

The Fraser River Panel met today to review assessment data on Fraser River sockeye salmon. The abundance of Fraser River sockeye in marine assessment areas and in the Fraser River is low at the present time. The marine migration of Early Stuart sockeye is almost complete. The Panel adopted an in-season run size estimate of 25,000 Early Stuart sockeye as a result of analyses indicating low abundance of these fish migrating through assessment sites. This return is substantially lower than the 90% probability level forecast and is likely attributable to stress that Early Stuart sockeye experienced due to high Fraser River flow conditions during freshwater migration in their brood year (1999). The gross escapement of Early Stuart sockeye into the Fraser River is presently estimated at 22,000 fish. The current estimate of the 50% arrival timing of Early Stuart sockeye in Area 20 is July 3, which is normal timing for these sockeye.

The early-timed component of the Early Summer-run sockeye stocks (Fennell, Bowron, Raft, Gates, Nadina, Pitt, and several smaller stocks) have been identified in test fishing catches in Canadian Area 20 since early July and now comprise approximately 50% of the sockeye migrating through this area. The 50% arrival timing of these fish is normally about July 21 in Area 20. Current assessments suggest that the return of these fish is later-timed than normal and/or at lower abundance levels than was forecasted. A clearer indication of their timing and abundance will be available by later next week.

Discharge levels in the Fraser River continue to be approximately 20% lower than normal and are presently about 4,400 cms at Hope. Fraser River water temperature (measured at Qualark Creek) has increased over the past week and was 17.5 °C on July 16. Fraser River water temperature is forecast to increase further next week and may approach levels that could cause physiological stress in migrating sockeye.

Several new assessment fisheries will be initiated later this season with the long-term goal of improving the accuracy of in-season Fraser River sockeye run size estimates. These assessment fisheries are being conducted by the following user groups in the areas indicated: 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, 13, and 20; United States purse seine assessment fishery in Area 5; and United States reefnet assessment fishery in Area 7.

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/TestFish/>. 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 and via fishery notices.

All commercial fisheries in Panel Area Waters remain closed.

The next in-season meeting of the Panel is scheduled to occur on July 22. 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.