BETHEL SEARCH AND RESCUE

BOX 2633, BETHEL, ALASKA

To Report a Missing or Overdue Person Call *911* or *907-545-HELP (4357)*

Gweek (Pavilla's) Island 11.18.2021:

Tiny Spot of Open Water

Gweek (Pavilla's) Island 11.18.2022:

Huge Open Water Area—9.5 miles above Bethel

11.18.22 BSAR Kuskokwim River Aerial Survey—Report 2022 - 06* *

"For Better or for Worse"

Summary:

For the past several years BSAR has been scheduling our first aerial freeze up survey of the Kuskokwim River on November 18th. Flying the same day each year allows us to look back at previous years for comparison.

In 2021, with a record cold November there were well established snow machine trails to nearby villages and even a limited amount of truck traffic on the River by this date.

For November 18, 2022 conditions are very different. The lack of cold weather and early snowfall has slowed the freeze up process on the Kuskokwim River and it's tributaries.

THERE IS CURRENTLY TOO MUCH OPEN WATER ON THE KUSKOKWIM RIVER FOR SAFE TRAVEL

NO MAIN RIVER TRAVEL RECOMMENDED AT THIS TIME

Due to the large number of open holes this report will only cover the ones in the immediate Bethel area.

There are plenty!

Some traditional areas of concern have actually frozen up better than previous years., but many other sections of the River have frozen up worse.

We have pictures of the entire river from Kasigluk to Napaimute. Please let us know if there are specific areas you would like see.

DANGER CLOSE— BETHEL AREA OPEN WATER

Straight Slough *looking downstream toward Bethel. Straight Slough is frozen better than previous years but there are still small areas of open water*

Very large open water at Joe Pete's. This picture is looking upstream towards Church Slough

WARNING: THE ARE MANY SMALLER OPEN WATER HOLES SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE RIVER

DANGER CLOSE— BETHEL AREA OPEN WATER—CONT'D

The Akiachak Channel was not observed due to fog. Kuskokuak Slough has many open holes including a large bank-to-bank hole at the cut-off slough above Kwethluk. The Upper End of Kuskokuak is frozen better than previous years but there is a large hole just downstream of the upper end in that narrow part of the Akiachak Channel

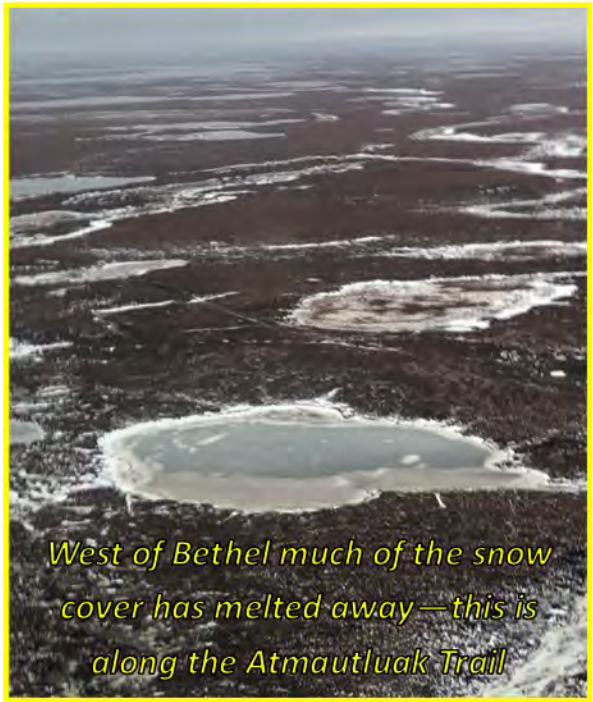
"For Better or for Worse" - Every year is different. Some areas have frozen better than previous years. Some are worse. Here are some examples

Worse: Bank to Bank Open Water at Cut Off Slough above Kwethluk

Better: Upper End of Kuskokuak

A Lone Ranger marking open water in the Akiachak Channel just downstream of the upper end of Kuskokuak SLough

Overview of Other Parts of the River: ***West of Bethel - the Johnson River: glare ice made it difficult to tell open water from recently frozen areas—there are many of both. Deep overflow was also observed.***



West of Bethel much of the snow cover has melted away—this is along the Atmautluak Trail

Conditions at Atmautluak on the Pikmiktalek River - a tributary of the Johnson River

Open Water Hiding in the Glare ice at Nunapitchuk

Glare Ice + Open Water = VERY DANGEROUS CONDITIONS!

Open Water in the lakes across from Kasigluk

The Johnson River Area—Continued:

Many Areas of Deep Overflow in the Lower Johnson River

Large Area of Open Water & Thin Ice at the Mouth of the Johnson River where it meets the Kuskokwim River

Further Up the River: There is too much open water to describe in this report. Large open water areas were observed below both Akiak and Tuluksak with dozens of smaller open water/thin ice areas. The lower end of the Tuluksak River is wide open. The following pictures show some of the more extreme conditions upriver.

Closing:

Patience is the best advice BSAR can give right now.

With a little patience and a stretch of cold weather conditions will improve—hopefully before the busy holiday season. There is just too much unmarked open water for safe travel on the main river right now. Even the back trails (overland) are marginal with thin ice, and water still under the snow in grassy areas. We have lost one traveler on the back trails already.

A big thank you to Napaskiak and Akiachak Search and Rescue groups for the open water they have done already in their immediate areas. It looks like there will be much more to do—especially in the Bethel area. Also thank you to Fox Air and pilot Will Wallace for the good flight.

Travel Sober—Travel Safe and Happy Thanksgiving from Bethel Search & Rescue!

** Please note this report is for informational purposes only. It is not an advisory that it is safe for travel*

*** This aerial survey was sponsored by the Native Village of Napaimute Ice Road Program*