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## Disastrous sockeye run flops to a finish



The Fraser River sockeye run is shaping up to be the worst one on record, as millions of fish have yet to show up.

By [Jeff Nagel - Surrey North Delta Leader](#)

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The Fraser River sockeye run is winding up and millions of missing salmon still haven't shown up.

The Pacific Salmon Commission estimates the run size at 1.42 million sockeye – the worst on record and significantly below the last two dismal years, which fishermen had hoped would not be repeated.

Observers see the result as a sign of ecological catastrophe.

And there's little hope more of the forecast run of 10.5 million sockeye will materialize.

"The migration through Juan de Fuca Strait has virtually dried up to zero," said Department of Fisheries and Oceans area director and Fraser panel chair Barry Rosenberger.

Small numbers of sockeye have continued to come around Vancouver Island through

Johnstone Strait, but he said those won't significantly change run size estimates.

If there's a glimmer of good news for sockeye it's that the Fraser River's water temperatures have cooled from dangerously high levels in late July and early August.

Rosenberger said low water flow conditions due to a summer with little rain remains an ongoing challenge for migrating salmon.

Sockeye fishing has been banned for commercial, sport and aboriginal sectors.

Pink salmon, however, are so far coming in relatively strong.

There's no estimate of the numbers yet, but hopes are high the pre-season forecast of 17 million pinks returning to the Fraser will prove accurate.

"It appears to be quite good," Rosenberger said.

Some U.S. fishing for Fraser pinks is underway and openings could also be approved soon on this side of the border.

A lengthy investigation is expected into the demise of this year's Fraser sockeye.

Federal NDP natural resources critic Nathan Cullen accused federal fisheries minister Gail Shea of turning a blind eye to the collapse of the sockeye fishery in B.C.

"The neglect by the Conservative government is killing Canada's wild salmon," Cullen said. "It seems that DFO has not learned the lesson of the cod collapse disaster."

An NDP action plan proposes a salmon summit, more funding for salmon enhancement, relocation of senior fisheries managers to B.C. and emergency funding to phase out open caged fish farms in favour of closed containment.

"Fraser River sockeye salmon are now commercially extinct," predicts Sto:lo fisheries adviser Ernie Crey.

Although 2010 is supposed to be the high year of the four-year cycle for sockeye, Crey says the dismal returns from 2007-2009 – each with less than two million salmon returning – mean the following three years will yield few fish.

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