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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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DEC surveys Yukon River water quality

Collaborative effort to help track changes to the river over 20-30 years

(Juneau, Alaska) A team of researchers led by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has completed two-weeks of field work surveying the water quality and habitat of 550 miles of the Yukon River. The researchers were part of a collaborative effort to determine the health of the river from Fort Yukon to Kaltag.

The University of Alaska, U.S. Geological Survey, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (YRITWC) assisted DEC in designing and implementing the survey.

"The field crews were made up of a diverse group of scientists from multiple organizations," said Terri Lomax, DEC's survey team leader. "Without these partnerships this project would not have been possible. The YRITWC played a critical role in the coordination, field work and outreach. USGS contributed the majority of the water chemistry analyses," said Lomax.

Field crews focused on taking river water samples at 50 locations along the Yukon River. In addition, the teams conducted physical habitat, sediment and biological surveys at 550 locations. The results for the water and sediment

samples should be available in December, while evaluating biological samples may take up to a year.

This year's survey builds on past work to develop baseline information on a river that flows from headwaters in Canada more than 2,000 miles to the Bering Sea.

"USGS did a study from 2000-2005 to determine baseline water quality conditions," said Doug Dasher, DEC's section chief for Water Quality Monitoring. "And since 2004 USGS has partnered with the YRITWC to continue long term monitoring of water quality. Now, working with both those groups we have established the framework for future monitoring that will allow us to see what changes may happen to the Yukon River over the next 20-30 years."