

HABITAT COMMITTEE COMMENTS ON
REVIEW OF 2007 FISHERIES AND SUMMARY OF 2008 STOCK ABUNDANCE
ESTIMATES

The Habitat Committee (HC) received a presentation from Alice Lowe, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), on freshwater habitat impacts on Sacramento fall Chinook. Based on information compiled by CDFG, the agency does not believe that problems in the freshwater system precipitated the current crisis. Freshwater conditions were, if anything, better during the brood years of the current adult stock (2004-2005) than in previous years.

In addition, Agenda Item D.1.b enumerated multiple research questions related to Central Valley fall run Chinook salmon. However, the importance of estuaries was not addressed in the list. The HC notes that there is little information about juvenile survival in the estuary, including the ability of the estuary to support the numbers of Chinook entering the estuary and the potential for competition between hatchery and naturally-produced fish for estuary resources. Information from other San Francisco Bay studies indicates that other species are declining as well. Clearly, the low estimate of marine survival incorporates estuary survival, but it is important to determine whether this portion of Chinook life history is limiting production of Sacramento fall Chinook.

While the current crisis may be related to ocean survival, attention and resources must continue to focus on habitat improvements. Improving freshwater (and estuarine) habitat is necessary to provide the best possible survival for whatever run sizes materialize, and to take advantage of improved marine survival conditions when they occur.

The low levels of Chinook stocks along the coast this year raise concerns about our ability to understand and plan for changing ocean conditions. The HC suggests that managers find ways to incorporate changing ocean conditions into forecasts and harvest projections.

PFMC
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