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## **Sockeye salmon in Fraser and Skeena Rivers 'critically endangered,' report says**

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VANCOUVER -- About one-quarter of the world's population of sockeye salmon is threatened with extinction and most of those endangered stocks are in British Columbia, according to a new global assessment released yesterday.

In releasing the findings, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, an organization supported by 11,000 scientists in 160 countries, added sockeye to its Red List of Threatened Species. The Red List was released at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain.

"While the global population [of sockeye] is still considered stable, approximately one-quarter of sockeye subpopulations are listed as threatened and endangered," the IUCN states. "Most of the critically endangered sockeye runs are in British Columbia, where dramatic declines occurred in stretches of the Fraser and Skeena Rivers."

The IUCN divided sockeye into 80 subpopulations globally. It found that five of those subpopulations have become extinct in recent history, while 17 are threatened, representing 23 per cent of existing populations.

Of the 33 subpopulations found in B.C., 12 are threatened, with population declines of up to 93 per cent.

The IUCN identifies the key threats to the species as mixed-stock fishing, changing ocean and river conditions, and the "negative effects of hatcheries and construction of artificial spawning habitat."

Dr. Peter Rand, lead assessor of the IUCN Salmonid Specialist Group, said in an interview from Spain that the assessment is the first to look at a Pacific salmon species on a global scale.

"The key finding ... is that there is significant decline in the abundance in a number of populations in B.C., enough to warrant listing by IUCN which represents a global standard for describing threatened and endangered species," he said.

Guido Rahr, president of the Wild Salmon Center, a U.S.-based, non-profit organization that works to preserve salmon stocks, said the IUCN's findings are disturbing.

"I think it's an extremely serious situation. What's happened with Atlantic salmon, and is now clear with Pacific salmon, is we're seeing the populations on the southern, and in some cases the central part of the range, declining steadily," Mr. Rahr said.

"What's important to know is that once fish populations decline it can be difficult to bring them back. That's been our experience in the Pacific Northwest and it's definitely been our experience with Atlantic salmon."

Dr. Craig Orr, executive director of the Watershed Watch Salmon Society, a B.C.-based non-profit, called the IUCN findings "a wakeup call."

"Some of these B.C. subpopulations are on the verge of collapsing entirely," he said. "We may not even be able to reverse the trajectory on these. ... I think that we're on the brink, with many of these subpopulations, of seeing them just wink out."

Jeffrey Young, an aquatic biologist with the David Suzuki Foundation, said the findings "put a spotlight on B.C. and the role Canada has to play in protecting sockeye."

Mr. Young said Canada needs to do a better job of protecting habitat, managing mixed-stock fisheries and implementing a wild-salmon policy developed recently by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Diane Lake, a spokesperson for DFO, stated in an e-mail that the department "welcomes independent scientific research, and will be carefully evaluating the IUCN report to see if it offers insights that could enhance the conservation and sustainable use of salmon stocks in B.C."