

The Fraser River Panel met today to receive updates on the migration of Fraser River pink and sockeye salmon. Although the abundance of Fraser sockeye in marine areas has declined rapidly over the past week, moderate catches of pink salmon in the Johnstone Strait purse seine test fishery have continued, which is consistent with the very large run of Fraser River pink salmon this year.

The total catch of Fraser River sockeye salmon in 2003 is estimated at 2,239,000 fish: 1,046,000 and 244,000 fish were taken by Canadian and United States commercial fishers respectively; 778,000 fish were harvested by Canadian First Nations fishers; 108,000 sockeye were caught in test fisheries, and an estimated 63,000 fish were caught in Canadian recreational fisheries. Catches of Late-run sockeye (excluding Birkenhead sockeye) in all fisheries totaled an estimated 343,000 fish.

The current in-season estimates of Fraser sockeye abundance by run timing-group are as follows: 30,000 Early Stuart sockeye; 585,000 Early Summer-run sockeye; 3,300,000 Summer-run sockeye; 322,000 Birkenhead sockeye; and 1,319,000 Late-run (excluding Birkenhead) sockeye. The estimated total run size of Fraser River sockeye is 5,556,000 fish, which is similar to the pre-season 50% probability forecast level of abundance (5,502,000 sockeye). While the estimated total run of Fraser River sockeye is very close to the forecast, the return of four-year old sockeye is below forecast while the return of five-year old fish has exceeded expectations.

Research studies are underway to monitor the migratory behavior of Late-run sockeye and determine the possible cause(s) of their early river-entry behavior. A tagging study focusing on Late-run sockeye is examining several aspects of their migratory behavior including their delay in the Strait of Georgia and the in-river mortality and spawning success of Late-run sockeye migrating at different periods through the marine approach areas. In total, 559 sockeye have been tagged in marine areas and 56 sockeye have been tagged in the Thompson River. Tagged sockeye have been detected at several tracking-sites in the Fraser River watershed.

Physiological studies are being conducted in conjunction with the Late-run tagging studies to determine possible causes of the early entry behavior of some Late-run sockeye. The physiological research has numerous objectives, some of which include: examining changes in the fish's physiology (e.g., by examining blood and muscle tissue) as they migrate from marine areas to their spawning grounds; assessing patterns of energy use and behavior of the fish in physically challenging portions of their migration; and investigating the effects of the parasite *Parvicapsula* on the physiology and mortality of sockeye. Preliminary results from these studies and the Late-run tagging studies noted above will be reviewed at a post-season Fraser River Panel meeting. The results from this research will be used to help formulate appropriate fisheries management strategies for future years.

The in-season run size estimate of Fraser River pink salmon was unchanged at the Panel meeting today, however, it is likely to exceed the provisional estimate of 25,000,000 fish. Assessments of the 50% arrival timing of Fraser pinks in Area 20 are indicating August 25, which is earlier than the forecast of August 31. Estimates of the catch of Fraser River pink salmon are as follows: 733,000 fish, and 772,000 fish harvested in Canadian and United States commercial fisheries, respectively; 43,000 fish taken in test fisheries; and 16,000 pinks caught in Fraser River First Nations fisheries. Catch estimates from recreational fisheries are incomplete at this time. An accurate estimate of the total Fraser River pink escapement (i.e., from a mark-recapture study) will not be conducted this year. However, DFO will be estimating the number of Fraser River pink salmon fry produced from this year's brood in the spring of next year.

Detailed information on the status of Fraser River sockeye escapement assessments currently being conducted by DFO on Early Summer-run, Summer-run and Late-run stocks throughout the Fraser River watershed are available on the internet at: <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fraser/escapeupdate.htm>.

The Panel announced the following regulations for Panel Area waters:

CANADIAN PANEL AREA WATERS:

Remain closed to fishing.

UNITED STATES PANEL AREA WATERS:

Areas 6, 6A, 7: Relinquish regulatory control effective Saturday, September 20.

Area 7A: Relinquish regulatory control of those waters southerly and easterly of a straight line drawn from the Iwersen's Dock on Point Roberts in the State of Washington to the Georgina Point Light at the entrance to Active Pass in the Province of British Columbia effective Saturday, September 20.

TREATY INDIAN FISHERY

Areas 6, 7, and 7A: No change to regulations. Open for net fishing in that portion of Areas 6, 7, and 7A south and east of the Iwersen Dock Line until 8:00 p.m. Friday, September 19, 2003. The Iwersen Dock Line is a line projected from the point where once the Iwersen Dock was located on Point Roberts in the State of Washington to the Georgina Point Light at the entrance to Active Pass in the Province of British Columbia, Canada. Purse seines may retain only pink and coho salmon and must release all sockeye and chinook salmon.

NON INDIAN FISHERY

Areas 7 and 7A Purse Seine: No change to regulations. Open in Areas 7 and 7A south and east of the Iwersen Dock Line until 8:00 p.m. on Friday, September 19, 2003. The Iwersen Dock Line is a line projected from the point where once the Iwersen Dock was located on Point Roberts in the State of Washington to the Georgina Point Light at the entrance to Active Pass in the Province of British Columbia, Canada. Only pink salmon may be retained.

Areas 7 and 7A Reef Net: No change to regulations. Open in Areas 7 and 7A south and east of the Iwersen Dock Line until 8:00 p.m. on Friday, September 19, 2003. The Iwersen Dock Line is a line projected from the point where once the Iwersen Dock was located on Point Roberts in the State of Washington to the Georgina Point Light at the entrance to Active Pass in the Province of British Columbia, Canada. Only pink salmon and marked coho salmon may be retained. Chum salmon may be retained beginning September 16, 2003.

Note: Fishers catching a radio-tagged sockeye (which will have a thin wire antenna protruding from the mouth and an external, blue Floy tag attached to the antenna) are requested to please contact the following phone number, which is toll free in Canada and the U.S. 1-877-666-7575.

The Pacific Salmon Commission (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/TestFish/>. The PSC has updated information on Late-run Fraser River sockeye migration behavior, en route mortality, and research results and plans on the Internet at: <http://www.psc.org/Pubs/LateRun/Index.htm/>. In addition, Fraser River Panel news releases, fishery regulations, sockeye and pink escapement data and stock status reports are available on the Internet at: www.psc.org. United States fishing schedules during the season are available for Treaty Indian fisheries through the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission at 1-800-562-6142. Non-Indian fishing schedules are 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 and via fishery notices.

The Panel will meet again September 26 to evaluate the status of the Fraser River sockeye and pink salmon runs and to consider regulatory actions.