

## Sockeye rebound puts nets, rods in water



Commercial and recreational fishing of Fraser River sockeye salmon has been approved starting Thursday.

*File*

By [Jeff Nagel - BC Local News](#)

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Commercial salmon fishermen are getting their first shot at Fraser River sockeye in four years.

Seiners were cleared to fish for sockeye in Johnstone Strait Thursday and Friday – the first time since 2006 – despite objections that it's too early in the run for fishery managers to be confident enough salmon will be left for conservation needs.

Fraser gillnetters were also expected to fish Friday in anticipation of a much better return this summer.

Recreational anglers can also fish for sockeye in marine waters and in the lower river upstream as far as the Mission Bridge starting Thursday until further notice, according to Barry Rosenberger, the federal fisheries department's area director for the B.C. Interior.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans had forecast 11.4 million sockeye would return to the Fraser this year, fanning hopes for a fishery after three years of dismal returns and commercial closures.

Fraser returns in 2008 and 2009 ended up below two million sockeye and are the subject of a judicial inquiry that resumes this fall.

"It's optimistic right now," Rosenberger said.

The initial two days of commercial openings are intended to harvest about 150,000 sockeye, he said, adding further openings would depend on the estimates of salmon entering the river in the days ahead.

Commercial seiners and gillnetters will initially target the waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland, from Campbell River to Port Hardy.

"We've objected to the opening until there's a little more firm in-season data," said Watershed Watch Salmon Society executive director Craig Orr.

Sto:lo fishery adviser Ernie Crey said he's also concerned DFO is moving too fast to let commercial boats take sockeye, particularly given the notorious inaccuracy of preseason forecasts in recent years.

"These things worry me," he said. "I don't see what the problem would have been to hold off for three or four more days to see what's happening to the summer run before jumping in the water."

Federal salmon policy generally means aboriginal bands along the Fraser also get to catch salmon to sell when there's enough sockeye to allow general commercial openings.

The economic opportunity fisheries are in addition to bands' constitutionally protected aboriginal right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

Crey said he's concerned aboriginal bands may end up left out if commercial boats fish now and managers subsequently decide to cut off the harvest.

Rosenberger said the early summer run sockeye the fleet will target are now estimated at 950,000 – far above the 383,000 preseason forecast.

Early Stuart sockeye are estimated at 155,000, up from the advance forecast of 41,000.

It's too early for in-season estimates of the inbound summer run or late summer run sockeye that make up the rest of the stocks.

A large component of the inbound sockeye are salmon that spawn in the Adams River in a huge run once every four years.

Because those fish are late-runners, an accurate picture of the overall sockeye run size may not emerge until the end of the month or early September.

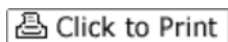
"What we're trying to do is effectively manage the fishery to our priority objectives," Rosenberger said. "The first objective is to meet the spawning ground requirements and the second to the First Nations and third, if there's that much left over, then we look at commercial and recreational fisheries."

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