

PSC Manager-to-Manager Meeting

The Pacific Salmon Commission Southern Panel bilateral manager-to-manager meeting was held on March 27th in Richmond, British Columbia. The Canadian delegation was comprised of several regional management staff from DFO and their PSC Southern Panel representatives. The U.S. delegation had PSC Southern Panel members, technical staff and some of the Fraser Panel representatives that met the previous day.

The meeting began with a summary of the technical committee schedule, followed by presentations of abundance forecasts, status determinations, and fishery structure.

Both Parties emphasized that this was a "*transition phase*" of the new PST coho agreement. It is anticipated that both countries will soon ratify this agreement and it will be fully implemented in the very near future.

The coho technical committee met the previous day and reviewed the new coho FRAM model, abundance forecasts, status determinations, and fishery structure for the 2002 seasons.

The coho technical committee reported that a bilateral work plan is in the early planning stage. The coho technical committee co-chairs indicated that it would be important to establish regular communications with the PSC Southern Panel regarding task priorities and progress.

The coho technical committee's primary focus will initially be on the development of a Regional Planning Model. It will likely incorporate much of the U.S. coho FRAM model.

The Canadian Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) personnel presented their review of the status of four coho management units: Interior Fraser (including Thompson); Georgia Basin; West Coast Vancouver Island; and the South-Central Coast. The Interior Fraser management unit is considered to be in low status and will be again limiting Canadian fishery opportunity in 2002. They indicated some uncertainty on the level of marine survival that the Interior Fraser coho will exhibit. They mentioned that last year the Thompson coho had good marine survival and the spawning escapement was about 2.5 times the forecast. However, they feel that as a precaution, poor marine survival is the approach to utilize in forecasting this year's abundance. DFO technical staff stressed the importance of the long-term rebuilding rate for this stock.

For the Georgia Basin and West Coast Vancouver Island, DFO staff indicated that their overall status is moderate with caution being extended to the fishery forecast.

The South Coast coho is considered to be in the low category. This is primary due to the marine survival appearing to continue to be low.

The DFO personnel indicated that this meeting was about three weeks early for having hard copies of their final forecasts for review. They indicated that they are just beginning their normal informal consultation process for the development of the upcoming season. The target date for plan development is mid-April. The U.S. representatives encouraged Canada to develop a more formal consultation process with an earlier timing in the near future.

Canada indicated that the Canadian fishery structure would be similar to last year (2001), again driven by the Interior Fraser coho and West Coast Vancouver Island (WCVI) Chinook. DFO indicated that effort would be taken to constrain exploitation rates to 3% on Interior Fraser and 15% on WCVI Chinook.

The U.S. presented an overview of general forecast methodology and stock status for Puget Sound and Washington coastal management units for coho. Information was given that all Puget Sound management units were in moderate status, except Skagit, which was abundant. The Washington coastal management units were all in the abundant category except for Grays Harbor, which was moderate.

Questions from the Canadian delegation centered on marine survival forecast methodology, forecast error, and mass-marking rates for hatchery stocks.

The U.S. managers provided information on the current fishery options adopted by PFMC in March and stressed that these options were still under discussion within the North of Falcon process. Emphasis was given that the U.S. management objectives are expressed in total fishing mortality rates and that the comprehensive package of fisheries were still under development.

Questions from Canada focused on Endangered Species Act (ESA) constraints and their deviation, methodology for estimating coho bycatch in sockeye and chum fisheries, whether coho bycatch are ceilings, and whether DNA sampling of coho bycatch occurs.