



PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY TREATY BETWEEN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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NEWS RELEASE

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The Fraser River Panel met today to examine assessment data on Fraser River sockeye salmon. Test fishing catches of sockeye from the marine approach areas indicate an increase in abundance relative to the previous week although abundance indicators are still far lower than pre-season expectations for this date. The diversion rate of Fraser sockeye through Johnstone Strait is currently estimated to be approximately 28%. Assessments of sockeye passage in the lower Fraser River have also increased in recent days although the abundance is tracking much lower than expected during pre-season planning.

Stock identification analyses confirm that Summer-run sockeye are now dominating in the marine assessment areas, however the proportion of four year old sockeye is still tracking below expectations. Recent DNA analyses indicate that the stock composition of Fraser sockeye in the marine approach areas is approximately 15% Early Summer-run, 70% Summer-run, and 15% Late-run sockeye. Due to the very low abundance of Fraser sockeye thus far this season, there have been no directed commercial fisheries for Fraser River sockeye. The estimated total non-commercial catch of Fraser sockeye this season is 36,000 fish, which have been harvested in test fisheries and First Nations FSC fisheries.

At the meeting on July 28 the Panel decreased the run size estimate for Early Summer-run sockeye from 264,000 fish (90% probability level forecast) to 150,000 fish. This run size estimate was unchanged at the meeting today. The estimated 50% migration timing of Early Summer-run sockeye through Area 20 is July 26, which is the date that was expected during pre-season planning. The estimated escapement of Early Summer-run sockeye past Mission through July 30 is approximately 61,000 fish.

Similar to Early Stuart and Early Summer-run sockeye, the return of Summer-run sockeye through marine assessment areas has been much lower than expected to-date. Chilko and Quesnel sockeye were forecast to comprise almost 90% of the Summer-run sockeye abundance this season. DNA analyses suggest that they are contributing a lower proportion of the Summer-run return, which is another negative indicator regarding the overall abundance of Summer-run sockeye this season. A run size estimate for Summer-run sockeye should be available next week near their expected peak migration date through marine assessment areas. The estimated escapement of Summer-run sockeye past Mission through July 30 is approximately 51,000 fish.

Weaver sockeye are expected to comprise most of the return of True Late-run sockeye this season. Other True Late-run stocks returning include Harrison, Late Shuswap, Portage, and Cultus. The expected 50% migration timing of Birkenhead and True Late-run sockeye through Area 20 is August 11, and 12, respectively. DNA analyses indicate higher than expected proportions of Harrison sockeye have migrated through the marine approach routes to-date. The presence of Harrison sockeye in marine DNA samples over the past few weeks is consistent with their typically early marine timing relative to other Late-run stocks. Consistent with recent past years, at least some of these Harrison sockeye have migrated upstream with little or no delay. Assessments of Late-run sockeye timing, abundance, delay in the lower Strait of Georgia and in-river entry behavior will be conducted over the next several weeks. The estimated escapement of True Late-run sockeye past Mission through July 30 is approximately 28,000 fish.

Migration conditions for sockeye entering the Fraser River have become adverse over the past week due to the sustained period of hot, dry weather and low discharge levels. On July 30 the Fraser River discharge at Hope was approximately 4,200 cms, which is about 5% lower than normal, while the water temperature at Qualark Creek was 20.7 °C, which is 3.4 °C higher than average for this date. High water temperatures can cause serious adverse effects on resident and migratory fish, including: increased energy expenditure; reduced swimming performance; increased susceptibility to disease; reduced reproductive success; and mortality at very high temperature levels. Fraser River water temperatures are forecast to increase to 21.4 °C by August 8, which would be a record for that date if it occurs. Water temperatures exceeding 20 °C may cause high pre-spawning mortality of Fraser River sockeye. Environmental conditions for salmon migration in the Fraser River will be monitored closely over the coming weeks.

At the meeting today, after reviewing environmental and stock assessment information, the Panel approved an increase in the management adjustment factor for Early Summer-run sockeye from 0.40 to 0.51. Management adjustments are employed to help achieve spawning escapement targets for Fraser River sockeye.

The DFO spawning escapement update for Fraser sockeye on July 27 indicated that on July 26, the enumeration fence on Forfar Creek had 415 sockeye counted through it, while 360 sockeye were counted through the Gluske Creek fence. The sockeye appeared to be in good condition. There are plans to also install enumeration fences in Kynock and Dust Creeks in the Early Stuart system.

The Pacific Salmon Commission reports daily test fishing catches of sockeye salmon on its recorded message at (604) 666-8200 and on the internet at: http://www.psc.org/info_testfishing_collections_2009.htm In addition, Fraser River Panel news releases, fishery regulations, sockeye and pink salmon escapement data, and sockeye and pink salmon stock status reports will be available on this website.

United States fishing schedules during the season will be available for Treaty Indian fisheries through the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission at 1-800-562-6142. Non-Indian fishing schedules will be available through the National Marine Fisheries Service's Hotline in Seattle at 1-800-662-9825. Canadian commercial fishing regulations will be announced on the Fisheries and Oceans Canada recorded message at 604-666-2828 (from the lower B.C. mainland), and toll free from outside the lower B.C. mainland at 1-866-431-3474, and via fishery notices. Consult the appropriate regulatory agency regarding fisheries regulations pertaining to species other than sockeye and pink salmon in the Fraser River Panel Management Area.

All commercial fisheries in Panel Area waters remain closed to fishing.

The next in-season meeting of the Panel is scheduled to occur on August 4. News releases in this series will be provided by the Panel through the Commission to inform those interested in the progress of the Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon runs.