

Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) summer Chinook fishery fact sheet

Background

The summer Chinook fishery in Area 7 (San Juan Islands) has remained under nonselective regulations during the months of July, August, and September while many other areas have switched to mark-selective (MSF) regulations. The Area 7 summer fishery is considered a mixed-stock fishery that harvests fish from both Puget Sound and Canadian river systems. The Pacific Salmon Treaty (Canada and U.S.) provides protection to wild salmon stocks compelling both countries to limit impacts on wild stocks of concern, with the conservation burden relying more heavily on the country of origin. Each year fewer wild Chinook return to Puget Sound, comprising an expected 15% of the total Chinook forecast for the 2015-16 fishing season. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission issued a North of Falcon policy (policy C-3608), which provides guidance to WDFW to maintain meaningful opportunity, maintain the uniqueness of fisheries, and to fish under MSF regulations in order to aid in maximizing fishing opportunity and minimize impacts on depressed stocks.

Proposal

- Additional daily limit including any combination of 2 pink or sockeye during July through August and 2 pink in September
- Convert July Chinook fishery to MSF (release wild Chinook)
 - Daily limit of Chinook would increase from 1 to 2 during July only
 - Southern Rosario and Eastern Strait closure would be removed during July only
- August and September would remain a nonselective Chinook fishery and the Rosario and Eastern Strait closures would remain in effect

Data analysis from dockside samples

- Legal-sized mark rates (recent 5-year average with 3-year average 3-5% higher)
 - July: 63%
 - August: 42%
 - September: 37%
- Coded Wire Tag proportions used in FRAM model for North of Falcon during July
 - Hood Canal: 68%; Nooksack: 15%; Mid-Puget Sound: 5%; Snohomish: 4%; Skagit: 2%; Canada: 2%, 4% other
- Genetics (2009 study)
 - July: 79% Puget Sound; 19% Canada; 2% other
 - August: 43% Puget Sound; 54% Canada; 3% other
 - September: 49% Puget Sound; 45% Canada; 6% other

Justification

Nearly all Chinook released from Puget Sound hatcheries are marked (>99%). The high July mark rate in Area 7 makes it a strong candidate for converting to a MSF as almost 2 out of every 3 legal-sized Chinook encountered could be kept, and fewer wild fish die due to the release mortality rate for legal-sized Chinook (at an assumed mortality rate of 10%). Further, anglers would have an increased daily limit from 1 to 2 Chinook. Most of the wild Chinook encountered during July are from Puget Sound stocks, thus an Area 7 MSF would help stabilize (or improve; e.g. Hood Canal) other Puget Sound fisheries and allow for additional conservation, even with re-opening the Rosario and Eastern Strait closure.