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Middle Kuskokwim Fish Wheel Project:

Final Performance Report to the Pacific Marine States Fisheries Commission

Summary:

The Native Village of Napaimute Environmental Director Dan Gillikin developed a proposal to implement a Middle Kuskokwim Fish Wheel Project. His vision for this project was to reintroduce the use of fish wheels to the communities of this part of the River. Fish wheels were once a common method for harvesting salmon but in recent years their use had declined to just two or three along the entire River.

The purpose of the reintroduction of fish wheels was to allow People in the Middle Kuskokwim the opportunity to harvest other species of fish during the recent years of King Salmon conservation. The use of other forms of fishing gear such as drift or set gill nets has been severely restricted but fish wheels have remained legal gear under the current regulations – as long as they have a “live box” and all King Salmon are released.

This proposal, along with some assistance from the Association of Village Council Presidents, was submitted to the Pacific Marine States Fisheries Commission (PMSFC). PMSFC was the agency responsible for administering Kuskokwim Fisheries Disaster Relief Funds previously appropriated by Congress.

The Middle Kuskokwim Fish Wheel Project Proposal was successfully awarded. The following pictorial essay demonstrates the important work that was accomplished with this funding.

The Native Village of Napaimute, along with our neighboring communities greatly appreciates this opportunity.

Phase I – August 2015 - procurement of supplies and mobilization:



Boat & motor dedicated to the project is ordered from Anchorage and shipped by barge to the Lower Kuskokwim Port of Bethel. There it is assembled and driven 160 miles upstream to Napaimute. Successful completion of the project also required use of another tribally-owned boat as well as use of personal boats



A few of the basic tools needed for fish wheel construction

Phase II – September through November - gathering local materials:



September: a crew is hired to travel 70 miles above Napaimute to gather driftwood logs for the fish wheel rafts



The logs are floated to Napaimute where they are hauled out of the water and stored to dry for the winter

October & November



Timber is harvested on Native Village of Napaimute's tribally-owned land using NVN equipment to be stockpiled and milled into lumber for the fish wheels in the spring of 2016



Stockpiled saw logs



November 2015: freeze up on the Kuskokwim – time to put a hold on the Project until spring

Phase III – April & May 2016 - milling the lumber and constructing the fish wheels:



April – May: Making fish wheel lumber on the Native Village of Napaimute's sawmill



First the fish wheel baskets are built



Then the rafts are built



Then the ladders, live boxes, and baskets are installed



Two completed fish wheels waiting for delivery

Phase IV – June 2016 - transportation to our neighboring communities and installation assistance:



Moving two wheels 60 miles downstream to Upper and Lower Kalskag on a beautiful June day



Transporting a fish wheel basket assembly 40 miles upstream to Crooked Creek where it was assembled on-site



Setting up the Upper Kalskag fish wheel



Project Leader Nathan Underwood points out where adjustments are needed (light blue shirt on the right)

The Results:



The purpose of the fish wheel project: enabling Middle Kuskokwim People to harvest species of fish other than King Salmon –this is a tub of Red Salmon



Reds cut for drying and smoking



Our Women are at their best when they're cutting Fishand their smoke houses are....



.....full!

We would like to thank the following key employees for their dedication to the success of this project:

Nathan Underwood, Project Leader
Dakota Phillips
Jacob Wise
Ben Leary
Kory Morrow
Jared Underwood
and the late Tommy Tom

We would also like to once again thank the Pacific Marine States Fisheries Commission for this opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Leary
Director of Development and Operations