



PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY TREATY BETWEEN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MARCH 18, 1985

600 – 1155 ROBSON STREET
VANCOUVER, B.C. V6E 1B5
TELEPHONE: (604) 684-8081
FAX: (604) 666-8707

Our File:

Your File:

No. 1

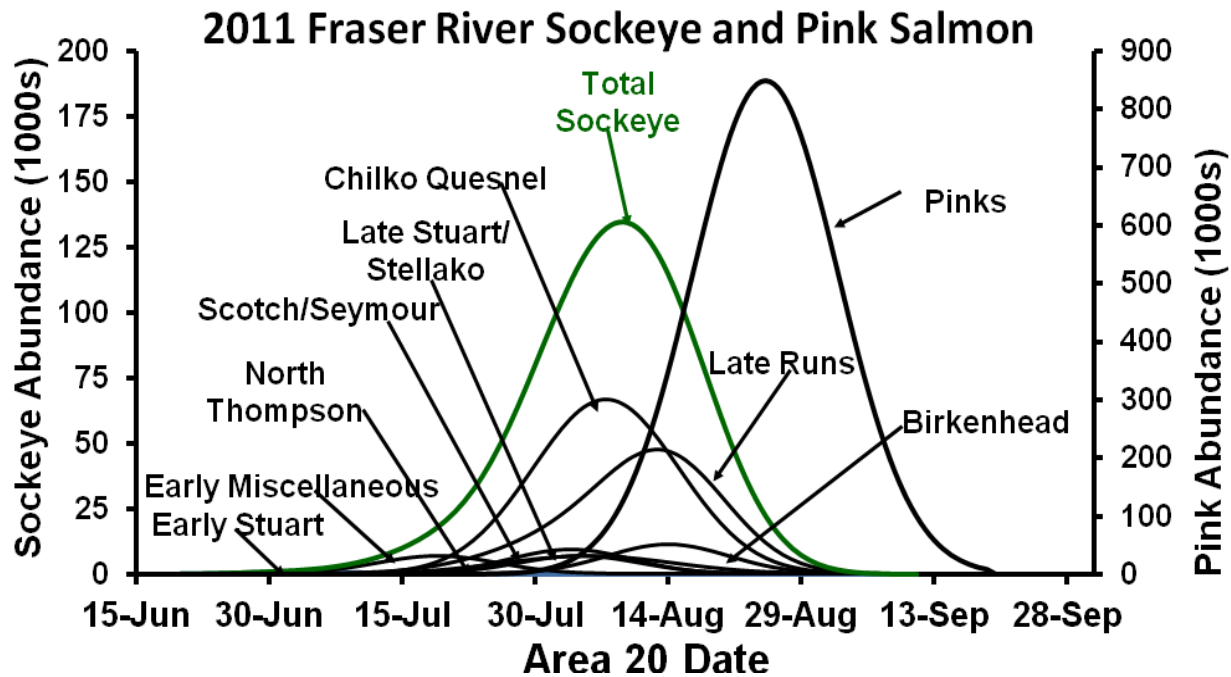
NEWS RELEASE

July 15, 2011

The Fraser River Panel (Panel) of the Pacific Salmon Commission has developed management plans for 2011 Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon fisheries in Panel Area waters. These management plans provide an approximate template of how fisheries could proceed if the runs return with expected timing and abundance (see Figure). Actual fisheries schedules will depend on in-season assessments of abundance, migration timing and river conditions. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) provided forecasts of Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon abundance to the Panel, as well as a schedule for calculating sockeye spawning escapement targets at different run sizes. DFO has advised that Fraser River sockeye salmon forecasts for 2011 remain highly uncertain due to variability in annual survival rates and uncertainty about changes in their productivity. For pre-season planning purposes, the Panel used the Fraser sockeye 50% probability level forecasts of abundance (one in two chance sockeye will return above or below the specified value) which assume that recent (generally below average) productivity will persist through 2011. Assuming recent productivity, the total Fraser sockeye forecast at the 50% probability level is 3,177,000 fish. To put the recent-productivity sockeye run size forecast uncertainty into context, there is a one in four chance at the 25% probability level that the actual number of returning sockeye will be at or below 1,687,000 fish and there is a three in four chance at the 75% probability level that the actual number of returning sockeye will be at or below 6,866,000 fish. The recent productivity forecast used by the Panel, is lower than the forecast that assumes long-term average productivity will persist through 2011 (50% probability level forecast of 4,627,000 fish; 25% and 75% probability level forecasts of 2,693,000 and 9,074,000 fish, respectively).

The pre-season forecast for Fraser River pink salmon is also highly uncertain since the forecast is outside of the historic data range due to the record high fry outmigration from the 2009 brood year. For pre-season planning of Fraser River pink salmon, the Panel used the 50% probability level forecast of 17,495,000 fish, which was based on long-term average productivity assumptions. To put the pink run size forecast uncertainty into context, there is a one in four chance at the 25% probability level that the actual number of returning pink salmon will be at or below 12,648,000 fish and there is a three in four chance at the 75% probability level that the actual number of returning pink salmon will be at or below 25,125,000 fish.

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



The forecasts for all of the Fraser sockeye run-timing groups in 2011 are below the cycle year average (1955-2007) for two primary reasons. First, the low adult sockeye return in 2007, which was the parent year for most of this year's return, resulted in a spawning escapement that was less than two-thirds of the cycle-year average. Second, productivity assumptions used to forecast the return this season are lower than average. For 2011, the Early Stuart sockeye return forecast at the 50% probability level is 17,000 fish (ranges from 11,000 to 27,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels). The forecast for Early Summer-run sockeye at the 50% probability level is 453,000 fish (ranges from 257,000 to 894,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels). The Summer-run sockeye return forecast at the 50% probability level is 1,500,000 fish (ranges from 903,000 to 2,657,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels), with Chilko sockeye expected to comprise approximately 75% of the total Summer-run sockeye return. The 2011 cycle is the sub-dominant line for Adams/Late Shuswap sockeye. The Late-run sockeye return forecast at the 50% probability level is 1,207,000 fish (ranges from 257,000 to 3,288,000 fish at the 25% and 75% probability levels) with the largest production expected to come from the Harrison, Late Shuswap and Weaver systems.

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 as well as Fraser River pink salmon. Research is continuing on identifying the cause(s) of the early entry behavior of Late-run sockeye. The potential continuation of a high in-river mortality rate experienced by several Late-run stocks is still a serious conservation concern and there is special concern for the very depressed Cultus sockeye run for which recovery efforts have been implemented by Canada to ensure this stock's long-term viability. The Panel is concerned about this phenomenon and the 2011 management plan was developed under the assumption that this abnormal upstream migratory behavior of Late-run sockeye will continue and that substantial in-river mortality will occur. 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.

Commercial fisheries in Panel Areas this year will be directed primarily at the harvest of Summer-run sockeye and Fraser River pink salmon. Commercial fishery openings to harvest sockeye and pink salmon are expected to occur from approximately late July to early/mid September, however as

noted earlier, they will depend on in-season assessments. Assuming that actual, in-season run size estimates for Early Summer-run and Summer-run sockeye salmon are approximately at the 50% probability level forecast of abundance, and the runs arrive at close to their expected dates, some low impact fisheries in Panel Areas would be expected to commence in late July. If the in-season estimated return abundances of Early Summer-run and Summer-run sockeye vary from their 50% probability level forecasts, the projected start dates and duration of fisheries may be adjusted. Conservation concerns for other species and stocks identified by Canada and the United States will be taken into account throughout the 2011 management season.

The pre-season forecast of the proportion of Fraser River sockeye salmon diverting their migration to the Fraser River through Johnstone Strait is 30% - 34%. DFO's pre-season forecast of the 50% marine timing of Early Stuart sockeye through Area 20 is June 29, which is earlier than average; while the forecast for Chilko sockeye is August 7, which is later than average. Fishery planning for Fraser River pink salmon was based on an expected diversion rate of 50% through Johnstone Strait and 50% marine timing through Area 20 of August 25.

Recent Fraser sockeye DNA analyses indicate that Early Summer-run sockeye are dominating samples collected in marine areas and Early Stuart sockeye comprise most of the sockeye in samples collected from the lower Fraser River. At the meeting today, the Fraser River Panel approved a run size estimate of 22,000 Early Stuart sockeye with 50% marine timing through Area 20 of July 1. The estimated escapement of Early Stuart sockeye past Mission through July 14 is approximately 19,000 fish. In-season assessments of Early Summer-run sockeye abundance should be available in early August after their peak migration through marine areas has occurred.

While the snowpack volume in the Fraser River watershed was only slightly above average this year, cool and wet spring conditions resulted in a protracted freshet and continued elevated water levels in the lower Fraser River. The water discharge at Hope has averaged approximately 9,000 cms since July 1, which is approximately 63% higher than the historic average for this period and it has been at near record high levels in recent days. The high discharge levels will likely have a negative effect on Early Stuart sockeye currently migrating upstream. Historic water discharge levels at Hope in excess of 8,000 cms have been associated with adverse effects on migrating Early Stuart sockeye. In some years, delays in migration due to high river discharge have caused elevated en route mortality of Early Stuart sockeye (e.g. in 1997 and 1999 when river discharge was also high during the Early Stuart sockeye migration, en route mortality rate estimates exceeded 50%).

On July 14, the Fraser River water discharge at Hope was approximately 9,400 cms, which is approximately 66% higher than average for this date. River flows in the lower Fraser River have increased in recent days, likely as a result of rainfall in the upper watershed, but are expected to decline soon. The temperature of the Fraser River at Qualark Creek on July 14 was 12.0 °C, which is 3.8 °C cooler than average for this date. At the meeting today, after reviewing environmental and stock assessment information, the Panel approved an increase in the management adjustment factor for Early Stuart sockeye from the pre-season estimate of 1.23 to 4.71. Management adjustments are additional fish that are allowed to escape upstream to help achieve spawning escapement targets for Fraser River sockeye.

Environmental data collected in the Fraser River watershed through DFO's Environmental Watch program, 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.

Gillnet test fishing began on June 22 in Area 29 (Fraser River at Whonnock) and on July 11 in Area 20 (San Juan) and Area 12 (Round Island). Due to the low run size forecast range for Early Stuart

sockeye, the Panel delayed the start of the Area 20 gillnet test fishery by several days. The Pacific Salmon Commission reports daily test fishing catches of sockeye and pink salmon on its recorded message at (604) 666-8200 and on the internet at: http://www.psc.org/info_testfishing_collections_2011.htm In addition, Fraser River Panel news releases, fishery regulations, sockeye and pink catch and escapement data and sockeye and pink salmon stock status reports will be available on this website.

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 and pink salmon in the Fraser River Panel Management Area.

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

The next in-season meeting of the Panel is scheduled to occur on July 19. 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 and pink salmon runs.