

Wilderness Tourism Association



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November 29, 2008

The Honourable Gail, Shea,
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Parliament Buildings, Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1A 0A6

The Honourable Stan Hagen
Minister of Agriculture and Lands
PO Box 9043, STN Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Ministers,

Re: action to protect wild salmon

We are writing to you both to express our great concern regarding wild salmon and the impacts to their survival from open net caged fish farms. The Wilderness Tourism Association (WTA) exists to ensure a sustainable future for BC's wilderness tourism industry. We represent the hundreds of small businesses that offer nature-based tourism activities throughout British Columbia. As an industry sector that relies on scarce natural resources, like wild salmon, to be successful and sustainable this is an issue of extreme importance to us.

The tourism industry is an important component of BC's economy. It is a key contributor to BC's GDP and is one of the largest private sector employers in BC. In 2008, tourists will spend approximately \$10 billion dollars in British Columbia and the industry continues to experience popularity and growth.

All BC communities feel the impact of tourism in their economies. A large percentage of these businesses are small, localized businesses that provide stability, diversification and job creation, whether it's in the wilderness, in or near municipalities, or on First Nations settlement lands. Nature based tourism considered to be high-value tourism products providing high yields and significant value added to BC's economy. Nowhere is this more true than on the coast of BC where the foundation of the sector is wild salmon. It is expected that Salmon related tourism on the coast will contribute \$1.4 billion in value added to BC's economy combining the direct, indirect and induced benefits.

Despite our industry's present and past success, we require a certain and equitable operating environment in order to be sustainable and contribute fully to the province's future growth. In this case it requires a resilient wild salmon resource to sustain the tourism products and activities that it supports. However, the recent science and public discourse indicating significant mortality in BC's wild salmon stocks due to sea lice generated by open net-cage fish farming

gives a clear warning to the BC's tourism industry. Our industry has reviewed the available science (both published and unpublished) regarding this topic, visited farm sites, consulted industry experts both in BC and Norway, and attended Pacific Salmon Forum meetings.

We acknowledge the following key issues:

- That the independent, peer reviewed and published research, based on the sampling of outgoing pink salmon fry around the fish farms, found heavy infestation and devastation of the fry by the sea lice incubated from the open net caged fish farms. The resulting scientific predictions found that these stocks will be locally extinct within four years.
- That our tour operators have witnessed, first hand, the savaging of the pink salmon fry by the sea lice incubated on the fish farm.
- That the sea lice problem is not specific to the Broughton Archipelago, and that there is evidence of significant sea lice impact on pink salmon and other stocks in the Discovery Islands area near Campbell River
- That the Broughton Archipelago and the Discovery Islands are the only areas of the southern coast where significant independent peer reviewed and published research has been carried out. In addition we have anecdotal evidence that sea lice problems also exist in Sechelt, Clayoquot Sound, Nootka Sound, Quatsino Sound, and Port Hardy.
- That the pink salmon returns this year (2008) in the Broughton Archipelago to be worse than in 2002, the year when government insisted on the fallowing of all farms on the out migration routes. After this fallowing the pink salmon stocks in Glendale River, for example, rebounded significantly from 18, 000 in 2002, to 686, 000 in 2004.
- That there is a documented decrease in the Southern Resident Orca population (southern Georgia Strait and Strait of Juan de Fuca), and an absence of pods and changes in behavior with the Northern Resident Orca population (Johnstone Strait). This is due to a decrease in the availability of Chinook salmon, which in turn depends on the pink salmon for its food.
- That there are reports of grizzly bears and black bears along the coast that couldn't find enough salmon this fall in preparation for hibernation. The impacts of this will be realized next Spring and the expectation is that many cubs will not be born.
- That the harmful effects of the widespread use of chemicals in the fish farming industry and waste from fish farms is well documented and raises a range of concerns. There is also widespread evidence of escapements and mortality of salmon predators like sea lions.
- That the fisheries scientists of Norway, Scotland and Ireland have told us not to duplicate their mistakes and to keep open net cage farms away from migratory salmon routes.
- That when salmon farms first appeared on the BC coast promises were made to keep the farms off wild salmon migration routes.

Despite some of the above research and facts being disputed by both fish farm and government scientists, the weight of peer reviewed, scientific evidence shows that the juvenile pink salmon fry are being decimated by sea lice incubated from the farms and we need to be taking the precautionary approach in making decisions about our wild salmon survival. Salmon farms can be managed, but we can't risk the loss of our wild salmon.

We understand that salmon returns are down along the whole southern coastline and that there may be other factors contributing to the decline of pink salmon other than fish farming (e.g. habitat loss, over fishing and by-catch, and pollution). We also understand that DFO has conducted research on climate change and its impacts to salmon and believe this to be the major cause of decreasing salmon populations. However, the historical data and evidence indicate that

the presence of open net-caged salmon farms also has significant impact and it is something we can control given the political and industry will.

We believe it is time that we heed the evidence and warnings, and move fish farms off the key migratory routes of wild salmon and into closed containment in order to allow for the unobstructed passage of juvenile salmon. We need priority and expediency for this issue before we cause irreversible damage to our wild salmon stocks. Clearly some wild salmon populations in the Broughton Archipelago are already on the brink of extinction. Under these drastic circumstances, not only will Canadian residents be unable to purchase a wild salmon from their local distributor or res, but there will be no salmon for catch and release sport fishing or bears, orcas or eagles for tourists to come and see - the very icons that make up Super Natural BC. The Nature based tourism and sport fishing tourism activities make economic contributions to B.C. that far outstrips the contribution made by salmon farms. However the continued operation of open net-cage fish farms puts the future of these economically significant sectors at risk.

If the tourism industry and salmon farming industry are to continue to be sustainable the following specific and immediate actions are required.

- That the farms along the Northern salmon migration route (Fife, Penphrase, and Tribune Channels) in the Broughton Archipelago be fallowed for the outgoing 2009 salmon fry. Specifically this means fallowing: the Marine Harvest farms at Sargeant's Pass, Humphrey Rock, Glacier Falls, Wicklow, and Smith Rock; and the Mainstream farms at Burdwood, Cliff Bay and Sir Edmund from March 1- June 30th.2009.
- That government initiate and sponsor independent research to sample outgoing fry for sea lice for all species of salmon migrating close to fish farms. This research needs to occur in all areas of southern BC and the data made available to the public.
- That government make investments and research in closed containment salmon rearing technology so the industry can embark on a plan for complete closed containment by 2013. Moving to closed containment is recognized by industry experts as the only way for the salmon farm industry to be sustainable and not impact wild salmon. In the meantime the above two actions are required to mitigate current sea lice impacts.

Please give the above actions your immediate attention. The wild salmon and our industry depend on it.

Respectfully,



Brian Gunn, President,
Wilderness Tourism Association

Cc. John Duncan, MP, Vancouver Island North