

**S**keena Chinook Salmon are in decline. There are as many reasons as there are theories for why this is so. The most plausible explanation is that there are a multitude of factors conspiring to bring the largest of the Pacific Salmon to the perilous position they are in now. We hope that fisheries scientists will be given sufficient resources and be granted enough time to research the sources of Skeena chinook woes, and that their labour will ultimately lead to concrete measures directed at solving the problem, but until that time sport fishers can and must take meaningful action to alleviate what could very soon become a crisis.

The bulk of Skeena chinook are headed for large lake tributary systems like the Morice, Babine, and Kitsumkalum. Long rivers like the Zymoetz, Kispiox, and Sustut have smaller but significant returns. A myriad of small rivers each host small numbers of the big salmon.

The Lakelse River fits into the last category. The prevalent view among fisheries staff and anglers has been that the Lakelse has a very small number of chinook and that the bulk of them spawn in Coldwater Creek. This theory is based on a tiny amount of sketchy evidence that was done long ago.

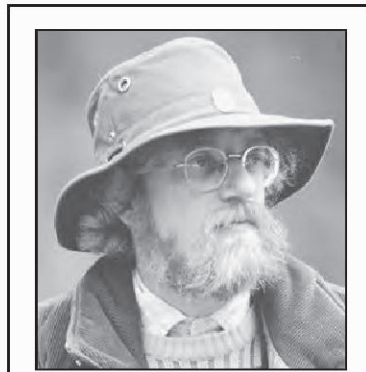
It is unquestionably true that chinook spawn in Coldwater Creek, but over the last two decades, while fishing for trout late in the summer and early in the fall, I have witnessed many pairs of chinook

spawning in various locations scattered throughout the entire river. It is quite possible that chinook also utilize Williams Creek as well. All of this makes me suspect that the system's chinook may have been much more abundant than it is commonly thought, still, there is little doubt that the chinook have been returning to the river in meagre numbers for a long time.

The Lakelse has been closed to chinook fishing above the logging bridge for just as long, but inexplicably, fishers have been allowed to fish for them in the water below the bridge. Almost all of that fishing is done from the bridge.

Forty years ago, and before, the lure of choice by the bridge fishers was salmon roe. They impaled it on barbed hooks until those irons were outlawed. Fishing thus they slaughtered countless cutthroat, Dolly Varden, steelhead juveniles and smolts, in their quest for chinook.

When ethical conservation-minded anglers expressed their concern about this crude fishery, its participants argued that the confluence of the Skeena and Lakelse



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## Salmon woes

Skeena and continuing their passage upstream. Apparently DFO didn't disagree, for the bridge fishery continues.

So where do these theories originate? First, you have to consider the people who advance them. They think that big is best. They are the supersize sector who prefer a mound of food from a buffet to a reasonable sized meal cooked by a skilled chef at fine restaurant. Go big or go home they chant from the cabs of their giant trucks.

When it comes to fish, they are consistent with their bloated philosophy, the want 'em big, lots of meat on the bone and lots of weight for bragging rights. In the

Rivers was where the side channel of the former met the latter less than a short cast below the logging bridge and, thus, the regulations governing the Lakelse — bait ban and a ban on chinook fishing — should, therefore, not apply.

To bolster their argument, the bait tossers contended that most of the chinook they were targeting were upriver bound salmon seeking the clean water of the Lakelse to cleanse their gills before taking the side channel back to the

realm of salmon that means chinook.

For these folks fishing is all about catching and killing in the most expeditious manner. This is why they seek out places like the Lakelse Logging Bridge for their sport. To justify this bad angling behaviour they concoct elaborate zany theories.

Do fish stop at clear streams to cleanse their gills? Do their gills require cleansing? The proponents of this haywire idea won't be able to cite a single scientific paper on this behaviour because they don't read scientific papers, and there are no such papers.

The notion that the meeting point of the Skeena and Lakelse Rivers is just below the logging bridge is just as preposterous as the gill cleansing theory. Most of the Lakelse's water (at this point almost all of it) flows another kilometre and a half before it meets the Skeena.

Yes, there have been times when a significant portion of the Lakelse's flow entered the Skeena approximately half a kilometre below the logging bridge after a flood took out a log jam that had been sprawled there for years, but this in no way supports the absurd contention that the confluence is at the high water channel.

Lakelse chinook are few. They are at the point where every potential spawner that passes under the logging bridge may well be critical to the survival of Lakelse chinook. Closing the pathetic and unethical bridge fishery is an easy and effective way of doing something meaningful to help those magnificent fish survive.