



WATERSHED TALK

NEWSLETTER

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END OF THE FRASER SOCKEYE SEASON – by FRAFS Biologist Mike Staley

The 2012 Fraser sockeye season is over in the Marine areas and the lower Fraser. The Marine test fisheries have been shut down for almost a week; the Mission hydro acoustic program was terminated this Monday and in-river test fisheries continue with catches of one to two sockeye per set. The season ended quickly, with a week remaining in August it is over.

Management of the late run impacts was a challenge this season. For the lower river First Nations, accounting for late run impacts may mean restrictions on further fishing for Chinook salmon. There is only one more weekend remaining for some of the lower Fraser First Nations to fish before the coho window closure arrives. The department has brought out sharpened pencils to calculate what if any remaining impacts are allowed on late run sockeye. Further fisheries planning will occur over the next couple of days.

There were no commercial sockeye fisheries this year or any retention of Fraser sockeye in recreational fisheries. There were commercial fisheries in the United States. The US fisheries took a significant portion of the allowable late run impacts. Unfortunately, this may have reduced access of First Nations to Fraser sockeye.

Sockeye have begun to arrive in their spawning areas in some abundance. It will be several months before we know whether the in-season estimates of abundance that were used to manage fisheries have resulted in spawning escapements at or near the targets. These data should be available late in the calendar year for most stocks and early in the New Year for the later runs.

The Fraser Panel operated as usual this season. However, the majority of the Canadian delegation is from commercial and recreational sectors that had no real expectation of significant fishing. All of the fisheries in Canada were for First Nations food, social and ceremonial fisheries. This season the interest of First Nations might have been better served with a larger, more significant delegation from First Nations fisheries managers. The consequences of the decisions of the panel, which resulted in larger than expected late run impacts by the US fishery, should have been better understood by the First Nations who have been impacted by the US catch of late run sockeye. In the future, First Nations need to play a stronger role in the Panel decision-making that impacts their fisheries.

There will be a post-season meeting of the Fraser Panel in the third week of September, where the final in season estimates will be reviewed.

We are now waiting Justice Cohen's report to see if there are any recommendations to enhance First Nations' role in in-season decision-making.

FRASER RIVER ABORIGINAL FISHERIES SECRETARIAT

c/o Nicola Tribal Association • PO Box 188 • Merritt, BC • V1K 1B8
Tel: 250-378-4235 • Fax: 250-378-9119 | info@frafts.ca • www.frafts.ca



CARP IDENTIFIED IN FRASER AND THOMPSON RIVERS – by FRAFS Operations Manager Neil Todd

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has confirmed that as of last week, they have received 8 reports of carp found in the Fraser River near both Lytton and Lillooet. Tracy Wimbush, Fisheries Program Manager for the Nicola Tribal Association, has also confirmed receiving reports and pictures of carp that were caught at Nicomen in the Thompson River last week. The fisher who caught one specimen at Nicomen said it was one of a school of about 12 that he observed. They appeared to be moving up-river.

Several media reports earlier this week speculated that the carp could be the “silver carp” (*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*), which has been known to push out local species of fish, and would have posed a major threat to the ecology of the Fraser River. However, it was reported today in one newspaper that the captured carp have been positively identified as the “common carp” (*Cyprinus carpio*). This species has been present and established in a number of lakes and ponds in British Columbia for many decades. They are non-indigenous, having probably originated in Eurasia or Asia. It appears that this is the only species of carp known to date that has established viable populations in British Columbia.

While some commentators have applied the label “invasive” to the speculated “silver carp” (and almost implying that the common carp is not), it should be noted that the common carp is also an invasive species and has undoubtedly altered the ecosystems in which it is now established.

The recent rash of documented reports of these “alien” fish in large rivers such as the Thompson and Fraser is new and unusual. Their presence in lakes such as Nicola and Okanagan is common knowledge; but these recent findings, in what does not appear to be their “natural” environment, is a bit of a mystery.

DFO recommends that any carp that are caught in the Fraser or Thompson River should be killed, and the carcass should be taken to the local DFO office or wrapped and frozen for pickup. First Nations communities in the mid-upper Fraser and Thompson systems are asked to alert their catch monitors, and to post a notice in their band offices and along fishing areas, asking their members to wrap and freeze any suspected carp or other non-indigenous fish for future examination.



Photo: Carp caught at Nicomen (Thompson Siding) Aug 24, 2012

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