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Your file *Votre référence*
Our file *Notre référence*
2020-502-00201

Dear Chief and Councils, Fishery Managers and Fishery Portfolio Holders,

I am writing to you today to update you on the status of the Fraser River Sockeye return and ask for your assistance.

As you are no doubt aware, the situation this year for Fraser River Sockeye is very poor. The Pacific Salmon Commission conducts various test fisheries and hydro acoustic monitoring of fish passage in the Fraser River and approach areas. This information is provided to the Fraser River Panel, a bilateral Panel composed of United States (US) and Canadian members whose task it is to review the data and make recommendations with regards to in-season run sizes and proposed commercial fisheries.

Based on the Panel meetings to date, the total return of Fraser Sockeye in 2020 will be the lowest return on record. As of August 18, 2020, approximately 210,000 Fraser Sockeye have been counted past the Mission hydro acoustic site in the lower Fraser River. The Pacific Salmon Commission is estimating that there is only an additional 30,000-35,000 Sockeye expected to pass the site in the coming weeks. This means the total return for 2020 is expected to be 240,000-260,000 Sockeye. For comparison, the final run size in 2019 was estimated to be 486,000 Sockeye.

The 2020 run size is an estimate of the total return of the fish to the river and does not reflect any mortalities that might take place during the final phase of the salmon's migration to their spawning grounds. For example, the 2019 total return of 486,000 Sockeye had an estimated escapement of ~300,000 Sockeye. Mortalities result from high water levels and temperatures as well as passage obstacles at places like Hell's Gate and Big Bar and also as a result of fishing. Fishing mortalities occur as both by-catch during Chinook fisheries and in directed Sockeye fisheries.

In 2020, there has not been and there will not be any commercial or recreational fisheries directed on Fraser River Sockeye. In addition, there will not be any licensed food, social, and ceremonial fisheries directed on Fraser sockeye in 2020. First Nations in the Thompson River and in the Fraser River downstream from the Thompson River confluence who are fishing for Chinook salmon destined for the Thompson are being asked to use gear and techniques to reduce impacts on Sockeye salmon as much as possible and have been required to release any encountered Sockeye.

I understand that there are many areas that have had little or no access to salmon this year and that the lack of salmon is causing a great deal of frustration, fear, and sadness within your communities. Ocean conditions in recent years appear to have been unfavourable for salmon. I am asking that all people on the Fraser River work together to help the salmon. My staff will continue to work to improve passage at Big Bar, monitor the health of the salmon, provide funding and expertise to restore salmon habitat, and work collaboratively on research projects aimed at learning more about salmon.

I am asking that you continue to work with us on these challenging tasks but also for 2020 to please communicate to your community members and others the need to reduce fisheries impacts for Fraser Sockeye salmon to the lowest possible levels and to emphasize that they should not be harvested. Unfortunately, we continue to have reports of unlicensed harvest of Sockeye in the Fraser River. While enforcement is one tool that we can use to support conservation, we also know that the influence that you as community leaders and advisors have is an equal if not greater measure. As announced on August 18, 2020, the First Nations Leadership Council is also calling for a complete closure of all Fraser River Sockeye fisheries.

It is critically important to allow as many Fraser Sockeye as possible to make it to the spawning grounds so that four years from now there is some hope for a stronger return of Sockeye. If we cannot get the salmon home, I fear that the returns will continue to diminish and like you, I don't want a future without salmon.

Yours sincerely,



Rebecca Reid
Regional Director General
Pacific Region

cc. Jennifer Nener, Director, Salmon and Client Services
Terri Bonnet, Area Director, Fraser and Interior
Andrew Thomson, Regional Director, Fisheries Management
Linda Higgins, Area Director, South Coast