

# The Columbian

## No One's Happy With Columbia Salmon Sharing

3 July 2008

By Allen Thomas

The Columbian

Conflict swirls constantly around Columbia River salmon management. It's as much a part of the river as the tides and eddies of the stream itself. One group is chafed about the fisheries of another incessantly.

So who's upset with who right now: Both the Columbia treaty tribes and the non-Indian lower river gillnetters are irked at the Washington and Oregon fishery agencies over the summer chinook season.

Sport fishermen between Tongue Point near Astoria and Bonneville Dam got an eight-day summer chinook season, which was calculated to be the amount of time it would take them to catch 1,200 salmon.

It turns out the catch average was about as expected (a salmon per 11 angler trips), but the fishing effort was greater than anticipated and the lower Columbia catch will be about 2,000 chinook. The season ended Saturday.

Fishing was better than anticipated upstream of Bonneville Dam, too. A catch of 500 was projected and the actual harvest will be more like 700.

So it turns out the total sport catch is about 2,700, not the 1,700 originally anticipated.

The summer chinook run forecast has been upgraded from 52,000 to 60,000, and that increases the sport share to 2,137, still way below the actual catch of about 2,700.

The tribes vented first at last week's Columbia River Compact when Terry Goudy-Rambler of the Yakamas told the states she was disappointed they can't control the sport fishery.

Gary Soderstrom, president of the Columbia River Fisheries Protective Union, an Astoria-based gillnetters group, said he shared the tribal concern.

Sportsmen are getting so efficient they might need the same onboard monitoring that the commercials receive, he said.

He was adamant the gillnet fleet not be shorted summer chinook due to the sport overage.

"We want those fish taken out of a sports fishery, not from us," he said. "We need every one of these summer chinook. They're a good quality fish."

With summer chinook fishing closed, the only sport fishery where those salmon could come from is upstream of Priest Rapids Dam.

Les Clark of the Northwest Gillnetters Association added, "The sport fishery seems to be getting out of hand all the time."

Sockeye situation

The lower Columbia net fleet also is exasperated by the management of the surprisingly strong sockeye run.

A return of 75,000 was forecast, and that's been upgraded to at least 210,000, which would be the third best since counting began at Bonneville Dam in 1938.

Sockeye are the sea-going version of a kokanee, while means they are great table fare.

The new Columbia River salmon harvest sharing agreement with the treaty tribes allows non-Indians a catch of no more than 1 percent of the sockeye run, no matter how large the return.

The tribal shares slides between 5 percent and 7 percent of the run.

That means non-Indians only can take about 2,100 sockeye this year, even with the excellent return. About 630 sockeye total were taken by sportsmen during the steelhead and chinook fisheries, and by the commercials in their chinook fishery last week.

The net fleet had a six-hour sockeye fishery on Monday between Washougal and Beacon Rock and could keep sockeye in their chinook fishery on Tuesday night.

Jack Marincovich of the Columbia River Fisheries Protective Union said there should be a sliding scale, where non-Indians get 1 percent at 100,000 sockeye, 2 percent at 200,000 and 3 percent at 300,000.

"We've been waiting 40 years for a record run of sockeye," he said. "It's going to be the largest run since Bonneville Dam was built."

Soderstrom, CRFPU president, was upset that Monday's commercial fishery was in the Columbia Gorge, far from the processing plants and other infrastructure.

The huge sockeye return eventually will result in a "snag-fest" in the Okanogan River, he said.

"You're leaving the consumer completely out of the picture," Soderstrom said. "He's paying for that recovery."

Guy Norman, regional director of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the 1 percent limit on non-Indian sockeye harvest is to protect Snake River sockeye, which are mingled in the Columbia with sockeye headed for the Wenatchee and Okanogan rivers.

Snake River sockeye are probably the stock most in risk of extinction. Most years, the return to the Stanley Basin in central Idaho is around a dozen sockeye, thus the need for extreme caution.

If big sockeye runs become common, the states will initiate consultation with the federal government to discuss increasing the non-Indian share, Norman said.

#### Sport vs. sport

There's been a simmering dispute within the sport-fishing community regarding Columbia River summer chinook regulations: specifically if fin-clipped chinook should have to be released (the case with spring chinook) or kept.

Summer chinook originate in Washington waters upstream of Bonneville Dam.

Years of work to improve habitat and integrate the wild fish with the hatchery fish has resulted in a relatively stable return.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's position is there is no real difference between the naturally spawning summer chinook and the hatchery fish, and that enough natural spawners are making it to the gravel to seed the limited habitat fully.

Thus, the states allow anglers to keep any summer chinook, fin-clipped or not.

Liz Hamilton of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association told the states last week the sport harvest might not have exceeded its allocation if only fin-clipped fish were kept.

NSIA position always has been to keep the ethic of releasing non-clipped fish, which also will result in longer fishing seasons.

Steve Watrous of Columbia Pacific Anglers thanked the states for the current rules.

"We're thrilled with the opportunity that we can recover a wild run to a strength where we can harvest those fish," he said. "The guys love not having to release those fish that aren't clipped. They are a thrill, and a primo fish."

It's Monday, and it's hot on the river. A refreshing breeze sweeps across the bow of Clark's boat as he lets out his roughly 750-foot gill net in hopes of catching some bluebacks.

His is among only a handful of commercial fishing boats on the water. Most fishermen lack the proper nets for sockeye because there's so little opportunity to fish for them.

Clark, a non-Indian from Washougal, allows his boat and net to drift before he reels in the net. He only catches a shad, a non-native member of the herring family originally from the East Coast.

"It looks like it's going to be McDonald's tonight," quips Tize Tolva, a longtime fishing buddy who came along for the ride. "We'll have to go and buy (sockeye) from the Indians, I guess."

Clark whips his vessel around and drops his net in a cove a few miles east of a rock wall, where he nets a handful. He works the area for the next few hours, pulling in handfuls of sockeye at a time. His catch for the day is about 30 fish totaling roughly 120 pounds.

Commercial fish buyers are paying about \$3 a pound for sockeye, so his catch will barely cover the day's cost of fuel for his boat.

"We didn't lose any money, but we didn't make too much money either," said Clark, who has fished the Lower Columbia River for 65 years.

"That's fishing — sometimes you don't do so good and other times you do extra good."

Tribal fishermen, however, are getting up to \$7 a pound for freshly caught sockeye — considered the best tasting fish the river has to offer.

Tribal members usually get a better price for fresh fish sold directly to the public than what commercial buyers pay. Among the smaller salmon species, an average sockeye weighs 3 to 5 pounds.

### **Roadside sales**

Near Cascade Locks, Ore., about a half-mile east of Bonneville Dam, tribal members fish from about a dozen scaffolds that line both sides of the Columbia.

Just above the river off state Highway 14, a sign reads "Fish for Sale" at the entrance of a nearby camp. Here, the public can buy fresh sockeye and steelhead from tribal members.

"It's been good," Yakama tribal fishermen Andrew Zack said about fish sales. "We're just exercising our (tribal) treaty rights."

His brother, Will, unties the handle of a large hoop net from the end of the 20-foot-long scaffold, and pulls up a blueback and a shad. He gently tosses the shad back into the river, but keeps the sockeye.

After cleaning it, he immediately puts it on ice.

"I've been hitting it hard," he said. "I filled my (coolers) quick and figured I'd better go and sell some."

Shortly afterward, a car pulls into the camp and the driver forks out \$21 for a three-pound sockeye.

Yakama fisherman Lew George said he can't recall seeing so many sockeye in the river.

"Incredible. I was prob-ably in my early teens since the last time I saw fishing anything like that, and I'm 49," he said.

Tribal members enjoy smoked and canned sockeye, he said, and having plenty on hand helps assure families are fed and that there is enough salmon for sacred ceremonies.

"That's the main thing," he said.

Biologist Ellis said more spills over dams, improved hatchery practices and strong survival rates among sockeye in the ocean are responsible for the large run.

Most of the sockeye in the Columbia River are headed for Lake Wenatchee and the Okanagon River, and fisheries on the Columbia River won't have much impact on the Snake River run, he said.

Longtime tribal fisherman Oliver Brigham said Idaho people must be praying hard for the fish.

"It's been a lot of years they've been down in the dumps," he said of sockeye numbers. "Hopefully there will be as many next year."

The large sockeye run helps after the spring chinook season was cut short because of low fish numbers, said Umatilla tribal fisherman Cliff Shippentower, who often lets the Zack brothers use his scaffold.

"It sort of makes up for that," he said. "It's real huge for us — something that we don't get to do every year."