

Saving Our Salmon

It is with grave concern that I continue to write on the state of our salmon resource. I cannot help but look at the Alaska example of record salmon runs, while in Canada our focus is on ocean conditions, and global warming for answers to our decline, the same ocean and climate conditions that produce the abundant Alaska salmon runs. In Canada the solution has and is always focused on reduction of fishing effort and redistribution of the best value for a pound of fish, rather than production of fish. The management regime that has dissected the coast into smaller access areas and groups in all fisheries, has extinguished economic viability through diversification. This process refocuses attention to economical access and away from the real problem, the declining salmon stocks.

In these times when there is a great deal of concern about the organic aspect of our food supply, we have ignored the principles of a healthy wild salmon in favour of farmed. We continue the trend of transferring the production of fish for food to a global economy rather than producing a Canadian product. We follow the short-term economic benefit of producing salmon products consistent with the production of salmon in other countries, countries that have little or no natural salmon, rather than the uniqueness of our natural organic production. We have also ignored the principles of all life forms connected to these wild salmon. This is a spiral that will not only see the end of our salmon, but will see the resulting decline of all and more, particularly our renewable resources.

The fact that I have a PHD in anthropology and a degree in fisheries biology might make my views more credible in the eyes of my critics. My opinions and observations however, could be judged on common sense alone.

The Decline Spiral:

Logging, mining and other habitat degrading practices have resulted in a process of a decline in salmon throughout the whole of the B.C. Coast. This process has not only reduced the capacity for access to, and degradation of, spawning grounds to these salmon, but the loss of the spawning salmon has reduced the nutritional value of the waters. This nutrition is essential to the recruitment of new salmon, depending on food to survive as a species. The waterways in which there are few, or no spawning salmon, lack the ability to deliver these nutrients to the lakes and estuaries to provide the necessary food source. This reduces the survival of those species that live the first year of their life in these rivers and streams as well as annual outward migrating species. Various development activities such as mining and logging reduce the ability of the soil to retain water resulting in extensive flooding and silting in vast areas of the B.C. interior and significant damage has occurred as a result of clear cutting for removal of pine beetle infestations. This results in spring silting and conditions, which are extremely detrimental to hatching salmon eggs, but also the ability for salmon to maintain their required in-stream or lake growth period.

Though over time there is likely a natural recovery and improvement in the condition of habitat, this recovery is limited to only some of the habitat and often absent of salmon as a result of earlier conditions. The absence of salmon opens the door and creates political incentives for other economic uses of our waterways. The net loss in salmon is no longer visible nor can the long-term ecological or economic value of salmon be weighed against the long-term or short term ecological and economical

benefits from other uses.

The necessity for governments to generate funds for growing government and their bureaucracies to provide government services, puts continuous pressure on our resources and environment. Politics such as they are, focus on what would appear the simplest quickest revenue generating use of resources. This is a result of several factors. One is the desire for re-election of a particular political Party, the necessity to appear to be creating jobs, and funding for government services to the public. Often some or many of these services are unnecessary, and the bureaucracies are perpetuating their own existence by creating more unnecessary rules and regulations for the public in general, but even more important, are almost never economically efficient. There is never any long-term vision. If we the government of the Country and we as the government of British Columbia had vision, we would be harvesting sustainably and protecting and managing all of our renewable resources first and foremost for the long term benefit of this Country and Province. WE can change our political policies in time to save our salmon, but we, and as I say we, I am referring to everyone that has an interest in the existence of our fish and environment, must change from an attitude of taking to an attitude of restoration.

Restoration Development and Funding Process:

The Federal Government's reluctance, or claimed inability to fund salmon enhancement or restoration and habitat protection, coupled with the lack of Federal responsibility to hold Provincial governments accountable for degradation of Salmon and Salmon habitat, is a major cause of salmon decline. The various social programs, such as seasonal benefits for fishermen and subsidies to the fishing industries though unnecessary, incur public costs. This may appear unfair to the people of Canada, and indefensible by the fishers of British Columbia. Yet the millions poured into the auto industry in Ontario and the various social costs over the last 30 years as the result of Quebec's threats of separation and the resulting transfer payments go relatively unnoticed. It might also seem coincidental that the Province leading the production output of manufacturing is Ontario, on which Ottawa sits. However, it would seem the social costs associated with the fishing industry have created support for incentives to reduce the number of participants in the industry, and withdraw the necessary funding needed to live up to Federal Government's responsibility to the resource. If these trends are to be changed we must ask, how do we go about it, and how will it be funded?

Salmon could be considered currency. Regardless of the value of different currencies, regardless of the interest rate, salmon will not change in relative value. In other words they are like gold. An investment in salmon today will bring future economic stability. So the sooner we invest the greater the increase of cost to profit ratio. How should we go about this changed focus? By concentrating on those that have sustained the biggest loss as a result of management policies, the communities. That is the fishing communities and the coastal communities.

Restoration and enhancement must take place coast wide. The logical people to carry out these projects are the people who live and work on the Coast. Access to many coastal rivers is only by boat. The fishing communities have boats, they have unemployed, they have no fishery and they have experience. Coastal Communities have local knowledge, declining populations and coastal history. Interior communities have access, increased unemployment as a result of continued curtailment of

logging. They also have experience with required equipment for building settlement ponds and run off control.

The financing of this recovery work should not be at taxpayer's expense. The initial funding should come from those responsible for the decline, the Federal and Provincial Government. This may appear to be at the expense of the taxpayer, but this would be a public investment. Not a bail out. Other sources would be available for the management and maintenance once the salmon were re-instated over time. Other sources of cost funding could be an increase in sport license, an increase in commercial license, increased stumpage fees in forestry, a major contributor to the problem, city water meter revenues, revenue from hydro, a major contributor to the problem, and creating revenues from water diversion, for irrigation another important contributor to the problem. The eventual financing could come from royalties from the increased salmon productions.

The details of such an incentive have to be supported by the communities involved. A design plan needs to be put in place to deal with priorities, procedure, and sequential processes. This will require a commitment by everyone including the environmental communities to remove the onslaught of diversions of public attention to and from all the believed environmental threats, a multitude of which are at times questionable, and focus on an actual commitment to do rather than lobby and campaign. One step at a time; lets not make it backwards.

It is my belief that there should be a curtailment of most of the advisory process and that a management committee be struck for the sole purpose of designing the procedures of this project, which should include all community involvement. This should be a community project and should be managed by the involved community, supported by governments, and DFO should only be an advisory to this committee.

The political, public, and industry focus must change, if we are to restore the ecological and economical value of British Columbia's most valuable resource, our Salmon. Those in the fishing industry are constantly being accused of an unwillingness to change; yet it is government policy that leads us down this declining spiral, because the government isn't willing to change. We must take the lead. Everyone in this Province should be telling government that this is a dead end road. If we continue down this road everything we value in this Province will be lost. It can be done.

Gerald Dalum, Fishing for Freedom