February 6, 2009
Page 1 of 2

Watershed Talk

Volume XIV
Issue 18

A weekly Aboriginal fisheries newsletter for fisheries representatives and their organizations

# FRASER WATERSHED JOINT TECHNICAL COMMITTEE UPDATE

## Fraser Chinook: Part 1

### By Pete Nicklin, Fraser Fisheries Biologist

The Fraser Watershed Joint Technical Committee (FWJTC) met in Richmond on January 28th. The meeting was well attended, although attendance was lower than it has been for the previous two meetings. The meeting focused on chinook and had two primary objectives:
1. Post-season review of 2008 management information and actions; and 2. Begin preparation for the upcoming 2009 Chinook season.

**Re-cap: pre-season chinook discussions, February 2008**

2008 was unique from a Chinook management perspective.

We began 2008 with an Outlook that was extremely poor for many Fraser Chinook stocks, due to a mostly declining trend in escapements for the early-timed portion of the Fraser run, further compounded by an expectation of lower returns due to poor marine survival conditions for salmon that out-migrated to the marine area in 2005.

In order to begin addressing the 2008 conservation concern for Fraser Chinook, DFO proposed management actions intended "to achieve a 50% overall reduction in estimated harvests of Early-timed chinook". DFO indicated that a decision on implementation of the proposed management actions needed to be made by the end of February 2008.

Pre-season discussions were challenging and sometimes difficult. Fraser chinook are caught in Commercial, Recreational and First Nations fisheries. Some key technical and management issues were only partially resolved due to data limitations, and the DFO's application of its Allocation Policy in this management situation. DFO proposed management measures that the Department believed would "maintain allocation priorities" while attempting to reduce the overall harvest rate on the earliest timed chinook. Data limitations include a lack of a direct Coded Wire Tag indicator for the earliest-timed group (as defined by DFO), limited DNA information in marine areas, unknown in-season abundance of early-timed Chinook, and catch monitoring and tag recovery programs not suitably rigorous enough for management resolution at this fine of scale.

In other words, it was not possible to determine what the effect of the proposed management actions would be on exploitation rates and spawning escapement.

The data limitations were a significant - and on occasion - frustrating concern to many people involved in pre-season discussions. The kinds of management measures proposed in 2008 were serious, and it should not have come as a surprise that people wanted to make sure that the proposed measures were grounded in a sound technical and policy framework.

I believe that everyone involved in the 2008 discussions shared a common understanding of the very real conservation crisis that these chinook were in, but possibly also questioned what part of the solution they were being asked to play. These questions could have been at least partially answered with more comprehensive technical information at hand. Perhaps in recognition of these questions, DFO made a commitment to gather additional data in order to address some of the technical limitations and prepare for a detailed post-season evaluation of the management actions.

Although marine information and assessment of early timed Chinook contains information gaps, our knowledge base of in-river migration timing, stock proportions and abundance is more comprehensive. The Albion Chinook test fishery, catch monitoring, an in-river run reconstruction model, CWT and genetic stock identification work, and escapement estimates all contribute to a more defensible understanding of what happens to these chinook when they reach the mouth of the Fraser. These in-river assessment tools are not perfect, and discussions of the limitations and assumptions had – and continue – to occur.

To subscribe or submit content, contact: Aimee Arsenault, Communications Coordinator
Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat • c/o The Nicola Tribal Association • Box 188 • Merritt, BC • V1K 1B8
Tel: (604) 836-1909 • Fax: (250) 378-9119 • E-mail: aimee@nicolatribal.org • Web: www.frafs.ca

February 6, 2009
Page 2 of 2

# Watershed Talk

Volume XIV
Issue 18

A weekly Aboriginal fisheries newsletter for fisheries representatives and their organizations

**Fast-forward to 2008 post-season discussions at the FWJTC**

Preliminary escapement estimates for the early timed Chinook group - defined by DFO as Birkenhead, Chilako, Coldwater, Cottonwood, Louis, Spius and Upper Chilcotin – are below brood (with the possible exception of Chilako, which does not have an estimate for 2003). 2008 is the fourth year in a row in which spawning escapement numbers have been less than those of the parent brood year for most of these early timed stocks. Whichever way the performance of the 2008 management measures will be evaluated, the fact remains that the declining escapement trends indicate that these chinook stocks are still a conservation concern.

Our primary objective #1 for this meeting could not be met. We did not receive DFO's detailed review document of 2008 early-timed chinook management, including the "enhanced" information collected through the 2008 season, as had been originally planned for this meeting. DFO gave a post-season review presentation to the FWJTC at the January meeting, but the presentation was unable to answer some of the questions from participants in order to allow for a complete discussion pertaining to 2008. Hopefully, the detailed document will be available shortly so that lessons learned from 2008 will be able to guide discussions in preparation for 2009.

It is therefore still unknown if the various chinook management measures applied in 2008 turned out to be congruent with the legal and policy allocation requirements. This issue was brought up at both the December and January FWJTC meetings in the context of requests to review the technical and legal-technical rationale of the management of priority.

From a technical standpoint, I think discussions are progressing positively on the chinook issue, but there is need for improvement. I still see a disconnect between First Nations and DFO in the way we are working on the same technical issues at the FWJTC. We need to be working more closely together to identify information gaps through the use of common datasets, and to collaboratively identify strategic ways to improve the information used to guide difficult management decisions.

*Part 2 of the Fraser Chinook article will outline analytical research being completed by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and the Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA). This research was presented at the January FWJTC meeting.*

*The next article will also talk about management issues and information for the Fraser Spring/Summer chinook, and contain a summary of the "collaborative management" discussion that took place at the conclusion of the January FWJTC meeting.*

# UPCOMING FISHERIES MEETINGS

Monday, March 9, 2009
**Fraser Watershed Joint Technical Committee**
Location TBA (Lower Mainland)

Tuesday March 10 & Wednesday March 11, 2009
**Forum on Conservation and Harvest Planning for Fraser Salmon** (Nanaimo)
Day 1: First Nations only
Day 2: First Nations and DFO

Please RSVP to Aimee if you will be attending these meetings: aimee@nicolatribal.org
Visit www.frafs.ca for more information.

Wednesday February 25 & Thursday February 26, 2009
**BC First Nations Fisheries Council Assembly**
Vancouver Island Conference Centre
Nanaimo, BC

This assembly is being held in conjuction with the BCAFN Chiefs Assembly Feb 23-25. A draft agenda, registration form and other meeting materials have been posted to the BC First Nations Fisheries Council website, as well as BCAFN Assembly materials. Day 1 will be a technical session, day 2 will be a strategic session to discuss the future mandate, structure and function of the FNFC.

Visit www.fnfisheriescouncil.ca for more information.

To subscribe or submit content, contact: Aimee Arsenault, Communications Coordinator
Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat • c/o The Nicola Tribal Association • Box 188 • Merritt, BC • V1K 1B8
Tel: (604) 836-1909 • Fax: (250) 378-9119 • E-mail: aimee@nicolatribal.org • Web: www.frafs.ca