

NO. 7 NEWS RELEASE August 6, 1999

The Fraser River Panel announced today that the 1999 Fraser River sockeye salmon run is expected to be less than one-half of the pre-season forecast. The current in-season estimate of Summer-run stock abundance based on daily escapement levels and test fishing catches is 1,400,000 fish compared to the pre-season forecast of 5,328,000 fish. While this estimate of abundance will be adjusted as additional data become available, the Panel clearly expects that a major reduction in expected abundance is unavoidable. PSC staff also provided a provisional estimate of 1,100,000 Late-run sockeye, down from the pre-season forecast of 2,125,000 fish. A more accurate estimate of Late-run sockeye abundance, based on in-season information is expected in 10 days. The total return of Fraser River sockeye salmon for 1999 is now projected at approximately 3,100,000 fish compared to the pre-season forecast of 8,248,000 sockeye salmon.

Catches and escapement of Fraser sockeye salmon now total 1,000,000 fish. The only commercial fishing that occurred in Panel waters this week was the Treaty Indian gillnet fishery in United States Areas 4B, 5 and 6C (Juan de Fuca Strait). There were 10 to 20 vessels fishing each day and they landed 10,000 sockeye salmon in the first five nights of fishing and will close at 6:00 p.m. today. Total commercial catches this season amount to 73,000 Fraser River sockeye salmon. Canadian catches total 56,000 fish while United States catches have reached 17,000. Test fishing catches amount to 36,000 sockeye.

Daily escapement of sockeye at Mission reached a maximum of 72,000 on August 4. The gross escapement of sockeye (Mission estimates plus First Nations catches below Mission) now totals 800,000 fish: 135,000 Early Stuart, 264,000 Early Summer stocks and 400,000 Summer-run sockeye. The possibility of Summer-run sockeye delay in the Strait of Georgia was examined via troll test fishing in the Strait of Georgia. There was no sign of substantial numbers of delaying fish off the mouth of the river. Daily escapements are expected to increase over the weekend as the sockeye that have been migrating through Johnstone Strait this week arrive in the river.

The arrival timing of sockeye salmon appears to be close to the long-term average as forecast by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The Summer-run stocks appear to have reached their peak on August 3-4 (Area 20 timing) as the migration of sockeye from Johnstone Strait is expected to arrive in the lower Fraser August 8-10. Late-run sockeye are expected to arrive near their average date for the cycle of August 14 (Area 20). The Johnstone Strait diversion of sockeye has increased dramatically over the past week. Currently, about 60% of Fraser sockeye are arriving via the northern (Johnstone Strait) approach route.

The migration of sockeye at Hells Gate slowed to a trickle this week as a large increase in water level appears to have impeded the progress of the migration in the Fraser Canyon. The river flow at Hope increased to over 7,800 cubic meters per second (cms) on Monday, August 2, as a result of heavy rains in the upper Fraser watershed. However, migration conditions in the Fraser Canyon improved at the end of the week as discharge levels dropped sharply to approximately 6,000 cms.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada provided information on the arrival of Early Stuart sockeye salmon. These fish were severely impeded in their upstream migration by record-level water flows in the Fraser River. The Panel expected major losses of these fish to occur en route to their spawning grounds. To date only a few sockeye have been observed on the spawning grounds and the expectation now is that over 90% of the Early Stuart sockeye escapement will not successfully arrive based on historical run timing.

Based on the updated expectation for sockeye salmon returns, the Panel announced that all Panel Area commercial fisheries will remain closed for the week of August 8-14. The Panel will meet again Tuesday, August 10, to review the progress of the sockeye salmon escapement and the entry of fish in Juan de Fuca and Johnstone Straits.

Fraser River Panel Sockeye Review

Week of: Aug. 1 -Aug. 7, 1999

Date: August 6, 1999

Area	Gear	Weekly Catch	%Fraser	Fraser Sockeye	
				Weekly	Cumul.
Commercial Catch					
Canada					
Areas 1-10	Net				0
Areas 1-10 "F"	Troll				0
Areas 11-12 "G"	Troll				1,900
Areas 11-16	Net				41,000
Areas 12-16 "H"	Troll				12,000
Areas 17-18-29 "H"	Troll				0
Area 20	Net				0
Area 29	Net				600
Canadian Total					55,500
United States					
Alaska	Net				0
Washington					
T.I. Areas 4B/5/6C	Net				17,700
T.I. Areas 6/7/7A	Net				0
N.I. Areas 7/7A	Net			0	0
U.S. Total					17,700
Non-commercial Catch					
PSC Test					31,800
Other Test					5,100
Fraser River Indian					57,100
Areas 12-124 Indian					0
Recreational					0
Charter					0
U.S. Ceremonial					0
Non-comm. Total					94,000
Catch and Escapement					
Catch Accounted-to-date					167,200
Potential Net Escapement (Mission esc. less IF & sport catch above Mission)					819,400
Total Accounted-to-date					986,600

Gross Escapement (includes Pitt R. sockeye)

Run	Stock/Group	Esc. Goal	Mission Esc.	AFS Below Mission	Total Esc.	% Complete
EStu	Early Stuart	146,000	135,200	200	135,400	93%
ESum	Early Summer		273,800	5,500	279,300	n/a
Summ	Quesnel/Chilko		317,100	6,800	461,800	n/a
	Late Stuart/Stellako		134,500	3,400		
Late	Birkenhead		0	0	0	n/a
	Adam/Lshu		0	0		
	Weav/L Misc.		0	0		