



To the:

Honourable Steve Thomson, Minister of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

Honourable Mary Polak, Minister of Environment

Honourable Norm Letnick, Minister of Agriculture

March 14, 2017

Dear Honourable Ministers Thomson, Polak and Letnick,

**Re: Fraser River Late-Run Summer Steelhead**

**Steelhead Stocks in Peril**

British Columbia's lakes, streams, tidal waters and stocks of salmon, steelhead and trout attract anglers from BC and around the world each year. The catching (and release) of fish for sport or recreation in BC provides significant economic benefit to the province through spending on transportation, food and lodging, fishing supplies and services and tax revenues. Salmonid species, in both freshwater and tidal waters, comprise the primary species for the sector.

In 2013, the value of BC's freshwater recreational fishery alone, was 957 million dollars in indirect expenditures, 546 million dollars in direct expenditures and 144 million dollars contributed in provincial and federal tax revenues. Steelhead angling is a substantial portion of this value. The financial contributions of the tidal recreational fishery would be in addition to these values.

The world has always valued BC steelhead. Steelhead of the Thompson River epitomize this high value and are considered iconic across the globe. Having long sustained First Nations people, steelhead are also central to this interior region's world-class recreational fishery. Unfortunately Thompson River steelhead are in steep decline. The Spences Bridge fishery declined from 14,000 angler days in 1985 to 4,000 angler days in 2005, and more recently no fishing, representing a loss of between 1.4 - 2 million dollars in direct annual expenditures to the local economy. This is a conservative estimate, calculated using provincial average expenditures for angling that are lower than for steelhead angling.

At the present time Fraser River late-run summer steelhead stocks (which includes Thompson River steelhead) are at extremely low levels of abundance and in a state of "Extreme Conservation Concern."

Fraser River late-run summer steelhead are a group of stocks that are mainly comprised of 10 spatially discrete spawning stocks distributed in the Fraser watershed upstream of Hell's Gate.

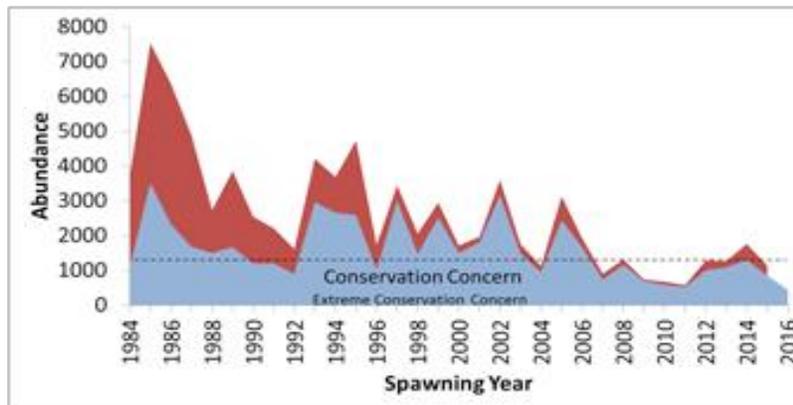
At the present time, the spawner abundance forecast for the 7 spawning stocks of steelhead that make up Thompson (4 stocks) is 350 and Chilcotin (3 stocks) is 140 fish for a total of 490 spawners.

These forecasts represent record low abundance for Thompson steelhead and near record low abundance for Chilcotin steelhead over monitoring time frames of 40 and 45 years respectively.



The previous record low for Thompson Steelhead is 430 fish and for the Chilcotin 130 fish estimated to have spawned in spring of 2016.

The aggregate run of Thompson, Chilcotin and other Fraser River late-run summer steelhead stocks normally peaks in Johnston Straits and Juan de Fuca Strait in late September and there is very low probability that these estimates will improve.



Thompson Steelhead pre-fishery abundance is shown in red above; spawner abundance is shown in blue. Thompson Steelhead Status from Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Nov 20, 2016

**Our organizations urgently request a new funding initiative to deal with recovery of these stocks.**

Our organizations recommend that the provincial government provide 7.5 million dollars in funding for an interior Fraser steelhead four year action plan that addresses stock recovery collaboratively with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, First Nations and Stakeholders:

Elements of the four year action plan to recover stocks:

1. Has the objective of increasing the abundance of interior Fraser steelhead to the routine management zone, while maintaining or increasing the genetic diversity, adaptive potential, and productivity of the steelhead.
2. Includes science-based programs to:
  - (a) Accurately determine timing and sources of steelhead mortality in freshwater and saltwater environments in order to reduce such mortality;
  - (b) Improve in-season stock monitoring to provide fisheries managers accurate information in order to facilitate reduced by-catch and mortality of steelhead in salmon fisheries through time and area closures and selective fisheries;
  - (c) Determine gene flow between and ecological relationships of steelhead and resident rainbow sub-populations;
  - (d) Determine the distribution and abundance of (juvenile and adult) steelhead and rainbow trout; and,
  - (e) Identify limiting factors and opportunities for increasing steelhead production and survival;
3. Implements a River Guardian Program with First Nations to monitor fisheries from the outlet of Kamloops Lake downstream to the mouth of the Fraser River;



4. Through the continued facilitation of stakeholders by the Fraser Basin Council, develops watershed sustainability plans for steelhead spawning and rearing tributaries to:

- (a) Ensure water quality, water quantity and watershed functionality;
- (b) Establish clear objectives and thresholds for environmental flows; and,

5. Develops parallel, individually tailored plans for all Interior Fraser steelhead stocks.

Signed:

BC Federation of Drift Fishers (BCFDF) president Rodney Clapton

BC Federation of Fly Fishers, (BCFFF) president Rich Ronyecz

The Steelhead Society of BC (SSBC) president Brian Braidwood

The BC Wildlife Federation (BCWF) Fisheries Committee chairperson Ted Brookman

cc: **Steelhead Caucus**

Hon. Naomi Yamamoto, Minister of State for Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Jordan Sturdy, MLA West Vancouver-Sea to Sky

Ms. Jackie Tegart, MLA Fraser-Nicola

Ms. Jane Thornthwaite, MLA North Vancouver

Hon. Donna Barnett, Minister of State for Rural Economic Development, FLNRO

Mr. Ralph Sultan, MLA West Vancouver-Capilano

Mr. Richard Lee, MLA Burnaby North

cc: Opposition Critics

Mr. Andrew Weaver, Leader BC Green Party

Mr. Harry Bains, Critic for Forest Lands and Natural Resource Operations

Mr. George Heyman Critic for Environment and Green Economy

Mr. Gary Holman, Deputy Critic for Environment, Fisheries and BC Ferries

Ms. Katrine Conroy, Interior Economic Development, Columbia Power and Columbia River Treaty