

Media Release—September 8, 2010

**BC conservationists concerned
sockeye fishery being kept open too long**

“DFO must close sockeye fishery to limit impacts to coho and steelhead”

Watershed Watch Salmon Society today expressed concern with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for allowing sockeye fishing to continue past Labour Day. Commercial sockeye fisheries are slated for Thursday and Friday in the lower Fraser River, violating the spirit and intent of pre-season fishing plans vetted by all sectors and aimed at protecting coho and steelhead which are now entering the river. The Vancouver-based group issued a press release last week warning against overfishing.

“Until this week DFO appeared to be managing the fishery appropriately in the face of this year’s fantastic sockeye return”, said Dr. Craig Orr, Executive Director of Watershed Watch. “The fishery has been going full-bore for several weeks now, they’ve taken more than 10 million sockeye, and it’s time to stick to the agreed-to fishing plan and allow less abundant coho and steelhead get up the river to their spawning grounds.”

Calls to fish harder are being made based on myths that salmon not killed today are somehow “wasted,” or worse, contribute to overcrowding and collapse. Salmon carcasses benefit the entire ecosystem, including bears, eagles, and the insects and plankton that provide food for juvenile salmon. Recent science, most notably documented in a 2004 study by the federally-appointed Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, also debunks the tired notion that overspawning leads to stock collapses.

The Fraser River sockeye fishery occurs mainly in marine waters and the lower Fraser River, and captures sockeye from over 40 genetically unique and irreplaceable sub-populations or “stocks”, as well as other species of salmon, including coho and steelhead. Many of these stocks are severely depleted. Cultus and Sakinaw Lake sockeye have been deemed endangered by the federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, with overfishing listed as a major factor in their decline. Most of this year’s abundant sockeye are from one stock only – the Adams River.

“In theory, several million more sockeye could still be harvested sustainably from the abundant Adams River stock this year if they were taken much closer to their spawning grounds using selective fishing techniques,” said Aaron Hill, Watershed Watch Ecologist. “But trying to catch them in the lower Fraser River using seiners is a risky move that will likely result in large catches of non-target fish.”

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