



Overall Salmon Recommendation



= Some Concerns

Last updated: September 21, 2006

BC Pacific salmon (wild)—Yellow

Until a comprehensive SeaChoice assessment of BC Pacific salmon is undertaken, all five salmon species are given a yellow (unknown) ranking consistent with SeaChoice evaluation methodology which, when information is unknown, defaults to yellow. All species have some conservation concerns surrounding habitat issues and endangered runs. At present, SeaChoice has no reason to fully endorse any given species, nor are there any obvious reasons for a species to be fully avoided and therefore a yellow recommendation is suitably precautionary. SeaChoice is planning to have comprehensive assessments and recommendations for all five species completed for 2007. In the meantime, we have provided interim recommendations based on best available information.

2006 SeaChoice Interim Pacific Salmon Recommendations

Fraser River Sockeye: Due to low stream flows and high water temperatures, the number of sockeye surviving the upstream migration to their spawning streams is lower than expected. Current abundance estimates are also lower than expected resulting in an over-harvest of many Fraser sockeye salmon stocks. Enjoy BC Fraser Sockeye in moderation.

South coast coho: Several coho populations along the south coast of British Columbia mainland and Vancouver Island are depleted and expected to have low returns in 2006. Fisheries targeting other salmon are affecting coho salmon, please choose a salmon species of less concern for your plate.

Fraser River/Georgia Strait Chinook salmon: Many south coast stocks are at very low levels. Although fisheries are planned to avoid impacts to Chinook salmon, bycatch remains a concern. Enjoy BC Chinook salmon in moderation.

Pink salmon: Pink salmon available in the marketplace are likely from sustainable sources. Enjoy BC pink salmon in moderation.

Chum salmon: Chum salmon available in the marketplace are likely from sustainable sources. Enjoy BC chum salmon in moderation.

Background for Yearly Salmon Recommendations

There are five species of Pacific salmon consisting of several thousand unique spawning populations found in British Columbia waters. The marketplace usually identifies Pacific salmon by species (e.g., pink, sockeye) and sometimes country of origin but does not recognize the various small spawning populations. While it is not possible to give a seafood recommendation for all the possible runs of salmon, SeaChoice does intend to provide general species-based recommendations in future years. For 2006, advice is provided based on a generic assessment below.

SeaChoice evaluates all fisheries based on five main criteria: inherent vulnerability, stock status, bycatch, habitat/ecosystem impacts, and management regime (link to relevant section in web site).

Inherent vulnerability: Pacific salmon are inherently resilient to exploitation because they are relatively short-lived, fast growing and have high reproductive potential.

Stock status: Individual stocks and populations of Pacific salmon vary considerably year to year. Of 5358 assessed Pacific salmon stocks in BC and the Yukon, 5.1% are of special concern, 11.4% are at high risk of extinction and 2.1% are extinct (Slaney et al. 1996).

Bycatch: The capture of weak stocks along with stronger stocks is the main bycatch concern surrounding Pacific salmon fisheries in BC waters. While fishing may or may not be the root cause of weak stocks, the spawning populations still need to be protected from harvest. There is a general management failure to take initiatives to control this problem. Consequently several smaller endangered stocks are at risk of further decline due to commercial fisheries.

Habitat/ecosystem considerations: Salmon are caught commercially by seine (~50%), gillnet (~25%) and trolling (~25%). These gears operate in mid-water, so habitat damage from fishing practices is considered minimal. Spawning Pacific salmon provide far ranging ecosystem values resulting from the transfer of nutrients to marine and terrestrial plants and animals. Salmon fisheries management has not yet accounted for the broader ecosystem values of salmon. Many freshwater habitats have been degraded or lost through forestry, agriculture, or development which, when combined with narrow geographic areas for unique stocks, is cause for concern.

Management regime: Commercial salmon fisheries are managed using restricted area, gear, and time openings. Harvest is generally regulated to meet pre-determined

escapement targets. Enforcement and in-season management adjustments are used to ensure these targets are met. However, the targets themselves do not yet protect weak stocks or consider the ecosystem role of returning salmon to other organisms. The recreational fishery for salmon is substantial in many areas and is inadequately monitored. Although Fisheries and Oceans Canada has a “Wild Salmon Policy” intended to protect salmon diversity and support ecosystem values, it has not yet been effectively implemented. Maintaining genetic diversity is considered necessary to allow salmon to adapt to predicted environmental changes associated with climate change (e.g., increased stream temperatures). Intensive fisheries present an unknown threat to this diversity.

2006 Synopsis

Salmon returning to Canadian streams and rivers in 2006 have endured abnormally warm ocean conditions with less food availability and the potential for increased predation (2005 State of the ocean report). Although 2006 marks the one in four year return to a strong cycle of Fraser River sockeye salmon, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has failed to adjust forecasts to account for these poor ocean conditions. Many other stocks of salmon remain in very poor condition, particularly coho and Chinook salmon (DFO salmon outlook). The federal government has chosen not to list an endangered coho salmon stock under the Species at Risk Act despite the recommendations of its own scientists. Other endangered salmon stocks are receiving less harvest protection this year, but recovery actions to address habitat issues are increasing for some of these stocks.

Wild Pacific salmon are available for purchase as fresh or processed product. Information provided by SeaChoice is specific to Canadian fisheries. Pacific salmon products available in Canada may be from another nation’s fisheries. For further information on the status of United States Pacific salmon fisheries please refer to Monterey Bay: Seafood Watch.

2006 synopsis by species

Sockeye salmon: Relatively abundant Fraser River return predicted, but harvest protection for small stocks has weakened and government forecasts have failed to account for adverse marine conditions. As of mid-September 2006 estimated fishing rates for Fraser River sockeye salmon have exceeded exploitation targets.

Chinook salmon: Expected returns are mixed across the coast, but very poor for some stocks of the Fraser River, Georgia Strait, and west coast of Vancouver Island. Commercial fishery is relatively precautionary but will affect declining stocks.

Coho salmon: Poor returns expected for many southern coast areas. Interior Fraser coho salmon were not listed under the Species At Risk Act. Fisheries are relatively precautionary, but coho bycatch by fisheries targeting other salmon species may be a problem.

Pink salmon: Returns along northern coast are predicted to be strong, however, data is lacking. Impacts from central coast fish farms, particularly sea lice infections on juveniles, continue to affect regional pink salmon stocks.

Chum salmon: Relatively strong returns predicted along the southern coast, but data is lacking. Some stocks are weak in the north, particularly along Haida Gwaii.

Literature Cited

Slaney, T.L., K.D. Hyatt, T.G. Northcote, and R.J. Fielden. 1996. Status of anadromous salmon and trout in British Columbia and Yukon. *Fisheries* 21:10–35.