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

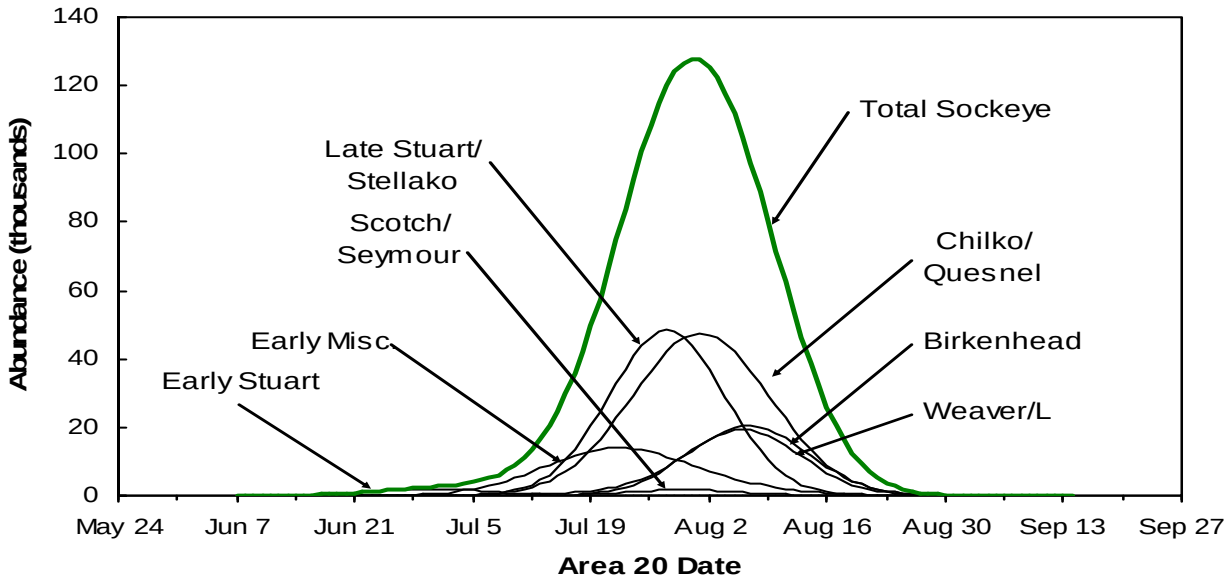
Our File:

Your File:

No. 1 **NEWS RELEASE** **July 11, 2008**

The Fraser River Panel (Panel) of the Pacific Salmon Commission has completed the management plan for 2008 Fraser River sockeye fisheries in Panel Area waters. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) provided forecasts of Fraser River sockeye salmon to the Panel, as well as a schedule for calculating sockeye spawning escapement targets at different run sizes. The Panel developed fishery plans for Fraser River sockeye at the 50% and 75% probability forecast levels of abundance (2,899,000 and 1,854,000 fish, respectively). Actual fishing plans will be based upon in-season assessment.

Forecast abundances for Fraser sockeye run-timing groups at the 50% probability levels are as follows: Early Stuart, 35,000; Early Summer-run, 349,000; and Summer-run, (e.g. Chilko, Quesnel, Stellako, and Late Stuart stock-groups) 1,810,000 fish. The 2008 cycle is the first off-line cycle for Adams River sockeye, and "true" Late-run sockeye have historically experienced small returns on this cycle line relative to Summer-run sockeye, with the Weaver Creek stock group the predominant Late-run stock. The 2008 forecast return of Late-run sockeye is 705,000 fish (374,000 of these sockeye are true Late-run sockeye, and 331,000 are from the Birkenhead and Big Silver stock-group). Abundance-timing curves for Fraser River sockeye stock-groups in coastal areas (i.e., Juan de Fuca Strait, Area 20), are shown below.



The problem of early entry of Late-run sockeye stocks has continued every year since 1996 and it continues to adversely impact their productivity and substantially reduce harvest opportunities on these stocks and on co-migrating Summer-run sockeye salmon. The in-river mortality rate of Late-run sockeye has varied substantially since 1996. However, a consistent pattern has been observed since 1996; Late-run sockeye that enter the river prior to mid-August generally have a very low chance of surviving to reach their spawning grounds and of the small fraction of fish that do successfully reach the spawning grounds, most females die un-spawned. The Panel remains concerned about this phenomenon and the 2008 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. A workshop was held June 16-17 at the University of British Columbia to review the current status of Late-run sockeye research. Substantial progress has been made documenting the behavior and understanding the causes of mortality, but the causes of the early entry behavior are still unknown. The proceeding of this workshop along with a summary brochure will be published by the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council. The brochure will be posted on the Pacific Salmon Commission website at www.psc.org. Management objectives and actions implemented in 2008 will place high priority on conserving Fraser River Late-run sockeye (which include Cultus Lake sockeye).

In response to low expected abundances and conservation needs for Early Stuart, Early Summer-run and Late-run sockeye, it is expected that commercial fisheries opportunities directed at Summer-run sockeye will be limited and restricted to a narrow timing window in late July and early August. Based on the assumption that 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 near the expected dates, low impact fisheries in Canadian and United States Panel Areas would be expected to commence during the week of July 20 to 26. If the estimated return abundances of Early Summer-run and Summer-run sockeye vary from the 50% probability level forecasts, it could change the projected start dates and duration of fisheries. Conservation concerns for other species and stocks identified by Canada and the United States will be taken into account throughout the 2008 management season.

Cooler than normal sea surface temperatures in the Gulf of Alaska and along the British Columbia coast have resulted in an expectation of earlier than average return timing and lower than average diversion rate. The pre-season forecast of the proportion of Fraser River sockeye salmon diverting through Johnstone Strait is 45%. DFO's forecast of the 50% marine timing of Early Stuart sockeye through Area 20 is July 1 (two days earlier than average); while for Chilko sockeye it is Aug 2 (one day earlier than average).

In-season assessments of Early Stuart sockeye indicate that they are currently tracking very close to the 50% probability level forecast of abundance (35,000 fish) and timing appears to be earlier than forecast; however a more accurate assessment of their abundance and timing will be available next week. The estimated escapement of Early Stuart sockeye past Mission through July 9th is approximately 26,000 fish. DNA analyses from test fisheries in Juan de Fuca Strait indicate that the proportions of Early Summer-run sockeye are increasing consistent with pre-season expectations and Summer-run sockeye are beginning to appear in the samples

Weather conditions in the Fraser River watershed have been cooler than average for much of June, which caused the snow pack to melt gradually. As of June 15, the snow indexes for the Upper and lower Fraser and Thompson River watersheds were above normal, while the Nechako and Middle Fraser watersheds were below normal. Air temperatures are forecast to be warmer than average in July and August. Early Stuart, Early Summer-run and Summer-run sockeye are currently forecast to encounter slightly lower than average discharge and slightly higher than average water temperatures in the Fraser River this season. Warm weather over the last couple weeks has generated slightly higher than average river flows and temperatures. On July 9, the discharge of the Fraser River at Hope was approximately 6700 cms (about 10% higher than average) and the water temperature of the Fraser

River at Qualark Creek was 16 ^{0} C, which is about ½ degree warmer than average for this date. 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 determine specific management actions that are required during the in-river migratory period to help achieve escapement goals.

Gillnet test fisheries in Panel Area waters began on June 25 in Area 29 (Fraser River at Whonnock) and on June 30 in Area 20. 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_2008.htm In addition, Fraser River Panel news releases, fishery regulations, sockeye escapement data, and 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 1-888-858-9319. 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.

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

The next in-season meeting of the Panel is scheduled to occur on Tuesday July 15th. Periodic news releases in this series will be provided by the Panel through the Commission to inform those interested in the progress of the Fraser River sockeye salmon runs.