

Sockeye run falls below projections

Low river flows and warm water are factors

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The sockeye salmon return in the Fraser River so far is about a third of what scientists had forecast, according to a report from the Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat.

Friday's weekly sockeye report estimates a run of 2.4 million salmon, more than 60 per cent below the pre-season forecast of 6.76 million sockeye.

FRAFS spokesman Walter Quinlan said although there are still runs in late September, there is "very little hope" they will see the anticipated abundance.

"First Nations are disappointed. This is going to cause some real hardships for those who rely on the sockeye runs as their main source of protein," Quinlan said. "It's going to be a very difficult winter."

Higher than average temperatures and low run-off may be to blame for the low return, he said. The report says the Fraser River is 19.7 C, or 1.7 C above average.

Record water temperatures forced Fisheries and Oceans Canada in mid-August to close salmon fishing on the Fraser River from its mouth to the Alexandra Bridge north of Hope.

Fisheries said estimates of sockeye, combined with record temperatures in the Fraser, have resulted in no allowable harvest and a conservation concern.

Water holds less oxygen as temperatures rise, making it difficult for fish to swim. Above 19 C, sockeye show signs of physiological stress and slower migration. Temperatures above 20 C are associated with high pre-spawn death and disease.