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PSC Manager-to-Manager Meeting

The annual US/Canada Manager-to-Manager meeting was held on March 6th in Richmond, British Columbia. The Canadian delegation was comprised of several regional management staff from DFO and their PSC Southern Panel coho working group representatives. The U.S. delegation had PSC Southern Panel coho working group members and technical staff and tribal and state managers. The meeting was held a week earlier than last year in an attempt to get the Canadian stock forecasts and preliminary fishing plans for inputs into the coho and Chinook FRAM for the 2003 fisheries prior to the March PFMC meeting.

The meeting began with a brief overview of the coho and Chinook FRAM and the U.S. process for developing pre-season fishing plans. The U.S. delegation provided Canada with an abbreviated version of the PFMC PSF I. A summary of the abundance forecasts and status determinations was discussed.

The coho technical committee's primary focus this year will be on the development of a Regional Planning Model for implementation of the bi-lateral coho management agreement. It will 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 2003. DFO technical staff stressed the importance of the long-term rebuilding rate for this stock.

For the Georgia Basin and West Coast Vancouver Island coho, DFO staff indicated that their very preliminary information is that the overall status is moderate with caution being extended to the fishery forecast. Canada expressed concerns for their Georgia Strait coho stocks. DFO also provided an overview of the status of their Chinook management units indicating that the WCVI and upper Fraser units abundances are trending upward while the lower Fraser and Georgia Basin are expected to be similar to last year's abundance.

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

Canada indicated that the Canadian fishery structure would be similar to last year (2002), again driven by the Interior Fraser coho and West Coast Vancouver Island (WCVI) Chinook. DFO indicated that effort would be taken to constrain Canadian exploitation rates to 3% on Interior Fraser coho and 15% on WCVI Chinook. They indicated that they were considering Marked Selective Fisheries for all southern BC sports fisheries beginning July 1, a month earlier start than last year.

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

The U.S. managers provided information on the current fishery options that would be proposed during the PFMC meeting in March and stressed that these options were still under discussion within the North of Falcon process. We told Canada that we expected that U.S. fisheries would likely be driven by management units such as Upper Fraser coho, Puget Sound chinook, Hood Canal and Strait of Juan de Fuca coho and possibly Grays Harbor and Oregon Coastal Natural coho. Emphasis was given that the U.S. management objectives are incorporated in the comprehensive package of fisheries that are still under development.

There was a breakout for technical information exchange on stock abundance and fishery expectations. Once we get the DFO projections in place, we will be sending the FRAM input files to DFO for their review and use.

DFO provided a heads up that some changes in stock abundance forecasts may result from the PSARC process.

The U.S. managers mentioned the Area 5/6 mixed stock fishery for Chinook that includes a pilot selective fishery for the summer of 2003. The U.S. also indicated that it would continue to constrain its exploitation rates to not exceed 10% on Thompson coho, as it did in 2002.

At the conclusion of the meeting we summarized several action items. Canada will provide their final 2003 chinook forecasts to us by possibly some time the week of March 10. Each country agreed to develop a flow chart to describe our respective planning processes. We agreed that next year's Manager -to-Manager meeting would be split into two meetings; the first being a technical exchange of preliminary forecasts in early March and the second a Managers meeting in mid-March to exchange preliminary fishing plans. Canada expressed some interest in expanding this forum to provide the opportunity to discuss management plans for species other than salmon to lead to more consistent cross-border fishing plans.

PFMC
March 11, 2003

