

### **NO. 3 NEWS RELEASE July 25, 1997**

The 1997 Early Stuart sockeye run is winding down in marine areas and in the lower Fraser River. Commission staff now estimate that the run will reach 1,550,000 fish, making this the largest Early Stuart run on record. Timing of the run has been quite unusual. The run has been later than normal by six days, as was forecast by Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Also, it has not been normally distributed (bell-shaped curve of abundance) but has been of longer duration than usual. Escapement into the Fraser River for spawning escapement and in-river catch is currently estimated at 1,036,000 fish.

However, those fish which passed Mission, B.C. prior to about July 17 have experienced severe migrational challenges in the Fraser Canyon. Discharges in the Fraser reached 9,300 cubic meters per second on July 17. High discharge and extreme turbidity caused the fish to cease migrating and to hold in the lower Fraser Canyon from Hope to Hells Gate for several days. Migration at Hells Gate resumed on July 19 after the river level dropped to about 8,000 cubic meters per second. Strong daily migration has been recorded at Hells Gate beginning July 21. Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientists have collected data from sockeye migrating in the Canyon and suggest that a significant portion (14%) of the Early Stuart sockeye that reached Hope, B.C., experienced stress from high discharge. It is estimated that approximately 14% of these fish will not have sufficient energy reserves to reach their spawning grounds and are expected to die on route. An additional 18% are estimated to be at high risk of loss. The balance of the run is expected to be able to migrate normally. Similar or higher levels of on route mortality have been recorded in past years, the most recent being in 1982 when only 4,600 Early Stuart sockeye reached their spawning grounds out of an escapement of 90,000 fish past Mission. Canada responded to the concern for on route mortality by increasing the escapement objective on Early Stuart sockeye by 187,000 fish.

Early Summer run sockeye stocks have now supplanted Early Stuart in Area 20 (Juan de Fuca Strait) and Area 12 and 13 (Johnstone Strait) test fishing samples. These stocks normally peak in the July 20 to 28 period, one to two weeks prior the main Summer run stocks. Early Summer sockeye comprise a number of stocks migrating to widely diverse parts of the watershed: Nadina and Bowron in upper Fraser tributaries; Gates, Fennell, Raft, Upper Adams, Scotch and Seymour to Middle Fraser tributaries; and Pitt, Chilliwack and Nahatlatch in lower Fraser tributaries. Escapement of these stocks has reached 121,000 sockeye. The abundance of Early Summer sockeye cannot be estimated well at this point in the season. However, based on the strong early escapement, staff have tentatively concluded that the run will reach or exceed the pre-season forecast (349,000).

Summer run sockeye (Quesnel, Chilko, Late Stuart, Stellako) would usually be present in significant proportions in marine areas now, but are not showing strongly at this date. This week, DFO provided Commission staff with a forecast of Quesnel/Chilko peak timing in Area 20 of August 7 (+ or - 6 days), which is approximately six days later than normal. The generally low numbers now present suggest that the run will be this late or later arriving in coastal areas.

Johnstone Strait diversion of Fraser sockeye has been forecast to be extremely high based on May-June sea surface temperatures along the north coast of Vancouver Island. Although the diversion rate on the early portion of the Early Stuart sockeye run appeared to be quite high, test fishing catches have indicated a more normal diversion rate at present. Weekly estimates of diversion rate will only be accurate when fishing commences on both routes.

The absence of an agreed management plan between the Parties on allocation of the total allowable catch of Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon continues. This lack of agreement prevents the Fraser River Panel from acting in its normal role as the regulatory authority for sockeye fisheries in Panel Area waters. However, both countries were able to agree on increasing the Early Stuart escapement objective by 187,000 fish in order to achieve conservation of this stock. Regulation of the fisheries is being conducted by the respective United States and Canadian domestic management agencies.

*Please note that Pacific Salmon Commission daily test fishing data and Pacific Salmon Commission news releases can be located at our internet site: [www.psc.org](http://www.psc.org).*