

Alaska Will Destroy Diseased Salmon Stocks

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has announced a decision to destroy a diseased brood stock of king, or chinook salmon, *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*, imported to Alaska from Washington State in 1972. Currently available scientific data indicates that the imported stock was not diseased initially, but probably became infected after contact with native sockeye salmon which had the disease. Ronald O. Skoog, Commissioner of Fish and Game, said the Department will use some of the affected fish for carefully controlled scientific studies, while the rest will be destroyed to protect native king salmon stocks. An immediate prohibition has been placed on any further releases of the affected kings.

In 1977, king salmon from the imported brood stock returning to the Mendenhall Ponds facility near Juneau were shown to be carriers of infectious hematopoietic necrosis virus (IHNV), a viral disease found in some salmonids. According to Robert S. Roys, Director of the Division of Fisheries Rehabilitation, Enhancement and Development (FRED), the problem kings were imported from the Carson National Hatchery on the Columbia River in 1972, before the Department had developed the capability to evaluate the genetic and pathological implications of salmon egg imports.

The decision to terminate the affected brood stock follows on the heels of an intensive review of the pathological, genetic, biological, and technical issues involved, and is based on the unanimous recommendation of Roys, his senior staff members, and the Regional Fisheries Supervisors in the Department's Southeastern Region.

The Department estimates that approximately 750,000 king salmon eggs and fingerlings at facilities in Petersburg and Sitka were affected and would have to be destroyed. In addition, Skoog said an interception and harvest program will be established at earlier release sites in Petersburg, Juneau, and Sitka to prevent spawning by returning adult and jack (immature male) king salmon infected by IHNV. Skoog also said that facilities where the Carson brood stock has been maintained will be disinfected to prevent future problems with the virus.

Roger S. Grischkowsky, the FRED Division pathologist, said the virus is found naturally primarily in sockeye (*Oncorhynchus nerka*), king salmon, and rainbow trout and steelhead (*Salmo gairdneri*) populations in the lower 48 states. However, he added that a 4-year study of the distribution of the virus in Alaskan salmon has shown that although IHNV may be found in nearly all natural sockeye salmon stocks, it has not been found yet in native Alaskan king salmon, rainbow trout, or steelhead stocks. Grischkowsky said that because the Carson king brood stock in Alaska has been shown to be susceptible to the virus, it poses a potential threat to the health of native king salmon.

IHNV can have serious detrimental effects on the survival of infected populations, but according to Grischkowsky it does not affect the value of commercial or sport caught fish.

The FRED Division currently is involved in a major king salmon enhancement program using native Alaskan stocks. According to Skoog, this program will continue to receive high

priority. At the same time, FRED Division scientists will be evaluating disease and genetic factors continually to insure that existing natural stocks are not endangered. Skoog said similar reviews will accompany all future fish and egg transports in Alaska, and expressed the belief that, in his words: "With proper control and monitoring hatcheries will continue to make a positive and growing contribution to salmon and trout production in Alaska without jeopardizing any of our native stocks. This Department's primary responsibility is to protect and sustain our native wildlife species, and we intend to do just that. We also intend to protect valuable hatchery stocks from contamination by wild stocks."

Bristol Bay Salmon Data Goes To Alaska

The Fisheries Research Institute at the University of Washington has turned over its storehouse of information on Bristol Bay sockeye salmon to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, that Department reports. The information, known as the Bristol Bay Data File, has been maintained by the institute for the past 6 years. Its relocation will provide Alaskan fisheries managers with faster information retrieval and greater flexibility in managing the rich sockeye salmon runs of Bristol Bay.

The Fisheries Research Institute began compiling information on Bristol Bay sockeye in 1946, when fisheries researchers began a sampling program on the adult salmon run in the Wood River system. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game began contributing information in 1960. Fisheries managers and biologists have long depended on the information files in monitoring the harvest and escapement of sockeye runs, but until 1972, when the files were put on computer tapes, retrieval of information was a lengthy process often requiring a week or more. Today, the computerized Bristol Bay file can provide biologists with escapement figures or smolt out-migration counts within

minutes. The result is increased efficiency in predicting future salmon runs and in promulgating day-to-day regulations to fully utilize the sockeye salmon resource.

The data file is composed of nine parts, including daily catch and escapement figures, tower and aerial escapement counts, outside, inside and offshore test fishing data, fishing period regulations, age and sex composition of both catch and escapement, and an overall summary of seasonal performance. The Bristol Bay Data File has been placed under the direction of Fish and Game research biologist Henry Yuen in Anchorage. The actual tapes will be stored at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. Yuen said data in the Bristol Bay files is available to anyone who desires detailed information on the sockeye salmon runs of Bristol Bay.

Texas Gulf Crabbing Hits All-Time High

Crabbers hauled in an all-time record catch of blue crabs on the Texas Gulf Coast during 1977, exceeding the previous high catch by more than a million pounds. The 1977 catch by commercial fishermen, compiled by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, was 8,150,384 pounds. The record had been 1973's total of 6,881,137 pounds.

This increased attention to the blue crab as a commercial species has prompted the department to start surveys to learn more about them. During 1977, crab trap surveys were initiated in several Texas bays to determine fishing pressure. Another survey is underway in the Galveston Bay system, with tags placed on the backs of a number of mature crabs in an attempt to learn more about their winter movements.

Fishermen who find these tagged crabs are asked to deliver the tag to one of the following: 1) the department office at Box 8, Seabrook, Tex., phone (713) 474-2811; 2) any commercial crab dealer on the Galveston Bay system; or 3) any Parks and Wildlife Department office or employee, including

your name, address, when and where caught, and the capture method. The round tags are attached to the crabs' backs with wire.

There are two species of blue crab on the Texas coast, but one of them, the lesser blue crab, is too small to be of commercial value. Biologists believe the increased crabbing may be due to several factors, including good prices, harsh weather in traditional crabbing areas in the northeastern states, and natural development of a hitherto underutilized resource.

New Marine Resource Committee Is Formed

A new Committee on Marine and Estuarine Resources has been formed by the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society, reports Committee Chairman Charles Manooch, III. The major objectives of the Committee are to 1) Create a general interest and awareness of marine and estuarine fisheries related work among AFS Southern Division members and, conversely, create an active participation in the Southern Division by marine and estuarine fisheries workers; 2) Provide a more uniform effort among fisheries workers throughout the Division to resolve problems which are common to both freshwater and marine regimes; discuss research and/or monitoring programs to address shared and unique problems; and 3) Strive to educate recreational fishermen in the area of management of estuarine and marine fisheries.

Persons interested in discussing these or other topic areas may contact the Committee Chairman Charles Manooch, III, Southeast Fisheries Center Beaufort Laboratory, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, P.O. Box 570, Beaufort, N.C. 28516. The Committee also plans to publish the marine and estuarine papers that are presented at each annual meeting. For information concerning the presentation of papers contact: John Grover, Dept. of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36830.

MARYLAND PREDICTS GOOD CRAB SEASON

A good year for Maryland crabbers is predicted by the Department of Natural Resources for the crab season which began 1 April and extends until 31 December. Ray C. Dintaman, Chief crab biologist with DNR's Fisheries Administration was hesitant to pin down specific figures, but said: "On the basis of a good 1976 hatch and preliminary evidence of a good 1977 hatch, we look for a better harvest in Maryland than we've had for the past two seasons."

The 1976 commercial harvest was 20.9 million pounds and the 1977 total was 19.2 million. Dintaman regards those years as normal fluctuations from the Maryland average of 25 million pounds.

A new reporting system for the crab catch will be inaugurated this year, Dintaman said, in an effort to obtain more accurate figures on the total crab catch. In the past, the figures reflected only those crabs which were processed in packing houses. They did not include the so-called "basket trade," Dintaman said, those crabs which go directly to market and crab houses where they are sold live or steamed.

Here's how the new system will work: New report forms have been prepared and mailed to crabbers. This year, only the state's 1,500 commercial crab potters will be required to use the new forms, but next season, Dintaman hopes all commercial crabbers will be using the new system.

Crab potters will record their catch daily and mail the forms to the Fisheries Administration at the end of the month. "I hope the system will give us a more complete picture of Maryland's crabbing industry," Dintaman said. He said he hoped it will disclose such information as: 1) The poundage caught per pot each day; 2) Areas of good and poor harvest, because the form provides a place to record the waters where the pots were set each day; 3) Final disposition of crabs landed. In addition to the good hatches, Mr. Dintaman said mortality of crabs over the winter appeared to be low.