Strong Runs Projected at WDFW Meeting

Local News

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Olympia, WA - Fishing prospects look bright this year for chinook in Washington’s ocean waters and the Columbia River, according to preseason salmon forecasts released today at a public meeting in Olympia. Opportunities for anglers also look good in Puget Sound, where coho and pink salmon runs are expected to be strong this year. Forecasts for chinook, coho, sockeye, pink and chum salmon mark the starting point for developing 2011 salmon-fishing seasons in Puget Sound, the Columbia River and Washington coastal areas. The forecasts were developed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and treaty Indian tribes. Fishery managers have scheduled a series of public meetings over the next few weeks to discuss potential fishing opportunities before finalizing seasons in mid-April. A meeting schedule, salmon forecasts and information about the salmon season-setting process are available on WDFW’s website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/northfalcon/ .

Phil Anderson, WDFW director, said department staff will work closely with tribal co-managers and constituents to develop fisheries that meet conservation objectives and provide fishing opportunities on abundant runs of wild and hatchery fish. "We will continue to design fishing seasons that not only meet conservation goals for salmon, but also minimize impacts to other species," said Anderson. "It is important that we take into account the entire ecosystem when managing our fisheries." Anderson noted that state budget reductions are also a factor in designing fisheries that can be managed effectively with a reduced staff. State general-fund support for WDFW was reduced by 30 percent in the current budget and is expected to drop even further over the next two years. As in past years, salmon-fishing prospects in 2011 vary by area: Columbia River: About 760,000 fall chinook are expected to return to the Columbia River this season. That’s about 112,000 more chinook than last year’s return and would constitute the fifth largest run since 1948, said Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River policy coordinator for WDFW.

More than half of the chinook forecast - about 398,000 salmon - is expected to be "upriver brights" headed to the Hanford Reach area and the Snake River. That would be the second largest run of upriver brights since 1964, when fishery managers began keeping records, said LeFleur.

"This should be a good year for upriver brights, which provide some of the best in-river fishing opportunities for anglers," LeFleur said.

While the chinook run is expected to be up, the forecast of 362,500 Columbia River coho is similar to last year’s projection.Washington’s ocean waters: Anglers can expect an ocean fishery for chinook and coho salmon this summer similar to that in 2010, said Doug Milward, ocean salmon fishery manager for WDFW.

"Last year, fishing was good for chinook and fair for coho," said Milward. "The number of salmon available for this summer’s ocean fishery is expected to be similar to last year, so anglers should see another good year of fishing." Nearly 250,000 hatchery chinook are expected to return this year to the lower Columbia River. Those salmon, known as "tules," traditionally have been the backbone of the recreational ocean chinook fishery. The 362,500 coho salmon bound for the Columbia River also account for a significant portion of the ocean catch. Puget Sound: Coho and pink salmon returns to Puget Sound are expected to be strong this year. About 980,000 coho are

forecast to return to Puget Sound streams, about 367,000 more fish than last year’s forecast.
In addition, nearly 6 million pink salmon are expected to return to Puget Sound this year. That forecast is 3 million salmon below 2009’s record return but still an abundant run, said Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager for WDFW. Most pink salmon return to Washington’s waters only in odd-numbered years.

"This is shaping up to be a really good year in Puget Sound for both coho and pink salmon," said Thiesfeld, who noted that an additional 17 million pink salmon are forecast to return to Canada’s Fraser River this year. "A portion of those Fraser River fish will make their way through the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the San Juan Islands boosting opportunities for Washington anglers." Summer/fall chinook salmon returns to Puget Sound are expected to total about 243,000 fish, slightly higher than last year’s projection of 226,000. Most chinook fisheries in Puget Sound likely will be similar to last year, said Thiesfeld. However, fishing opportunities in the Green (Duwamish) River and Elliott Bay could be limited by a low forecast of wild chinook, he said.
Thiesfeld said a Lake Washington sockeye fishery is unlikely this year. The sockeye forecast is about 34,600, well below the minimum return of 350,000 sockeye needed to consider opening a recreational fishery in the lake. State, tribal and federal fishery managers will meet March 5-10 in Vancouver, Wash., with the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) to develop options for this year’s commercial and recreational ocean chinook and coho salmon fisheries. The PFMC establishes fishing seasons in ocean waters three to 200 miles off the Pacific coast.
Additional public meetings have been scheduled in March to discuss regional fishery issues. Input from these regional discussions will be considered as the season-setting process moves into the "North of Falcon" and PFMC meetings, which will determine the final 2011 salmon seasons. The PFMC is expected to adopt final ocean fishing seasons and harvest levels at its April 9-14 meeting in San Mateo, Calif. The 2011 salmon fisheries package for Washington’s inside waters will be completed by the state and tribal co-managers during the PFMC’s April meeting.