

## Fraser sockeye fishery opens - first big run in four years

By Darah Hansen, Vancouver Sun August 6, 2010

British Columbia's commercial fishermen were out in Johnstone Strait off Vancouver Island Thursday to take advantage of the first significant Fraser River sockeye salmon opening in four years.

Seiners were approved to fish from 6 a.m. until 9 p.m. Thursday. The opening continued today with gillnetters joining the commercial fleet in the same area.

Phil Eidsvik of the B.C. Fisheries Survival Coalition said local fishermen are relieved to be back working.

"After ... years of no fishing, most guys know they have a big stack of bills to pay," he said.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials said returns this summer have so far been much better than expected.

That trend is expected to continue with seven to 11 million fish expected to return to the Fraser River by the end of the season, well above early forecasts of five to eight million.

The vast majority, 80 per cent, of the sockeye are expected to arrive in the coming weeks.

"At this stage this is a good fishery. Presumably things will continue to develop and we'll have other opportunities," said Barry Rosenberger, federal fisheries director for the B.C. Interior.

The sockeye fishery was last open to commercial fleets in 2006 when a total commercial catch of 3.7 million fish was approved.

A limited fishery opened in 2008 with only 17,000 sockeye caught.

The total allowed catch for the current two-day fishery is 150,000 fish.

Rosenberger said this year could yield a total catch of about three million fish, if runs continue to look strong.

Not everyone is happy about news of the sockeye opening.

Craig Orr of the Watershed Watch Salmon Society said it's too early to determine if the forecast number of fish returns is correct.

"Pre-season forecasting models are notoriously wrong about 75 per cent of the time," he said, adding that without reliable data, "you run the risk of overfishing."

Orr also urged more caution to better protect weaker stocks within the fishery.

<http://www.vancouversun.com/Fraser+sockeye+fishery+opens/3366028/story.html>

Both the Sakinaw Lake and Cultus Lake sockeye populations were designated as endangered in 2002 by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife, an independent group of scientists and wildlife experts. However, neither is listed on the Canadian government's species-at-risk registry.

Rosenberger said forecasting the fish returns is "not a simple process."

"There is a lot of information. You try to make the best decisions you can with the information you've got at a given time," he said.

Monitoring will continue throughout the summer.

Eidsvik said fishermen remain cautiously optimistic as they prepare for the season to get underway in earnest.

"It's a day-to-day thing," he said of the industry. "If the fish are there tomorrow, then we fish. If they aren't, then they don't fish."

Eidsvik said there are about 400 gillnetters and 165 seiners licensed to fish Fraser River salmon in B.C.

dahansen@vancouversun.com

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