

YUKON FISH NET RECYCLING PROGRAM



Arnold Alfred, Paul Jenson, and Clint Teeluk collect and load exchanged gillnets from St. Mary's for recycling

Background

Until the 2010 fishing season, commercial and fishers within the Alaskan portion of the Yukon River drainage were able to use gillnets of any stretch mesh size to harvest Chinook salmon. In recent years, most fishers used gillnets that were between 8.0 and 8.5 inch stretch mesh; some even larger. Because of concern that adequate numbers of Chinook salmon were not reaching the spawning grounds, the Alaska Board of Fisheries, in their January 2010 Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim fishery regulatory meeting, decided to set a 7.5 inch maximum stretch mesh size for gillnets used in the Yukon Area, effective in 2011. This regulation was designed as a conservation tool to allow more of the largest and oldest Chinook salmon to escape the fishery and spawn. This regulation was based on data provided by ADF&G obtained through a 3-year study that documented Chinook salmon catches from various sized gillnets. Starting with the 2011 fishing season, the use of gillnets with a stretch mesh of greater than 7.5 inches is prohibited in the Yukon Area.

Money appropriated by Congress to compensate fishermen for the commercial Chinook salmon disaster of 2009 is being used for direct payments to qualifying commercial fishermen and also to replace all the old current commercial and subsistence gear that will no longer be legal, with the required mesh size gear. Funds are being provided through NOAA's Operations and Management Division, Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service and managed by Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Net Exchange

Commercial permit holders must surrender the old, now unlawful gillnet webbing in order to receive a new 7.5 inch gillnet. Also under this program, subsistence fishing households will receive a new 7.5 inch gillnet upon receipt of their old webbing. Only the webbing will be exchanged. The lead lines and cork lines must be taken off the nets and can be retained for re-use by the fishermen. This exchange ensures that this program will not result in an expansion of fishing gear used to harvest Chinook salmon within the Yukon Area and will avoid other debris-related problems.

Net Recycling

Currently no appropriate mechanism exists for appropriate disposal of the old nets that are collected (burning nylon nets is hazardous), so backhaul logistics have been designed after talking with the coordinators for the net distribution programs in the upper and lower rivers. Kwikpak Fisheries is coordinating the logistics in the lower river; Tenana Chiefs Conference in the Upper River. The system in the lower river involves collecting nets and getting them to hub villages by various river or overland routes where they can be flown or trucked to Anchorage. Palletized nets will be loaded into a shipping container and barged down to Seattle. In the upper river, collected nets will be brought to villages that are on the river and picked up on a barge and transported to Nenana. From Nenana the nets will be containerized, brought to Fairbanks and barged down to Seattle. This program will pay the freight and shipping costs as well as the additional costs to the coordinators/community staff to promote the program, communicate about correct preparation and handling of the exchanged nets, assure proper bundling of the webbing for recycling, coordinate the timing to assure nets from each village get loaded onto the air freight or river barges and get sent down to the recycler.

The fishermen, their communities and packing houses will provide matching assistance to the program through the work of the fisherman in properly preparing the material (the cork and lead line needs to be removed and can be retained for re-use by the fishermen), bundling the webbing for recycling (web needs to be tightly bundled and tied up with hanging twine or put in plastic bag and tied) and transporting their used webbing to the exchange point.

What happens to the used webbing?

PSMFC has coordinated a gillnet recycling program for years from other communities and has worked with Skagit River Steel and Recycling in Burlington, Washington to assure proper handling and marketing. This company will also accept these Yukon gillnets. Funds, if any, received from the nets, will go back into helping to pay for the costs of the program.

Recent markets for the nylon webbing (2009-2010) have been in Vietnam, Korea, and China. Other countries where gillnet is/was marketed to include Hong Kong, Taiwan, Soviet Union. Domestic markets are still not competitively available. Webbing is not made back into webbing, as it loses some of its properties, but is primarily made into molded products. The process:

- a. Fishermen remove leadline and corkline from gillnets that are no longer useable and tie the webbing up in tight bundles or put it in strong bags (so each webbing is kept separate and doesn't tangle up with others, so it is easy to load on the conveyor belt at the recycler's baling operation).
- b. The webbing is shipped from the participating communities to the Seattle, area and then trucked to Burlington, Washington. Participating communities include: Naknek, Dillingham, Cordova, Kenai, Juneau, Douglas, and Ketchikan, Alaska; Seattle and Bellingham, Washington; and Astoria, Oregon).
- c. Webbing is kept dry and stockpiled at Skagit River Steel and Recycling's facility.
- d. When there is enough material collected, nets are baled by the recycler.
- e. Baled nets get marketed overseas in container loads of 40,000 lbs. or more.
- f. Nets are chopped up or ground up and cleaned.
- g. This chopped or ground up net scrap is melted and made into small pellet pieces.
- h. The pellets are sold into the secondary nylon market for manufacturers involved in the following industrial categories: auto parts, electronic parts, appliance parts, utensils.
- i. The nylon pellets from the nets may be mixed with other nylon compounds or other compounds to make various parts
- j. Some of the hundreds of molded items that can be made are:
 - castors for chairs (wheels)
 - use in chair bases after it is mixed with fiberglass
 - tool handles
 - autoparts
- k. The technology has changed recently, so now recycled nylon is also able to be used in such things as:
 - plastic film (that has a nylon filament) that lumber is wrapped up in for example
 - upholstery
 - carpets

Contacts for the net collection and recycling program are:

Upper Yukon River: Tanana Chiefs Conference, Lisa Kangas, 907-452-8251 ext 3451

Lower Yukon River: Kwikpak Fisheries, Jack Schultheis, 907-351-7362

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