

SOCKEYE IN-SEASON UPDATE - By Neil Todd

Editorial note: the following summary of the in-season update conference call is provided by Neil Todd. Normally a more detailed account would be provided by Pete Nicklin, who is not able to do it for this edition.

Mike Staley conducted the third sockeye in-season update teleconference call at 4 p.m. on Thursday, August 2, 2007.

TEST FISHERIES

Test fisheries "outside", i.e. Area 20 (Strait of Juan de Fuca, off Victoria on Vancouver Island) and Area 12 (Johnstone Strait area north of Campbell River) are beginning to show some improvement, although for this time of the year and the expected returns, they are still showing very modest numbers.

The test fishery catches are providing some indications that, as of the information provided to date:

- The Early Summer Run timing group is arriving about a week later than normal timing (note that the very few returning Early Stuart appeared to arrive with relatively normal timing);
- The Early Summer Run timing group is returning at abundance levels far lower than the pre-season 50% probability forecast, and may not be sufficient to achieve spawning escapement targets;
- Four year old sockeye, which should be showing up as 80-90% of the test catches, comprise less than 50% of the catches to date; five year old fish still predominate, which is another indication that total run size will be far less than predicted;
- Average size of the fish is smaller than normal so far this year.

EARLY STUART SOCKEYE

The Pacific Salmon Commission estimates that 12,700 Early Stuart sockeye made it past Mission. Most of these fish are now in the mid-upper reaches of the Fraser. As of a couple of days ago, none had been seen on the spawning grounds.

EARLY SUMMER RUN SOCKEYE

As noted under the "Test Fisheries" heading, indications are quite strong at this time that this group will not return at the 50% probability forecast. The Pacific Salmon Commission will be recommending that the Fraser Panel adopt an in-season run size estimate, for management purposes, of 230,000. This is equivalent to the pre-season forecast at the 90% probability level. This size of run leaves NO fish for harvest – all are needed for spawning escapement.

Concerns have been expressed to DFO for over a week

now regarding their decision to open fisheries on Early Summer Run sockeye without knowing whether or not there would be a harvestable surplus.

SUMMER RUN SOCKEYE

It is still too early to make any predictions regarding the strength of the Summer Run timing group. However, some stocks in this group are beginning to arrive; a total of 174,000 fish from this group are projected to enter the Fraser by next Tuesday.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

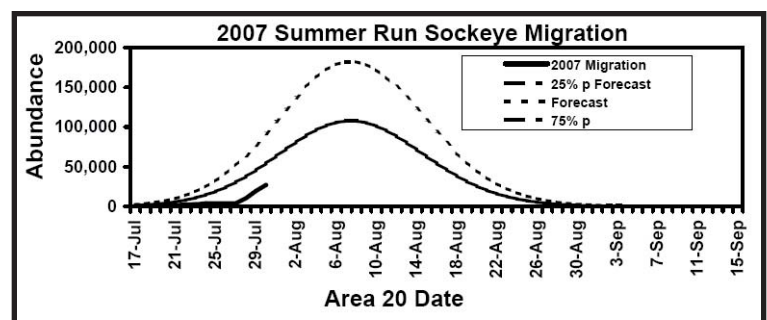
Fraser River migration conditions are good: temperature is at 17.6C, which is fine for this time of year; and flows are dropping to about 4900 cms, which is reasonable for this time of year.

OTHER: FRASER PANEL

Based on yesterday's information, today (Friday August 3) is a critical decision-making day for the Fraser Panel in relation to the Early Summer Run sockeye and sockeye management in general for this year. If the Panel does not accept the Pacific Salmon Commission recommendation regarding adoption of the run size at the 230,000 level, the door will be left open for more sockeye harvesting to continue despite the very low numbers currently showing as of yesterday's conference call. The risk of not meeting spawning escapement targets, and compromising future ability to meet First Nations' needs, would certainly be very high. Fraser First Nations are waiting to see what the Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans will do.

NEXT UPDATE:

The next scheduled update will be held Thursday, August 9, 2007. However, with the potential shortages in the runs being indicated at this time, FRAFS will be issuing update bulletins as necessary as soon as new information becomes available.



Editorial Note: The following letter from the Marine Conservation Caucus to DFO (written approximately one week ago) expresses concern over the timing of opening sockeye fisheries. As of today, levels of escapement of sockeye into the Fraser River are still far below those needed for meeting basic spawning escapement targets for all stocks.

MARINE CONSERVATION CAUCUS

1037 Madore Avenue, Coquitlam, BC V3K 3B7

Phone: 604-936-9474 Fax: 604-936-5150 Web: www.mccpacific.org

July 27, 2007

Re: Fisheries for early summer Fraser sockeye 2007

Paul Ryall
Fisheries and Aquaculture Management
Suite 200 - 401 Burrard Street
Vancouver, B.C.
V6C 3S4

Dear Paul Ryall,

It has come to our attention that DFO has licensed 24 hours of drift net fishing and 48 hours of set gill-net fishing between Sawmill Creek and the Fraser River mouth for lower Fraser First Nations for the weekend of July 27-29, and are planning food fisheries in the upper Fraser as well. These fisheries will primarily harvest Early Summer sockeye. We have reviewed the available data provided to the Fraser River Panel as of July 27, and we have been in contact with the responsible DFO biologists and managers (July 26, 2007).

USEFUL LINKS

- **Albion Test Fishery – Chinook Gill Net:** http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fraserriver/commercial/commercialalbionchnk_e.htm
 - **Pacific Salmon Commission Website:** www.psc.org
 - **LGL Fishwheel Catch Updates:** http://www.psc.org/info_lglfishwheelcatch.htm
 - **Upper/Mid/Lower Fraser Catch and Openings:** <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fraserriver/firstnations.htm>
 - **Pacific Salmon Commission Test Fisheries:** http://www.psc.org/info_testfishing_summaries.htm
 - **Pacific Salmon Commission News and Regulatory announcements:** http://www.psc.org/news_frpnews.htm
 - **Fraser River Mission Escapement Reports:** http://www.psc.org/info_inseasonfraserescapement.htm
 - **Fraser River Environmental Watch Program:** http://www-sci.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fwh/index_e.htm
- For more information contact Pete Nicklin @ (250) 392-5888 or by email: indiseaent@shaw.ca.

It is our understanding that Fraser sockeye have failed to arrive in the river in sufficient numbers to support even reduced food fisheries for First Nations, and there is no reliable indication of fish building in offshore areas. In fact, many sockeye runs along the coast this year (Skeena, Barclay Sound, Lake Washington, Early Stuart) appear to be returning below expectation but on time.

Given the data in hand, and assuming the Early Summer runs are on time (and there is no reason to assume otherwise, except unbridled optimism) the in season run size estimates for Early Summers (based on several alternative models presented by the Pacific Salmon commission using test fishing data) suggest an Early Summer sockeye run to the Fraser of less than 100 K (less than 15% of the pre season forecast of 690K). While we are all hopeful that this situation will improve, there is no evidence of sufficient sockeye to meet minimum escapement objectives, much less support fisheries.

Conservation must come first. We urge you to postpone all fishing, including first Nations food fishing for Fraser sockeye unless and until sufficient Fraser sockeye return to meet escapement needs. Opening sockeye fisheries now will not only contribute to a possible conservation crisis for Early Summer Fraser sockeye, but may also infringe on the Rights of First Nations fishing in the upper Fraser.

Regards,
Ken Wilson
Marine Conservation Caucus, Salmon Committee

cc Paul Sprout, Don Radford, Mel Kotyk, Hon. Loyola Hearn

Fraser Watershed Technical CONFERENCE CALLS

Fraser Panel Liaison Mike Staley will share up-to-date technical information from the Fraser Panel via teleconference on Thursday afternoons at 4:00pm.

NEXT CALLS: AUGUST 9, 2007; AUGUST 16, 2007

In order to participate you will need the following numbers:

Toll Free: **1-877-385-4099**

Vancouver Local: **604-899-2339**

Participant Access Code: **3196930#**

The Watershed Talk is available for download at www.frafs.ca. Next issue: August 10, 2007