

NO. 3 NEWS RELEASE July 7, 2000

Pacific Salmon Commission staff today reported to the Fraser River Panel that the 2000 Early Stuart sockeye run is expected to total approximately 300,000 fish, or about 3% more than the pre-season forecast (291,000). At this abundance, the 2000 run would be the second largest on the cycle and just 14% less than the largest return on the cycle (1992 = 350,000). The cumulative gross escapement of Early Stuart sockeye through July 6 stands at 223,000 fish. The remaining Early Stuart sockeye should enter the river over the next ten days. Catches of Early Stuart sockeye now total 53,000 fish; 45,000 in Canadian First Nations fisheries, 1,000 in United States Treaty Indian food and ceremonial fisheries and 7,000 in test fisheries.

The early-timed component of the Early Summer sockeye stocks (Fennell, Bowron, Gates, Nadina, Pitt and several other smaller stocks) are now appearing in Juan de Fuca Strait (Area 20) and the Fraser River. Gross escapement of these stocks now totals 18,000 fish.

PSC staff calculate that the 50% arrival date in Area 20 for Early Stuart sockeye this year was June 27, which is approximately six days earlier than average. Early Summer sockeye stocks have also appeared in Area 20 several days earlier than normal. The unusually early arrival timing of Early Stuart and Early Summer stocks has led the Panel to advise the fishing community that Summer and Late Run sockeye may also arrive at dates earlier than currently forecast. To provide data for monitoring the timing and abundance of returning sockeye, the Panel approved advancing the starting dates of gillnet and purse seine test fisheries in Johnstone Strait (operated by Fisheries and Oceans Canada at the request of the PSC) and purse seine test fishing in Juan de Fuca Strait.

Fish size in 2000 has been larger than average. Age 4 Early Stuart sockeye have averaged approximately 6.0 lb (2.7 kg). Sockeye entering the Fraser River are reported to be in excellent condition.

Conditions for the migration of salmon in the Fraser Canyon had been good during the early portion of the run. However, water levels have risen substantially in the past week as a result of the snowpack melting from warm weather last week and heavy rains in the upper Fraser watershed. Discharge at Hope has risen from 6,300 cms on June 28 to 8,000 cms on July 6. At 8,000 cms, sockeye are slowed in their migration and delays are possible. Discharge levels are predicted to decline over the next week. Visual observations of sockeye at Hells Gate have been impaired by the high turbidity of the water. River water temperatures at Hells Gate are average (14 C) for this time of year and should remain favorable in the near term.

The Panel announced that all Panel Area commercial fisheries remain closed as planned. The Panel will meet again on Tuesday, July 11, to review the progress of the Early Stuart and Early Summer sockeye migration.