

The Two-Way - NPR's News Blog

British Columbia Sees Largest Salmon Run In A Century, 34 Million Strong

Categories: [Food](#), [Environment](#)

05:39 pm

October 26, 2010

by BILL CHAPPELL



Sockeye salmon are making their run up the Fraser River in numbers not seen since 1913. More than 34 million salmon are reportedly in the British Columbia river system, befuddling scientists who last year tallied less than 2 million fish.

GARY STEWART/AP

As you can probably tell, this is a file photo of sockeye salmon swimming at the mouth of the Adams River, part of the Fraser River System in British Columbia.

The BBC has [an interactive report on the run](#) — and some words

of caution from scientists who warn against interpreting the boom of 2010 as a promise that similar numbers of salmon will return in 2011.

The long-term pattern of smaller runs has been blamed on both commercial fish farms and an increase in predators in the sockeyes' migratory path.

Professor Daniel Pauly, a world fisheries authority at the University of British Columbia, says he doesn't expect this year's massive run to start a new trend.

"I think science is very good at predicting long-term trends over larger areas and it's not good at predicting details over shorter time periods in limited areas," Pauly told the BBC.

One theory behind this year's outsize salmon run suggests that ash from the volcanic eruption of Kasatochi in 2008 put nutrients into the Gulf of Alaska — and that, in turn, put out a smorgasbord of [diatoms](#) for the adolescent salmon to eat.

As research scientist [Tim Parsons tells the CBC](#), "So, we get back, in my hypothesis, 34 million salmon — which was totally unpredicted — instead of the 1.5 million salmon of the previous year, which fed on a diet... composed of very small plankton."

After last year's small run, the Canadian government formed a panel to explore the reasons for it. And as the [Vancouver Sun reports](#), the Cohen Commission inquiry has spurred [public demonstrations and posturing](#) by those in favor and against fish farming.

If you're the kind of person who'd like to follow fisheries news, you should check out BBC reporter [Susan Watts' blog](#).

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Recent First



Bryan Leaferton (AdamsRiver) wrote:

John Smitty you are incorrect. Fraser River Sockeye are generally 4 year olds - leaving freshwater in their second year of life. There are other age groups but they do not spend 3 years in freshwater lakes to the best of our knowledge. Secondly, the salmon that die following spawning decompose and provide nutrients for all the animals, plants, insects and algae in the ecosystem which in turn feeds juvenile salmon in freshwater. Yes, there definitely is an impact from this year's run.

Sunday, October 31, 2010 11:45:40 AM

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john smitty (McGyverizer) wrote:

even if whatever problems have caused low migrations in the past have been alleviated, the record run this year wouldn't "feed" another generation for 4-8 years anyway... and whatever caused this particular increase happened 4-8 years ago... the offspring they spawn this year will live in freshwater lakes for 3 years before they hit the open ocean...

this year's run cannot have ANY impact whatsoever on next year's run, and it foolish to just assume that there's an abundance of salmon all the sudden...

Tuesday, October 26, 2010 8:52:27 PM

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Wolf Pack (ThisIsMyBoomstick) wrote:

By the way, thank you for the link to Susan Watts' blog.

Tuesday, October 26, 2010 8:51:23 PM

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Wolf Pack (ThisIsMyBoomstick) wrote:

I would love to see millions of salmon in a river, stream, or creek. I bet the grizzlies are loving this smorgasbord. I would too if I was there with a fishing pole.

Not a bad article either. Wish there were more articles about fisheries and aquatics on this site.

Tuesday, October 26, 2010 8:49:00 PM

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Debra Dunker (jlyfsh) wrote:

If this is the case, than we can expect larger migrations in the area around Greenland, Yes??

Tuesday, October 26, 2010 7:28:28 PM

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Peter Sullivan (JTiberiusKirk) wrote:

Just goes to show that sometimes science gets an unexplained surprise now & then from mother nature. We humans really don't know as much as we think we do.

Tuesday, October 26, 2010 7:10:56 PM

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Marty Kassowitz (mkass) wrote:

So much for needing genetically modified salmon. <http://organicconnectmag.com/wp/2010/10/the-case-against-genetically-modified-salmon/>

Tuesday, October 26, 2010 6:59:40 PM

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Mary Woodbury (Duende) wrote:

Good article, but I would advise against the negative connotations of posturing. I was one of the paddlers, and the journey was a very positive one, in celebration of wild salmon, a precious resource for this area. The photo you link to is actually a traditional First Nations canoe ritual, where when you approach another's land by canoe, you hold up your paddles in respect and peace, and your chief interacts with the chief of the land on which you're embarking, and requests permissions to go onshore. This traditional ceremony was reenacted at every First Nations stop along the way. Various bands opened up their grounds to all paddlers, offering food and camping grounds for the night in the five-day journey.

Tuesday, October 26, 2010 6:54:11 PM

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