



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Mailing Address: 600 Capitol Way N • Olympia, WA 98501-1091 • (360) 902-2200, TDD (360) 902-2207
Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building • 1111 Washington Street SE • Olympia, WA

February 15, 2001

RECEIVED

FEB 21 2001

DEMO

Mr. Jim Lone, Chairman
Pacific Fishery Management Council
2130 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 224
Portland, Oregon 97201

Dear Mr. Lone:

As you know, the Pacific Fishery Management Council informed the Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in September 2000 that the fall run of Queets coho had not met its spawning escapement objective of 5,800 fish for three consecutive years and, therefore, met the definition of an overfished stock under Amendment 14 of the Council's Pacific Coast Salmon Plan (FMP). Pursuant to Amendment 14, the Council directed the Salmon Technical Team (STT) to work with the state and the Quinault tribal fishery managers to complete an assessment of the stock within one year.

We know that both state and tribal biologists have been under extremely heavy workloads due to the Pacific Salmon Commission's action that requires the development of an abundance based management plan for coho salmon covered by the Pacific Salmon Treaty. This new abundance based approach to management of coho stocks encountered in the fisheries along the west coast of Vancouver Island will undoubtedly have very positive affects on Queets River coho and other coho stocks included in the Council's FMP. In recognition of the workload issues impacting those members of the STT who are responsible for drafting the report on Queets River coho, and because of the recent and dramatic improvement in the health of this stock, we are taking this opportunity to offer some thoughts and recommendations regarding the background and management of this stock and the necessity of the STT writing an assessment report for Queets River coho.

The Queets River is located in the rain forest of the Olympic Peninsula on the southwest side of the Olympic Mountain range. Much of the mainstem river is located within the Olympic National Park (ONP), with the remainder flowing through the QIN reservation, before emptying into the Pacific Ocean along the Washington Coast. The terrain within the ONP is steep and the annual rainfall often exceeds 100 inches per year. The river bed and spawning habitat are affected by slides due to the heavy rainfall and unstable terrain. Poor logging practices have also played a significant role in the degradation and loss of spawning and rearing habitat in the tributaries of the Queets River.

Mr. Jim Lone
February 15, 2001
Page 2

Queets River coho has been co-managed by the QIN and the Department for many years. Like most salmon stocks, Queets coho has fluctuated in abundance, but has generally been viewed as a healthy stock. The Clearwater River, and other tributaries to the Queets River, have been heavily logged over time. This has increased the variability of both flows and subsequent freshwater production of smolts. As with many other coho stocks, ocean environmental conditions also play a large role in the productivity of this stock.

In addition to the adult production that results from wild fish, the QIN has a wild coho supplementation program in this system. QIN's supplementation program in the Queets is recognized as an outstanding program relative to the attention given to capture and use of naturally spawning brood stock and acclimation and release of juveniles from ponds located throughout the Queets system. Adult production from the supplementation program has ranged from 521 to 3,900 fish and has likely assisted the natural population's resiliency in years of low wild run sizes.

The co-managers have historically managed the harvest of this stock to meet the spawning maximum sustained yield escapement range of 5,800-14,500 fish. In the last ten years, the spawning escapement goal has been reached five of those years, not including the natural spawning supplemental production. In seven of the last ten years the escapement has been at least 80 percent of the goal. Like many other hatchery and wild populations of coho salmon along the West Coast, we believe the poor ocean environmental conditions that have been present the last decade have played a large role in this stock's relatively poor productivity.

The 1991 brood year was hit particularly hard by exceptionally high (record) instream flows in 1992. The subsequent spawning escapement in 1994 plummeted to 1,105 fish. The returning adults in 1997, from the 1994 brood, were also depressed, numbering only 1,851 fish. We are pleased to report, however, that the combination of restrictive harvest regimes, favorable instream conditions, and improved ocean conditions resulted in a 2000 spawning escapement for this brood cycle of an estimated 6,700 fish. Furthermore, the co-managers are predicting a 2001 ocean age 3 run-size of 12,000 fish.

As you know, in years when the stock has been predicted to return below spawning escapement range, the co-managers have recommended to the Council to set harvest rates at absolute minimum levels. In 1994, when Queets coho and many other stocks were forecasted to return at record low levels, the coho fisheries north of Cape Falcon were closed. In 1997, 98, 99, and 2000, when Queets coho were forecasted to return below the spawning escapement goal, the Council adopted ocean management measures recommended by the co-managers which reduced the harvest rate on Queets coho by Council-managed fisheries to under 10 percent. In-river sport and tribal net fisheries have also been curtailed or closed to protect Queets wild coho throughout this time period.

Mr. Jim Lone
February 15, 2001
Page 3

Queets Coho Harvest Rate in
Council-Managed Waters

1997 - 3.4%
1998 - 4.1%
1999 - 9.4%
2000 - 6.8%

In recognition of:

- 1) the dramatic improvement in the health of this stock observed in 2000 and forecasted for 2001, and
- 2) the steps underway in the PSC forum to assure that U.S. ocean and west coast of Vancouver Island fisheries to meet the conservation needs of U.S. naturally spawning coho stocks, and
- 3) the history of the co-managers and the Council of reducing harvest rates on Queets coho in Council-managed waters to levels comparable to stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act and similar to the rate identified under 3.2.4.2 of the FMP (Natural Stocks with Minimal Harvest Impacts in Council-Managed Fisheries), and
- 4) the workload currently on STT members,

QIN and WDFW recommends that the Council postpone and reconsider the necessity of the assignment made to STT and the subsequent actions defined in the FMP under 3.2.3.2 (Assessment) and 3.2.3.3 (Council Action) until March 2002. At that time, the Council will have an opportunity to reassess the health of the Queets River coho stock and the need to proceed with the actions required in the FMP for an overfished stock.

We will be prepared to discuss, with the Council, our proposal at the March 2001 meeting. If you have questions or would like to discuss our proposal prior to the meeting, please contact Phil Anderson at (360) 902-2720, or Ed Johnstone at (360) 276-8215.

Sincerely,



Philip Anderson
Special Assistant to the Director
Intergovernmental Policy



Ed Johnstone
Policy Representative
Quinault Indian Nation

PA:EJ:dak

cc: Jeff Koenings, Rich Lincoln

