

New York Again Stocks Pacific Salmon in Lake Ontario

New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will immediately resume stocking Lake Ontario with Pacific salmon—cohos and chinooks—Commissioner Robert F. Flacke has announced, in speaking at the Department's Salmon River Hatchery site, under construction near Altmar in Oswego County. These salmon, together with the Department's existing stocking of brown and rainbow trout, will greatly increase the recreational opportunities available to fishermen on Lake Ontario, reports the DEC.

"Our new stocking program will provide both fish that can be eaten—spring-run brown and rainbow trout and coho salmon—and fish whose greatest value is as trophies—fall-run coho and chinook salmon. This way," the Commissioner continued, "we will maintain the excellent inshore spring fishery for browns, rainbows, and cohos and restore the popular fall salmon runs up the lake's tributary streams."

Stocking of cohos and chinooks and possession of these two Pacific salmon, except for trophy purposes, was halted in 1976. A limited number of coho salmon was stocked for monitoring purposes. These restrictions were imposed because it was learned that fish had accumulated high levels of such toxic materials as mirex and PCB's from Lake Ontario.

"Last year, the ban on possession of cohos and chinooks was lifted and the State Department of Health issued an advisory that individuals should eat no more than one meal a week of these fish and that pregnant and nursing women, small children, and young people,

should eat none at all," Flacke recalled.

"Now, although we still have a toxic substance problem in Lake Ontario, I have decided, after consultation with Health Department officials, to resume stocking of cohos and chinooks," Flacke declared.

"During the two years in which stocking was halted, public attention has been focused on the problems associated with mirex in the lake," he



Coho salmon.

asserted. "I now believe that, taking into consideration the wide publicity the mirex pollution has received and the advisory issued by the Health Department, the general public has been made aware of the risks associated with eating these fish.

"While most recreational fishermen will regard fall-run Pacific salmon as trophy fish, some will choose to eat them. If people do eat them, however, they should follow our recommendations for filleting, trimming, and cooking to reduce toxic levels as low as

possible. Furthermore, the Health Department advises people who do eat fall-runs should limit themselves to two meals per month of these fish to further lessen their exposure to toxic levels," the Commissioner pointed out.

Rainbows and brown trout, taken in the spring, are smaller-sized fish, generally up to 27 inches, and, along with spring-run coho salmon, contain sufficiently low levels of toxicants that they can be eaten. Pacific salmon grow quickly, are most vulnerable to angling pressure when they are mature and return to tributaries to spawn, but show significantly higher toxic levels than spring-run coho salmon and brown rainbow trout.

Commissioner Flacke said there had been wide support from fishermen and resort interests in the resumption of stocking—even with the understanding that the fish would not be safe for wide-scale human consumption. "Our fishermen want the opportunity to catch these large, spectacular fish, whether or not they can be eaten," Flacke declared.

A spawning run of chinook salmon is expected this fall in the Salmon River and other tributaries. These will be from fish stocked in 1976. By 1980, a normal large run of coho salmon may be expected and in subsequent years, both coho and chinook salmon will be taken.

The Salmon River Hatchery, now 25 percent completed, is expected to be the major source of fish stocks for Lake Ontario when it is completed in 1981. Its full-scale production will begin in 1982. Until that time, Pacific salmon will be reared in other hatcheries the Department operates. The Department now stocks about 500,000-600,000 pounds of trout and salmon annually in the state. When the Salmon River Hatchery is in full production, the stocking goal will be close to 1,000,000 pounds annually to meet statewide needs.

The 1979 stocking program for Lake Ontario will include 200,000 chinook spring fingerlings and more than 175,000 coho smolts. The Department stocked 40,000 coho fall fingerlings in Lake Ontario last December for monitoring purposes.

Alaska Reports King, Coho Salmon Releases

More than 1.4 million king and coho salmon smolts have been released this year for enhancement of Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound fisheries, according to Bob Roys, Director of the Division of Fisheries Rehabilitation, Enhancement and Development of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Two-thirds of these fish, Roys said, were king salmon. The total is a 100,000-fish increase over last year's king and coho smolt releases, he added. The scheduled fish releases, by area, include: Seward area: 210,000 cohos, 217,000 kings; Whittier area: 105,000 cohos; Homer area: 141,000 cohos, 220,000 kings; Kasilof area: 181,000 kings; and Anchorage area: 147,000 kings.

Another 195,000 kings were to be planted at other locations, Roys said. The smolts were released in early summer.

Ten percent of the cohos are expected to return as adults late in the summer of 1980, Roys said. Survival for kings is 3 percent lower because they stay at sea and are exposed to predation longer. Kings from this year's releases will return over the next 4 years.

FLOODING MAY HURT OYSTERS IN TEXAS

Galveston Bay's troubled oystering industry may be in for continued setbacks due to the flooding in southeast Texas earlier this year. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials said salinity levels dropped to zero in some sections of Trinity Bay and were significantly below normal in other areas of the bay system.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission closed the Galveston Bay system to oystering 15 December and kept it closed for the entire 1978-79 oystering season because of a scarcity of marketable-sized oysters. This scarcity was a result of 3 consecutive years of poor oyster reproduction.

Influxes of freshwater threaten to prevent a spring oyster spat set

(reproduction) when it was needed most. "We probably already (early May) have some oyster loss in upper Trinity Bay, and we could face a serious loss elsewhere in the system if we continue to have rain and heavy runoff," said marine biologist Bob Hofstetter of Seabrook. An encouraging note, however, is that a good spat setting occurred last summer, and these immature oysters should be hardy enough to survive the freshwater conditions and provide a harvest next season, Hofstetter added. Galveston Bay is important to the State's oyster industry, as it traditionally produces from 70 to 90 percent of the annual harvest.

The Bay's brown shrimp crop also is likely to suffer from the recent floods, according to the department shellfish program director C. E. Bryan. "Dry years with relatively high salinity levels tend to favor brown shrimp production while wet, cool weather during spring can cause the loss of some browns and a retarded growth rate of others," Bryan said. He added that white shrimp generally tolerate low salinities better than browns, but they comprise a smaller percentage of the annual harvest. Galveston Bay may have been hit hardest, but San Antonio Bay and Sabine Lake also are experiencing a period of low salinities, Bryan said.

Texas Checks Creels of Marine Fishermen

The days of unmonitored and unregulated harvest of offshore finfish species by anglers in the Gulf of Mexico are numbered, says the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (P&WD). Representative of the new era is the offshore creel survey which has been instituted by that Department to monitor the Gulf harvest by Texas sport fishermen.

In conducting the survey, department coastal fisheries personnel have begun to man boat ramps frequented by Gulf sportsmen and to go on board party boats to interview anglers and check their catches. "We are looking at everything the fishermen bring in, but primarily we are interested in billfish,

snapper, ling, and king mackerel, the big four Gulf sport species," said P&WD creel program leader Larry McEachron. "By checking the success rate for offshore anglers and weighing and measuring their catch, we should be able to determine the offshore harvest and what any trends in the harvest may be," he explained.

"The new offshore creel survey program is part of an increasing trend for the department to become involved with offshore species," McEachron added. The aim of any fisheries research, of course, is conservation of fisheries resources through creation of wise management programs. In that context, the trend in Gulf fisheries research can be expected to ultimately affect the conduct of both sport and commercial fishing in the Gulf as the need for regulation is determined.

The offshore data being collected by the department is being made available to the Gulf of Mexico Marine Fisheries Council which is charged with managing fisheries resources within the 200-mile fishing zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Consisting of both professional and nonprofessional fishery experts from each of the Gulf states, this council is now in the process of developing a number of conservation programs for various finfish species including billfish, snapper, grouper, and king mackerel.

California Fish Landings Down

Total California landings of fish and shellfish for 1978 have been estimated at 638.4 and 83.9 million pounds, respectively. This represents a decline in volume of 17.4 percent from the previous year. The 1978 catch was valued at \$228.2 million. The take within the U.S. Fishery Conservation Zone (FCZ) was estimated at 230.2 million pounds (31.9 percent). Of the remainder, 18.7 percent was taken within 3 miles of U.S. shores and 49.4 percent was taken outside U.S. jurisdiction.

Most of the catch, 91.4 percent, was used as human food, while canned pet food, reduction, and bait accounted for 3.6, 3.1, and 1.9 percent, respectively.