, Alaska. All capture, handling, research, and photographs were conducted under MMPA Permit #19309 issued to the Marnie Mammal laboratory (MML), Alaska Fisheries Science Center. Pups were handled for eleven minutes or less, transmitter stays on for several months.
- New Ichthyosaur fossil discovery near McCarthy. Located from 1950s journal notes.
- Fossil wood: evidence of the oldest known Holocene advance of southern Alaska glaciers: about 5,000 years old - shows forested before glaciers.
- Lake Ahtna shorelines. Artifacts from 10k-12k and 3-6k. NPS appreciates partnership with Ahtna.
- Restoration at Kennicott - 20 years of restoration. Installed new exhibits this summer.
- Shared pictures of the Bonanza Mine area as seen during recent exploration.
- NPS issued a special use permit to allow a land owner temporary access, under NPS supervision, and to facilitate park documentation of the area.
- WRST is a UNESCO World Heritage site so NPS can work easily with Canada (Kluane and Glacier Bay). Joel Berger at Colorado State University wants to compare and contrast our Park with Patagonia, specifically with Bernardo O'Higgins National Park in Chile. WRST has the largest non-polar ice mass in the world, Patagonia has the second largest. The research is interested in studying glacial retreat and how land mammals are responding.

Ahtna Inc. – Sarah Daszkiewicz

- Ahtna has three new hires
 - John Leonhart and Trent Colt have been on board since May as new wildlife biologists
 - Ray Stickwan was hired in May for patrolling and trespass incidents
- Ahtna is working on a carnivore stewardship plan; bear management plan, as an indirect way to manage the moose population.
- Ahtna wants to work with BLM to help improve 17b trails on Ahtna land and to help clean up 1 acre dump sites that BLM has on Ahtna land. Also help establish kiosks with land info at beginning of 17b trails. More outreach about 17b trail information to public would be good idea
- At mile 44 Tok Cutoff, the State is taking gravel out of an old gravel pit. A hole could create water problems and could make access to native allotment behind the pit difficult.
- Ahtna is participating in a carbon sequestration project – get paid for carbon in your trees (sell “carbon credits” to BP and bigger companies).
 - Encourages and helps increase good forest management/stewardship
- NRT's worked on signage during hunting season along the major highways, 17b easements, etc. to combat lots of trespass that happens all over Ahtna lands

- Ahtna is working on developing and improving its campgrounds– Sailor’s Campground, Hilltop Campground

Copper Country Alliance (CCA) – Ruth McHenry

- Worked with Copper River Watershed Project to keep up awareness of oil spills near the Copper River (Tanker Trucks!)
- Conference in Fairbanks by Department of the Environmental Conservation, attended by trucking companies and employees. Big state = 90% of spills coming from “pups”, a short tanker at the end that sometimes “wags the dog” and causes accidents. Big state using fewer pups, more singles and doubles instead. Big Center says road hunters are the biggest hazard. There was a Paxson Lake accident involving road hunters.
- White Sweet Clover: Concern for a number of years about white sweet clover.
- Also, have received information about herbicide use – less is used than the person who was concerned thought. NPS tried to eliminate white sweet clover by manual means; no luck.
- Aminopyralid herbicide is used near the Slana River – thought is keep an eye on herbicide area and see if it does any good or bad. Will be reevaluating in coming years.
- Sturgeon case decided at the 9th circuit court level. Wanted to use hovercraft in Yukon-Charley National Park and preserve. NPS had said they had a right to regulate what happens on a river within a park, regardless of ownership of river, so far NPS wins. Copper Country Alliance weighed in on side of NPS.
- Trustees for Alaska. Does not affect outside the Parks, Preserves, or Federal Wildlife Refuges. Wildlife live in parks and noisy means of transportation, etc. disrupt intent of park lands.
- Pebble Mine Project: Under current administration this is being revisited. Copper Country Alliance thinks this is a mistake: if world’s biggest sockeye fishery is threatened then how about the Copper River. It sets a bad precedent, comments are due before the Oct. 17th deadline.
- Selection process for nominating outstanding natural resource waters and give extra protection process varies from state to state. CCA thinks scientists should be involved and wants to allow private organizations and individuals to nominate waters, not just the state legislature.
- Annual bird outing on Kenny Lake. Kenny Lake fair booth theme was the 6 species of grouse in the Copper Basin. Thanks ADF&G for poster and brochures.
- Climate change effects and predictions for the Copper Basin is the theme for CCA annual meeting. Presentation to be by Jeremy Littell with USGS Alaska Climate Science Center. Meeting is 7 pm, Nov. 6 at the Kenny Lake Public Library.
- Copper Country Alliance tote bags for sale - \$9.00 (sold at cost).

Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE) – Robin Mayo

- Stellar summer! WISE partnered with BLM to provide hikes and camps. Reached 125 individuals totaling 400 miles hiked with the help of WISE staff and BLM interns.
- Americorps Volunteer Mikela Dalton will be with WISE for the next year! We work in partnership with RurALCAP for our Americorps volunteers.
- Winter will be quiet. The lecture series and In-Class Science will continue.
- Organizing Christmas bird count.

- Next summer will likely drop in federal funding.
- Copper Country Discovery Tour took 350 individuals out to the nature hike. And 30 people attended the sketching/watercolor workshops.
- Working on a new program for next year, Outdoor Wilderness Leadership Skills (OWLS) where high school students will have the opportunity to learn outdoor leadership and earn high school credit.

Copper River Watershed Project (CRWP) – Kate Morse and Chantel Adelfio

- Held Community Canoe Days event in Slana and at Paxson – goal is to get community members out in the watershed. Canoeing and hands-on activities. Returned in September for aquatic ecology field trips with all students in Slana and Mentasta Lake schools. Also assisted with WISE’s Changing Seasons program
- Led lecture and field trip during CRSD high school trek in natural resources.
- Supported the Copper River Stewardship Program.
- Finished some surveys to generate scores on condition of culverts and quality of habitat to help prioritize which culverts to replace to maintain fish passage.
- Pursuing funding to replace culverts on Little Tonsina Spur Road: US Army Corps and FWS main partners. Working on developing a concept design to better assess options and costs. One idea is a single land bridge to allow DOPT heavy equipment and gravel pit access.
- Meeting Nov. 2 with the fish passage planning team. This is an open group, and if you interested in participating, contact Kate (kate@copperriver.org, 907-424-3334)
- Salmon Blitz: North Pacific Research Board funding that is coming to an end. Training community members and youth to do surveys. Volunteers set traps, and identify fish species.
 - Did most surveys on BLM land off Tok Cutoff: Bear Valley/Mentasta-area studies. Juvenile kings in mouth of furthest south creek in Bear Valley. Also caught 2 Chinook in Moose Creek, (.6 miles upstream of confluence with Tazlina)
- Creative writer storyteller to produce 3 audio stories that will be made available to Copper Basin visitors through the Alaska App. Topics are Kenny lake homesteaders, Slana homesteaders, Wilson Justin interview of Ahtna story-telling
- Surveyed 159 acres, 14 of which were infested with primary white sweetclover and bird vetch. Prioritized removal of white sweetclover located in gravel pits and near stream crossings, aiming to decrease the spread of WSC to new locations and susceptible locations along rivers. CRWP employees manually and mechanically controlled 11.1 acres of WSC throughout Copper Basin.
- Fifth annual Copper Basin Weed Smackdown. 18 volunteers removed over 1,800 pounds of white sweet clover from near the Gakona Bridge.
- Partnered with the Copper Basin 300 for the second year to assist with purchase of weed free straw for the CB 300 race.

Chickaloon – Jessica

- No projects in the Copper Basin this year.
- Usually use personal use fisheries for elders’ lunch food programs but didn’t do that this year due to scheduling versus fish runs.

- Have juvenile salmon study for baby chinook and coho salmon pit tags in moose creek.
- Monitoring tributaries in the Mat Su, also continuing a contaminated lands program/brown fields program, just getting started, some of the tribes in the Copper River watershed have a longer history of those programs
- Second year of cultural education and outreach programs--includes a lot of community education classes. Working on developing cultural tourism through existing businesses here in the Mat Su.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Tyler Fanning

- Copper Basin area plan is on hold due to other priorities.
 - Got through the Scoping process – comments are accessible on the DNR CRBAP Update website.

Bureau of Land Management Glennallen Field Office – Marnie Graham

- Staffing:
 - Past Field Manager Dennis Teitzel has moved. Brian Novosak was acting in his place but has finished his assignment. Marnie Graham is now the acting Field Manager until the end of January.
 - We have a new maintenance employee, Jake Flowers.
 - This summer we hired 18 seasonal hires. They were a combination of local hires, returning hires, Student Conservation Association (SCA), Prince William Sound College (PWSC) Interns, GS and Wage Grade hires.
- Subsistence: (As reported today (10/4)).
 - Moose
 - Season closed September 20th, reports due by October 5th
 - 1396 permits issued – 11 more than last year
 - 85 harvested – 10 less than last year
 - Caribou
 - Season closed September 30th. Will reopen October 21st-March 31st
 - 2947 permits issued – 40 more than last year
 - 268 harvested – significantly higher than last year but average compared to past years.
 - 153 males
 - 115 females
- BLM NEPA Actions:
 - GFO Signed 23 NEPA documents and have 8 projects that are being actively worked on
 - Copper Valley Telecom’s fiber optic line From Gakona to Delta Junction – Signed
 - Rainy Creek – right-of-way across the Delta River that provides access to State mining claims – Signed
 - Our work load has increased significantly since adding Southeast, Alaska. We currently have multiple NEPA actions taking place in Haines and throughout Southeast, Alaska.
 - We continue to ask that applications that require NEPA analysis are turned in at a reasonable time. Because Alaska’s weather patterns provide for such a small “field season”, applications need to be turned in earlier rather than later. On many NEPA actions, our staff is required to complete analysis in the field that can only be completed during the summer.
- Recreation:

- Trails: GFO staff completed culvert installations on the Top of the World trail. We installed Geoblock, brushed and cleared, did repairs, and monitored off highway vehicle and non-motorized use on numerous trails.
- Rivers: Conducted three river monitor patrols on both the Gulkana and Delta Wild and Scenic Rivers, performed backcountry campsite inventory and monitoring within river corridors and removed over 75 lbs of garbage from the river corridors!
- Resources:
 - Fisheries/Hydrology: The Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring Strategy (AIM) project was a success. GFO is currently applying for water rights for the Gulkana River to ensure water quantity and quality remains as needed in order to preserve the Outstanding Remarkable Values that the river was designated for as a Wild and Scenic River (Fisheries, Recreation, Wild character)
 - Forestry: GFO has five commercial operators this winter and over 100 active Personal Use Wood Cutting Permits that were issued in both Valdez and Glennallen
 - Cultural: Surveyed BLM lands for cultural resources, relocated and recorded some cultural sites and found some new ones; consulted with federally recognized Tribes and Corporations; and conducted analysis in support of proposed actions for use of Federal managed lands. Proactive efforts and partnerships allowed projects to move forward well ahead of timeframes normally required.
- Law Enforcement: Have had a few Law Enforcement detailers working with our office to help with the increase of state hunters on federal managed lands. The largest issue this year was in the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District (TLAD) with off-highway vehicle (OHV) violations. We are hoping to work on better signing/public outreach this winter and spring to address this issue.
- Partnerships: Partnered with Ahtna to provide a checkpoint for the CB300 at the BLM Sourdough Campground and are hoping to do that again this year! Other partners include the Alaska Department of Fish and Game – Wildlife (moose and caribou populations) and fish population monitoring and grayling studies, the Copper River Watershed Project – Invasive Weeds, youth, and stream restoration on middle fork trail, the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment, Prince William Sound College, the Student Conservation Association, Takshanuk Watershed Council, the Copper River School District, Ahtna, the National Park Service, and the Chicago Botanical Garden.