

PACIFIC SALMON COMMISSION ACTIVITIES PFMC BRIEFING PAPER

The Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC) met January 9th -13th in Portland, Oregon for the exchange of post season reports for the 2005 fisheries. Preliminary indications are that all fisheries were within their treaty obligations. Chinook, coho, and chum issues were discussed during the post-season review of fisheries by the PSC and the PSC Southern Panel.

The PSC concluded its annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia the week of February 13th – 17th, 2006 at which several important issues were discussed. This was the 21st annual meeting of the PSC. The PSC schedule was to focus upon the bi-lateral fisheries that were still unresolved.

The following issues of relevance to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) were discussed at these sessions:

Chinook:

First, the chinook fisheries off the coast of the West Coast of Vancouver Island (WCVI) were a main focal point of discussion during the post-season review. Fisheries off WCVI can significantly affect stocks originating from the Columbia River and Puget Sound, including several listed under the Endangered Species Act. The shift in the seasonal catch distribution pattern of this fishery and its potential effect on U.S. stocks were discussed with Canadian representatives. A technical assessment of this pattern shift will be completed this summer by the Chinook Technical Committee (CTC) of the PSC. It is anticipated that further policy discussion of the implications associated with this fishing pattern shift will occur this fall with Canada.

Second, the PSC established a Chinook Interface Group (CIG) a couple years ago to help provide policy guidance to the CTC while working on assignments relating to Chinook salmon. The CIG and a workgroup of the bi-lateral CTC met during the January and February PSC meetings and will continue to work on a prioritized list of Chinook assignments.

Coho:

The Southern Panel reviewed the 2005 post season catch report and discussed stock status for the various management units covered by the PST coho agreement. The Interior Fraser management unit consists of five separate populations, (including Thompson coho), is expected to continue to remain a management concern for Canada for several years. These stock groups are now in the process of being listed under SARA, Canada's equivalent to ESA, which has been recently enacted by the Canadian federal government. The expected schedule for Interior Fraser coho SARA considerations by Canada will be in the spring of 2006.

The Canadian members of the PSC Southern Panel expressed concern regarding the most recent estimates of the U.S. interceptions of Thompson R. coho in 2004. During the February meeting, the PSC Coho Technical Committee revised its estimate of the total exploitation rate by U.S. fisheries on Interior Fraser coho during the 2004 season upwards to 10.7%, from the preliminary estimate of below 10% provided in January. The revised estimate reflects corrected catches in Puget Sound terminal areas, particularly in Bellingham/Samish Bays, Hood Canal, and Port Gardner Bay (terminal area for Stillaguamish and Snohomish). Both the January and February exploitation rates

were generated through the use of coho FRAM based on post season estimates on fishery mortalities and escapements.

Under the PSC Southern Coho Agreement, a Coho Working Group was established by the Parties to assist the Coho Technical Committee in implementing the PST Coho Agreement. The first meeting of the bi-lateral coho working group was held on December 8, 2005 in Richmond, BC. This was an introductory meeting with issues only broadly discussed. There will be another follow up meeting of this group in the summer of 2006. The Coho Technical Committee has been working on the first priority of eight work assignments, the development of regional fishery planning models.

Other matters:

Chum:

The PSC Southern Panel was successful in negotiating the PST Chum Annex for 2006 through the remainder of the PST Agreement (2008). The PSC approved the new Chum Annex on Friday, February 17, 2006.

Bi-lateral discussions:

Finally, the 2006 Manager-to-Manager meeting has not yet been scheduled. Efforts are being taken to arrange this meeting prior to the second North of Cape Falcon meeting scheduled for the March 28th – 29th so the information can be taken into consideration prior to the April PFMC meeting. The intent is to exchange preseason expectations of stock status and anticipated fishery structure that can readily be incorporated into model inputs and to identify particular areas of management concern. At this point, it is anticipated that the Canadian stock status and fishery structure will be similar to last year. Interior Fraser coho, (including Thompson coho) remains in low status and conservation concerns still exist regarding the lower Georgia Strait and WCVI chinook stocks. These conservation concerns will shape the 2006 Canadian fisheries.

CWT Expert Panel Report

A response to the Expert Panel recommendations for the CWT program was agreed upon by the PSC. A Work Group of 8-10 members will be formed to develop an Action Plan defining tasks associated with recommendations of the PSC's CWT Expert Panel Report. The Work Group will initially address the short-term tasks related to recommendations of the Expert Panel. The highest priority will be placed on those tasks that need immediate action and generally viewed as directly related to addressing the current deficiencies in the CWT program (e.g., recommendations #1-4). It is anticipated that the Work Group will transmit its report to the PSC by August 1, 2006, with a presentation of its findings at the PSC's Executive Session in October, 2006.

