

FRASER WATERSHED JOINT TECHNICAL COMMITTEE UPDATE

By Pete Nicklin, Watershed Stock Management Coordinator FRAFS

The Fraser Watershed Joint Technical Committee hosted a special meeting on October 10th in Kamloops to discuss Fraser Chinook. The meeting was well attended by First Nations and DFO.

The FWJTC chose to meet outside of its regular meeting schedule and to concentrate entirely on Fraser Chinook issues. Reasons for this included:

1. Preliminary escapement information on many Fraser Chinook stocks was available for discussion. Of particular interest for the group to discuss were the 4sub2 returns in order to see if there were similar trends seen when compared to the failure of the 4 year old Fraser sockeye, and Interior Fraser coho from Fall 2006 (in general, Fraser mid-Upper Fraser Chinook returns were poor).
2. Chinook management is relatively unique in that the management issues occupy almost the entire calendar year, from October to October (roughly the beginning and the end of the harvest cycle for Fraser Chinook during a calendar year). This means that Chinook that will return to the Fraser in 2008 are now being exposed to commercial and recreational harvests in the marine areas over the next 10 months.
3. To review the fisheries that harvest Fraser Chinook, in light of the fact that there is great concern about the likely poor return of sockeye to the Fraser in 2008, and people's attention may turn to Chinook in order to meet FSC needs.
4. Conservation concerns for some of the earliest timed portion of the Fraser Spring's have reached critical levels.
5. The Chinook Annex of the Pacific Salmon Treaty expires at the end of 2008, and questions had arisen with regard to DFO's process to discuss the Annex re-negotiation and some of the technical details embedded within Canada's "status-quo" position.

Reasons 1-4 – management of Chinook stocks and fisheries.

The first four reasons for the meeting are inter-related, and they generated considerable information and discussion. The issues all relate to an urgent need for Fraser First Nations to understand and quickly start dealing with these inter-related issues:

1. Sockeye harvesting in 2008 is expected to be as bad as, if not worse than, that of this year. Fraser First Nations may require much more access to Fraser Chinook in 2008 than they have normally required in recent decades. Marine commercial fisheries on Fraser Chinook salmon may be opening this month. Marine recreational fisheries on Fraser Chinook salmon may be occurring from this month through to late summer/early fall of 2008. The Chinook harvested in these fisheries will therefore be gone, reducing the numbers available for Fraser First Nations during the spring and summer of 2008.
2. The earliest timed portion of spring Chinook may be reaching

critical levels (e.g. fewer than 120 spawners in the Coldwater River this year, 78 spawners returned to the Upper Chilcotin), prompting serious conservation concerns for these stocks.

3. Chinook discussions are so important and timely for Fraser First Nations to consider because DFO is managing fisheries under the Integrated Fisheries Management Plan covering the term of June 1st, 2007 to May 31st, 2008. The escapement information that we have from this year shows a need to open the discussions of management actions on Chinook. Existing management plans may be utilizing information that has not considered the cumulative effect of potentially poor Chinook and sockeye returns to the Fraser in 2008.

Reason 5 – the Pacific Salmon Treaty Chinook Annex negotiations.

On September 11 FRAFS sent a letter to DFO (cc'd to the Watershed) that posed several questions with regard to Canada's position on re-negotiation of the Chinook Annex of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. DFO responded to those questions in a timely manner, and the first part of the FWJTC meeting focused both on the questions and DFO's response. As a result, FRAFS will be issuing a response to DFO's response to the Chinook Annex questions in order to seek clarification and more complete information. This letter will be circulated to the Watershed, and any reply from DFO will be subsequently circulated as well. The clarification and information sought are in relation to:

- Question Number 1 from the FRAFS letter was not directly answered. That question asked whether or not Canada's current re-negotiation position can meet the current and future needs of Fraser First Nations.
- Discussion at the October 10th meeting leaned toward the thought that Fraser Chinook assessment tools needed improving before they could be considered appropriate for the proposed new term of 10 years. Also concerning the 10 year term, more information is required to show how domestic changes within the terms of the PST agreement have affected Fraser First Nations interests in Fraser Chinook stocks.

The FWJTC meeting resulted in the following action items for FRAFS' biologists to complete in the next couple of weeks.

1. The FWJTC meeting notes will be completed and sent out to the watershed, which will provide Fraser First Nations with a detailed description of the issues discussed at the October 10th meeting.
2. A summary document rolling up the main issues from the FWJTC notes will be circulated with the meeting notes in order for people to quickly familiarize themselves with the main issues.
3. Further clarification and additional information will be requested of DFO as a result of the response received to the letter of inquiry concerning the PST Chinook negotiations.

