



Regulatory Options for Managing the Pacific Salmon Recreational Fishery in Ontario

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Regulatory Guidelines for Managing the Pacific Salmon Recreational Fishery in Ontario

This report describes the regulatory options for the management of Pacific salmon in Ontario. The options are based on current scientific knowledge on the effectiveness of various regulations for managing salmon (see Sullivan, 2003). They are a combination of management strategies designed to provide angling opportunities while protecting salmon populations from overexploitation.

The goal of this approach is to ensure that regulations can be rationalized on a sound biological basis to achieve resource sustainability according to the Strategic Plan for Ontario Fisheries (SPOF II) (OMNR 1992). At the same time Ontario's fishing regulations will be streamlined and simplified to provide additional angling opportunities.

In order to provide consistency to the management of salmon in Ontario, the regulatory options contained herein are the only options to be used in the development of any new regulations for Pacific salmon. Where the existing regulations do not conform to the approach in this report, they should be analyzed using the criteria set out in the provincial Approvals in Principle process.

Border waters and/or the Great Lakes that have international or interprovincial agreements in place may be considered exceptions to the Pacific salmon tool kit if they do not conform to the tool kit recommendation. For those waters where agreements are not currently in place, the harmonization of multi-jurisdictional regulations should be sought and where possible be compatible with the Pacific salmon tool kit.

Introduction

For the purpose of this exercise, Pacific salmon includes pink salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*), coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), and chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*). The three species are classified together for the purposes of regulations however there are distinct differences between each. All three have been introduced to the Great Lakes with coho and chinook salmon currently providing important fishing opportunities from both naturalized populations and put-grow-and-take stocking events.

Pink salmon were inadvertently introduced to Lake Superior in 1956 (Nunan 1967) and have since established small naturally reproducing populations in all of the Great Lakes (Mills et al. 1993). Pink salmon normally mature and spawn at two years of age (Kwain 1982). They die after spawning. Pink salmon play a relatively minor role in any of the Great Lake fish communities.

Coho salmon are an important sport fish species first introduced to Lake Erie in 1933. Historically, all five Great Lakes have been stocked with coho salmon and naturalized

populations have been established in each of them. Coho spawn in tributaries of the Great Lakes from September to March and die shortly thereafter similar to pink and chinook salmon.

Chinook salmon are one of the largest sport fish of the Great Lakes and are a significant target for the charter boat industry. The chinook salmon was first introduced (unsuccessfully) to all of the Great Lakes except Lake Superior in 1873 (Mills et al. 1993). It wasn't until plantings in the mid 1960's that naturally reproducing populations were established. Naturalized populations currently exist in most of the Great Lakes. Chinook typically migrate into Great Lake tributaries as early as late August with later runs continuing through mid November. Chinook salmon provide valuable shore and tributary angling opportunities in the fall as well as open water fisheries in spring and summer.

Chinook salmon are stocked into Lakes Ontario, Huron, Michigan and Superior while coho salmon are only stocked into Lakes Michigan and Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) stocks only Lake Ontario with both chinook and coho salmon. Volunteer fishing clubs run private, provincially sanctioned, hatcheries for Chinook salmon stocking in Lakes Superior (one operation) and Huron (four operations). There is also a significant number of Pacific salmon stocked into the Great Lakes annually by American jurisdictions. The stocking of Pacific salmon in the Great Lakes is intended to enhance any natural reproduction with put-grow-and-take fisheries according to the Joint Strategic Plan for Management of Great Lakes Fisheries (GLFC, 1997). Recently, significant levels of natural reproduction of Pacific salmon have been documented in some Great Lakes (MNR 2003) however no special regulations have been implemented to protect these populations across the Great Lakes (with the exception of minimum size limits in the United States to protect recently stocked fish). The management of Pacific salmon in each Great Lake will also be influenced by Fish Community Objectives which are reviewed and revised (if necessary) through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, approximately every five years. Future management objectives for Pacific salmon could therefore change any revisions to the Great Lake specific fish community objectives.

Open/Closed Seasons

There are currently four open seasons for Pacific salmon in Ontario (Table 1) with most lakes having an all-year, or open-all-year except December 24 open season. Several exceptions associated with Pacific salmon exist for the purpose of creating fishing opportunities or protecting vulnerable fall runs of other migratory species. The proposed seasons and all other recommended options contained in this toolkit are consistent with the regulatory principles developed for streamlining Ontario's fishing regulations.

Table 1. Open seasons for Pacific salmon in Ontario (based on the 2004 Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary).

Open season	Division(s)
Open all year	1,3,4,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,12A,14,15,16,17,18,26
Open all year except December 24	2,19,20,21,22/22A,23,24,25,28,30,31,32,33,34,35
April 26 (last Saturday)-September 30	6,13
January 1-March 7 & May 20-October 15	27

Recommended Season Dates:

- **The Pacific salmon fishing season for all Great Lakes proper should be open all year.**
- **Open seasons for Pacific salmon in fisheries management zones with Great Lake tributaries should conform to one of the following standards if any Pacific salmon species is present in the zone:**
 - (i) **Open all year for all Lake Superior tributaries (certain exceptions may apply to conserve coaster brook trout).**
 - (ii) **Fourth Saturday in April to September 30 for Southern and Central Ontario (Lake Ontario, Erie, and Huron tributaries) to maintain consistency with other seasons for migratory salmon and trout.**
- **Year-round open seasons and extended fall seasons for migratory rainbow and brown trout should now include Pacific salmon.**
- **When these species are absent in a division it should have a closed season.**

Catch and Possession Limits

Catch limit is defined as the number of fish a person is allowed to catch and keep in one day. The possession limit is the number of fish a person is allowed to legally possess at any time whether on-hand, in cold storage, or in transit. In most cases, possession limits are the same as one day's catch limit. The concept behind catch and possession limits is to limit the harvest, to equitably distribute the resource among users, promote an ethical use of the resource, and to convey a realistic expectation regarding capacity of the fishery resource.

Salmon and trout are included under an aggregate catch limit, which means that the catch and possession limits for any one species represent the total allowable combined

catch of salmon and trout. In some cases the proportion of the aggregate catch that one species may represent is restricted (i.e. in some areas with a aggregate catch of five fish, only one can be a lake trout).

All fisheries management zones in the province have a Pacific salmon catch and possession limit of 5 for holders of a sport fishing licence and 2 fish for holders of a conservation licence. Present catch and possession limits should be maintained given the present management regime; however, should future sustainability issues or conservation concerns arise (e.g., Lake Superior populations) more conservative limits may need to be considered.

Recommended Catch and Possession Limits:

- **Catch and possession limits for Pacific salmon should remain at 5 fish for the holders of a sport fishing licence and 2 fish for the holders of a conservation licence.**
- **Pacific salmon should still be considered as part of an aggregate limit with other trout and salmon.**

Size Limits

Size limits are not currently used to regulate Pacific salmon fisheries and should not be used to regulate a predominately put-grow-and-take fishery. Should the sustainability of certain populations become an issue, size limits may be considered.

Size Limits Recommendation:

- **Size limits should not be used to manage put-grow-and-take fisheries of Pacific salmon.**

Fish Sanctuaries

Fish sanctuaries are not currently used to regulate or protect Pacific salmon fisheries and should not be used to regulate a predominately put-grow-and-take fishery. In the past, there have been instances where fish sanctuaries have been used for social reasons associated with concerns for trespassing during the salmon runs. Sanctuaries should not be created for social or economic reasons. Sanctuaries however may be required in the future should the management of Pacific salmon populations change from a put-grow-and-take fishery.

One legitimate exception to this recommendation is a section of the Credit River which has been designated as a seasonal sanctuary in order to provide a secure source of eggs for the Ringwood Fish Culture Station.

Fish Sanctuary Recommendation:

- **As a general rule, sanctuaries should not be used to manage put-grow-and-take fisheries for Pacific salmon.**

Special Regulations

Special regulations are not currently used to regulate Pacific salmon fisheries and should not be used to regulate a predominately put-grow-and-take fishery. Should conservation concerns arise for certain populations special regulations may need to be considered on an experimental basis.

Special Regulations Recommendation:

- **Special regulations should not be used to manage put-grow-and-take fisheries for Pacific salmon.**

References

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Appendix I. New Fisheries Management Zones for Ontario's Sport Fisheries