

Fishing plans announced by Feds decrease protection for endangered salmon stocks in BC

Abundant stocks could be harvested without harming those at risk, but Ottawa and fishing industry aren't on board

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Vancouver, BC (June 25, 2014) --- In anticipation of large predicted returns for a handful of the Fraser River's 44 sockeye salmon populations this summer, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has more than quadrupled the number of endangered Interior Fraser River coho salmon that can be killed as unintentional "bycatch" in the sockeye fishery. Conservationists from Watershed Watch Salmon Society, the Raincoast Conservation Foundation, and SkeenaWild Conservation Trust say the official fishing plan was released 3 weeks late and also allows for increased harm to many other depleted salmon stocks.

"The Fisheries Minister has shown yet again that her primary allegiance is with the big fishing companies, and not the vast majority of British Columbians who want to see their depleted salmon populations rebuilt," said Aaron Hill, a biologist with Watershed Watch. "It should be called an 'overfishing plan'."

Most of the sockeye salmon returning to the Fraser River this year are the progeny of those that spawned in 2010—the largest return in over 100 years. While fishermen and conservationists are both optimistic that the large runs of sockeye will materialize this year, fish from abundant populations will be migrating back to their home rivers alongside depleted populations including Cultus Lake sockeye, and Sakinaw Lake sockeye, which are classified as "endangered" by the federal government's Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

"These depleted stocks were once abundant," said Misty MacDuffee of Raincoast Conservation Foundation, "and the strong stocks of today could be weak in the future. We can't just base our fisheries on the strong stocks. If we managed our financial assets the same way, we'd all be broke."

The conservationists say that the official fishing plans make little allowance for new "stock-selective" fishing that would be a "win-win." They argue that abundant sockeye returns could be harvested with far less damage to depleted populations if more fishing effort was focused in locations where the strong stocks can be fished in isolation from the weaker stocks—where First Nations sustainably harvested salmon for centuries—rather than increasing fisheries in areas where weak and strong stocks are mixed together.

"We were hoping to see the fishing plans make more room for sustainable First Nations in-river fisheries," said Greg Taylor, a former fishing company executive now working on behalf of Watershed Watch. "We know that allowing high numbers of salmon to spawn



has many benefits - both ecologically and economically. It is actually possible to protect our salmon and eat them, too.”

Now approved by the Fisheries Minister, the fishing plans take retroactive effect June 1, setting management rules for all salmon fisheries on Canada’s West Coast.

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B-roll, photographs available

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Fraser is BC’s largest salmon-bearing river system and the Fraser watershed drains approximately one quarter of the Province. It is believed to host more genetically distinct salmon populations than any other river system on Earth.

For over a decade, Canadian fishermen were limited to killing a total of 3% of the Interior Fraser coho run per year, to promote rebuilding of the population. The new fishing plan increases that limit to 16%, with additional increases by American fishermen likely to follow.

Harvest rates for sockeye salmon could allow well over half of the fish from several depleted populations to be taken by fishermen in waters where the depleted and abundant sockeye migrate together. A 2013 science report by DFO (see below) determined that seven of the 24 Fraser River sockeye populations they looked at were in the “red zone.” Under Canada’s Wild Salmon Policy, “The presence of a [population] in the Red zone will initiate immediate consideration of ways to protect the fish, increase their abundance, and reduce the potential risk of loss.”

The Pacific Salmon Commission—a joint Canada-US body that coordinates management of salmon fisheries between the two nations—tracks Fraser River sockeye runs using 19 reporting groups representing the 44 genetically distinct sockeye populations in the Fraser River. Of the 19, less than 50% in 2014 are expected to exceed the number of returning spawners that would maximize their abundance in future generations.

Federal government information on endangered salmon stocks mentioned above:

Interior Fraser River coho - <http://tinyurl.com/nn6dq6h>

Cultus Lake sockeye – <http://tinyurl.com/m8pknr>

Sakinaw Lake sockeye - <http://tinyurl.com/p75e2sy>

In a 2011 poll conducted by Angus Reid Public Opinion, 77% of British Columbians surveyed disagreed that “the extinction of small salmon runs is acceptable as a trade-off to maintain the commercial fishing industry’s current practices.” The full poll can be accessed at: <http://tinyurl.com/kvbct56>

The map and table below show red/yellow/green status of Fraser River sockeye populations, taken from “Integrated Biological Status of Fraser River Sockeye Salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) Under the Wild Salmon Policy”, Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat, Science Advisory Report 2012/056 (available at <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/Library/349836.pdf>).

Pacific Region		Biological Status of Fraser River Sockeye Salmon		
<i>Table 3: Integrated status designations for the 24 Fraser River Sockeye Salmon CUs, ranked from poor (Red zone) to healthy (Green zone) status. For each CU, more commonly used stock names are presented. Cyclic CUs are also identified. * indicates provisional status designations; R/A: Red/Amber; A/G: Amber/Green; DD: data deficient; Undet: undetermined.</i>				
Status	Conservation Unit	Cyclic	Stock	
Red	Takla-Trembleur-ES	cyclic	Early Stuart	
Red	Nadina-Francois-ES		Nadina	
Red*	Taseko-ES		Miscellaneous Early Summers	
Red	Nahatlatch-ES		Miscellaneous Early Summers	
Red	Bowron-ES		Bowron	
Red	Cultus-L		Cultus	
Red	Widgeon - River		Miscellaneous Lates	
R/A	Chilliwack-ES		Miscellaneous Early Summers	
R/A	Francois-Fraser-S		Stellako	
R/A	Quesnel-S	cyclic	Quesnel	
R/A	Takla-Trembleur-Stuart-S	cyclic	Late Stuart	
Amber	North Barriere-ES		Fennel & Miscellaneous Early Summer	
Amber	Anderson-Seton-ES	cyclic	Gates	
Amber	Kamloops-ES		Raft & Miscellaneous Early Summers	
Amber	Harrison (U/S)-L		Weaver	
A/G	Pitt-ES		Pitt	
A/G	Shuswap-ES	cyclic	Scotch, Seymour, Misc.E.Sum.	
Green*	Chilko-S & Chilko-ES agg.		Chilko	
Green*	Lillooet-Harrison-L		Birkenhead	
Green	Shuswap Complex-L	cyclic	Late Shuswap	
Green	Harrison - River		Harrison	
Green	Harrison (D/S)-L		Miscellaneous Lates	
?	DD	Chilko-ES		Chilko
?	Undet.	Seton-L	cyclic	Seton

