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Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs Ken Smith announced today an early opening of the Sockeye and Pink Salmon Fishery of the Fraser River System in the State of Washington in two areas of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

The Makah and Klallam Indian tribes began fishing in their treaty fishing sites within the Strait on June 27. This opening date precedes by approximately six days the opening by other treaty tribes and non-Indians on July 3-5.

"By taking this action we are assuring that the United States fulfills its obligation under a 1979 Supreme Court decision which said that we have the responsibility to regulate the fishery to provide the tribes the full opportunity to harvest their treaty share of the salmon," Smith said.

"The run timing and narrow geography of the Strait necessitates extra time for the affected tribes to catch their portion of the treaty share," he added.

Federal biologists predict a heavy run of salmon for the 1981 fishing season. The runs of the prized fish in these waters are equally shared between the U.S. and Canada under the terms of a 1980 Convention. The U.S. has treaty obligations to certain Northwest Indian tribes to provide the full opportunity to harvest one-half of each year's run passing through tribal treaty fishing areas.

Interior regulations sent to the Federal Register, implement the system which the U.S. has used since 1977 to meet its obligations both to Canada and to U.S. treaty Indians. This year, as in previous years, the affected treaty tribes will regulate their fisheries concurrently and in a manner consistent with Interior regulations.

The Commerce Department regulates the non-Indian fishery in accordance with recommendations from the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission The State Department pursuant to Article VI of the Convention has exempted from the Commerce regulations treaty Indian fishing under Interior regulations.

The treaty catch will be closely monitored. Should it be necessary to fulfill U.S. obligations under the Convention to assure proper spawning escapement and equal division of the catch between U.S. and Canada, the Commerce Department pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding with Interior will direct in-season adjustments of the fishing schedules.