

Pre-Season Salmon Planning in Full Swing



Sockeye salmon caught as part of a past Ahousaht food fishery.

Although First Nations in Canada have priority access to fish for food and ceremonial use, careful planning for where and when we catch those fish is still an important part of overall fisheries management. Equally important is sharing information about how many fish we will catch.

Late last month, Nuu-chah-nulth Nations shared plans for food and ceremonial fishing during a meeting of the Joint

Technical Working Group. The working group brings nations together with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to discuss technical issues related to fisheries.

This year, Nuu-chah-nulth Nations developed their fishing plans early to get ready for fishing activities which are already starting in some areas. "Planning for sockeye fisheries should start fairly quickly, because local populations (such as those in the Hobiton, Somass, and Gold Rivers) have already

began to return," said Uu-a-thluk biologist, Jim Lane.

Nations who plan to fish together, or access sockeye from a territory other than their own, are working to make sure agreements are in place to ensure food fish for their communities. This preparation is especially important during a year when sockeye returns are expected to be lower than average.

"Fisheries and Oceans Canada forecasts low returns for sockeye this year," said Lane. "They're predicting half of last year's numbers for the Somass, and lower than previous years for other

Barkley Sound stocks...It will be important to look to other species that are more abundant to help offset the limited opportunity for sockeye."

Some nations, like Ahousaht, are already making back-up plans. If the nation's fishers can't meet their community needs in their own territory, they will forge protocol agreements with other First Nations whose stocks are more abundant.

"We're going fishing in our area, but our second plan is to go on the other side and make a protocol agreement for sockeye," said Larry Swan, Fisheries Manager for Ahousaht First Nation.

Other nations also have access to a variety of species but still hope to catch their sockeye allocation. Part of the Ma-nulth Treaty, Huu-ay-aht First Nations is working to increase their effort on the water to make that possible.

"Other nations have access to a variety of species in their territory, but still hope to catch their sockeye allocation..." says Larry Johnson, Director of Lands and Resources for Huu-ay-aht. "The most challenging thing for me is to know how much to budget for food fish and how much to leave so that our fishers can still enjoy their treaty right."

Ma-nulth Nations work on their fishing plans individually before Fisheries and Oceans Canada rolls

them together into a larger plan. Other nations, like Tseshaht and Hupacasath, plan their sockeye fisheries jointly before starting to fish on the Somass River in late May or early June.

In the northern region, Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nations relies entirely on their territory for food and ceremonial fisheries. "They have been fishing in the Gold River for five thousand years," says Uu-a-thluk biologist, Roger Dunlop. Dunlop expects the nation to meet its need for food and ceremonial sockeye once again.

For more information on salmon planning, contact your nation's fisheries manager or your Uu-a-thluk biologist.

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—Larry Johnson, Director of Lands and Resources for Huu-ay-aht

This year's Fraser River stocks will have limited opportunity, with likely one or two weeks in late July and early August. There will also be other opportunities for pink salmon later in August, and chinook and coho throughout summer.



Larry Swan of Ahousaht Fisheries measures one of the Nation's food and ceremonial fish during a past fishery.

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Some are predicting that sockeye returns on the west coast of Vancouver Island will be less abundant this year.