

Drift Gillnet Task Force Meeting Summary

December 7, 2009, 10am-5:30 pm.

Ketchikan, Alaska

Presentations were made as follows:

- Bo Meredith – Tree Point
- Scott Forbes – POW/Stikine
- Dave Harris – Taku/Snettisham
- Randy Bachman (presented by Bill Davidson) – Lynn Canal
- Andy Piston – escapements and McDonald Lake update
- Eric Prestegard – DIPAC
- Lon Garrison – NSRAA
- Susan Doherty – SSRAA
- Bob Gubernick – USFS (information about stream rehabilitation program)

Discussion/Questions during presentations:

Tree Point – concern was expressed about Canadian interception of enhanced Nakat chums. Bo: It's not a treaty issue but there was a suggestion to ask the Canadians for more data about harvests.

POW/Stikine – Discussion issue #3—there was no mid-week opening in District 8 during week 29, the first week of McDonald Lake sockeye conservation under the Action Plan. Scott: sockeye harvests were declining, and there was concern over the Tahltan harvest being over the TAC. Harvest wound up just slightly over the AC. Troy: week 29 is getting into the end of the Tahltan run and into the mainstem run. A suggestion was made about uncoupling D6 & D8 fishing times. Scott explained that McDonald is not driving D8, the Stikine sockeye determined by the Stikine Management Model based on Kakwan CPUE early/mark-recapture later determines openings. There is not a problem with timeliness of the data or cooperation with Canadians. Troy further explained uncoupling could lead to loss of stock composition data due to boat movement between districts. There was a question about if the large number of DIPAC chums caught in D6 was due to a sampling issue by sampling boats that came down from D11. This wasn't an issue with mixed loads, samplers would not sample mixed fish and it was early in the years when there is not much boat movement between the D11 & D6.

Taku/Snettisham – should expect mesh restrictions and conservative fishing time again south of Circle Point due to concerns with meeting Speel Lake sockeye escapement goal. There were a couple of questions concerning escapement; one was if the Dept. is working towards a goal for Crescent Lake and the other was does the Dept. have concerns with it's escapement. No the Dept. is not working towards a goal and yes the Dept. does have concerns as the numbers observed are below what has been seen in the past. Another question was if Speel is a Stock of Concern? Dave H: need 5 years for a Stock of Concern. Will continue to manage conservatively. Is the large effort in D11 a concern: Dave H: Not a concern, but it could result in more conservative management.

Lynn Canal -- concern expressed both about adequate access to DIPAC chum in Sec 15C and passing enough Chilkoot Lake sockeye to reach escapement goal. Randy wanted to convey that will continue with mesh restrictions. Question about the effectiveness of mesh restrictions. Scott K: time and area the first management options. Discussion deferred until afternoon session. Concern expressed with only 2 days fishing time in the fall and those 2 days often preempted by weather. If both coho and chum were OK could extend. In response to a question if 24-hour notice is always needed for extensions there was a comment that shorter notice may be acceptable only in the fall. Made a note to discuss this further with Randy before finalizing the 2010 management plan.

Escapement -- 7 of 13 stocks with goal were within range. However, since sockeye returns fluctuate so much, we do need multiple years below goal before considered a concern. Question about poor chums in the northern districts. Andy P: 2008 was start of decline in returns due to poor marine survival.

DIPAC – forecast 2.15 million chum, 198,000 sockeye

NSRAA – forecast 1.0 million chum to Deep Inlet, 23-26 k Chinook

SSRAA – read 13,000 otoliths showing high harvests in commercial traditional fisheries. Some NSRAA and DIPAC fish included and some unmarked Annette hatchery production. Forecasts: 1.11 million Neets summer .16 million Neets fall chum; 0.19 million Nakat summer .07 million Nakat fall; 0.28 Anita

Discussion Issues

1. McDonald Lake Update

Andy Piston summarized with a short slide presentation. Escapement goals were nearly met. Returns of genetic information are supporting the timing and locations of fishery restrictions in place in the action plan. Another year of genetic data and then otolith-marked sentinel stock returns first show in 2011. Getting baseline limno data from unfertilized lake condition.

Concerns were over foregone harvests due to reduced fishing time during peak weeks, conversion from a mixed stock to a single stock fishery, and consequent effort shifting to adjacent fisheries. Troy pointed out that to achieve escapement the one thing ADF&G can do is limit harvests. Scott K questions the location and amounts of surplus escapements are from foregone harvests. Troy also made the point it takes more than just one year of meeting escapement for the stock not to be a stock of concern anymore.

2. Other potential stocks of concern

None at present. Watching escapements at Chilkoot Lake and Speel Lake but need to see entire cycles of shortfalls before formal consideration. The department has discretion to consider the entire set of information prior to presenting at the regular board cycle. The department is continuing to manage fisheries to reach these goals, and refining management measures to avoid formal designations.

3. Midweek lost opportunity in District 8 was discussed during manager's presentation—see above.
4. Potential for additional fishing time in Section 15-C in postage stamp area.

In agreement that fisheries should be managed based on wild stocks, fishermen are exploring if there are ways to increase access to enhanced chum returns while also reaching the Chilkoot escapement goal. The suggestion is to increase time in postage stamp area, and to consider a mid-week opening.

Scott Kelley indicated that postage stamp management came through the task force and has been in effect since 1997 or 1998 to provide opportunity. A mid-week approach could potentially exacerbate problems due to effort shifts.

Data on slide showed breakdown of Chilkoot harvests 5,600 from 15-A, 1,500 from Boat Harbor THA, 7,700 from 15-C. Randy indicated 70% of samples from 15-C were from the postage stamp.

Norman Hughes and Shane Blough would like data from just the Postage Stamp area to see if harvests can be further reduced by shifting harvest patterns in 15C. If boats shift into this area are their samples skewed?

After much discussion we agreed to discuss further on the phone with the area manager before finalizing the management plan, consider restructuring how samples are collected, and to apply conservative management to reach the escapement goals.

5. Speel Lake sockeye backplanting

The DIPAC Snettisham Hatchery Management Plan makes this an option if escapement goals aren't being reached. Kevin said if we don't achieve escapement goal in the next 1-2 years we will then consider it, but it is not an automatic reaction whenever we don't make an escapement goal. Norm Hughes asks why we would not do this? Kevin answered that 1) it may not fix the problem, as all stocks are low in the area 2) the priority is wild stock management to reach the goals in most years, 3) there could easily be a turnaround of returns since 2005 outmigration was a harsh year for many species. Eric Prestegard suggested if backplanting is to proceed, we would backplant presmolt in the fall, not fry in the spring to avoid impacting the lakes productivity. Andy Piston pointed out that backplanting Hugh Smith Lake was not successful. It was noted that backplanting would not affect

management style, as we will continue to manage for the wild stocks in Port Snettisham.

6. Deep Inlet foregone harvest – dropped item.

7. Review of Hawk Inlet seine interception of Districts 11 & 15 returns

Kevin indicated seine harvest in Dist 12 was 43,000 versus average of 55,000. Percent Chilkoot in the traditional fishery is not sampled and unknown, but known in the seine test fishery through scale samples. Hawk Inlet was restricted by area which reduced both sockeye and pink harvests. July harvest was managed to restrict sockeye bycatch to 15,000 wild fish as specified in the management plan. It was noted that according to scale pattern analysis in some weeks of the test fishery Chilkoot fish made up over 30% of the harvest. Scott Kelly pointed out the scale data is one of the best long term data sets for sockeye in the region. Arnold Enge pointed out similarities with the McDonald Lake situation, and Bill Auger noted that a presence of 14% McDonald Lake fish was enough to restrict fishing. The conclusion was more weight should be placed on the scale analysis when determining Hawk Inlet openings.

8. Review of Permitted Hatchery Capacities. Any underutilized capacity?

A handout show all permitted capacity for SE Alaska.

Scott Kelley reviewed permitting process: PAR by 2/15. Commissioner approval based on RPT recommendation. Each project or alteration is considered case-by-case. NSRAA is exploring expansion of its production and locations. DIPAC is exploring expanding its production at McCauley hatchery after obtaining land. SSRAA may expand into void after sentinel stocks program ends and exploring a potential new facility since out of water and space. Scott Kelley mentioned mitigation funding will be available through the PST and letters have been sent out to the associations.

Next Year's meeting

USAG indicated after the meeting that they would like to have next year's meeting in Wrangell, and earlier if possible.