

NO. 5 NEWS RELEASE July 21, 2000

Over the past week, significant changes have occurred in the abundance and composition of the sockeye salmon migration in Fraser River Panel Area waters. Early Stuart sockeye have cleared the lower Fraser River. Early Summer sockeye stocks now predominate in the river with Summer-run stocks contributing, as well. In Area 20 (Juan de Fuca Strait), purse seine test fishing commenced this week just as an increase in Summer-run sockeye abundance arrived. Summer-run stocks now comprise approximately 50% of the fish in Area 20. The remainder are Early Summer stocks.

The final in-season estimates of Early Stuart sockeye show a total return of 365,000 fish, which is 25% higher than Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) pre-season forecast of 291,000 fish (50% probability). The gross escapement into the Fraser River has reached 352,000 fish. Current catch statistics show a total catch of 172,000 Early Stuart sockeye, including 161,000 in Fraser River First Nations fisheries. The Early Stuart arrival timing is now estimated at four days earlier than average. During the period of high river flow in early July, migrating Early Stuart sockeye were delayed in the Fraser Canyon. A strong migration past Hells Gate was observed on July 12-14 and large catches were reported by DFO in fisheries above Hells Gate for the week of July 10-16. The high river level also slowed the upriver migration of fish that passed Hells Gate prior to the increase in discharge. As of July 20, no sockeye have been seen by DFO observers at Fort St. James, at the outlet of Stuart Lake.

PSC staff presented in-season run-size estimates for the return of Early Summer stocks to the Fraser River Panel today. While estimates were above DFO's pre-season estimate of 547,000 fish (50% probability), the uncertainty in the estimates led the Panel to adopt the pre-season 50% probability estimate as the working number for decisions. A firm in-season update of the abundance of these stocks is expected early next week. Early Summer stocks also are returning earlier than average; however, data are inadequate to accurately estimate the timing at this point.

The Summer-run sockeye now present in Area 20 are predominately fish returning to Stellako River, Quesnel Lake and Late Stuart streams. In 2000, Chilko sockeye are expected to contribute over 50% of the Summer-run abundance, but were only about 25% of the Summer-run fish in an Area 20 purse seine sample taken on July 20. Later arrival timing of Chilko sockeye relative to the Stellako and Late Stuart stocks or deviations from pre-season forecasts for the stocks may be responsible for the observed stock proportions.

Fraser River water levels have declined over the past week from 6,800 cms on July 14 to 5,600 cms today, which is close to the long-term average for the date of 5,200 cms. High air temperatures throughout the watershed this week has led to an increase in water temperatures. While temperatures in the main stem Fraser River remain favourable for sockeye migration (16 C), temperatures in the Nechako River have climbed to over 19 C despite the release of additional water by Alcan to moderate the increase in water temperature of the lower Nechako.

In order to provide Treaty Indian fishers in United States Areas 4B, 5 and 6C (Juan de Fuca Strait) the opportunity to harvest sockeye salmon, the Panel approved the following regulations for the period commencing July 21:

UNITED STATES PANEL AREA WATERS:

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C: Open to drift gillnets 6:00 p.m. Friday, July 21 to 12:00 p.m. (noon) Wednesday, July 26.

The Panel will meet again Monday, July 24, to consider regulations in all Panel Area waters for the remainder of the week.