

A weekly Aboriginal fisheries newsletter for
fisheries representatives and their organizations

SOCKEYE 2008: A ROLLER COASTER RIDE

Pete Nicklin was unable to give us his detailed technical update report this week, so the following summary has been provided by Neil Todd.

Looks like we're over the hump and accelerating down the other side.

At this time a week ago, things were looking up. Early Summer Run abundance had exceeded expectations at even the 50 % probability (50p) level, and indications were that Summer Runs were building toward the 50p level. On the strength of those indicators, commercial and recreational fisheries were opened in Canada.

It didn't take long for the bubble to burst. The commercial fisheries were quickly closed at the beginning of this week, and the sport fishery was closed on Wednesday.

The following is a summary update:

Test Fisheries

Test fisheries in Area 20 have been dropping off for the last few days. While catches on the American side in Juan de Fuca are still occurring, there is no doubt that abundances have fallen off. Numbers of fish passing through the Mission hydroacoustic station no longer seem to be matching the projections from the Area 20 and Area 12/13 test fisheries.

The Johnstone Strait test fisheries are still experiencing very low catches, indicating that relatively few sockeye are diverting down the inside. At this time of the year, even if numbers are relatively low, these test fisheries usually catch only Fraser sockeye stocks. In recent days, however, non-Fraser sockeye are showing in these test fisheries; this is another indication that Fraser sockeye returns are falling off significantly.

Early Summer Run Sockeye

On Tuesday of this week the Pacific Salmon Commission staff recommended dropping the in-season runs size estimate from 500,000 to 425,000. This number is still greater than the pre-season forecast of 349,000 at the 50% probability level – the one bright light in an otherwise gloomy picture.

Summer Run Sockeye

The Summer Run stocks, which appeared to be starting to build a week ago, almost immediately began to fall off. A week ago there were estimates of the Summer Run stocks coming in at the 50% probability

level of 1.8 million. Commercial fisheries, and sport fisheries, were planned and implemented based on this expectation. By Tuesday of this week the PSC staff downgraded their estimates and recommended an in-season run size estimate of 1,182,000 (the pre-season forecast at the 75% probability level). Commercial (and sport) allowable catch in Canada was eliminated at this run size.

As of today, the Summer Run timing group has now been down-graded to an in season run size estimate of 750,000. This is roughly equivalent to the pre-season forecast at the 90% probability level, which means the run appears to be failing even more than was anticipated pre-season.

Late Run Sockeye

Birkenhead sockeye were forecast to return in strong numbers this year, maybe as much as 300,000 fish. They are not showing up yet in numbers anywhere near that. There is not a lot of data to work with yet, and currently the in-season estimate is 137,000 fish.

The "true lates" – Weaver Cr in the lower river, and the Shuswap system, appear to be returning in lower numbers than hoped for – with any luck they will achieve the 75% probability level (232,000). A large majority of these numbers are destined for the Weaver system; only a few thousand are expected back to the Adams/ Shuswap system this year. High en route and pre-spawning mortality levels are once again expected this year for this run timing group.

Other

Reports from the Early Stuart spawning grounds indicate that the fish have arrived in numbers that match their parent brood year, and there are still more to come. The potential for this stock group to exceed the brood year spawning numbers is good news. And three sockeye have shown up at the Cultus sockeye counting fence on Sweltzer Creek.

While the Watershed Talk is a useful source of technical fisheries information, we also welcome articles and updates on community fisheries projects and events.

Submission guidelines are available at www.frafs.ca under Watershed Talk.

Please share your success stories with us!

FIRST NATIONS IN-SEASON TECHNICAL CONFERENCE CALLS

Unless otherwise announced, the 2008 First Nations In-season technical conference calls will be at 4PM every Thursday until mid-September.

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