

NO. 5 NEWS RELEASE August 7, 1998

The Fraser River Panel met today to review sockeye salmon catches and escapements in the past week and to receive reports from Commission staff on the status of the stocks. Age 4 returns to Early Stuart, Early Summer and Summer-run sockeye stock groups appear to be substantially below the preseason forecasts. These fish are from the 1994 spawning population and migrated to sea as one-year-old smolts in the spring of 1996. They are returning after two years in the ocean. Sockeye returns to other areas, including Bristol Bay, Alaska, also indicate poor ocean survival of the 1996 smolt migrants. A consistent pattern of low sea survival across all Fraser River sockeye stocks has been observed in several past years, most recently in 1995, when the returns of all stocks were about one-third of forecast. While the returns in 1998 have not been as poor as in 1995, the expectation is that Late-run sockeye stocks will be similarly affected.

Catches in commercial fisheries in the week of August 2-8 have totalled approximately 1,000,000 Fraser River sockeye. Canadian catches now total 1,100,000 sockeye and United States landings amount to 250,000 fish; 220,000 in Washington waters and 30,000 in Alaska. Escapement of sockeye past the Pacific Salmon Commission's hydroacoustic site at Mission, B.C. now totals 1,550,000 sockeye, including 290,000 of Early Summer stocks and 1,090,000 Summer-run sockeye. The Chilko and Quesnel sockeye stocks presently comprise approximately 65% of sockeye entering the lower Fraser River.

Run size estimates presented today are as follows: Early Summer – 450,000; Summer-run – 4,500,000; Late-run – 3,000,000 (interim estimate). At these returns, the total Fraser River sockeye abundance in 1998 would be 8,125,000 fish compared to the pre-season forecast of 11,218,000 fish.

Water temperatures in the Fraser River and tributaries continued to be at or above previous maxima. Daily temperatures at Hells Gate declined slightly from over 21 C to 20.4 C on August 6. Early Stuart sockeye have not arrived in expected numbers at their spawning grounds in the Stuart Lake watershed. Enroute mortality and diversion of fish into non-natal tributaries have been observed. Pre-spawning mortality of fish arriving on the spawning grounds is currently averaging 36% of the females. Enroute and pre-spawning mortality is expected to affect Early Summer and Summer-run sockeye escapements in 1998.

The Panel discussed the potential impact of adverse water temperature conditions in the Fraser River on the survival of Early Summer and Summer run sockeye prior to spawning. Decision on changes that might be made to escapement targets was not reached at this meeting and will be discussed further at the Panel's next meeting scheduled for telephone conference call at 11:00 a.m., Monday, August 10.

The Panel also announced that commercial troll fishing in Canadian Area 18-1, 4 and 11 and Area 29-1-4 and 6 will be closed at 6:00 p.m., Friday, August 7.

The Panel scheduled fishing times for the period commencing August 8, as follows:

UNITED STATES FRASER RIVER PANEL AREA WATERS:

TREATY INDIAN FISHERY:

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C: Drift gillnets open 12:00 p.m. (noon) Sunday, August 9 to 12:00 p.m. (noon) Friday, August 14.

Areas 6,7 and 7A: The Treaty Indian fishery previously scheduled has been delayed for twenty-four hours pending the outcome of further discussion by the Fraser River Panel on Monday, August 10 at 11:00 a.m. Details of further fisheries in this area will be announced following that meeting.

NON-INDIAN FISHERIES:

Areas 7 and 7A: Reef nets open 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Saturday, August 8, and Sunday, August 9.

The non-Indian purse seine and gillnet fisheries previously scheduled have been delayed for twenty-four hours pending the outcome of further discussion by the Fraser River Panel on Monday, August 10 at 11:00 a.m. Details of further fisheries in this area will be announced following that meeting.

CANADIAN FRASER RIVER PANEL AREA WATERS:

Remain closed to troll and net fishing.

The next meeting of the Panel will be at 11:00 a.m. Monday, August 10, by telephone conference.