

Middle Kuskokwim Fish Wheel Project

Mark Leary, Director of Development and Operations, The Native Village of Napaimute



Project Summary

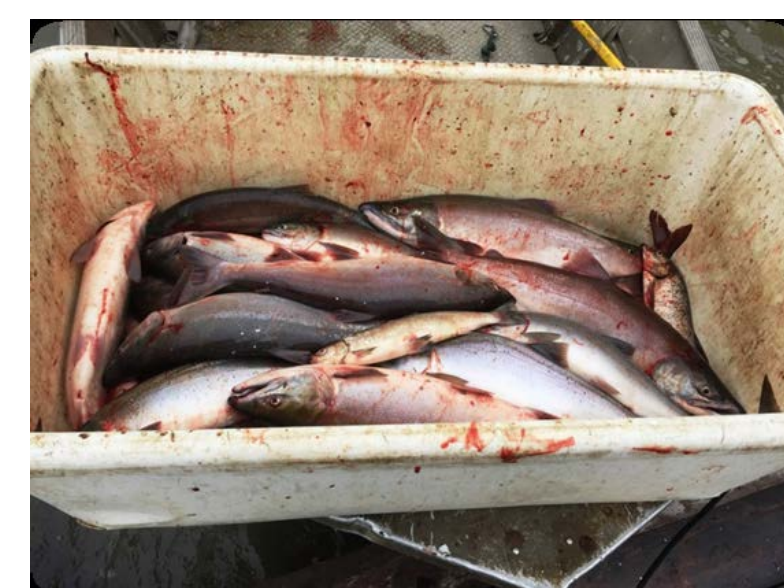
The Native Village of Napaimute Environmental Director, Dan Gillikin, planned the **Middle Kuskokwim Fish Wheel Project** with a vision to reintroduce the use of fish wheels to the communities of this part of the River. Fish wheels were once a common method for harvesting salmon but in recent years their 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 important project was administered by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and successfully completed by the Native Village of Napaimute. The following pictorial essay demonstrates the important work that was accomplished with this funding.

The Results

Fish wheels were successfully constructed and installed helping the Middle Kuskokwim People to harvest species other than King Salmon. Here are examples of Red Salmon being put to good use...filling smoke houses along the Middle Kuskokwim!



Acknowledgments

Thanks to PSMFC and 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.



Phase I: Procurement of supplies and mobilization (August 2015)

A boat & motor dedicated to the project was ordered from Anchorage and shipped by barge to the Lower Kuskokwim Port of Bethel. There it was 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: Gathering local materials (September - November 2015)



a crew traveled 70 miles above Napaimute to gather driftwood logs for the fish wheel rafts



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



Timber was harvested from the Native Village of Napaimute's tribally-owned land. Timber was stockpiled and milled into lumber for the fish wheels in the spring of 2016



November 2018: freeze up on the Kuskokwim – time to put a hold on the Project until spring

Phase III: Milling the lumber and constructing the fish wheels (April & May 2016)



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

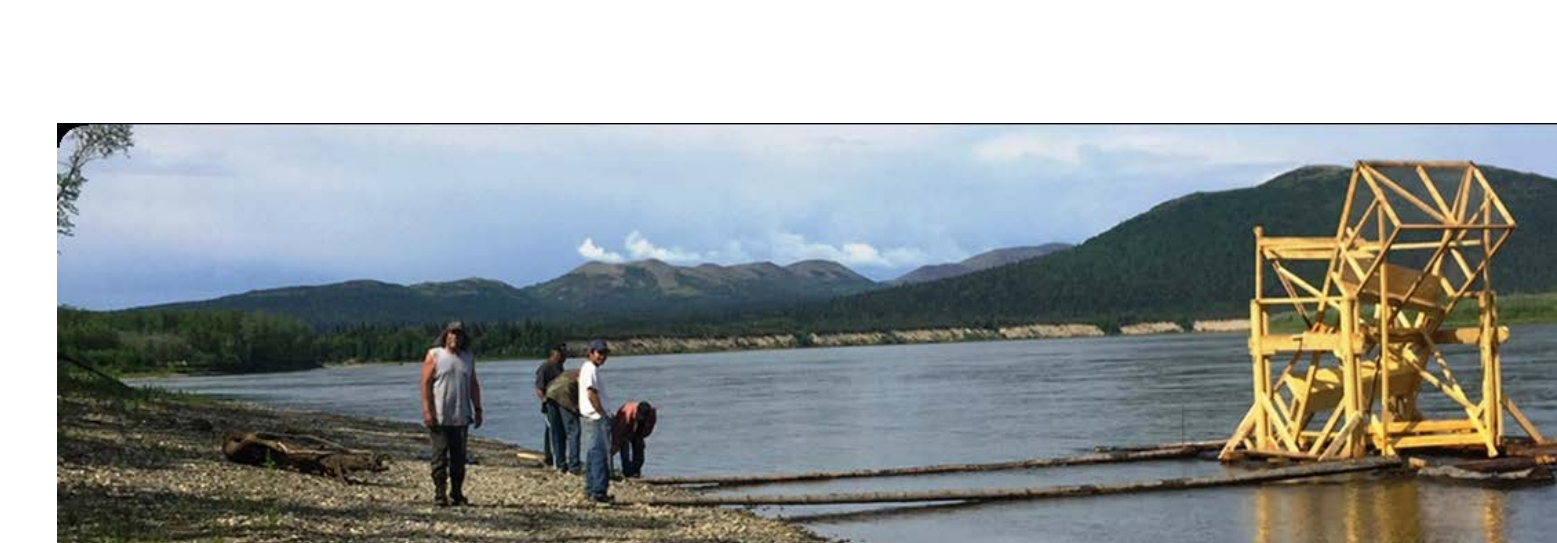
Phase IV: Delivering and helping to the install the completed fish wheels (June 2016)



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



Moving 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