

United by Salmon

North Coast Gathering Celebrates Wild Fish, Calls for Moratorium on Farms

By Howard Silverman

May 12, 2005

(TERRACE, BRITISH COLUMBIA) While early spring Chinook splashed in nearby streams, hundreds skipped a day on the Skeena River and its tributaries to cast - not their rods or nets, but their votes - for wild salmon. The Save Our Wild Salmon Summit held on May 7th attracted representatives of a dozen First Nations bands, commercial and recreational fishermen, and citizens from up and down the coast to support a call for a moratorium on salmon farm expansion. The farms have been blamed for harming the wild fish.



“We want to give voice to a broad range salmon farming opposition,” explained Gerald Amos, a former chief of the Haisla First Nation who sits on the Steering Committee of the newly formed Friends of Wild Salmon , the summit’s organizer.

So far, the North Coast of British Columbia has not seen the open-net fish farming that surrounds Vancouver Island in the south. According to a survey conducted by McAllister Opinion Research, a large majority in the region would like to keep it that way - 72% of respondents oppose the introduction of salmon farms.

Ecological impacts

In the U.S. lower 48, attention to salmon farming issues tends to focus on consumption. A recent paper in the journal, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, reinforces those concerns with its conclusion that eating farmed salmon - even “low frequency” consumption - can result in heightened health risks. In British Columbia, though, the production of farmed salmon is causing consternation. In the McAllister survey, 83% rated one ecosystem impact - the spread of sea lice from farmed to wild fish - as a major concern.

“There is no longer any doubt that sea lice transmissions from salmon farming are affecting wild salmon,” underscored one of the summit’s speakers, Martin Krkosek, who presented the results of his recent paper , published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. Mr. Krkosek and his co-authors find that infection rates can jump 73 times among juvenile salmon, when the young fish pass by the farms on their seaward migration.

Those results further implicate farmed-to-wild infections in the 2002 collapse of pink salmon stocks in the Broughton Archipelago, where 26 farms are concentrated. The number of pink salmon returning to spawn that year plunged from 3.6 million to 147 thousand. “I’ll tell you what we have seen in our own eyes, in our territory in the Broughten Archipeligo,” testified summit speaker Bill Cranmer of the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk First Nation. “As we speak, the sea lice are killing the salmon farm.

ECOTRUST

721 NW NINTH AVE, SUITE 200, PORTLAND, OREGON 97209

WWW.ECOTRUST.ORG

CONTACT: HOWARD SILVERMAN TEL: 503.467.769 HOWARD@ECOTRUST.ORG

We cannot over-emphasize the danger of the open-net fish farm operations, not only to the salmon, but to the clams, the herring, and everything that swims in the ocean.”

A common future

For those living on British Columbia’s North Coast, the threats posed by salmon farms are drawing closer. Eighteen farm sites have been proposed near the mouth of the Skeena River, home to the second largest wild salmon run in the country.

Coastal communities who welcome the farms can be attracted by the industry’s promise of jobs. Yet government statistics show that while 900 workers are employed directly by salmon farming throughout the province, commercial and sports fishing (of all species) support 5,400 and 8,900 jobs, respectively.



As speaker after speaker extolled the spiritual, cultural, and economic benefits of wild salmon, a shared understanding spread through the Kitsumkalem Community Center. “We have the commercial sector sitting down with the recreational section, river fishermen sitting down with First Nations. We’re all in this together,” declared Stan Dennis, of the Laxkwalaams First Nation. “We want a moratorium. We will get a moratorium.”

New Democratic Party MP Nathan Cullen echoed those sentiments. “There have been many divisions over the years between many of the peoples that I’ve seen here today, between the commercials and the natives, and all the rest. But there’s a unifying element, and that is what’s been spoken about, and that’s our future, our collective future in this place, our collective future and our responsibility.”

After diner and music, the attendees drifted away, yet something remained. The expression of shared values, rooted in place, lingers like a prayer.

Transcriptions from the Save Our Wild Salmon Summit are online at <http://www.salmonnation.com/community/friends.html>

This story from <http://www.ecotrust.org/citizenship/united.html>

ECOTRUST

721 NW NINTH AVE, SUITE 200, PORTLAND, OREGON 97209

WWW.ECOTRUST.ORG

CONTACT: HOWARD SILVERMAN TEL: 503.467.769 HOWARD@ECOTRUST.ORG