

## Summary of salmon returns and major fisheries so far for BC and Alaska – July 22, 2016

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### British Columbia

#### *Nass River*

- The Nass River sockeye return is well below expectations. There were 9 Gillnet openings in June and early July, but there are unlikely to be any further. Escapement targets are expected to be achieved.
- Area 3 (Nass) chum fisheries directed at Alaskan hatchery fish have done well, with catches nearing 70,000. Area 3 will go to non-retention of chums as of July 20th to protect Nass River and other Canadian chum populations. It is expected that Canadian chums in this area will return better than the recent average. The absence of any further gillnet openings will provide further protection.
- Area 3 pink fisheries continue strong with catches nearing 500,000.
- An at-sea compliance monitoring program began July 24th, several weeks after the start of the fishery. Industry is required to pay for the program and therefore has little incentive other than to do the very least DFO, and the public, will let them get away with. In this case there will be 2 observers for one day per week. As there have been at least four days fishing per week, this means that at-sea observers will be present to monitor compliance for only one day of a potential four day fishing week. And as it is a large fishery area, the coverage for the one day will be poor.
- DFO's Conservation and Protection Branch is responsible for compliance in BC's fisheries. Their target is a 95% compliance rate. Without an at-sea monitoring program they lack the resources to adequately monitor compliance with regulations and Conditions of Licence in all the fisheries that may be open on any one day.

#### *Skeena River marine mixed stock fisheries*

- Skeena sockeye are on track for a poor return. The return is nearing its peak timing. Current projections suggest the return will be lower than pre-season projections, which were already much lower than average.
- DFO unexpectedly opened the Skeena commercial fishery twice in early July, contrary to what they said they would do in this year's Integrated Harvest Planning Committee (IHPC) meetings, and what was written into the draft Integrated Fisheries Management Plan (IFMP). DNA analysis indicates the fisheries were directed upon wild sockeye populations, which DFO has agreed are in need of protection. DFO first described them as "assessment" fisheries, then backed away from this wording, and described them as "fisheries to see what might be coming". This management approach is fundamentally different from what has been in place for at least 15 years. First Nations and other upriver interests are angry that DFO agreed to these openings without consultation, and independent of the IFMP process.
- Skeena chinook numbers are down. This is particularly concerning for First Nations who rely on chinook for food. Concerns have been raised that marine and in-river recreational

fisheries continue unabated even though DFO understands that chinook abundance is well below average.

- There are early indications of a strong pink return.
- Early steelhead returns are strong.

### ***Douglas Channel/Great Bear Rainforest***

- Area 6 is seeing a strong even-year pink return with the seine catch already exceeding 250,000.
- There will be an at-sea compliance monitoring program in place. But as in Area 3, it will not be in place for each fishing day, or cover all sub-areas.
- There were early indications of a strong return of chums in Area 6. Seines in one two-day opening encountered and released over 30,000 chums. Since then, encounters have dropped off.
- There was a gillnet opening in front of the Kitimat River hatchery, catching over 10,000 chums. But this fishery has been curtailed as the hatchery has had difficulty getting brood stock. It is still early in the return.

### ***Bella Bella/Bella Coola***

- There have been strong gillnet catches of chums in both inside and outside fisheries.
- Because of flooding in the brood year, Area 8 is not expected to see a pink surplus
- There is no information on steelhead encounters in the BCGNA.
- There is no at-sea compliance monitoring program planned for Area 8.

### ***Smith Inlet***

- Escapements are above target and gillnet fisheries have been continuing daily. There have been good catches for the small fleet in the area.
- This is a remarkable turnaround for an area which has not seen a significant commercial fishery for decades, however, the Gwa'sala 'Nakwaxda'xw people who rely on this run for food have expressed strong concern over the level of fishing.

### ***Barkley Sound***

- Sockeye fisheries continue in Barkley Sound. The run was slightly upgraded to 1.15 million. This provides for a commercial catch of 440,000. Both seines and gillnet are approaching their catch limits at this run size.

### ***Fraser River chinook***

- The populations of Fraser chinook that are of significant conservation concern (those Fraser River populations that tend to spend two years in fresh water) are returning below what DFO has identified as the minimum conservation threshold. They are also facing difficult environmental conditions on their migration as the Fraser River is both warmer and lower than average. First Nations and conservationists have raised concerns that DFO has not

taken any additional management actions to protect these populations. This week a number of lower Fraser First Nation communities initiated legal action.

- The concern is that a significant proportion of the chinooks present (based on recent DNA work) in the San Juan and Fraser approach recreational fisheries come from these depressed populations. DFO's management response is to allow the recreational fleet to retain a maximum of two chinook between within a 9 inch slot (24.5 inches to 33.5 inches), and release all other chinooks. The concern with this management approach is it assumes:
  - Most of the stocks of concern are longer than 33.5 inches in the marine environment.
  - There is a high compliance rate in the recreational fishery.
  - Most fish are released without injury or undue stress.
  - Most of the released fish survive to spawn.
  - The management action is having the intended effect.
- When in fact:
  - There is an absence of information on the marine length frequencies of the populations of concern.
  - There is no at-sea independent compliance monitoring program.
  - It is recognized that fish handling practices are not what they should be to minimize stress, injury, and disease.
  - There is evidence that an unknown number of released chinook are eaten by predators while still hooked or soon after release, succumb to injuries and disease caused by being caught and released, the stress of being caught and released impacts their ability to complete their migration and spawn. It is also understood that warm water (such as what they will experience in the Fraser) will exacerbate problems associated with stress, injury and disease. Total mortalities of released fish are neither quantified nor estimated.
  - There has been no research on whether the management actions being undertaken are producing the intended benefits.

### ***Fraser River sockeye***

- It is still early in the Fraser sockeye return, but returns are tracking below pre-season median forecasts.
- Early Stuart sockeye, which were projected to have a return of only 33,000, are tracking a third lower.
- Early Summer sockeye are similarly returning at low numbers.
- Any possible fisheries will come from the summer segment of the return. It is still too early to estimate the strength of their return.
- The Fraser River water level is 13% below average, while temperatures are 6% above average.
- This is an off year for pinks.

### ***Okanagan sockeye***

- Okanagan sockeye, which return through the Columbia system, appear to be having a much better than predicted return.

## Alaska

- The Bristol Bay sockeye return, for the second year in a row, arrived much later than average. The final catch may exceed 35 million. The pre-season projection was for a harvest of 31 million fish.
- Prince William Sound pink harvests are relatively poor compared to recent years. Chum catches are very good.
- Kodiak pink fisheries are struggling with poor abundance.
- Northern Southeast Alaska pink fishing is poor relative to recent years. Directed Gillnet chum fisheries are doing well.
- Southern Southeast Alaska is seeing both strong pink and chum catches. The strong SSE pink catches indicate a more southerly migratory route this year. Sockeye fisheries in NSE and SSE have seen mixed results.
- District 4 interceptions of Skeena sockeye are poor. But because DFO allowed two unanticipated early Gillnet fisheries for Skeena sockeye, DFO has not been in a position to ask ADF&G to exercise restraint due to the poor Skeena sockeye return. Hence, ADF&G has allowed bi-weekly seine fisheries in District 4.
- The strong SSE pink catches indicate a more southerly migratory route this year. This typically benefits BC's north coast pink fisheries.
- Tree Point (which intercepts Nass sockeye) has seen below average catches of sockeye, average for chum, and well above average catches of pinks. The high number of pinks is due both to abundance and their size this year. The average size of pink salmon throughout Alaska and north/central BC is well above average.