



TNG Weekly Salmon Fisheries Season Update – Week of Aug.30, 2020

Providing the latest information important to T̓ilhqot̓'in fish and fishing activities

Hello all! The TNG Fisheries Department is in the middle of the salmon return season for 2020. By now, most people are aware this is another very tough year for salmon returns to the Fraser River, T̓ilhqot̓'in fisheries and spawning grounds, an even tougher than what was expected earlier in the season. This is an unfortunate situation, and it has been “all hands on deck” for the TNG Fisheries Department to focus our field work, data analysis and communications to support T̓ilhqot̓'in leadership during this difficult fishing season. The salmon return is so low in 2020, T̓ilhqot̓'in leadership issued a temporary fisheries closure notice in mid-August in order to allow as many salmon to return to the spawning grounds as possible.

Fortunately, the TNG Fisheries Team has used the experiences from 2019 to prepare for the challenges of the 2020 salmon return. Due to the very low anticipated returns of Chinook and sockeye this year, the TNG team has implemented new field projects and communications that include:

1. **Additional TNG-led monitoring field projects** to collect extensive direct information on Chinook and sockeye in the T̓ilhqot̓'in Territory, to inform Leadership's in-season decision making. New activities include a roving sonar, non-retention test fishery and site visits.
2. **Weekly updates to T̓ilhqot̓'in leadership** and TNG senior management throughout the season fishing season (weekly calls, newsletters) to support decision making.
3. **Emergency hatchery enhancement measures** to increase the number of fry/smolts produced from returning spawners to avoid extirpation (loss of population in the future) due to very low returns.

2020 – IN SOME WAYS BETTER, IN SOME WAYS WORSE THAN 2019

- **Better than 2019: Big Bar Landslide**
 - Although water levels at Big Bar were higher for the first part of the season in 2020 - which caused a significant barrier to earlier returning Ja̓s and Ts'eman – the water levels dropped faster than we saw in 2019, which has allowed natural fish passage to occur earlier than in 2019
 - Salmon passage occurred at higher water levels than in 2020, which appears to show there was some success with the in-stream work completed in the Winter and Spring of 2020
 - Although passage success looks to be higher than last year, Big Bar Landslide is still an issue at high water flows
- **Worse than 2019: Overall salmon return**
 - **Ja̓s and Ts'eman are estimated to be the lowest return on record.**
 - The TNG Fisheries Department is currently in the middle of field season, counting salmon on the spawning grounds via helicopter, SONAR and working with DFO on science related projects throughout the Territory.

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- Best available data on all salmon stocks on which the T̓silhqot̓in Nation depend is regularly monitored and analyzed from ocean to spawning grounds and this year, TNG has the most extensive data available to-date. All information collected to-date and directly observed by TNG staff confirms that Chinook and sockeye have returned at the lowest levels ever seen and are of very high conservation concern.

TNG FISHERIES DEPARTMENT IN-SEASON ACTIVITIES

Key in-season activities are:

1. Analyzing best available information throughout season: ocean to spawning grounds;
2. Collecting extensive additional information in the field (counting fish in T̓silhqot̓in Territory);
3. Communicating near real-time information & our technical recommendations to TNG Senior Managers & Leadership
4. Regular updates through TNG communication channels (including this newsletter!)

2020 Field work currently includes:

1. TNG's core annual programs:
 - Catch monitoring: what is being caught in the T̓silhqot̓in fishery;
 - Annual enumeration programs for Chinook and sockeye (Helicopter flights, Taseko SONAR, deadpitch, mark and recapture) and coho flights.



Pic 1 (above right)- **Taseko Sonar Program:** Three cabins at the Taseko River ARIS site will be used for computer room, sleeping quarters and supplies storage. They were stained in the July 16th by some Fisheries and Rangers staff.

Pic 2 (above left) – Wacey Alphonse, Shawn Harry, Leonard English, Jimmy Harry, Mason Seaward and Randy Billyboy.



Pics 3, 4 and 5 (above) – **Taseko Sonar site** – set up of diversion fence and ARIS (sonar) for under water visuals of salmon migrating up the Taseko River to either Elkins Creek or Taseko Lake. Mason Seaward, Jason Hance, Jimmy Harry, Paul Grinder and Wacey Alphonse assisting in set-up of fence. Sonar set up by Leonard English.

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Pic 6 – Pete Nicklin, TNG Fisheries Biologist doing Upper Chilcotin River Chinook Flights (counting fish from air!) started Aug 10, 17 and 21. Other flights will be of the Lower Chilcotin River, Elkins Creek and Chilko River.



Pic 7 (above left) – Winston Bambrick - Chinook Sentinel Stock Program at Chilko. Started Aug 14 to Sept 4 with Gerald William. He reported 100 tags were done with a few Sockeye also caught and released.

Pic 8 (above right) - Gerald William at Lingfield beach seining site.

2. Additional strategic TNG-led projects include:

- Non-retention test fishery at Nagwentled (Farewell Canyon) to provide valuable real-time information on presence and health of salmon.
- TNG Fisheries Department SONAR work on the Chilcotin and Taseko Rivers
- Emergency enhancement brood stock collection
- Continued water sampling for hatchery feasibility assessment.



Pic 9 (above left) Winston Bambrick posting a TNG Test Fishing sign for anyone coming by.

Pic 10 (above right) Gerald William taking a picture of Winston Test Dip Netting at Nagwentled.

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Pic 11 (above left) – New TNG non-retention test fishery program: Leonard English helping with non-retention Test Dip Netting at Nagwetled.

Pic 12 (above right) - One of the Chinook caught, quick measurement and sexed before being released back into the Chilcotin River unharmed. 6 catch and releases from Aug 8th to Aug 11th. 3 males and 3 females.

We will continue to communicate fisheries updates throughout the rest of the season through TNG channels. Our field monitoring work will continue into November, to capture all salmon runs, before we get back to our desks and start analyzing the data for post-season analysis.

We are currently scheduling the TNG Fisheries Forum (originally scheduled for early May but cancelled due to COVID) for February or March of 2021. For further information, please contact Randy Billyboy, Fisheries Manager, at the T̓silhqot̓in National Government – 250 392 3918, ext.113.

We'd like to end with a huge shout-out to our awesome Fisheries Coordinator, Leonard English, our invaluable and experienced fisheries technicians, Gerald William and Winston Bambrick, Paul Grinder and the TNG Rangers for their direct support in fisheries monitoring and research!

Sechenalyagh from Randy, Pete and Michelle!



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