



WATERSHED TALK

NEWSLETTER

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FRASER SOCKEYE UPDATE

By Neil Todd, FRAFS Operations Manager & Mike Staley, FRAFS Biologist

Mike Staley held his third sockeye in-season update conference call for First Nations on Thursday, July 26. The Fraser River Panel then met Friday morning, and again Monday afternoon, July 30.

Test Fisheries

Test fishing catches, and the numbers of sockeye passing Mission, had been fairly flat late last week. However, the Area 12 fishery (Johnstone Strait) saw an increase in catch on Thursday. Over the weekend the Area 20 seine test fishery increased significantly, representing an increased flow of fish through the southern route. Stock ID suggests that there is still a significant portion of Early Summers in the mix, suggesting third bump in the abundance.

Early Stuart

The bulk of the Early Stuart run is now well on its way up-river. With the drop in river discharge to around the river levels continued to decline, the MA for Early Stuarts has been decreased somewhat. It is too soon to say, but there is some cautious optimism that returns to the spawning grounds might come close to meeting DFO's spawning escapement target of 56,000 (out of a run size of almost 200,000).

Early Summer Run

This stock aggregate is complex and the information regarding it can easily be misleading, particularly around the MA and its effects. The MA was increased slightly to

1.25 on Thursday, but the Panel chose not to adjust the MA as it is very sensitive to timing and flow. Based on information on Monday and their timing, the group of fish heading upstream, who are most affected by the flow and temperatures, had their MA increased slightly. But again, it is very sensitive to the timing of the entire migration up the canyon.

The problem for up-river stocks (and the First Nations that rely on those stocks) is that the MA is determined on the aggregate as a whole. The in-season run size for Early Summer runs was set to 410,000 last week, and was increased to 450,000 today. But over half of those fish don't go past Chilliwack, which means their MA is extremely low (non-existent for Pitt) compared to the majority of stocks that have to traverse the Fraser Canyon and Thompson or Upper Fraser systems. The MA for these stocks as of Thursday was 4.59 with an 82% difference between the numbers at Mission, and the numbers reaching the spawning grounds. Therefore, out of an estimated 120,000 Early Summer run sockeye going upstream, only about 17% – 22,100 fish – of all stocks combined will make it to the spawning grounds. On Monday that MA had increased to 4.72. This obviously has implications for all First Nations fisheries and particularly those from Chilliwack upstream. DFO appears to be starting to open FSC fisheries on the Early Summer run aggregate, despite the presence of many of the aggregate's stocks at very low run size levels.

The other issue associated with the problems caused by aggregate based management, particularly for Early

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Summer run stocks: based on the much lower MA assigned to the aggregate, the Fraser Panel might decide that there is some TAC that could be shared with the U.S. That would be fine if all that was caught was the Chilliwack stock (200,000 strong), but as noted above, there is no TAC for the majority of Early Summer run stocks. In fact, for many this year, there is a conservation concern. It is anticipated that PSC staff might determine a slight increase again in the MA, which theoretically would eliminate any TAC for sharing. The Fraser Panel will decide today on whether or not to extend the current U.S. fishery.

Today the panel approved an in-season run size for Early Summers of 450,000 and a management adjustment of 1.27. With these numbers, the calculations suggest there is no international TAC of Early Summers. The US proposed to open their so-called straits fisheries today to be reviewed tomorrow for possible closure or extension on Wednesday.

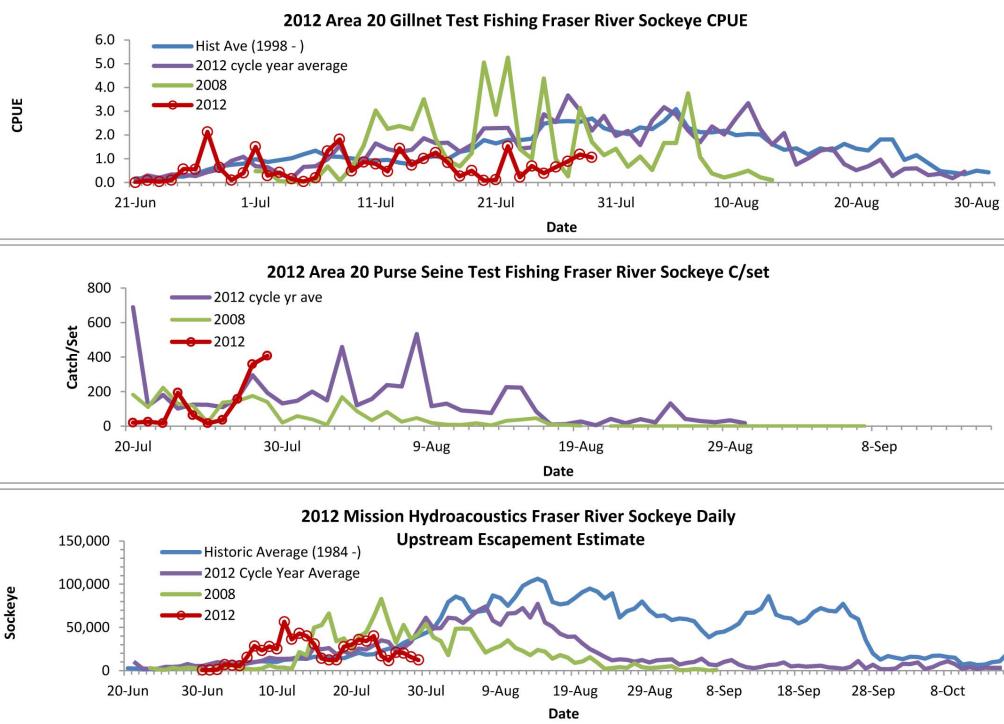
Summer Run

It is still very early and there is significant uncertainty about the migration of the Summer runs. The timing of the run is also uncertain; however, if the increased test fisheries translate into a measurable flow of fish, then the summer run may reach the P75 level. At this level, there is a small margin of fish for commercial fishing.

The Panel will meet again tomorrow – Tuesday, July 31 – to review the current information.

Environmental

Fraser River discharge is now at about 6400 cm. This is still 35-40% higher than normal, but fish are able to move up the canyon. It is to be expected that these higher than normal flows will cause higher than normal stress levels. Luckily, water temperatures are pretty much normal for this time of the year.

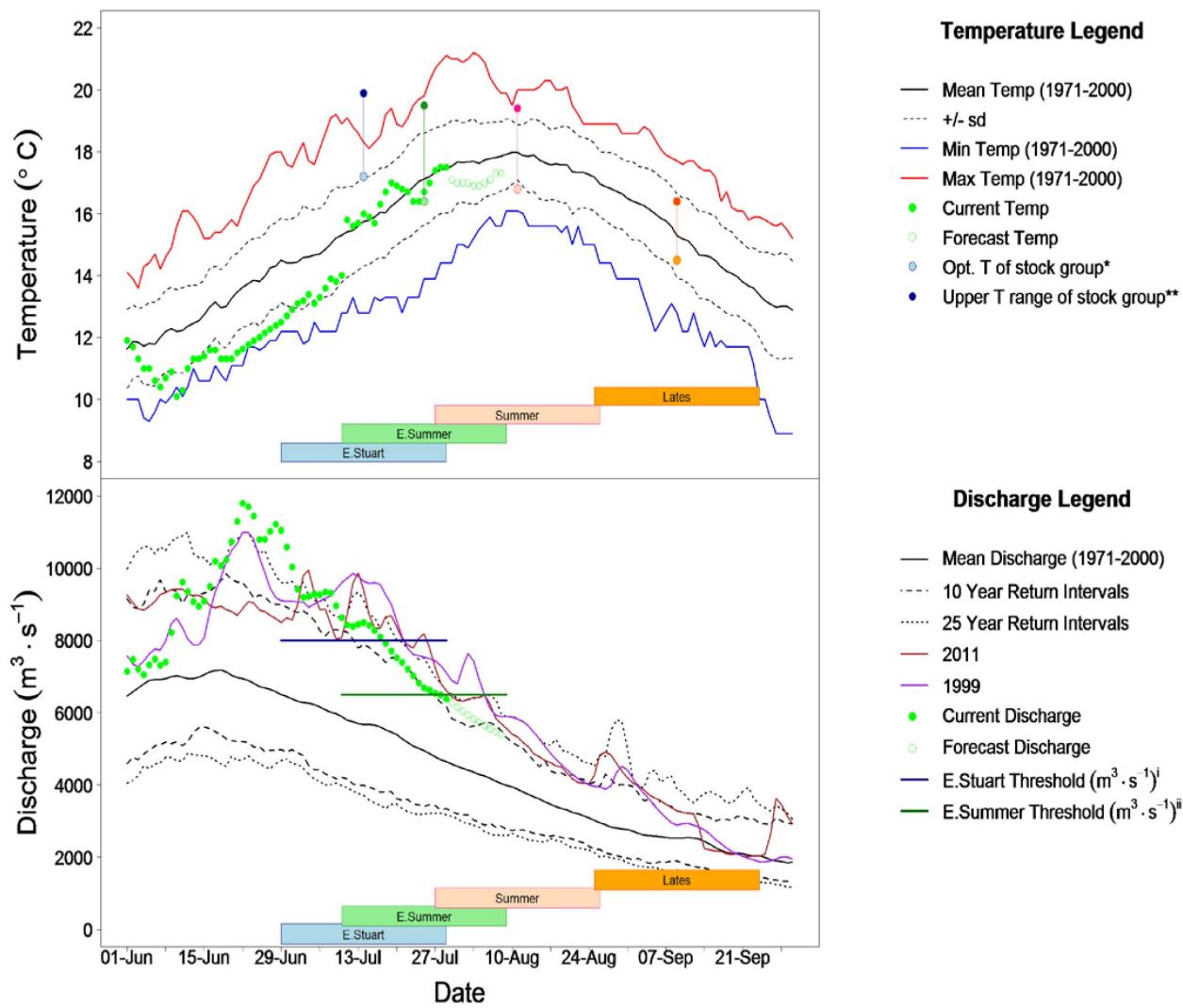


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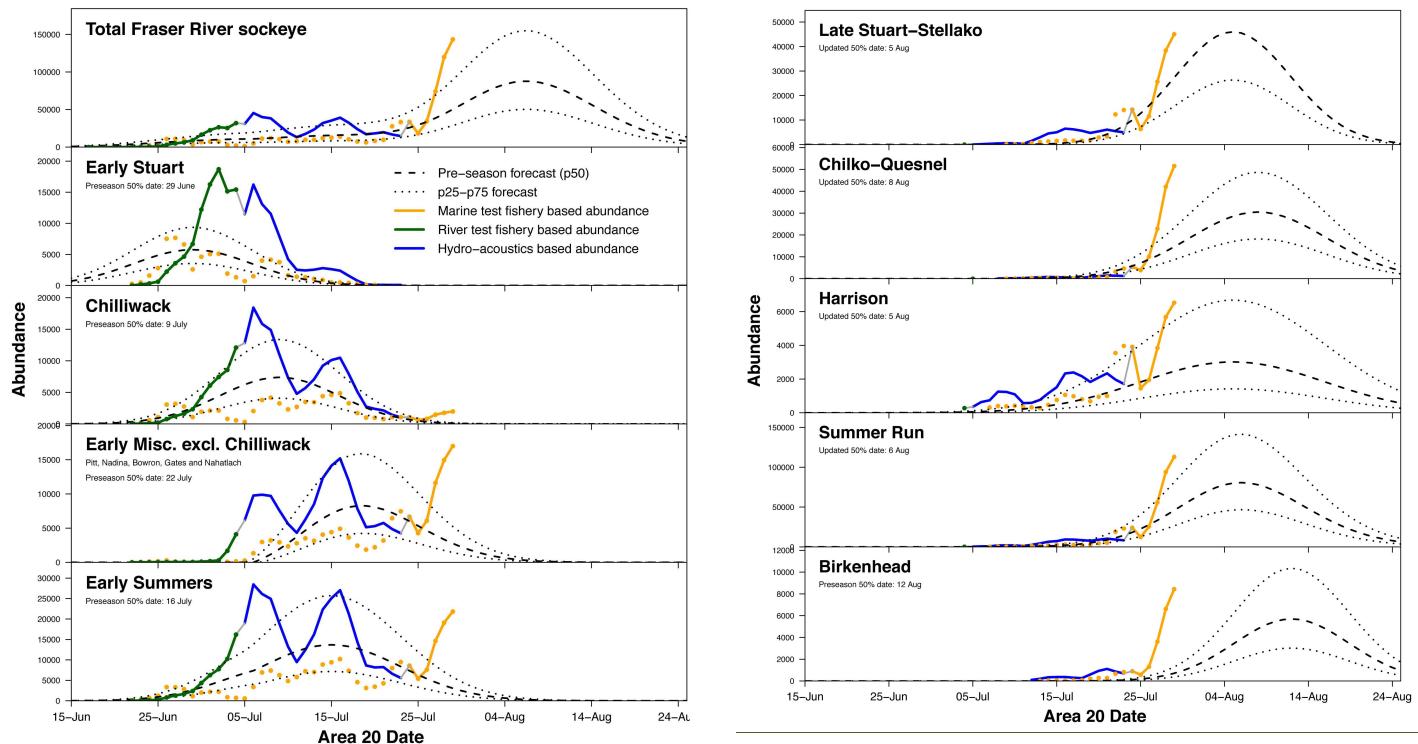


Temperature at Qualark and Discharge at Hope





2012 Fraser River Daily Sockeye Migration Abundance



FRAFS First Nations In-Season Technical Conference Calls

Thursdays at 4:00 PM unless otherwise noted

Hosted by FRAFS Biologist Mike Staley

Dial in number: 1-866-512-0904; Passcode: 4954972#



General Information

With Chinook and sockeye approaching and in the Fraser, these links may be of interest:

Albion Test Fishery – Chinook Gill Net:

<http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/fraser/docs/commercial/albionchinook-quinnat-eng.htm>

Pacific Salmon Commission Website: www.psc.org

Fraser River Fisheries Information: <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/fraser/index-eng.htm>

Pacific Salmon Commission Test Fisheries: http://www.psc.org/info_testfishing.htm

Pacific Salmon Commission News and Regulatory announcements:

http://www.psc.org/news_frpnews.htm

Fraser River Mission Escapement Reports:

http://www.psc.org/info_inseasonfraserescapement.htm

Fraser River Environmental Watch Reports: <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/habitat/frw-rfo/reports-rapports/2012/reports-rapports-12-eng.htm>