



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 met today to review the status of Fraser sockeye salmon abundance estimates, migratory behavior and escapements. Recent purse seine test fishing catches in Johnstone and Juan de Fuca Straits that began on August 1 and gillnet test fishing catches have indicated an increasing migration of sockeye through marine approach areas, which is consistent with the anticipated building abundance of Summer-run sockeye entering coastal waters over the coming week. However, the overall abundance of Fraser sockeye migrating through marine assessment areas over the past week has continued to be lower than expected. Estimates of sockeye escapements by the Mission hydroacoustic program have increased over the last few days although observations of sockeye at Hells Gate have remained very low over the past week.

DNA analyses of sockeye sampled in recent marine area test fisheries indicate Fraser sockeye contributions of approximately 15% Early Summer-run, 70% Summer-run, and 15% Late-run (primarily Harrison) sockeye. Assessments of the early-timed component of the Early Summer-run sockeye run (Bowron, Fennell, Gates, Nadina, and Pitt) indicate that their marine migration timing is later than expected. At the meeting today, the Panel approved a run size estimate of 231,000 Early Summer-run sockeye (the 90% probability level forecast) for management purposes. The estimated escapement of Early Summer-run sockeye past Mission through August 2 is 19,000 fish.

Analyses of the age composition of Summer-run sockeye from scales collected in test fisheries are following the trend of Early Stuart and Early Summer-run sockeye and are suggesting a weak return of four year old sockeye relative to pre-season expectations. Chilko sockeye were forecast to comprise approximately 50% of the total Summer-run sockeye return in 2007 and recent DNA analyses indicate a relatively strong contribution of Chilko sockeye to marine-area test fishing catches. Summer-run sockeye migration through marine areas is presently tracking an abundance level below their 50% probability level forecast (3,369,000 fish) or their migration timing is later than average. A more accurate assessment of their abundance should be available by late next week. The estimated escapement of Summer-run sockeye past Mission through August 2 is 27,000 fish.

The 50% probability level forecast for true Late-run sockeye (Late Shuswap, Cultus, Portage, Harrison and Weaver stocks, but excluding Birkenhead) is 1,530,000 fish, while the Birkenhead stock group are expected to return at an abundance level of 613,000 fish (50% probability level). Late-run sockeye returns are forecast to be composed mainly of sockeye from the Late Shuswap and Weaver stocks, while the 50% probability level forecast for Cultus Lake sockeye is 4,000 fish and only 1,000 fish at the 75% probability level forecast. The expected 50% migration timing of Birkenhead and true Late-run sockeye through Area 20 is August 15, and 16, respectively. In recent years, the marine migration of Harrison River sockeye has occurred much earlier than the other true Late-run stocks. Recent DNA analyses suggest that the migratory timing of Harrison sockeye through the marine approach routes is consistent with this pattern. The estimated escapement of Harrison sockeye past Mission through August 2 is 13,000 fish. Assessments of Late-run sockeye timing, abundance, delay in the lower Strait of Georgia and in-river entry behavior will be conducted over the next several weeks.

On August 2, the Fraser River discharge at Hope was about 4,900 cms, which is approximately 10% higher than normal, while the water temperature at Qualark Creek was 17.7 °C, which is normal for this date. Fraser River water temperatures are forecast to decrease slightly to approximately 17.0 °C by August 11. At the meeting on July 31, after reviewing environmental and stock assessment information, the Panel approved a decrease in the management adjustment factor for Early Stuart sockeye from the pre-season estimate of 1.92 to 1.06 (or, 13,000 fish). Management adjustments are employed to help achieve spawning escapement targets for Fraser River sockeye.

DFO has operated escapement enumeration fences on two Early Stuart creeks (Gluske and Kynock) since about mid-July but have been unable to put a fence on Forfar Creek due to high water levels. The first sockeye passing the fences on Gluske and Kynock creeks were observed on July 30 and 31, respectively, and they were reported to be in good condition. The enumeration fence on Sweltzer Creek was operational on July 27 and no Cultus Lake sockeye have passed through the fence to-date.

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 August 6. 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.