

# Yukon chum salmon decision put on hold

by Dave Elias  
for the Tundra Times

The Board of Fisheries last week refused to determine that an emergency exists, authorizing them to deal with an anticipated subsistence problem in the Yukon fall chum salmon fishery.

On the last day of their meeting in Anchorage, Royce Purinton, chairman of the Interior Regional Council, presented the board with a petition asking for emergency rule making on June chum interception in the South Shumagin and False Pass fishery. A similar petition was presented to the board by John Thompson, chairman of the Southwest Regional Council.

Purinton said the board's own staff figures show that in 1987, 404,757 chums are projected to return to the Yukon fishery. With an escapement goal of 308,000, only 96,757 fish are left in the allowable catch category.

However, 170,000 chums are reserved for subsistence use, 20,000 of which are designated for personal use. This works out to a difference of about 54,757 fish between what is expected to be in the river — 404,757 — and what is required for conservation of the stock and subsistence requirement — 458,000.

State regulations give conservation goals — escapement — the first priority, and subsistence is mandatory after that, according to Purinton.

Earlier, the board had approved a proposal to allow for commercial

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fishing in the Yukon fishery for fall chums on an emergency order basis, with guidelines for harvest ranging from none to 160,250 chum salmon.

At first the board considered a motion to protect the Yukon fall chum subsistence fishery by closing the South Peninsula fishery — False Pass — when 400,000 Yukon fall chum were taken.

Fishermen in the False Pass area are really after sockeye salmon, but chums are caught along with the sockeyes. A similar limit was in effect for 1986, and the 1986 return for Yukon chums was somewhat above the forecast.

Consideration of the motion to limit the False Pass fishery led to a legal obstacle. The board is not allowed to consider proposals during its meetings that have not been given proper legal notice, and no such notice was given so that representatives of the False Pass fishery could respond.

However, the board could take such action if it was found that an emergency existed — an emergency being something that affected the public peace, health, safety or general welfare.

So the motion regarding limiting the False Pass fishery was withdrawn, and another motion was made to determine

if an emergency existed in the Yukon fishery.

A long session of testimony by the staff on the kinds of projects and the accuracy of those projections took place at the meeting. The board was told that returns might range from as low as 200,000 to as high as 600,000, but that the 400,000 figure was still the best estimate for 1987.

The staff said that the average fall chum subsistence catch in the Yukon fishery over the past eight years was 180,000. It was estimated that there could be a 50-percent reduction in the up-river salmon harvest in a worst-case scenario for 1987.

In the end, only two board members supported determining that an

emergency existed — Bix Bonney of Anchorage and Ernest Carter of Fairbanks. Four members voted against the motion to determine that an emergency existed — Val Angasan of Dillingham, Joe Demmert of Ketchikan, Mike Haggren of Kodiak and Gary Slaven of Petersburg. Board member Jesse Foster of Quinhagak was absent.

Dave Cooper, advisory council member from Marshall, later said he believes an emergency does exist.

"I'd expect anywhere from a 40 to 50 percent reduction in subsistence and no commercial fishing at all unless something really significant happens," he said. He added that, according to Alaska Department of Fish & Game figures, 200,000 chum not caught in False Pass results in a saving of 50,000 Yukon fall chums.

Representatives of the Yukon fishery may request a special board meeting to reconsider the matter.