

Response Statement for Sockeye Salmon, Cultus population

April 21, 2004

Common Name: Sockeye Salmon, Cultus population

Scientific Name: *Oncorhynchus nerka*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Endangered

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: The Cultus population has unique genetic and biological characteristics (migratory delay of adults at the Fraser estuary, protracted lake residency before spawning, exclusive lake spawning, late spawning date, deepwater life of fry). The lack of success with previous attempts to transplant sockeye to Cultus Lake and other lakes, suggests that Cultus sockeye are irreplaceable. The Cultus population has collapsed primarily due to overexploitation, including directed and incidental catches in mixed-stock fisheries at levels above those that can be sustained. An additional key source of impact on spawning adults since 1995 has been very high pre-spawn mortality, associated with unusually early migration into freshwater and with *Parvicapsula* parasite infestation. There are also ecological impacts to the lake habitat from colonization by Eurasian Watermilfoil, land development, stream channelization, nutrient input, and recreational use. Under present conditions, there is a high probability of extinction of the Cultus sockeye.

Occurrence: British Columbia, Pacific Ocean

Competent Minister(s):

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Provinces and territories to be consulted:

British Columbia

Applicable federal legislation: Fisheries managed and fish habitat is protected under the *Fisheries Act*.

Conservation activities underway: A recovery strategy is being developed by a team of individuals with technical expertise in recovery planning. Incidental harvest has been reduced since 2001, and habitat restoration and brood stock protection programs are underway.

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: The Minister of the Environment will immediately forward the COSEWIC assessment of this species to the Governor in Council (GIC). The Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will consult with the government of British Columbia, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not this species should be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act*. Information respecting opportunities to comment will be posted on the public registry. The Minister of the Environment will then review the comments received and, following consultation with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, will make a recommendation to the GIC on whether or not to add this species to the List. The GIC will make a decision within nine (9) months of having received the assessment.