



PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY TREATY BETWEEN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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NEWS RELEASE

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The Fraser River Panel (Panel) of the Pacific Salmon Commission has developed management plans for 2012 Fraser River sockeye salmon fisheries in Panel Area waters.

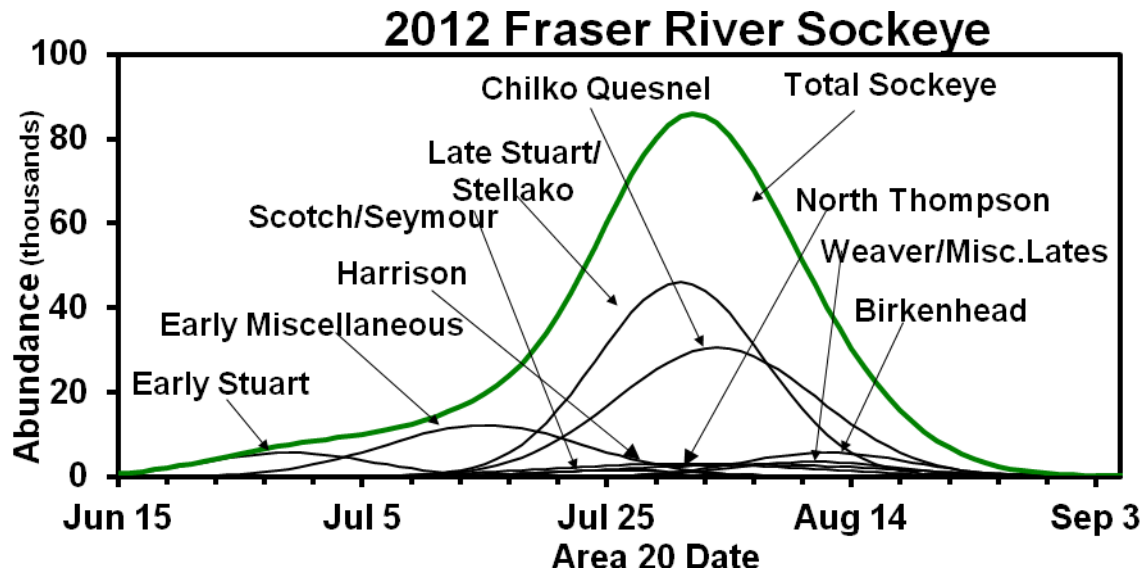
Pre-season expectations

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) provided forecasts of Fraser River sockeye salmon abundance, timing and diversion rate to the Panel, as well as a schedule for calculating sockeye spawning escapement targets at different run sizes. In addition, DFO also provided forecast of river migration conditions. The 2012 cycle has the lowest average return of the four cycles of Fraser River sockeye with an average return (1956-2008) of 3,849,000 fish. The total Fraser sockeye forecast mid-point or 50% probability level is 2,119,000 fish, for 2012. The primary reason for the forecast of a small 2012 return is that the number of effective female sockeye spawners in the 2008 brood was the lowest on the 2012 cycle line since 1968. DFO has advised that Fraser River sockeye salmon forecasts for 2012 remain highly uncertain due to variability in annual survival rates and uncertainty about changes in their productivity. To put the sockeye run size forecast uncertainty into context, there is a one in four chance that the actual number of returning sockeye will be at or below 1,203,000 fish (the 25% probability level forecast) and there is a three in four chance that the actual number of returning sockeye will be at or below 3,763,000 fish (the 75% probability level forecast). For pre-season planning purposes, the Panel used the 50% probability level forecast (equal chance of a higher or lower return) of 2,119,000 fish.

The Early Stuart sockeye return forecast at the 50% probability level is 99,000 fish (ranges from 61,000 to 161,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels). The forecast for Early Summer-run sockeye at the 50% probability level is 277,000 fish (ranges from 145,000 to 522,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels). The Summer-run sockeye return forecast at the 50% probability level is 1,585,000 fish (ranges from 917,000 to 2,776,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels), with Chilko sockeye expected to comprise approximately 35% of the total Summer-run sockeye return. The Late-run sockeye return forecast at the 50% probability level is 158,000 fish (ranges from 80,000 to 304,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels). For the 2012 management season, Raft, North Thompson, and Harrison sockeye will be managed as part of the Summer-run group.

Marine conditions were used to forecast the 50% marine timing of Early Stuart sockeye through Area 20 of June 29, which is earlier than average. Based on this Early Stuart timing, the expected marine timing of Chilko sockeye is August 3. The pre-season forecast of the proportion of Fraser River sockeye salmon diverting their migration to the Fraser River through Johnstone Strait is 43%.

Expected abundance-timing curves for Fraser River sockeye stock-groups in coastal areas (i.e., all marine migration timed to Juan de Fuca Strait, Area 20), are shown below.



The snowpack volume in the Fraser River watershed was above average this year. Fraser River discharge levels are forecast to be higher than average this summer, while water temperatures are forecast to be slightly below average. Cool and wet spring conditions have resulted in very high flows over the past few weeks. The river discharge at Hope exceeded 10,000 cms for the period June 17 thru July 1, approximately 60% higher than the historic average for this period. Continued high flows will likely negatively impact the upstream migration success of Early Stuart sockeye resulting in elevated en route mortality.

Management constraints and expectations

In addition to low overall expected abundance, the problem of early entry of Late-run sockeye stocks has occurred in most years since 1996 and it continues to adversely impact their survival and productivity, substantially reducing harvest opportunities on these stocks and on co-migrating Summer-run sockeye salmon. The Panel's management approach for Late-run sockeye presumes that, similar to recent years, Late-run sockeye will enter the Fraser River earlier than the long-term average, and some proportion will not survive to spawn. Panel management objectives will place a high priority on achieving Fraser sockeye escapement goals, including those for Late-run sockeye. Additional management actions may be taken by Canada to protect Cultus and Sakinaw sockeye. Conservation concerns for other species and stocks identified by Canada and the United States will be taken into account throughout the 2012 management season.

If the runs return with expected timing and abundance (see Figure above), commercial fisheries would be directed at harvestable surpluses in the Summer-run management group, with low impact fisheries expected to commence in Panel Areas during the third week of July. Actual fisheries schedules will depend on in-season assessments of abundance, migration timing and river conditions.

In-season assessments

Gillnet test fishing began on June 20 in Area 29 (Fraser River at Whonnock) and on June 22 in Area 20 (Juan de Fuca Strait). Recent stock discrimination analyses indicate that Early Stuart sockeye are the predominant Fraser stock in samples collected from both marine and lower Fraser River test fisheries. The estimated escapement of Early Stuart sockeye past Mission through July 6th is approximately 28,500 fish. High river flows have delayed the start of the lower Fraser acoustic monitoring programs and reduced catches in in-river test fisheries used for stock discrimination. Consequently, current in-season estimates of lower Fraser escapements by stock-group are based on the Whonnock test fishery and are particularly uncertain. There were no changes to run sizes at today's meeting. Updates to Early Stuart run size are expected next week and an update to Early Summer-run run size is expected in late July, after the peak of their marine migration has been observed.

On July 4th, the Fraser River discharge at Hope was approximately 9,224 cms, which is approximately 40% higher than average for this date. The temperature of the Fraser River at Qualark Creek on July 4th was projected to be 13.4 °C, which is below average for this date. Based on pre-season expectations for high flows, the Panel adopted a large pre-season management adjustment for Early Stuart sockeye of 101,000 fish. Management adjustments are additional fish that are allowed to escape upstream to help achieve spawning escapement targets for Fraser River sockeye. There were no changes to management adjustments at the meeting today.

All commercial fisheries in Panel Area waters remain closed to fishing.

Monitoring plans and in-season resources

The Area 12 gillnet test fishery near Round Island is expected to commence on July 9. Pending river flows, the Cottonwood gillnet test fishery (near Deas Island in the Fraser River) is expected to commence late next week. The remaining Fraser Panel test fisheries including United States Juan de Fuca gillnet, US reefnet observations and Purse seine test fisheries in Canadian areas 12, 13 and 20 are expected to commence the third week of July. The Pacific Salmon Commission reports daily test fishing catches of sockeye salmon on its recorded message at (604) 666-8200 and on the internet at: http://www.psc.org/info_testfishing_collections. In addition, Fraser River Panel news releases, fishery regulations, sockeye catch and escapement data and sockeye and salmon stock status reports will be available on this website.

Environmental data collected in the Fraser River watershed through DFO's Environmental Watch program (<http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/habitat/frw-rfo/intro-eng.htm>), will be included in weekly in-season news releases from the Pacific Salmon Commission. Fraser River discharge levels and water temperatures will be monitored closely this summer to guide specific Panel management actions that may be required during the in-river sockeye migratory period to help achieve escapement goals.

United States fishing schedules during the season will be available for Treaty Indian fisheries through the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission at 1-800-562-6142. Non-Indian fishing schedules will be available through the National Marine Fisheries Service's Hotline in Seattle at 1-800-662-9825. Canadian commercial fishing regulations will be announced on the Fisheries and Oceans Canada recorded message at 604-666-2828 (from the lower B.C. mainland), and toll free from outside the lower B.C. mainland at 1-866-431-3474, and via

fishery notices. Consult the appropriate regulatory agency regarding fisheries regulations pertaining to species other than sockeye salmon in the Fraser River Panel Management Area.

The next in-season meeting of the Panel is scheduled to occur on July 10th. News releases in this series will be provided by the Panel through the Commission every Friday during the in-season management period to inform those interested in the progress of the Fraser River sockeye salmon runs.