

NO. 6 NEWS RELEASE July 30, 1999

The Fraser River Panel reviewed the catches and escapement of Fraser sockeye salmon at a meeting today. Commercial fishing commenced this week in both United States and Canadian areas. A Treaty Indian gillnet fishery in United States Areas 4B, 5 and 6C (Juan de Fuca Strait) landed 6,000 sockeye salmon and a gillnet fishery in Canadian Areas 12 and 13 harvested approximately 33,000 sockeye. In total, approximately 70,000 Fraser River sockeye salmon have been caught in all areas, including 24,000 in Panel authorized test fisheries.

An increase in the daily numbers of sockeye entering the Fraser River was noted beginning Sunday, July 25. However, the increase at Mission was not commensurate with the increase in test fishing catches in Juan de Fuca Strait (Canadian Area 20) six days earlier. The possibility of delay in the Strait of Georgia will be watched. Early Summer sockeye escapement past Mission has now reached 154,000 fish. The abundance of Summer-run sockeye reaching the Mission hydroacoustic site now totals 142,000 fish, which is well below the level expected based on forecasts of run size and arrival timing.

While Summer-run sockeye (Chilko, Quesnel, Stellako and Late Stuart) now predominate in Area 20 catches, measurable numbers of Early Summer sockeye remain in the Area. These latter stocks would normally be swamped by a larger abundance of Summer-run stocks. While this may be a positive sign for Early Summer sockeye abundance, it is a negative for Summer-run stocks. The Panel considers it is too early to project the actual abundance and arrival timing of Summer-run stocks; however, the data collected to date suggests that the abundance of 4-year-old sockeye of all stocks is below forecast levels. Since this is the predominant age group in the forecast (i.e., 95% of all Summer-run sockeye should be age 4 fish), the lower showing of this age group suggests that the abundance of Summer-run sockeye will be less than forecast.

The migration of sockeye at Hells Gate was highest to date on Friday, July 23, as some of the fish that had been delayed in the Fraser Canyon were able to pass upstream despite the continued high discharge. Maturing sockeye have been reported in the area between Yale and Hells Gate this week, suggesting that some of the Early Stuart and Early Summer sockeye that migrated upstream at high discharge levels will not successfully pass through the Canyon. More recent migrants should be able to successfully negotiate the river at the current flow level. River flow at Hope dropped from 7,700 cubic meters per second (cms) on Friday, July 23, to 7,000 cms today. However, increased flow due to heavy rains in the upper Fraser watershed will raise discharge at Hope this weekend and may hinder passage in the coming days. The migration conditions in the Fraser Canyon continues to be a major concern to the Panel.

In light of the concerns for Summer run sockeye, the Panel agreed to implement the following management measures:

UNITED STATES FRASER RIVER PANEL AREA FISHERIES:

TREATY INDIAN FISHERIES:

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C: Close to drift gillnets as scheduled at 12:00 p.m. (noon) Saturday, July 31 and re-open to drift gillnets 12:00 p.m. (noon) Sunday, August 1, to 12:00 p.m. (noon) Tuesday, August 3.

The Panel will meet again Monday, August 2, to review the progress of the sockeye salmon escapement and the entry of fish in Juan de Fuca and Johnstone Straits.