

PROGRESS REPORT ON CAUSES OF THE 2008 SALMON FAILURE

Returns of several west coast Chinook and coho salmon stocks were lower than expected in 2007, and low jack returns in 2007 for some stocks suggested that 2008 would probably be worse. The most prominent example is Sacramento River fall Chinook (SRFC) salmon, for which spawning escapement in 2007 is estimated to have been 88,000, well below the escapement conservation goal (122,000-180,000) for the first time since the early 1990s, continuing a declining trend since the recent peak escapement of 775,000 spawners in 2002. In addition, the 2007 jack returns for SRFC were an order of magnitude below the previous record low return in 2006. Similar low returns have been documented for some coastal coho salmon. As a result of the low returns in 2007 and even lower forecasts for 2008, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) adopted the most restrictive salmon fisheries in the history of the west coast.

In response to these severe restrictions, the Council requested the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) convene a scientific forum to investigate the potential causes of the decline in the status of Council related salmon stocks, in particular SRFC, and if possible make recommendations on how to improve the advance forecasting of salmon abundance. The NMFS Northwest and Southwest Science Centers convened the 2008 West Coast Salmon Work Group (Work Group), which was made up of scientists from Federal, State, and Tribal agencies and Universities to begin investigating the cause of the 2008 salmon failure. The Work Group met July 29 and 30 in Santa Cruz for an organizational meeting. Drs. Churchill Grimes and John Stein from the Southwest and Northwest Science Centers will present a report from the Work Group (Agenda Item D.2.b, Work Group Report).

The Work Group also convened an August 29 biological technical meeting in Sacramento to gather additional information from other agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the public that would provide context or insight into the possible causes for the sharp decline in SRFC spawning escapement experienced in 2007 and forecast for 2008. Attachment 1 is the announcement for that meeting.

Council Task:

1. Discuss process and timeline for completing the Work Group objectives.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item D.2.a, Attachment 1: Biological Technical Meeting Announcement.
2. Agenda Item D.2.b, Work Group Report: Progress Report to the Pacific Fishery Management Council on Deliberations of the Scientific Working Group to Evaluate the Decline in Sacramento River fall Chinook and other West Coast Salmon.
3. Agenda Item D.2.e, Public Comment.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. West Coast Salmon Workgroup Progress Report
- c. Agency and Tribal Comments
- d. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- e. Public Comment
- f. Council Discussion and Guidance

Chuck Tracy
John Stein, Churchill Grimes

PFMC
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