



PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION

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

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NEWS RELEASE

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The Fraser River Panel met today to examine biological and other assessment data on Fraser River sockeye salmon and discuss fisheries plans. Test fishing catches of sockeye from the marine approach areas indicate an increase in abundance relative to the previous week although abundance indicators are still lower than pre-season expectations for this date. Stock identification analyses confirm that Early Summer-run and Summer-run sockeye are now dominating in the marine assessment areas. Estimates of sockeye escapements past Mission have been stronger than expected over the past week, primarily due to the continued escapement of Early Stuart sockeye. The migration of sockeye past Hell's Gate also increased considerably over the past week and reports indicate that they are in good physical condition.

The proportion of age 5 sockeye in test-fishing catches to-date has been higher than forecast and suggests possible weakness in the return of age 4 Fraser sockeye, which are expected to comprise most of the Early Summer-run (76%) and Summer-run (96%) returns this year. The body size of Fraser sockeye continues to be smaller than average this season. As a result of concerns over the physical viability of Early Stuart sockeye (due to their small body size) several Early Stuart sockeye (collected from the lower Fraser River from July 12 to 15) were examined. Measurements of their condition were within the range recorded from samples collected in recent years.

The marine migration of Early Stuart sockeye is declining rapidly. The estimated 50% passage date of Early Stuart sockeye through Area 20 this season is July 15, which is 12 days later than average (July 3) and six days later than the latest migration dates previously observed (July 9). At the Panel meeting on July 26, the run size estimate of Early Stuart sockeye was increased from 130,000 to 185,000 fish (slightly higher than the 75% probability level forecast of 175,000 fish) due primarily to larger than expected escapements of Early Stuart sockeye into the Fraser River. The estimated escapement of Early Stuart sockeye past Mission through July 28 is 183,000 fish. It is expected that the Early Stuart run will reach or slightly exceed 200,000 fish.

The migration of Early Summer-run sockeye is tracking near the 75% p level forecast of abundance (391,000 fish) assuming that they are returning approximately eight days later (50% migration timing through Area 20 of July 31) than average (July 23). The estimated escapement of Early Summer-run sockeye past Mission through July 28 is 59,000 fish.

It is early in the migration of Summer-run sockeye through the marine assessment areas, however, current data suggests that their timing is later than average (50% migration date through Area 20 of August 8). If their marine timing is substantially later than average, an accurate estimate of their run size may not be possible until about mid-August. The estimated escapement of Summer-run sockeye past Mission through July 28 is 19,000 fish.

Migration conditions for sockeye in the Fraser River are presently satisfactory; however they are forecast to become more adverse over the next few days. An estimate of the present discharge of the Fraser River (at Hope) is not available. The water temperature of the Fraser River (at Qualark Creek) on July 28 was 17.8 °C, which is average for this date, however, it is forecast to increase to 19.0 °C over the next few days, which may cause physiological stress to migrating sockeye.

The Panel employs Management Adjustments (MA) during the in-season management period to help ensure that spawning escapement targets for Fraser River sockeye are achieved. These adjustments are additional fish that are allowed to escape upriver for the purpose of increasing the likelihood of achieving the spawning escapement targets. The management adjustment models use patterns in the historical data to predict how many additional sockeye are needed to compensate for differences between projected (in-season) and achieved (post-season) estimates of spawning escapement. These differences between estimates occur partially as a result of en route losses due to difficult migration conditions from high river temperatures or flows, but also as a result of consistent differences between in-season and post-season estimates of escapement for some early-timed sockeye runs, even when migration conditions are favorable. The source of these latter differences are difficult to identify in a given year, but are generally due to year-to-year variations in estimates of Mission escapement, estimates of catches in the river upstream of Mission, and spawning ground escapement estimates. As a result of an increase in Fraser River water temperatures, the management adjustment for Early Stuart sockeye has been increased from 74,000 fish to 114,000 fish to help ensure that the target escapement reaches the spawning grounds.

Enumeration fences on four creeks in the Early Stuart system are now operational, however, no sockeye have been counted through them to-date. Observers noted the first sockeye holding off of the mouth of Forfar Creek on July 25. Sockeye have been observed either in or holding off the mouths of several Takla Lake and Middle River spawning tributaries. The electronic fish counters at Gates Creek were installed on July 21, however, no sockeye have been enumerated to-date.

The Panel announced the following regulations for Panel Area waters:

CANADIAN FRASER RIVER PANEL AREA WATERS:

Remain closed to fishing.

UNITED STATES FRASER RIVER PANEL AREA WATERS:

TREATY INDIAN FISHERY:

Areas 4B, 5 and 6C: Open to drift gillnets 12:00 p.m. (noon), Monday, August 1, 2005, to 12:00 p.m. (noon) Wednesday, August 3, 2005.

NON INDIAN FISHERY:

Remain closed to fishing.

(Note: U. S. Non-Treaty fishers should check the U.S. hotline and WDFW regulations before fishing as there are additional State of Washington regulations, including time restrictions that may be in effect).

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.

The Panel will meet again on August 2 to evaluate the status of the Fraser River sockeye migration and to consider regulatory actions.