



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

August 13, 2008

SUBJECT: Biological Technical Meeting regarding the low returns of Sacramento River fall Chinook in 2007 and projected for 2008.

Dear Colleague:

In April 2008 the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) adopted the most restrictive salmon fisheries in the history of the west coast, in response to the sudden collapse of Sacramento River fall Chinook (SRFC) salmon and the poor status of many west coast coho salmon populations. The PFMC adopted a complete closure of commercial and recreational Chinook fisheries south of Cape Falcon, Oregon, allowing only for a mark-selective hatchery coho recreational fishery of 9,000 fish from Cape Falcon, Oregon, to the Oregon/California border. In response to these severe restrictions, the PFMC requested that NOAA Fisheries convene a scientific forum to investigate potential causes of the precipitous decline in status of the SRFC stock. As a secondary concern, the PFMC also requested analysis of the potential depression of other salmon stocks that contribute to west coast marine fisheries. A biological working group (WG) has therefore been convened to conduct an assessment of the SRFC collapse.

During previous salmon and marine fish status reviews, the agency has had success obtaining new and useful information from biologists familiar with the species or stock under review. This information can play an important role in the subsequent WG assessment. To that end, we have scheduled a public biological technical meeting to be held on August 29, 2008, in the Stanford room of the John E. Moss Federal Building, 650 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, California 95814. We will begin the meeting at 10:00 AM and conclude by 4:30 PM. Following opening remarks by a representative of the WG, we wish to hear from co-managers, and others, with scientific information on SRFC or other Chinook or coho stocks that would provide context or insight into the possible causes for the sharp decline in SRFC spawning escapement experienced in 2007 and forecast for 2008. If it is possible for you to attend, please be prepared to discuss the following topics:

- I. Information and data directly related to diminished survival and/or production of the 2004 and 2005 broods of SRFC, including (if known) their source(s), severity, geographic scope, and relative contribution. The attached questions are provided for your consideration of existing threats.
- II. Information and data directly related to the effectiveness of current mitigation strategies designed to ameliorate current threats to the stock.

If you have any questions or comments about this meeting or wish to arrange to make a Powerpoint or other type of presentation (strict limit of 10 minutes in length) at the meeting, please contact Tommy Williams at (831)-420-3912 or by e-mail at Tommy.Williams@noaa.gov. We would also appreciate it if you would email Tommy Williams to let us know whether or not you, or a representative, are planning to attend. Thanks for your consideration and we hope to see you at the meeting.

Please note, cameras, including cell phones with cameras are not allowed in this Federal facility.

Sincerely,

John E. Stein
Churchill Grimes
Leads, SRFC WG

Attachment

cc: Donald McIsaac, PFMC
Norm Bartoo, SWFSC
Usha Varanasi, NWFSC
SRFC WG

ATTACHMENT

QUESTIONS RELATIVE TO THE STATUS OF THE 2004 AND 2005 BROODS (MAJORITY OF ADULTS RETURNED IN 2007 AND 2008) OF THE SACRAMENTO FALL CHINOOK SALMON

Freshwater Biological Focus

- 1) Was there a disease event in the egg incubation, fry emergence, rearing, or downstream migration phases?
- 2) Was there a change in recovery, spawning and/or release strategies during hatchery operations?
- 3) Was there a change in the methodology or operations of the San Francisco Bay net pen 'acclimation' program for trucked hatchery fish?
- 4) Were there any problems with fish food or chemicals used at hatcheries?

Freshwater Habitat Areas Focus

- 1) Were there drought or flood conditions during the spawning, incubation, or rearing phases?
- 2) Was there any pollution event where juveniles were present?
- 3) Was there anything unusual about the flow conditions below dams during the spawning, incubation, or rearing phases?
- 4) Were there any in-water construction events (bridge building, etc.) when this brood was present in freshwater or estuarine areas?
- 5) Was there anything unusual about the water withdrawals in the rivers or estuary areas when this brood was present?
- 6) Was there any unusual temperature or other limnological conditions when this brood was in freshwater or estuarine areas?
- 7) Was there any unusual population dynamics of typical food or prey species used by juvenile Chinook salmon in the relevant freshwater and estuarine areas?
- 8) Was there anything unusual, in the same context as above for juvenile rearing and outmigration phases, about habitat factors during the return of the 2 year olds from this brood?
- 9) Was there a change in the recovery of juvenile outmigrants observed in the USFWS mid-water trawl surveys and other monitoring programs in the Delta.

Freshwater Species Interactions Focus

- 1) Was there any unusual striped bass population dynamics or behavior when this brood was in freshwater or estuarine areas?
- 2) Is there a relationship between declining Delta smelt, longfin smelt, and threadfin shad populations in the Delta and Central Valley Chinook survival?

Marine Biological Focus

- 1) Was there anything unusual about the ocean migration pattern of the 2004 and 2005 broods?

- 2) Was there anything unusual about the recovery of tagged fish groups from the 2004 and 2005 broods the ocean salmon fisheries?

Marine Habitat Areas Focus

- 1) Were there periods of reduced upwelling or other oceanographic physical conditions during the period of smolt entry into the marine environment, or during the period of marine residence up to the return to freshwater of the jacks?
- 2) Were plankton levels depressed off California, especially during the smolt entry periods?
- 3) Oceanography: temperature, salinity, upwelling, currents, ~~red tide~~, etc.

Marine Species Interactions Focus

- 1) Were there any unusual population dynamics of typical food or prey species used by juvenile Chinook salmon in marine areas? (plankton, krill, juvenile anchovy or sardines, etc.)
- 2) Was there an increase in bird predation on juvenile salmonids caused by a reduction in the availability of other forage food?
- 3) Was there increased predation on salmonids by other finfish species (e.g., lingcod)?

Cumulative Ecosystem Effects Focus

- 1) Were there other ecosystem effects?
- 2) Were there synergistic effects of significant factors?