

### **NO. 3 NEWS RELEASE July 16, 1999**

The Fraser River Panel met today and expressed their continued concern for the successful migration of Early Stuart sockeye salmon now present in the Fraser Canyon area. As of July 16, no sockeye have been observed passing Hells Gate and only a few have been caught above Hells Gate by Aboriginal fishers. An estimated 122,000 Early Stuart sockeye have passed the PSC's Mission hydroacoustic site in the period July 1-15. This is approximately 80% of the 150,000 projected total run of this stock in 1999. Unless passage conditions substantially improve within the coming week, a large fraction of these fish may not reach their spawning grounds in the Stuart River watershed located approximately 1,000 km upstream. Continued high river water levels also may impact Early Summer sockeye now present in the river and those which are expected over the next few weeks. Even the early segments of the Summer-run sockeye stocks may be impacted by the high water levels in the Fraser Canyon when they arrive later this month. As a result, there have been no commercial fisheries on these stocks and extremely low or no harvest in Aboriginal and recreational fisheries in both Canada and the United States.

Environmental conditions in the Fraser River deteriorated further this week. Although water temperatures are favorable for migration, the water level at Hope, B.C., rose to a peak discharge of 10,200 cubic meters per second on July 12, which is the highest discharge for this time of year for the past 80 years. Forecasts suggest that the river level will decline slowly over the next two weeks and will be approximately 8,000 cubic meters per second one week from now, which is the discharge level above which sockeye migration is severely impeded.

Early Summer sockeye stocks now predominate in Canadian Area 20 gillnet test fishery catches. These fish are returning to a number of streams in the Fraser River watershed, both below and above the Fraser Canyon. The most abundant of these are Fennell Creek, Bowron River, Gates Creek, Upper Pitt River, Nadina River, Scotch Creek and Seymour River sockeye. Canada's forecast of total return for these stocks in 1999 is 477,000 fish. Assessment of actual return abundance will be conducted over the next two weeks as these fish enter Juan de Fuca and Johnstone Strait and migrate past Mission. No directed commercial fishing is anticipated for the Early Summer sockeye stocks.

Summer-run sockeye are beginning to appear in Area 20 catches. Canada has provided the Panel with a peak arrival forecast for Chilko sockeye in Area 20 of August 3. This is the long-term average peak date of return. Based on the forecast arrival timing for Summer-run stocks, the abundance of these fish in Area 20 would be expected to increase rapidly after July 20.

The Panel reached agreement on the pre-season fishing plan today. Details of this plan will be published early next week.