



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 receive assessments from the Pacific Salmon Commission staff on the status of the Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon runs. The estimated abundance of sockeye salmon migrating through marine areas and into the Fraser River has been much lower than forecast over the past several weeks. It is increasingly likely that poor marine survival conditions (very warm ocean temperatures and reduced food supply) that juvenile Fraser River sockeye encountered in 2005 has contributed to the very low return of adult four-year-old Fraser River sockeye thus far this season. Fraser sockeye have not been the only group of salmon to be adversely impacted by poor marine conditions in 2005. Low adult salmon returns of other species of salmon (e.g. coho in 2006) as well as some other non-Fraser stocks of sockeye salmon have also been observed. Studies conducted by DFO researchers on the growth rate of juvenile coho salmon off the west coast of Vancouver Island found that they were the lowest on record in 2005. Low growth rates in juvenile salmon are often associated with higher mortality rates due to predation by other fish. The small return of Early Summer-run and Summer-run Fraser sockeye to-date has prevented the commencement of fisheries that were scheduled during pre-season fishery planning since the returning sockeye are needed to meet spawning escapement requirements in the Fraser River watershed.

The diversion rate of Fraser River sockeye through Johnstone Strait has increased over the past week and is currently estimated to be approximately 50%. DNA analyses of sockeye sampled in marine area test fisheries have been variable over the past few days, but have averaged contributions of approximately 10% Early Summer-run, 55% Summer-run, and 35% Late-run sockeye. The escapement of Fraser sockeye past Mission and observations of sockeye migrating past Hells Gate have increased over the last few days.

Assessments of both the early-timed and in particular, the later-timed stock components (Scotch and Seymour stocks) of the Early Summer-run sockeye run continue to indicate that they are returning at only a small fraction of the pre-season 50% probability level forecast of 690,000 fish. At the meeting today the Panel reduced the run size estimate of Early Summer-run sockeye from 231,000 fish (the 90% probability level forecast that was being used for management purposes) to 150,000 fish based on an assumed 50% migration timing of Early Summer-run sockeye through Area 20 of August 3, which is three days later than expected. The estimated escapement of Early Summer-run sockeye past Mission through August 9 is 63,000 fish.

Summer-run sockeye were forecast to be the most abundant Fraser sockeye run this season and were expected to provide substantial fishing opportunities. However, similar to Early Stuart and Early Summer-run sockeye, in-season estimates of Summer-run sockeye are much lower than their pre-season 50% probability level forecast (3,369,000 fish). At the meeting today, the Panel approved a run size estimate of 1,261,000 fish (90% probability level forecast) for fisheries management purposes. The estimated escapement of Summer-run sockeye past Mission through August 9 is 204,000 fish.

Recent DNA samples from the marine approach areas indicate that Late Shuswap sockeye are beginning to contribute an increasing proportion of the Late-run sockeye return. This was expected since Late Shuswap sockeye were forecast to comprise close to half (994,000 fish at the 50% probability level forecast) of the total Late-run sockeye return of 2,143,000 fish (50% probability level forecast). The return of Late-run sockeye thus far is tracking a run size below the 50% probability level forecast. Stock identification analyses of sockeye samples collected from the lower Fraser River gillnet test fisheries indicate that Late-run sockeye are currently entering the Fraser River with little or no delay in the Strait of Georgia. The estimated escapement of true Late-run sockeye (excludes Birkenhead sockeye) past Mission through August 9 is 78,000 fish.

The migration of pink salmon through the marine approach areas has been occurring since approximately mid July. The peak migratory timing of Fraser River pink salmon through Juan de Fuca Strait usually occurs between late August and early September. An in-season estimate of their abundance will not be available until later in August, after a larger portion of the run has migrated through the marine approach routes. The 50% probability level forecast for Fraser River pink salmon this season is 19,570,000 fish. Assessments of their migratory timing, stock contribution to fisheries and abundance will be conducted over the next several weeks. Fisheries directed at Fraser River pink salmon would take into account conservation concerns for other species and stocks.

On August 9, the Fraser River discharge at Hope was about 4,200 cms, which is approximately 9% higher than normal, while the water temperature at Qualark Creek was 18.2 °C, which is approximately 0.5 °C higher than average for this date. Fraser River water temperatures are forecast to decrease to approximately 17 °C over the next week.

In the Early Stuart system, 122 sockeye have been counted through the Gluske Creek enumeration fence through August 9 and 45 sockeye have been enumerated at the Kynock Creek fence through August 8. The sockeye are reported to be in good condition. Daily counts of Chilko sockeye at Henry's Bridge began on August 7 but none have been observed thus far. 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 13. 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.