

# Salmon are counting on us

## Chilliwack Progress

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I was very pleased last week to see our B.C. Environment Minister Barry Penner ask the Federal Minister Gail Shea to call for a public review of the disastrous 2009 sockeye season this year. (Sockeye disaster prompts call for a public review by B.C. minister, *The Progress*, September 22 by Jennifer Feinberg) Although I welcome this call by Mr. Penner I believe there is a lot more that should be examined in a public review process than just looking at the “forecasting method” used by DFO that Mr. Penner suggests should be done.

I believe all fishing sectors, Commercial, First Nations and Recreational anglers have had effect on the low sockeye returns during this and some previous seasons. As well I think some Federal and Provincial government policies have not helped matters now and in the past.

Commercial fishing at one time had many many openings in the Fraser River from the Fraser River Estuary right up to Mission. Were too many of the previous generations of Sockeye allowed to be harvested then, in order to sustain the runs? Some First Nations fishers fish illegally during closed times with set and drifts nets often under darkness and some people think there has not been proper enumeration of fish taken then and during their sanctioned openings. Fish are often sold outside economic opportunities during food, social and ceremonial only fisheries.

This year recreational anglers during the peak of the sockeye returns to the Fraser River were asked by DFO to fish selectively and were asked not to bottom bounce (flossing) where the interception of sockeye happens regularly. Many anglers complied, but others, did not. This caused the river from the Agassiz Rosedale Bridge to the Hope Bridge to be closed by DFO to salmon fishing for the recreational on August 16 before being opened again after the sockeye runs had passed to their natal streams.

The Provincial and Federal Government do not get passing marks in my books either. Both governments allow Atlantic fish farms on the coast to continue and still issue licenses for more to be built, even after Alexandra Morton has provided evidence time after time of the damage sea lice are doing to sockeye and other salmon species. It appears both the Provincial and Federal government allow monetary and international concerns to come before the well being of out wild stocks.

For the last few years both levels of government have allowed gravel mining to go on in the Fraser River main stem around Chilliwack that affect salmon rearing and habitat areas. The Provincial Government sells this to the public in the guise of flood protection while many know it is about the revenue to be gained by gravel companies to be used for British Columbia Gateway projects and other construction projects that need the gravel for fill,

concrete and asphalt.

For example in 2006 a well publicized news story saw millions of pink alveins killed due to a causeway being built across a Fraser River side channel. This caused the channel to de-water suffocating the millions of alveins still in their redds giving them no chance to emerge and migrate to the ocean to begin their 2 year life cycle. Where was the Provincial Environmental Minister that year asking for an investigation into this devastation? There was no investigation that I know of, nor were charges ever laid.

Financial cut backs to Fisheries and Oceans Canada budgets over the last years has, according to some, seen the lack of proper assessments of out-going smolts and fry. Also, the monetary and staff cut backs have negatively affected the proper counting of the returning salmon to their natal streams.

I feel it is time to stop blaming just nature and global warming (climate change) to the decrease in some of our salmon runs but all user groups need to look at themselves to see what they can do to reverse this trend of decreasing sockeye salmon and other species of salmon. After all, we owe it not only to our future generations, so they too can witness each year the marvelous return of our precious salmon – a renewable resource – to our rivers, but most importantly, we owe it to our fish to do so. They, the salmon are counting on us, and if they could talk they would say get on with it”

Christopher Gadsden

Chilliwack

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