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# Last Call

A R E P O R T O F T H E P A C I F I C S A L M O N F O R E S T S P R O J E C T

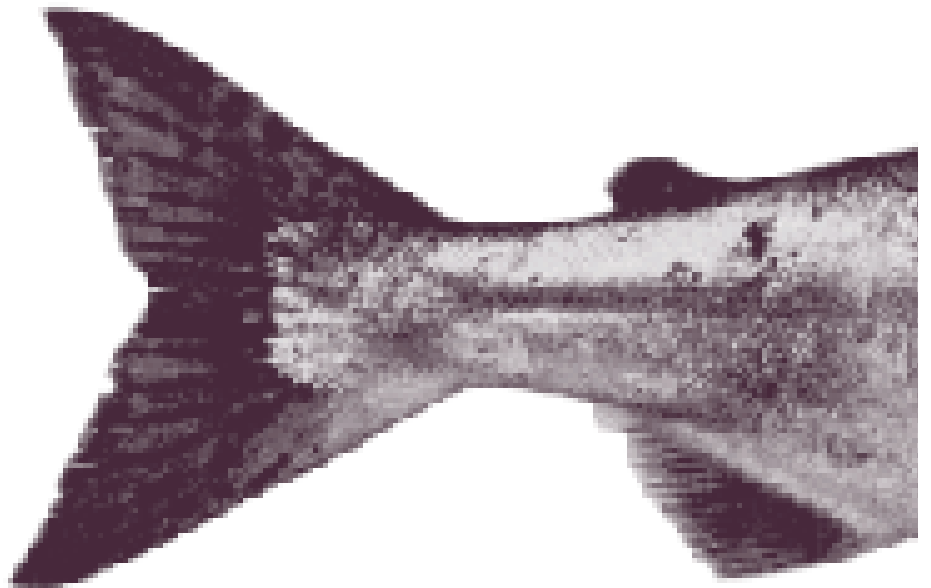
## The Will to Save Pacific Salmon

by Terry Glavin

### Executive Summary

David Suzuki Foundation

Informed observers — fisheries biologists, Aboriginal People, conservationists, commercial fishermen and anglers — have told us for years that if wild salmon are to have a future on Canada's west coast, we must be prepared to make sweeping changes to the way we do things on land, in rivers and at sea.



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What's new about this year's message, however, is that time has really run out. There's no time left for argument or assigning blame as to what has caused this crisis. If wild salmon are to be a part of our future, a decision must be made now. It is a straightforward matter: either wild salmon will survive, or they won't. Either salmon will continue to contribute a necessary component to the environmental health of this province, or they won't. Either salmon will be part of our culture, quality of life and economy, or they won't.

To decide that wild salmon must have a place in our future is a simple thing to do. The consequences, however, are enormous and dramatic.



Mark Hobson photo.

If wild salmon are to be a part of our future,  
a decision must be made now.

**Drastic Changes** This decision will mean sweeping disruptions to the way we live. It will change everything – from the way we build cities, cut trees and graze cattle, to the way we govern ourselves. It will mean drastic changes in the way we catch salmon, where we catch them, how much we catch – or even if we catch them. Either we change now, or there won't be any salmon left.

We do not make this statement lightly. The David Suzuki Foundation is an ardent supporter of government measures that will allow for vibrant and healthy fisheries for all sectors: aboriginal communities, commercial and recreational fishermen. Key members of this Foundation, including Dr. David Suzuki, have family and community ties to fishing and deeply appreciate the importance of the salmon fishery to coastal communities. However, we believe the time has come that we all must be honest about the seriousness of the dilemma before us: the Pacific salmon fishery will never return to “the good old days”.

It is time to face the fact that the “industry” as we've known it is over, and must be replaced by something new.



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**A New Dialogue** The current disputes between Canada and the U.S., and the governments of B.C. and Canada, are detracting from the far more critical and historic dialogue about the future of Pacific salmon, period. The time for a completely new dialogue between people of both countries about the future of the salmon is long overdue.

Canadians and Americans must set aside their differences and focus on an integrated, long-term strategy to protect the genetic diversity of Pacific salmon. This strategy must be comprehensive and adaptive, from the bi-national to the watershed and community level. The strategy must integrate the actions of every level of government with jurisdiction that impacts salmon. And the scope of such a strategy cannot be limited to the traditional concerns regarding fisheries, but must also include international measures like reducing emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

**Ecological Disturbances** In recent years, fisheries scientists throughout the Pacific have begun to document long-term cycles and fluctuations in weather, barometric pressure and ocean productivity, and how these fluctuations mirror trends in the abundance of Pacific salmon.

Changing ocean temperature regimes are causing salmon to change their homeward migration routes, and major salmon runs are exhibiting unanticipated behaviour in the timing of their returns to B.C. rivers. These fluctuations and variability in ocean regimes and the possibility of long-term declines in ocean productivity make changes in land-use and fisheries management practices even more crucial. To make matters more perilous, salmon are encountering extreme stresses in freshwater in the final stages of their homeward migrations.



Mark Hobson photo.

In 1998, water temperatures in the Fraser River were among the highest on record and water levels were the lowest on record. These conditions compelled fisheries managers to make decisions about fishing openings that caused further hardship on a commercial industry already in deep economic crisis.

The commercial salmon-fishing industry, as it has evolved over the past century, is no longer viable and government policy must reflect this fact.

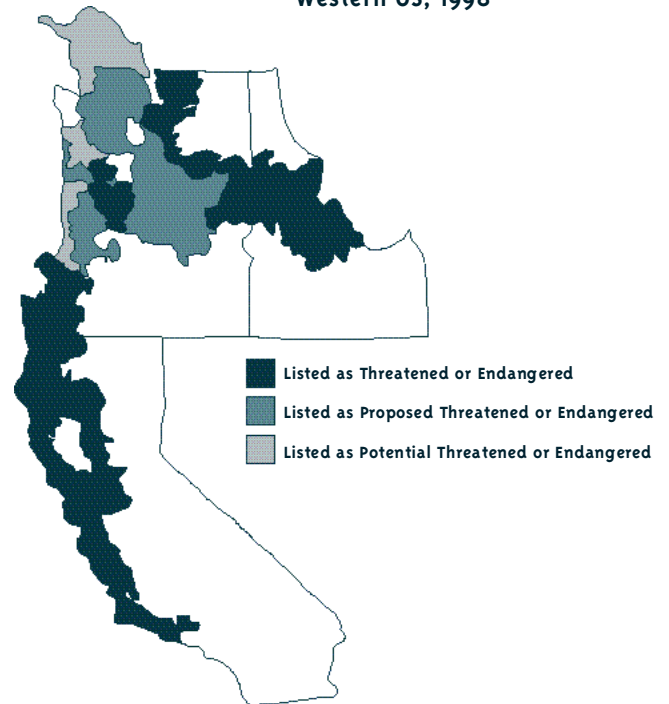
With the possible exception of some Alaskan fisheries, commercial salmon fishing can no longer be regarded as an industry in any conventional sense. It can no longer provide a livelihood to the vast majority of fishermen. Worldwide, the price influence of the salmon netcatch industry on all the major markets, along with a variety of other factors, has caused the unit price of salmon to drop precipitously. Industry analysts long ago conceded that these trends will not reverse, even if wild salmon production drops dramatically. Prices for wild chinook, sockeye and coho are likely to keep falling, but prices for chum and pink are not likely to fall, simply because they can't: any further price declines will mean fishermen will simply not be able to afford to fish them.

The conclusions of this report are not based on wistful, utopian notions about the future or overly pessimistic assessments of the present. They are based on years of analysis by scientists and economists from a variety of disciplines and agencies, including the WorldWatch Institute, the U.S. National Research Council and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

## Threatened and Endangered

Since the beginning of the century, salmon have disappeared from almost half their former range over the northwestern section of North America. Of the distinct spawning populations that remained in the U.S. south of Alaska as of June 1998, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service had identified four populations as "officially" endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Another five populations had been declared "threatened", and currently a further 18 salmon populations – from southern California to Canada – were classified as candidates for endangered or threatened status. Canadian salmon have no specific "endangered species" laws

**Geographic Extent of Threatened or Endangered Pacific Salmon Stocks in Western US, 1998**



Since wild salmon have a genetic imprint from their natal stream, geographical areas can be used for defining genetically distinct salmon stocks or populations.

In the United States, salmon stocks are classified as "Evolutionary Significant Units" or ESUs. The above map depicts the ESUs which are currently listed as "threatened" or "endangered" in addition to those ESUs which are proposed, or have the potential to be, threatened or endangered. SOURCE: National Marine Fisheries Service, May 4, 1998

that would provide maps indicating the location of the biological trauma wards that the salmon's terrestrial habitats have become. Unlike U.S. fisheries agencies, Canada doesn't have much comprehensive data about the status of salmon under its jurisdiction. However, a 1996 American Fisheries Society review of a variety of Canadian fisheries data found that assessments were possible for only slightly more than half the roughly 9,600 salmon stocks in B.C. and the Yukon. Of those, 624 were found to be at "high risk" of extinction, 78 were at "moderate risk" and 230 were of "special concern". Another 142 were extinct.

## Structural Changes

If there is to be a commercial fishery for salmon at all, significant structural change in the industry is necessary. Both the U.S. and Canadian governments must assist commercial fishermen and shoreworkers to develop new fishing practices, new markets and new ways to add “value” to fewer fish.

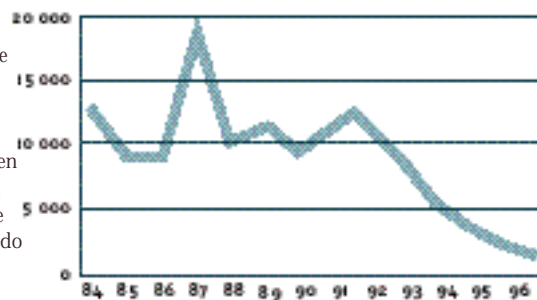


## Some of the major recommendations of this report are:

- mixed-stock fisheries management regimes must be brought to an end
- interception fisheries, undertaken by the commercial and recreational sectors in both countries, must be replaced by more stock-specific, selective fisheries
- governments in both countries should expend every effort to assist fishermen and fishing communities to make these difficult transitions
- the Pacific Salmon Treaty, and its enabling legislation in Canada and the U.S., should be repealed and replaced with a new convention that binds all of the Pacific states and British Columbia
- a new bi-national treaty must reflect not only the legitimate interests of fishermen, but also the public interest in salmon. Salmon is a classic common-property resource in the U.S. and in Canada and is by law a resource owned by the Crown
- any new treaty must be informed by the importance of maintaining biological diversity in salmon populations rather than short-term industrial purposes

### Trend in Coho Escapements into Enhanced Coho-producing Streams in the Thompson River Watershed

The annual cumulative count for coho escapements are based on fence count records for the Louis, Lemieux, Dunn, Eagle, Salmon and Deadman rivers. The plotting of this data demonstrates the dramatic drop in coho escapements in the Thompson River Watershed. Coho escapements peaked in 1987, declined sharply, rallied in 1992 and then have continued to drop. This trend in the Thompson River Watershed could be considered indicative of the general state of coho in BC since commercial activities, like logging, and other events in the watershed do not explain the trend.



## Healthy Fisheries

What all this means is that by allowing the old, volume-based industrial fisheries to die, commercial fishing does not have to die with it. It is only by ending the conventional, industrial fisheries – and by moving away from our reliance on conventional-gear vessels in mixed-stock fisheries – that healthy, productive commercial salmon fisheries can survive. Traps, weirs and fish-wheels can be easily and economically deployed as alternatives to the traditional non-selective fisheries using seine nets, gillnets and trolling vessels.

While licence buy-back schemes may provide short-term and final relief for

individual fishermen, such measures do nothing for fishing communities. Nor do they reflect the real and growing opportunities in the market for specialty salmon products, and for adding value to the resource which can be attained through the careful handling that low-volume fishing allows.

The changes contemplated by this report are upon us. Either salmon will be part of our future or they won't: either we face the bow into this fierce weather or we'll roll and founder. There's no time left. We must decide now.

What all this means is that by allowing the old, volume-based industrial fisheries to die, commercial fishing does not have to die with it.



**The David Suzuki Foundation**  
2211 West Fourth Ave., Suite 219  
Vancouver, BC Canada V6K 4S2  
E-mail: [solutions@davidsuzuki.org](mailto:solutions@davidsuzuki.org)  
Web: [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)  
Tel: (604) 732-4228  
Fax: (604) 732-0752

**David Suzuki Foundation**  
Finding solutions

### Terry Glavin

Terry Glavin grew up fishing on the BC Coast. He is an award-winning journalist who has written widely on West Coast fisheries, including the books **Dead Reckoning: Confronting the Crisis in Pacific Fisheries** and **A Ghost in the Water**. He is currently West Coast columnist for the **Globe and Mail** and a member of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council.

### David Suzuki Foundation

The David Suzuki Foundation is a federally registered Canadian charity working to design a vision of Earth in which humans live within the planet's productive capacity – and finding and communicating practical steps to bring that vision to reality.

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