

# Yukon fishermen upset about chum salmon interception

by Patti Harper

for the Tundra Times

Representatives of Yukon River Fish and Game advisory councils meeting in Holy Cross May 29th, voted to urge the State Board of Fisheries to open their Spring 1986 or Fall 1985 meeting to proposals related to fall chum runs on the Yukon River.

The harvest of chum salmon on the Yukon river increased sharply in the 1970s but now that fishery, which has become a major income source for river residents is threatened by declining stocks.

The fall 1986 run is expected to be especially poor, so fishermen are fighting to see their chums make it back to the river for harvest.

Many of the fish are being intercepted as incidental catch during the June False-Pass/Shumagin Island fishery for sockeye salmon.

From 1970 to 1979 the incidental chum harvest in that fishery averaged 277,000 salmon, according to Alaska Department of Fish and Game figures. The chum catches have since increased dramatically with a record catch of more than a million chums in 1982, the main parent year for the 1986 Yukon River chum run.

There are no definitive data on how many of the chums caught in the False-Pass/Shumagin area are headed for the Yukon River, but a 1983 study indicated that 39 to 99 percent of individual takes

totalling 756,000 fish were the Yukon River stock. The total subsistence and commercial harvest by Alaskans on the river that year was about 1.5 million chums.

Yukon river fishermen have lobbied the Board of fisheries for several years on proposals they think would reduce the incidental harvest of Yukon chums, but they've been largely unsuccessful due to the lack of more specific scientific information.

Those present at the Holy Cross meeting voted unanimously to urge advisory councils to present three proposals to the Board of Fisheries for consideration. One would close the intercepting fishery for the month of June, the time when Yukon

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chums are thought to migrate through that area. Another proposal would restrict the amount of gear the purse-seiners in that fishery could use to three-and-a-half strips. The third proposal would set a quota on chum salmon. Royce Purinton of Nulato urged a 300,000 limit on the incidental catch of chums in the False-Pass/Shumagin Island fishery.