



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 stock monitoring and other biological data associated with the Fraser River sockeye salmon runs. The migration of sockeye through Juan de Fuca Strait has been building over recent days as indicated by catches in the Area 20 gillnet test fishery and the gillnet test fishery on the southern side of Juan de Fuca Strait (United States Area 5). Catches of sockeye in the Area 12 gillnet test fishery have been low, indicating low migratory abundance of sockeye through Johnstone Strait. Estimates of sockeye passage past the Mission hydroacoustic site have also been low over the past week.

DNA analysis of a sample collected from the Area 20 gillnet test fishery on July 18 indicated Fraser sockeye contributions of 25% Early Stuart, 48% Early Summer-run, 20% Summer-run and 7% Harrison (Late-run) sockeye. At the meeting on July 18, the Panel approved an in-season run size estimate of 70,000 Early Stuart sockeye, which is slightly below the 50% probability level forecast of 84,000 fish. The Early Stuart run size estimate was unchanged at the meeting today. The 50% arrival timing of these sockeye through Area 20 is estimated to have occurred on July 7, which is four days later than forecast. The average size of four year old Early Stuart sockeye this season has been approximately 5.3 pounds (2.4 kg), which is about half a pound (0.23 kg) lower than average. Due to adverse river conditions, the Panel approved an Early Stuart sockeye management adjustment that would result in the expectation that only 29% of the Early Stuart sockeye that migrate into the Fraser River would reach their spawning grounds. The estimated escapement of Early Stuart sockeye past Mission through July 20 is 51,000 fish.

Early Summer-run sockeye abundance through the marine approach areas is presently tracking below expectations, unless their marine timing is considerably later than forecast. An in-season update of their run size will not be available until about early August, although in-season assessments of how the run is tracking relative to the forecast will be provided. The estimated escapement of Early Summer-run sockeye past Mission through July 20 is 10,000 fish.

Summer-run sockeye (Chilko, Quesnel, Stellako, and Late Stuart) are expected to comprise slightly over 40% (7,158,000 fish at the 50% probability level forecast) of the total Fraser River sockeye run in 2006 and significant harvest opportunities this season were focused on this timing-group in the pre-season plan. The forecast of the 50% migration timing of Summer-run sockeye through Area 20 is August 9; however, their timing may be later than this if they follow the pattern of some other Fraser and non-Fraser (e.g., Lake Washington) sockeye stocks this season. An update of Summer-run sockeye run size will likely not be available until after the first week of August.

The predation of sockeye by seals from the gillnets used in the lower Fraser River test fisheries over the past month has resulted in the loss of important biological samples and data that are used in the management of Fraser River sockeye salmon. It is hoped that when the larger sockeye runs (e.g. Summer-run sockeye) enter the lower Fraser River over the coming weeks, this problem will become less serious as a higher proportion of the sockeye will be retained in the nets even after predation by seals.

Fraser River discharge at Hope is currently about 3,400 cms (36% lower than normal for this date) and the water temperature (at Qualark Creek) on July 20 was 17.3 °C. Hot weather in the Fraser watershed is forecast to cause a rapid rise in water temperatures over the next week, with water temperatures forecast to exceed 21 °C by July 26. Prolonged exposure of migrating sockeye to water temperatures in this range can lead to severe stress and can result in death prior to spawning. In response to these unfavorable conditions, the Panel approved a management adjustment for Early Summer-run sockeye of 372,000 fish based on the pre-season forecast run size (1,303,000 fish at the 50% probability level). Environmental conditions for migrating sockeye in the Fraser watershed will be monitored closely over the coming weeks.

Sockeye enumeration fences on Forfar, Gluske, and Kynock, Creeks in the Early Stuart system have been installed. The first sockeye were observed off the mouth of Forfar Creek on July 19.

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.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 and pink salmon in the Fraser River Panel Management Area.

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

The Panel will meet again on July 25 to evaluate the status of the Fraser River sockeye migration and to consider regulatory actions.