



Chinook Salmon

Research Project

Yukon River: Eagle to Circle

Alaska

Studying predator-prey relations between juvenile Chinook Salmon and other fish species

Project outline

This project is a baseline study of predator prey relations between juvenile Chinook salmon and other fish in the Yukon River drainage. This includes Pike, Burbit, shefish, whitefish, sculpins and sucker fish. Samples are collected using hook and line, fike nets, and minnow traps. When a juvenile Chinook is caught it is sedated, weighted, measured, and released. When another species is caught it is sedated, weighted, measured and its stomach is pumped before being released. The stomach contents of the fish are then placed in ethanol and preserved for later study. All fish must be placed in recovery, which is either a bucket of freshwater or a net so that the sedative can wear off before they are released. Sometimes a fish will be killed and preserved as a specimen for use in a bone key to help identify the stomach contents of other fish.



Chinook or King Salmon

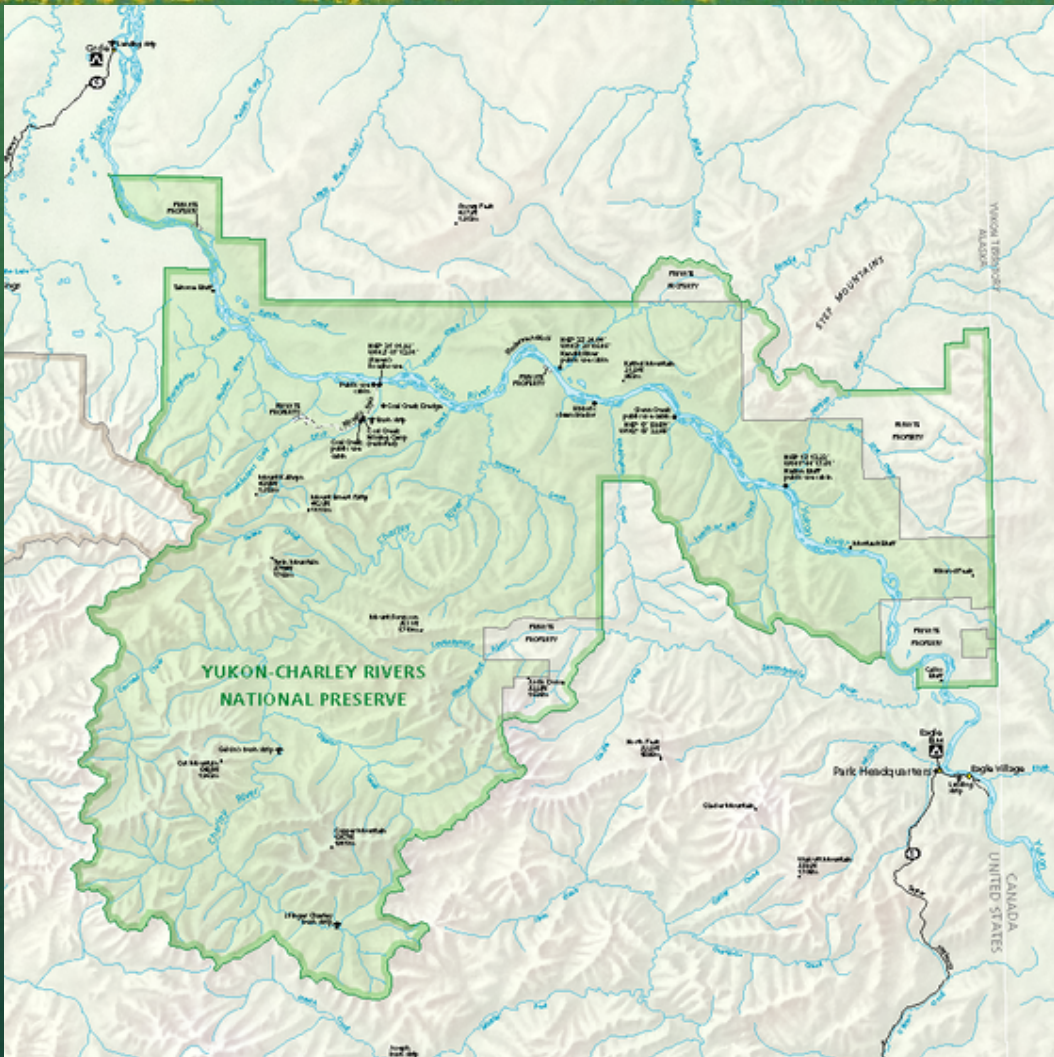
Oncorhynchus tshawytscha



Shefish picture from ADF&G website

Location

On this trip our study area was the stretch of the Yukon River between the village of Eagle and the village of Circle. We had five days to get from point A to point B and catch and sample as many fish as we could along the way.



Getting There

Ben and Kiersten, the technicians, drove to Eagle ahead of us and spent a few days sampling the area around the village. On August 10 my dad and I flew in and unfortunately Kiersten had to fly out on the same plane due to unexpected dental issues. We loaded our gear into a tiny truck loaned to us by some locals who were helping us with the project. We ended up leaving later than expected due to technical difficulties with our motor.



On the river day one:

Once we were on the river we traveled downstream and checked a few minnow traps along the way. We ate dinner at Andy's homestead and continued downstream catching a few juvenile Chinooks and a juvenile pike in some of the minnow traps that had been set the day before. We camped for the night at the mouth of the 17 mile river where Ben had caught his shefish the day before.



PUSH NOSE OF FISH TO CAP. THIS BOARD IS CALIBRATED



Day two



We got up early in the morning and fished from camp with no luck. Then we traveled down river to the to Tatonduk River and again fished with no luck. We continued on to a public use cabin a mile past the Nation River. There we set up camp before heading back to the Nation to set traps and scout possible fishing spots for the following day. I had a small pike chase my you lure to the shore but we still couldn't catch anything.



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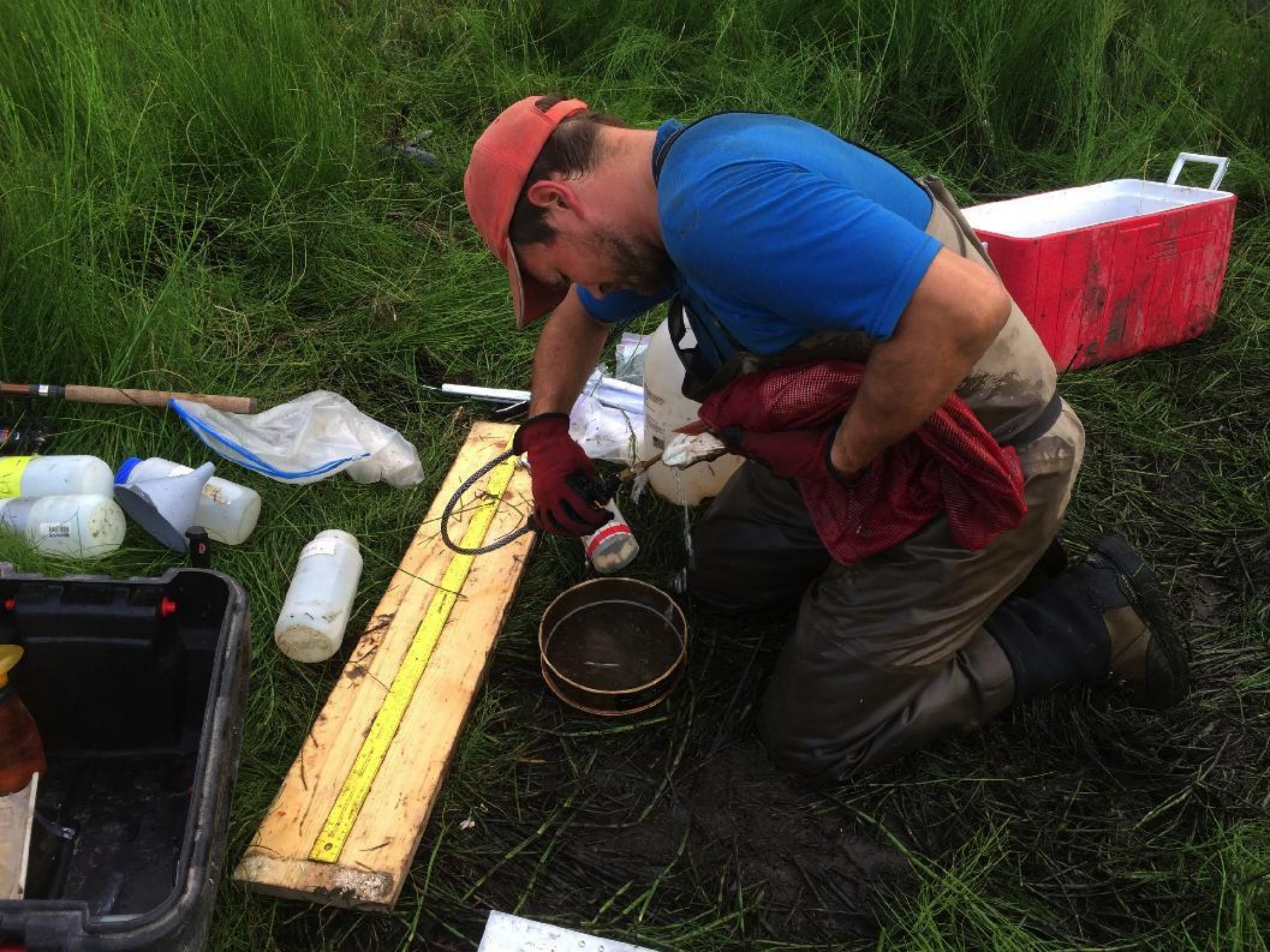


Day three

We awoke and drove the boats back to the Nation River and fished for a while with no success, but were pleasantly surprised to find a burbot in one of our fike nets. Unfortunately we forgot to take any pictures of the fish. We then continued to a public use cabin on a slough at the mouth over the Kandik River. The slough was full of Pike and we finally had some good success with hook and line fishing. We caught the fish late in the evening just before dark, so Ben had to stay up until 11 PM sedating, waiting, measuring, puking, reviving and releasing 14 pike while dad and I unloaded the boats set minnow traps and made dinner.









Day four

We slept in a little and checked the minnow traps to find one juvenile burbot, then played a game of Tetris, which was how Ben described trying to fit all of our gear into the boats. From there it was only about an hour down river to the mouth of the Charlie River. We again found good fishing but because we still had a long way to go to make it to circle by day five, we didn't have nearly as much time as we would have liked to explore the river. We traveled the rest of the day and set up camp at another public use cabin. That evening we set minnow traps in the stream next to camp, and went to a stream just downriver and set up the fike nets and more minnow traps. The banks of the stream were lined with grizzly and wolf tracks.





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“Burblit!”









Day five

Day five was devoted to travel. We had a lot of river miles to cover to make it to Circle and awoke early. We had two sculpins and a juvenile whitefish in the minnow traps and the fike nets were empty. As we packed to go it started to rain. We had a long day ahead of us. I managed to catch a little sleep on the way there and at around 2 o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at Circle to meet Mike who would be driving us back to Fairbanks.





Summary

It was a fun trip and a great experience! I learned about proper data collection and the different methods people use to collect fish. I hope Ben and everyone else working on the project will get some good data when they analyze the samples we collected this winter.