



Pacific Fishery Management Council **NEWS RELEASE**

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PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL RELEASES SALMON ABUNDANCE FORECASTS FOR 2009 FISHING SEASONS

Portland, OR – Scientists from the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Salmon Technical Team have tallied the number of spawning fish that returned in 2008 and have completed their forecast of 2009 salmon numbers. Council Vice Chairman Mark Cedergreen of Westport, Washington notes that “The forecasts are a mixed bag. The high number of Columbia River hatchery coho should be good news for Washington and northern Oregon fisheries, but California fisheries are facing another very low Sacramento River fall Chinook return.”

2009 Salmon Abundance Estimates

Abundance estimates for 73 salmon stocks were developed and reviewed by the Council’s Salmon Technical Team in a meeting February 17-20. These estimates and the associated analysis are published in *Preseason Report I: Stock Abundance Analysis for 2009 Ocean Salmon Fisheries*, now available on the Council website or the Council office¹.

Abundance South of Cape Falcon, Oregon

Sacramento River and Klamath River fall Chinook stocks fuel commercial and sport Chinook fisheries in California and in Oregon south of Cape Falcon (near Nehalem in northern Oregon). In 2008, the unprecedented collapse of the large Sacramento River stock caused the complete closure of these fisheries for the first time in history. In 2009, the forecast is for another very poor return of Sacramento fall Chinook but a healthy return of Klamath River fall Chinook.

¹ <http://www.pcouncil.org/salmon/salpre.html>

The 2009 forecast for Sacramento River Fall Chinook is 122,196 absent any fishing, which is at the bottom end of the spawning escapement goal range of 122,000-180,000 adult natural spawning and hatchery fish². The 2009 forecast compares to the 2008 forecast of 54,600. While roughly twice the abundance of last year's unprecedented low, this would be the third lowest return since 1992³.

"This is grim news for the State of California," said Council Chairman Don Hansen. "We won't be able to talk about this without using the word 'disaster.' There has been a tremendous appeal from people in Fort Bragg, California for at least some sort of Chinook season to target the healthy Klamath runs in 2009, and people on the central Oregon coast have been asking for a fishery on just hatchery-origin coho. But that was before this forecast was released. The Council process will consider the pros and cons of this issue thoroughly at our meetings in March and April."

Klamath River fall Chinook are forecast to be at a level of 81,000 fish prior to any fishing, compared to a natural spawner floor of 35,000, and a goal of 41,700 to produce the maximum sustainable number of fish.

Abundance North of Cape Falcon, Oregon

The picture is more optimistic for salmon stocks north of Cape Falcon.

The forecast for Columbia River hatchery coho stocks is for over one million fish. This is about five times greater than the 2008 forecast and rivals the big years of 2001 and 1991. In addition, the forecast for Oregon coastal natural coho is improved over 2008, and is the second highest forecast since 1996. However, some coho runs, such as Stillaguamish and Snohomish, are expected to be weak in 2009.

The 2009 aggregate Columbia River Chinook forecasts are also greater than the 2008 forecasts. The Columbia River "tule" stocks, which have an ocean residence pattern off the mouth of the Columbia River and to the north, support Chinook fisheries in the area north of Cape Falcon. However, the mix of the two main components of the tule stocks is different this year, which may not be beneficial to ocean fisheries.

"The Council will face management challenges for both coho and Chinook mixed-stock

² Spawning escapement is the number of fish returning to spawn after harvest and other removals from the population. The spawning escapement goal is sometimes called the "conservation objective."

³ Salmon are anadromous, which means they hatch in rivers, creeks, and hatcheries; migrate to the ocean for several years; and then return to the rivers of their birth to spawn. Most Sacramento River fall Chinook live to be about three years old, but there is a significant four-year-old component in some years, and some fish return as two-year-olds and five-year-olds. Sacramento fall Chinook of catchable age this year were spawned in 2005 and 2006 and migrated to the ocean in 2006-2007.

fisheries north of Cape Falcon,” said Council Staff Officer Chuck Tracy, “but the March Council meeting should result in a variety of open-ocean fishing alternatives for the public to comment on.”

2008 Spawning Escapements

Salmon spawning escapement numbers for 2008 were developed and reviewed by the Council’s Salmon Technical Team in a four-day meeting January 20-23. These estimates, as well as fishery landings, regulations, and economic effects are published in the *Review of 2008 Ocean Salmon Fisheries*, now available on the Council website or the Council office⁴.

2008 Escapement South of Cape Falcon

As noted above, California and Oregon Chinook fisheries South of Cape Falcon are supported by Sacramento River fall Chinook. As recently as 2002, 768,000 adults returned to spawn. The average catch in commercial and sport fisheries south of Cape Falcon supported by this stock, known in those years as the “workhorse stock,” was almost 600,000 fish from 1983 to 2006.

In 2008, the forecast of poor Sacramento returns led to the largest fishery closure on record. That year, adult spawning escapement for Sacramento River fall Chinook failed to meet the escapement goal (122,000-180,000 adults) for the second time in 16 years. The forecast in 2008 was for less than 60,000 spawners, while the actual return was about 66,000. “The forecast was remarkably accurate, particularly given the unprecedented nature of the situation,” said Council Executive Director Donald McIsaac.

In addition, the count of jacks in the Central Valley fall Chinook return this past fall was the second worse return on record. Jacks are immature fish that return to the rivers at age two (unlike adult fish, which return at age three, four, or five). Jack returns are used to forecast the next year’s return. Only 4,061 jacks returned, compared to a long-term average of about 40,000.

Klamath River returns were well below forecast levels, with 31,000 naturally-spawning adults in 2008, which is below the 35,000 minimum escapement floor and the 40,700 management objective for 2008⁵. This is the fourth year in the past five with natural spawning escapements under 35,000 adult fish. However, 20,300 jacks returned to the river in 2008—one of the top two jack counts since 1986.

⁴ <http://www.pcouncil.org/salmon/salsafe08/salsafe08.html>

⁵ Klamath River fall Chinook triggered an overfishing concern in 2007 and are under a rebuilding program. The annual management objective relates to rebuilding the stock.

Oregon coastal coho had much better returns in 2008 than forecast, with a total of 165,700 natural spawners. This was the best return in four years and the fifth best since at least 1970.

2008 Escapement North of Cape Falcon

North of Cape Falcon, Columbia River hatchery coho returns were almost triple the 2008 forecast of 196,700. Columbia River Chinook returns were also better than forecast. However, there were at least two coho stocks in Washington that did not meet their spawning escapement goals.

Social and Economic Impacts

North of Cape Falcon, fishing communities should benefit from increased harvest levels over last year. However, South of Cape Falcon, where Sacramento fish stocks have the biggest impact, the economic implications of the low abundance of Sacramento River fall Chinook salmon will be substantial, particularly after several years of poor returns. The commercial and recreational salmon fishery had an average economic impact to communities in 2003-2007 of \$66 million (\$38 million in the commercial fishery and \$28 million in the recreational fishery), but only \$6.9 million in 2008.

In 2008, a Federal fishery disaster was declared due to the collapse of the Sacramento River fall Chinook stock, and Congress appropriated \$170 million in aid. To date, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (www.psmfc.org) has distributed approximately \$110 million to fishing businesses in California, Oregon, and Washington.

Causes

The reason for the sudden collapse of the Sacramento fall Chinook stock in 2007 and 2008 is not readily apparent, although both natural and hatchery-produced fish have been similarly affected. The Council requested a multi-agency task force led by the National Marine Fisheries Service's West Coast Science Centers to research about 45 possible reasons for the collapse. A draft report of the research results will be presented at the Council's April 4-9, 2009 meeting in Millbrae, California.

Management Process

The Council will review the stock size projections and set harvest levels this spring. At its March 7-13 meeting in Seattle, Washington, the Council will develop a range of management options. Salmon management discussions begin on March 8, when the Council will review 2008 salmon fisheries and discuss stock abundance estimates. The Council will tentatively adopt a range of salmon management measures for analysis by Council technical teams and scientists on March 9, and discussions will continue

through March 12. On Thursday, March 12, the Council is scheduled to adopt up to three fishing season options for public review.

Public hearings to receive input on the options are scheduled for March 30 in Westport, Washington and Coos Bay, Oregon; and for March 31 in Eureka, California. The Council will consult with scientists, hear public comment, and revise preliminary decisions until it chooses a final option at its meeting during the week of April 5 in Millbrae, California. All Council meetings are open to the public.

At its April 4-9 meeting in Millbrae, the Council will narrow these options to a single season recommendation to be forwarded to National Marine Fisheries Service for their final approval before May 1.

Council Role

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 for the purpose of managing fisheries 3-200 miles offshore of the United States of America coastline. The Pacific Council recommends management measures for fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington.

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On the Web

Online press packet: http://www.pcouncil.org/newsreleases/sal_presspacket2009.html
(to be posted on the afternoon of Wednesday, February 25)

Pacific Fishery Management Council: <http://www.pcouncil.org>

Schedule of hearings: <http://www.pcouncil.org/events/2009/salproc09.html#hearings>

Geographical points used in salmon management:
<http://www.pcouncil.org/facts/geosalmon.pdf>