



Drought Management

GWA is very concerned over the ongoing pressure of climate change and drought threatening the health and sustainability of salmon and steelhead stocks in our region. These conditions, paired with the forecast of more droughts and severe conditions in the future, support implementation of precautionary protective measures for fish populations in our territories. Gitksan Watershed Authorities, Skeena Fisheries Commission & other Skeena First Nations Fisheries are trying to work with the province and federal government to enforce tangible drought management plans meanwhile collecting our own datasets to support community-led drought management in our territories. The Kispiox and Bulkley Rivers are priorities for planning and providing the technical evidence to support fishing changes during specific warm water conditions.

GWA is doing field work to monitor, salvage stranded fish and plan habitat interventions to prevent fish mortalities and migration issues as the water gets lower.

Skeena Chinook

The 2024 Chinook salmon run is low, with an estimated number into the Skeena River based on information to July 16th from 15,600 to 23,300 with a median (middle) estimate of 19,100 Chinook into the Skeena. This is considerably below the long-term average, raising concerns about the overall health of the Chinook population this year. This estimate is supported by reports from food, social, and ceremonial catch monitoring activities with catch per net effort below average, high numbers of jacks and smaller than normal Chinook.

The table below shows the 2024 Skeena Chinook Tye Test fishery index is extremely low.

	Tye index to date July 16th
2024	44.89
2023	74.45
1984-2023 average	151.63
1984-2023 minimum	39.36
1984-2023 maximum	333.49

The 2024 Chinook run is currently tracking below average and the second lowest index on record. There will not be enough spawners back to natal streams, impacting future returns. Chinook sizes are smaller and the number of jacks compared to large Chinook which we consider for future abundance concerns. Sockeye returns are less of a concern and should be considered a better target in 2024.



Skeena Sockeye

Currently, daily run estimates are tracking close to 2023, and considerably higher than 2020 and 2021. This year, we expect a lower return of age-4 sockeye and an average return of age-5 sockeye. Early season data shows the number of sockeye passing through Tyee is below the long-term average and based on the information to date the in-season median estimate depending on timing is:

- early run-timing forecast: 1,119,035 sockeye
- Average run-timing forecast: 1,856,740 sockeye
- Late run-timing forecast: 3,282,172 sockeye

These estimates are based on historical data and current observations and will be refined as the season progresses.

Skeena Fisheries

The Gitksan, Gitanyow and Lax Kw'alaams have agreed to enter into an MOU (memorandum of understanding) for the 2024 season for the catch of coastal food fish. Understanding the health of returning salmon is improved with better catch reporting which will be shared among Nations.

Food, Social & Ceremonial fisheries throughout the Skeena are observing lower Chinook catches than recent averages, smaller sizes and a high proportion of jacks.

Recreational fishing for Chinook salmon started open and was closed in river and changed to only in the ocean and switched to a bag limit of 1 Chinook per day effective on June 14 -22, to zero Jun 23-July17, 2024. It is planned to be open to 1 bag limit per day July 19 and 2 per day starting August 11th. While there are a smaller proportion of Skeena sockeye in marine area 3/4 we are recommending that the opening wait until mid August due to the extremely low returns and unknown proportions of Skeena fish.

Data Gathered From: Skeena First Nations Technical Committee, Gitksan Watershed Authorities Catch Monitoring Program & DFO in-season updates

Area 4 commercial gillnet fisheries on Sockeye salmon had an opening July 16th. With commercial openings on the coast, we anticipate that there will be in-river Economic Opportunity fisheries.

Data Gathered from: Skeena First Nations Technical Committee & Gitksan Watershed Authorities Catch Monitoring Program



Skeena Summer Steelhead

Tyee Test Fishery operations began on June 10th. The cumulative Skeena River summer steelhead index to July 17th is 24.31. The average to this date = 8.99 (range: 0.30 (1999) to 50.31 (1966)). The escapement for Skeena summer run steelhead to July 17th is estimated to be 5,956, the average to this date = 2,203 (range: 74 to 12,326).

Data Gathered from: Provincial Biologist/Fisheries Manager, Kenji Miyazaki

GWA, SFC and some Gitksan Watershed tables (via GLMO) are now working with the province (responsible for managing Steelhead) by discussing what technical and relationship work is needed to work together and share information to improve stock assessment and management plans that will support the sustainability of Steelhead populations.

Project Highlight

Fish Camera Counting Weirs

GWA continues to collaborate with Skeena Fisheries Commission on two camera weirs that operate by solar and internet power to remote count of salmon moving into Bear Lake and Upper Kispiox (Swan/Stephens Lake) spawning areas. Improved spawner counts are an important foundation for further assessments of wild salmon population health. It is one priority step in the Anspayaxw sockeye resiliency planning. Planning and understanding the goals for recovery of sockeye in the Anspayaxw is still ongoing and requiring input. This population has been showing declines and is a concern.

For further information please contact

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