



WATERSHED TALK

NEWSLETTER

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2022 WATERSHED TALK NEWSLETTER UPDATE

By: Greg Witzky, FSMC Interim Executive Director

Since the first issue of the Watershed Talk (WST) newsletter on January 6, 1995 the purpose has been to distribute timely and efficient communications between Indigenous peoples and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). Unfortunately, the WST newsletter was put on hold during the 2021 fishing season for funding support issues beyond our control. Those issues have been resolved and we are again distributing in-season fisheries information and technical data.

It has again been decided that the Watershed Talk newsletter will revive some of its old traditions and return to a more narrative communications approach highlighting the fisheries management and conservation issues and concerns important to Indigenous peoples today. There will be less technical graphs and tables and more community profiles and stories instead. The recent FSMC and DFO joint management Motion passed by the bi-lateral Fraser Salmon Management Board (FSMB) recommending that the Fisheries Minister increase the Indigenous Food, Social, Ceremonial (FSC) allocations by 25 % for the 2022 harvest season is inserted into this week's WST newsletter for your information.



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Joint DFO/First Nations board outlines approach to seek increased 2022 opportunities for rights-based fisheries, given strong forecast, past deficits.

With strong 2022 Fraser River sockeye returns expected, DFO and First Nations on the collaborative [Fraser Salmon Management Board](#) (FSMB) have recommended that 2022 management should seek to identify opportunities for increased harvests for First Nations' Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) fisheries, outlining a proposed approach consistent with fair, sustainable and responsible fishery management.

Poor returns and environmental factors in recent years have severely limited rights-based FSC harvests of Fraser Sockeye, threatening food security for many indigenous communities. Commercial and recreational Fraser sockeye

fisheries were also closed during the past 3 years as part of DFO's precautionary fishery management to help conserve struggling populations.

Indigenous groups along the Fraser Sockeye migratory route have strongly urged that their priority access rights require that DFO increase FSC fishery access and allocations for the dominant 2022 Fraser sockeye cycle, especially with poor returns and further constraints expected again in the next 3 non-dominant Fraser Sockeye years.

DFO has been working intensively with indigenous peoples and other partners to plan for the 2022 sockeye season, and FSMB members acknowledged the enormous complexity of designing sustainable fishing plans for multiple harvester groups that put conservation first, that honour FSC priority rights and other often competing obligations, and that target stronger populations while avoiding weaker stocks.

In March 2022, the Fraser Salmon Management Council (FSMC), which represents 76 signatory Fraser and approach First Nations, passed a unanimous resolution at a special assembly urging DFO to increase 2022 Fraser sockeye FSC allocations to begin making up for past and future expected deficits. Similar calls came from both FSMC signatories and non-signatory First Nations at the March 2022 Fraser and Approach Salmon Planning Forum and through letters written to the Department.

The FSMC recommendation was forwarded to the FSMB, which was established through the historic 2019 Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement (CMA) signed by the FSMC (Tier 1) and DFO. The 8-member FSMB has been working with Independent Chair Marcel Shepert to build the foundation of a new collaborative management model for Fraser salmon and this is one of the board's first key working recommendations, approved by consensus at their August 2, 2022 meeting.

- Read the full FSMB recommendation (See below)

"Both sides worked extremely hard and showed they're 100% committed to supporting the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement as we worked to find consensus," said Shepert. "The joint FSMB recommendation is a modest gesture with an uncertain outcome, but it's a hugely important step for this new collaborative table. Our job is to design and implement systemic, transformative change that puts First Nations at the table as equal partners in managing Fraser salmon for the benefit of all future generations. We face a long and arduous journey but I'm very proud to see this group starting to move forward together. The salmon can't wait, and we are all well aware of that urgency."

Interim FSMC Executive Director Greg Witzky agreed: "This is just a first step and there's a lot of work ahead of us, but this gives me optimism that we can be a force for positive change. Our 76 delegate nations have worked very hard to respect and accommodate our diverse interests and this shows we're stronger when we work together, and sit down as equal partners with DFO and others to work collaboratively. Our challenge is to respond to the urgent needs we're hearing today, while getting to work on a new framework that will ensure healthy salmon and healthy fisheries for future generations."

The FSMB's motion urges all parties, including DFO, to use their relevant management authorities to collaborate on identifying and where possible implementing opportunities to increase FSMC member First Nations' 2022 Fraser sockeye FSC harvests by up to 25%, setting out a contingent approach subject to in-season assessment of key considerations, including conservation as the top priority.

In developing the recommendation, FSMB members recognized the challenges of implementing such a change in a complex in-season context, and the motion specifically acknowledges key management considerations and obligations that will shape the eventual outcome, noting that final decisions rest with the appropriate DFO authorities.

Finally, while recognizing that FSMC can only speak formally on behalf of the 76 FSMC signatory First Nations, the FSMB stressed that the spirit of this recommendation seeks to also extend additional FSC opportunities for non-signatory First Nations with Fraser Sockeye allocations for 2022. The board also recognized that the FSMC

mandate precludes speaking for non-signatory nations and that this advice does not in any way affect the rights for any non-signatory nations.

DFO and FSMC representatives on the Fraser Salmon Management Board have agreed to engage in-season as required to support implementation of the August 2, 2022 recommendation.

Contacts:

For further information or questions, please contact:

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 - Greg Witzky, Acting Executive Director, operations@frasersalmon.ca
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada:
 - Linda Higgins, FSMB Representative | linda.higgins@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
 - Les Jantz, JTC Co-Chair | lester.jantz@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Links:

- Fraser Salmon Management Council: <https://frasersalmon.ca>
- Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement: https://frasersalmon.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20190705_FSMC-DFO-signed-agreement.pdf
- Fraser Salmon Management Board: Independent Chair Marcel Shepert, ic@frasersalmon.ca

Full text: Fraser Salmon Management Board (FSMB) Motion approved August 2, 2022

FSMB MOTION: 2022 FRASER SOCKEYE FSC

Rationale: Whereas the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement (CMA) Guiding Principles, Schedule D states that the Aboriginal right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes has top priority, after conservation, over other users of the resource; and that after conservation, any allocation of priorities will give priority to First Nations FSC for Fraser salmon; and

- Whereas First Nations harvests of Fraser sockeye have been severely reduced due to poor returns in the past 3 years, with similar constraints expected for the next 3 years, First Nations have stressed the urgent need to provide additional opportunities for FSC access if strong returns are seen in 2022; and
- Whereas a First Nations Proposal for an FSC increase for 2022 was informed by consensus advice from the 2022 spring Fraser and Approach Salmon Forum supporting a significant increase, and by the proposal that was formally and unanimously endorsed by a quorum of FSMC delegates in a March 2022 special assembly; and
- Whereas it is acknowledged that final decision rests with DFO, as this may reflect a change from the approved 2022/23 IFMP; and
- Whereas the Department will need to consider obligations under existing, binding agreements with parties that may supersede this recommendation; and
- Whereas the FSMC can only speak formally on behalf of the 76 FSMC delegate nations, the spirit of this recommendation may extend additional opportunities for all First Nations who have Fraser sockeye allocations for 2022, and is not intended to affect in any way the rights for any non-signatory nations.

MOTION: Therefore be it resolved that the FSMB recommends the following:

That parties use their relevant management authorities to collaborate on identifying and, where possible, implementing opportunities to increase member First Nations' 2022 Fraser sockeye FSC harvests by up to 25%, subject to in-season assessment of the following considerations:

- Contingent approach: Fraser Panel needs to confirm TAC is available.
- An adaptive approach will be used to consider the possible harvest increase based on in-season availability and accessibility of TAC based on a number of factors (Management Adjustment (MAs), run-size, timing, environmental conditions, conservation constraints).
- Careful consideration to avoid increased risk of potential negative impacts to individual communities or conservation (sockeye stocks and other co-migrating species).
- Given the need to balance the urgency to act, strong prior endorsement by FSMC Member Nations and consultation requirements, it is important that the proposal/implementation be accompanied by strong joint FSMC/DFO communications.
- The potential to expand application of these opportunities to non-Member Nations based on consultations.

Moved: Pat Matthew; Seconded: Jennifer Nener; approved by consensus

The Fraser Panel met today, summary is below:

- A total of 759,400 sockeye have been accounted to date in catch and escapement past Mission. Including projections (700,000 in the marine approach) based on the marine test fisheries in Area 12 and Area 20 there are currently 1.4 million sockeye estimated to date.
 - Summer run sockeye have been taken over much of the test fishery catches in the Marine approach.
- Test fisheries in the marine approach Area 12 and 13 (Johnstone Strait) have been low for gillnets and purse seines. Area 20 (Juan de Fuca) test fisheries catches are holding with moderate catch, indicating continued marine migration. Marine test fishery abundance has indicated increasing abundances of all Fraser sockeye over the past few days.
 - Diversion through Johnstone Strait to date has been low (20%), consistent with the pre-season forecast.
- Early Summers (run timing group 2 of 4) are still present in the river and expected to be the constraining management unit to fisheries this season. Currently Early Summers are tracking below the midpoint forecast even with a delayed run timing assumption.
 - Determining an Early Summer run size to date has taken up most of the discussion. The Early Summers are either late or below the midpoint forecast. There are still some Early Summers being detected in the marine test fisheries but estimating the seaward abundance has been a challenge for PSC staff. The issue to date is a long migration time with no clear peak in migration. Statistical estimation techniques are challenged without being able to identify a clear peak in migration like we have seen this year.
- Summer run (run timing group 3 of 4) sockeye stocks of forecasted abundance (Chilko and Quesnel) are starting to show in the marine approach. There should be an indication of Summer run abundance early next week.
 - To date the Summer run is tracking at or below the midpoint forecast of 4.4 million. It is still early for an in-season estimate of abundance.
- Late run (run timing group 4 of 4) are still only in trace amounts to date. This is expected based on their later migration timing.

- More sockeye have been observed passing Big Bar. Water levels and discharge rates are below the threshold to delayed migration at Big Bar. The river conditions for Fraser sockeye look normal, no substantial change in natural mortality is expected based on environmental conditions to date.
- With an assumption of later timing (4 days later than forecast), we are tracking close to the p50 for the whole Fraser return (10 million). Using pre-season timing Fraser sockeye are tracking are between p25 and p50 (5 million - 10 million).
- The US proposed continuing the Treaty Indian commercial fishery in Area 4b,5,6c (Juan de Fuca), and an observatory reef net fishery for genetic samples. Which was approved by the Fraser Panel.
 - The US 4b, 5, 6c Tribal fisheries have been ongoing all week for commercial and Ceremonial and Subsistence fisheries.
 - The US wants to discuss a 6,7,7a Tribal and All Citizens commercial fishery on Tuesday once more information is available.
- The Fraser Panel has tentatively ~~allowed~~approved payfish retention for the test fishery program ~~starting on~~ August 10. The Panel will revisit and finalize this decision on Tuesday.
 - Payfish are taken by the test fishery program with the intention to pay for the in-season stock assessment program. Payfish are not used for in-season management and are solely to offset the cost of running the Fraser Panel in-season stock assessment program through the Pacific Salmon Commission.

The next Fraser River Panel meeting is scheduled for 11AM Tuesday August 9th.

Fraser River Panel Schedule:
Tuesday and Friday 11am.

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://psc-org.zoom.us/j/81888592927>

Or One tap mobile :

US: 8887880099,,81888592927# (Toll Free)

Or Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

US: 888 788 0099 (Toll Free)

Canada: 855 703 8985 (Toll Free)

Webinar ID: 818 8859 2927

International numbers available: <https://psc-org.zoom.us/j/81888592927>

Links

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

BC River Forecast Centre Website: <http://bcrfc.env.gov.bc.ca>

Environment Canada's Water Office Website: http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/index_e.html

Pacific Salmon Commission Website: www.psc.org

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

Pacific Salmon Commission News and Regulatory announcements: <http://www.psc.org/publications/fraser-panel-in-season-information/fraser-river-panel-regulatory-announcements/>

Fraser River Mission Escapement Reports: <http://www.psc.org/publications/fraser-panel-in-season-information/fish-passage-past-the-psc-hydroacoustic-counting-station-near-mission-bc/>

Fraser River Environmental Watch Reports: <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/habitat/frw-rfo/index-eng.html>

The Albion Test Fishery information can be found at:

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