



PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY TREATY BETWEEN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MARCH 18, 1985

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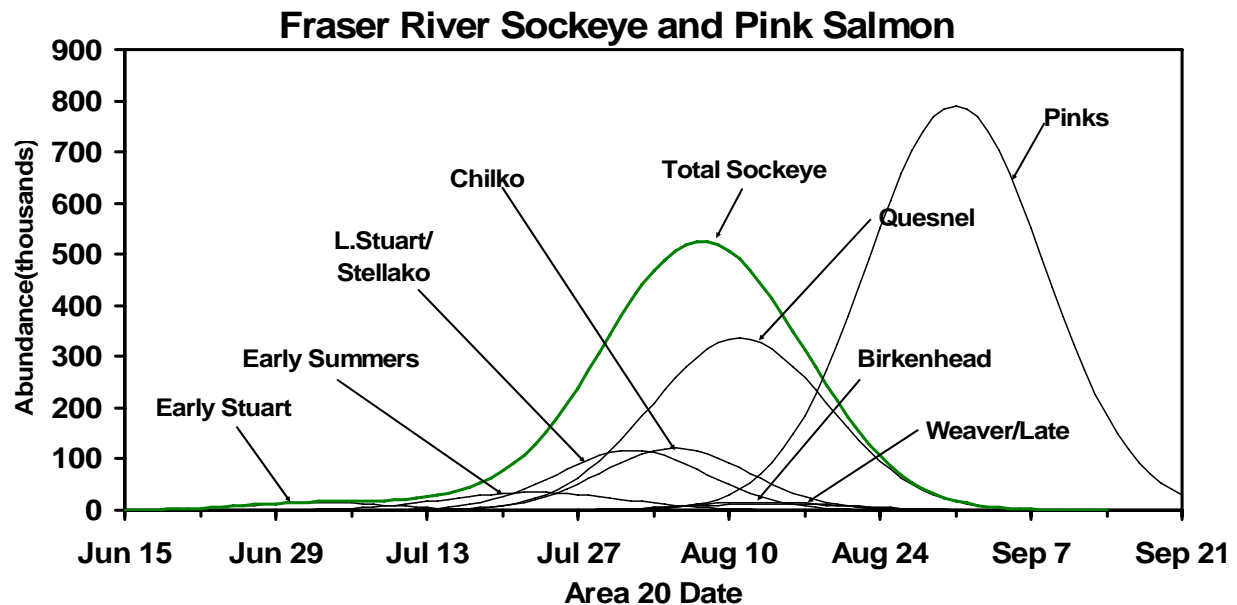
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NEWS RELEASE

June 29, 2005

The Fraser River Panel (Panel) of the Pacific Salmon Commission has completed the management plan for 2005 Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon fisheries in Panel Area waters. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) provided forecasts of Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon abundance to the Panel, as well as a preliminary schedule for calculating sockeye spawning escapement targets at different run sizes. The Panel developed fishery plans for Fraser River sockeye at the 50% probability forecast level of abundance (12,548,000 fish). The 50% probability level forecast for Fraser River pink salmon is 16,318,000 fish. Abundance-timing curves (at the 50% probability level forecast) for Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon in coastal areas (i.e., Juan de Fuca Strait, Area 20), are shown below.



Average adult returns of Fraser River sockeye salmon on the 2005 cycle line are the highest of the four cycle lines because of the large production from Summer-run stocks (particularly Quesnel, Chilko, and Late Stuart stocks). The forecast abundances of Early Stuart and Early Summer-run sockeye in 2005 are 258,000 fish, and 718,000 fish at the 50% probability levels, respectively. Summer-run sockeye stocks comprise the largest proportion of the sockeye forecast with a cumulative return of 11,048,000 fish (50% probability level forecast). Late-run sockeye return abundance at the 50% p level is 524,000 fish (247,000 of these sockeye are “true” Late-run sockeye, and 277,000 are from the Birkenhead and Big Silver stock-group).

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 (as well as reduce harvest opportunities on co-migrating Summer-run sockeye and Fraser River pink salmon). The in-river mortality rate of Late-run sockeye has averaged 61% since 1996 and was estimated to be 82% in 2004. In the brood year (2001) Fraser River discharge and water temperatures were generally favorable for sockeye migrating to their spawning grounds. However, the in-river mortality rate of Late-run sockeye was estimated to be 88%. The Panel remains concerned about this phenomenon and the 2005 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. Research is continuing on identifying the cause(s) of the early entry behavior. Further background information about this problem and the research being conducted is available on the Pacific Salmon Commission website at www.psc.org. Management objectives and actions implemented in 2005 will place high priority on conserving Fraser River Late-run sockeye (which include Cultus Lake sockeye) and Sakinaw sockeye.

Commercial fisheries in Panel Areas directed at Summer-run sockeye will be concentrated in late July and early August in response to constraints for Early Summer-run and Late-run sockeye. Commercial fishery openings in Panel Area waters in 2005 will be based on abundance estimates and run timing of sockeye and pink salmon, and on their corresponding spawning escapement needs. Based on the assumption that Early Summer-run and Summer-run sockeye salmon are approximately at the 50% probability level and the runs arrive at near normal dates, fisheries in Canadian and United States Panel Areas would be expected to commence during the week of July 24 to 30.

Fisheries targeted on Fraser River pink salmon will be conducted, subject to Late-run sockeye harvest constraints. Conservation concerns for other species and stocks identified by Canada and the United States will be taken into account throughout the 2005 management season.

The forecast of the proportion of Fraser River sockeye salmon diverting through Johnstone Strait is 80%. Forecasts of the migratory timing of Early Stuart and Chilko sockeye along with Fraser River pink salmon will be provided to the Panel by DFO. 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.

The reported snow-water indexes in the Fraser River watershed to June 15 are far below average: the upper Fraser and Nechako are 11% and 12% of normal, respectively, while the middle and lower Fraser are 37% and 9% of normal, respectively. Snow-water equivalencies are presently similar to 2004 when record-high water temperatures were recorded in the Fraser River in August and high in-river mortality was observed. The Snow Survey Bulletin of the B.C. Ministry of Environment forecasts that unless spring and early summer precipitation is well above normal, there is high potential for very low flows in several B.C. rivers this summer, including the middle and lower portions of the Fraser River. Forecasts predict that along with low Fraser River flows this season, water temperatures will be higher than average. Temperature forecasting models currently project that some Early Stuart, Early Summer-run, and Summer-run sockeye may be exposed to water temperatures exceeding 18 °C, which is the temperature threshold above which adverse impacts on migrating sockeye have often been observed. 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.

It is too early in the marine migration of Early Stuart sockeye to provide an assessment on their run size or timing. Migration conditions for sockeye entering the Fraser River are presently satisfactory. The discharge of the Fraser River at Hope is currently 5,550 cms, which is approximately 17% lower than normal for this date. The water temperature of the Fraser River at Qualark Creek is currently 15.4 °C.

Test fishing in Panel Area waters began on June 21 in Canadian Area 20 and on June 22 in Area 29 (Fraser River at Whonnock). 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_2005.htm. In addition, Fraser River Panel news releases, fishery regulations, sockeye and pink 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.

As in recent years, assessment fisheries will be conducted with the long-term goal of improving the accuracy of in-season Fraser River sockeye run-size estimates. The Fraser sockeye assessment fisheries that will be conducted in 2005 include: Canadian Area B purse seine assessment fishery in Areas 12 and 20; Canadian Area D gillnet assessment fishery in Area 12; Canadian Area E gillnet assessment fishery in the Fraser River in Areas 29-9 and 29-17; Canadian First Nations' FSC (Food Social and Ceremonial) purse seine assessment fishery in Areas 12, and 13; and United States reef net assessment fishery in Area 7.

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 5. 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.