



PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION

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

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At the Fraser River Panel meeting today, PSC staff provided an update on the status of the Early Stuart and Early Summer-run sockeye runs. Sockeye catches in marine and Fraser River test fisheries thus far this season indicate that the migration of sockeye has been very low. Based on pre-season expectations, the marine migration of sockeye should increase soon as additional Early Summer-run and Summer-run sockeye begin entering the marine assessment areas. Estimates of sockeye escapements in the Fraser River past Mission have also been low and observations of sockeye migrating through Hells Gate have indicated a small but steady migration since early July. The Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has announced that the exploitation rate limit for Cultus Lake sockeye in 2007 will be 20%. Fishing plans will reflect this exploitation rate limit.

Four year old Early Stuart sockeye were forecast to contribute approximately 96% of the production this season. However, the run has been weak this season due to age four fish returning at below forecast levels. Reports of Somass (Barkley Sound), Lake Washington and Baker Lake sockeye to-date also indicate weakness in the return of four year old sockeye. There is high uncertainty in run size estimates of Early Stuart sockeye this season due to the low amount of assessment data and biological samples for stock and age composition analyses. Current run size assessments indicate that the run size of Early Stuart sockeye this season will be less than half of the 50% probability level forecast of 45,000 fish. Assessments of the 50% arrival timing of Early Stuart sockeye in Area 20 are consistent with the pre-season forecast of July 1. The estimated escapement of Early Stuart sockeye past Mission through July 19 is approximately 11,000 fish.

Early Summer-run sockeye (e.g. Fennell, Bowron, Raft, Gates, Nadina, Pitt, Seymour, and Scotch stocks) will be continuing to enter the marine assessment areas over the next few weeks. The 50% probability level forecast for these sockeye is 690,000 fish. An in-season estimate of their run size should be available in early August assuming that their peak marine timing is near average (July 31 in Area 20). The estimated escapement of Early Summer-run sockeye past Mission through July 19 is approximately 5,000 fish.

The cooler, wetter weather in the Fraser River watershed over the past several days has caused a decrease in water temperatures. On July 19, the Fraser River discharge at Hope was about 6,600 cms, which is approximately 22% higher than normal, while the water temperature at Qualark Creek was 17.1 °C, which is almost 1 °C higher than average for this date. The discharge of the Fraser River at Hope is forecast to decrease while water temperatures are forecast to increase to approximately 18 °C by early next week.

As in previous years, the Panel may employ Management Adjustments (MA) during the in-season management period to help ensure that spawning escapement targets for Fraser River sockeye are achieved. Management adjustments for Fraser sockeye are typically applied when the runs encounter adverse river migration conditions attributable to high river temperatures and flows. The adjustments are

intended to compensate for natural, environmental, or stock assessment factors and help allow additional fish to escape and reach the spawning grounds at target levels.

The predation of sockeye by seals from the gillnets used in the lower Fraser River test fisheries continues to be a serious problem and has resulted in the loss of important biological samples and data that are used in the management of Fraser River sockeye salmon.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has initiated spawning ground assessments in the Early Stuart system, with sockeye enumeration fences being installed on Forfar, Gluske, and Kynock Creeks.

The PSC 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_2007.htm. In addition, Fraser River Panel news releases, fishery regulations, sockeye and pink salmon 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 1-888-858-9319. 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 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 24. 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 and pink salmon runs.