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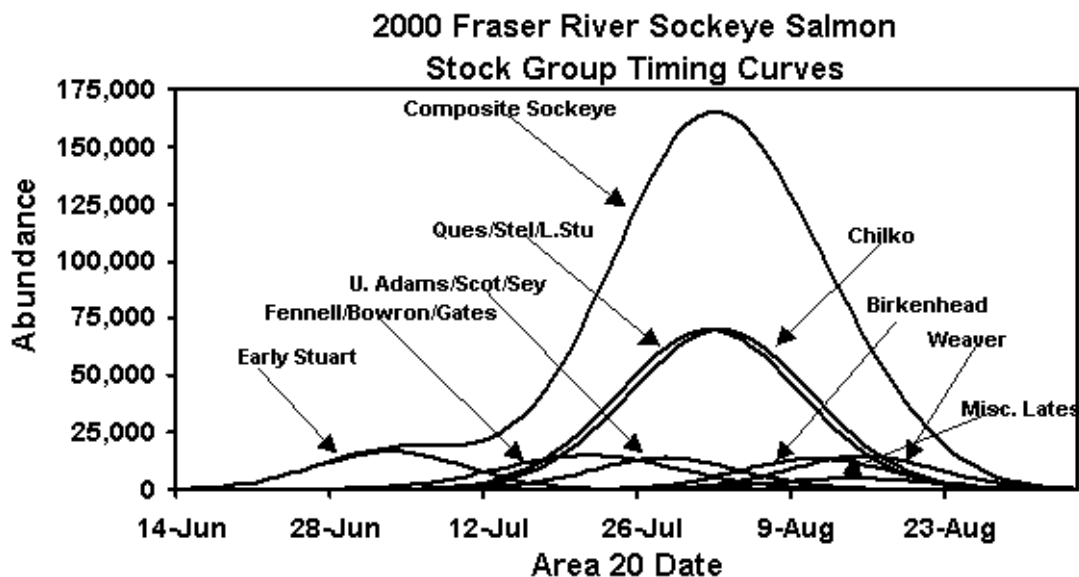
The Fraser River Panel met May 18-19, 2000, to develop the 2000 fishery management plans for Fraser River sockeye salmon in Panel Area waters. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) provided the forecast of sockeye abundance to the Panel, as well as a schedule for spawning escapement targets at different run sizes. The 2000 season is the second under the renewed Annex IV of the Treaty, signed in June 1999. The United States share of the TAC of Fraser River sockeye will be reduced from 22.4% in 1999 to 20.4% in 2000. In addition, the United States will receive compensation for a catch shortfall of 26,000 fish in 1999.

In the forecast, Canada noted mixed signals from the data relating to the 2000 return. On the positive side, the 1996 spawning escapement of Fraser River sockeye salmon of 2,062,000 fish, was the largest on the cycle since records have been maintained (i.e., 1940-1996). The abundance was just over double the average of the prior five cycle line escapements (995,000). Large escapements for the cycle were observed at Chilko, Stellako, Weaver, Gates, Pitt, Raft, Nadina, Fennell and Upper Adams.

On the negative side, very few jack sockeye (age 3 fish) returned in 1999 from the 1996 spawning. Both the catch and escapement of jacks were low. While en route mortality of jack sockeye associated with high Fraser River water levels in 1999 undoubtedly reduced the escapements to the spawning grounds, mortality in the river clearly does not explain the low estimate of abundance. The sockeye that will return as age 4 fish in 2000 migrated to sea as smolts in the spring of 1998, during the latter phase of the 1997-1998 El Nino.

The forecast of the sockeye return in 2000 is approximately 4,100,000, 3,300,000, and 2,300,000 fish at the probability levels of 50%, 60%, and 75%, respectively. These forecasts are highly uncertain. Ocean survival of age-4 sockeye returns is unknown but potentially unfavourable ocean conditions may result in run sizes that are less than the 50% probability level. As well, the preceding return in 1999 was affected by extremely poor ocean survival.

Summer-run sockeye stocks should provide the bulk of the catch. At the 50% probability level (point estimate), the forecast for the Chilko River and Lake sockeye return was 1,444,000 fish; Stellako River - 645,000; Quesnel Lake stocks - 311,000; and, Late Stuart - 268,000. Abundance-timing curves for sockeye salmon stock/stock groups in coastal areas (Area 20) are provided below. Forecast abundance and long-term average dates of migration at Area 20 have been used for this graph.



If the return is approximately 4,100,000 fish, the total allowable catch for international sharing (TAC) would be about 1,850,000 and fisheries in Canadian and United States waters would commence as follows: United States fisheries in Areas 4B, 5 and 6C would be expected to commence the week of July 23-29; fisheries in Areas 6,7

and 7A would be expected to commence the week of July 30-August 5. Canadian Area H troll fisheries in Panel Area waters would commence the week of July 30-August 5. Area 29 gillnet fisheries would not be expected prior to the week of August 13-19.

If the return is approximately 3,300,000, the TAC would be about 1,200,000 and fisheries would have reduced catch objectives. United States and Canadian Panel Area fisheries would commence as above.

At the 2,300,000 return level, the TAC drops to approximately 600,000 fish. United States fisheries would be expected to commence as above. Canadian commercial fisheries in Panel Area waters would not be expected.

The United States fishery would not commence as described above unless the total run-size is expected to exceed 1,500,000 sockeye. Fisheries could commence at a later date if a United States share is identified.

DFO will provide forecasts of arrival timing and diversion rate via Johnstone Strait for sockeye in 2000 at a later date. The pre-season fishing plan was developed with an assumption of recent average diversion rates (50%) and average migration timing.

Test fishing in Panel Area waters will commence June 21. The Pacific Salmon Commission makes available daily test fishing catches of sockeye and pink salmon on its recorded message at (604) 666-8200 and on the Internet at: <http://www.psc.org/testfish/>. 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 1-888-858-9319 (new number). Canadian fishing regulations will be announced on the Fisheries and Oceans Canada recorded message at (604) 666-2828.

The first in-season meeting of the Fraser River Panel will be held July 5 by telephone conference. In-person meetings of the Panel will be held at the Richmond Inn, Richmond, B.C., beginning July 7. Periodic news releases in this series will be provided by the Panel through the Commission to help inform all those interested in the progress of the runs during the fishing season.