

FOPO Brief.

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Introduction

The future of all Pacific salmon in BC and Yukon depends on decisions that will be made over the next 10-20 years and is intricately linked to climate change and impacts in the ocean environment. For many years, the oceans were consistently productive, but this has increasingly broken down over the past 20 years; almost certainly associated with increased effects of climate change and its impact on the ocean ecosystems. Ocean conditions are a large factor influencing salmon abundance presently but freshwater and estuary habitats will continue to be essential for their survival. It is important to do everything we can to support recovery of our wild salmon populations. We must recognize that recovery will take time, and there are no quick fixes.

Key points:

1. The new \$\$ announced in the federal budget are a great step in the right direction. But it is important to recognize it will take time to turn things around. An ongoing commitment of funding and effort to support Wild Salmon Recovery will be required.
2. Wild Salmon Recovery needs an overarching plan. Action is required now and into the future, but it would be a mistake and lost opportunity to just start picking ideas that sound appealing without first assessing and understanding the priorities and benefits of different needs and options.
3. The current system and organizational infrastructure is not designed to manage and solve this problem. DFO needs support to reorganize and refocus. Federal, provincial and First Nations cooperation is essential to success.

Federal budget announcement

We are pleased to see the funding commitment for “Preserving Wild Pacific Salmon” in the federal budget. It is imperative that we do everything within our power to support wild salmon recovery. We have the ability to make things better. We thank this Committee for your study on the “State of Pacific Salmon” and the attention you are bringing to this matter.

The current funding announced in the budget is for the next 5 years. This is a great step in the right direction, but it will require ongoing sustained investment to help turn things around for our irreplaceable wild salmon.

There are no simple quick fixes or silver bullets. Wild salmon are resilient, and recovery is possible. It will take time, ongoing effort and commitment. We need to be realistic about the timelines to expect for results from actions that we begin today.

We have not seen any detail as to how most of the \$647M will be used. We would welcome opportunity to advise and inform decisions around how these \$\$ will be applied and activated.

We also note significant new investments in the budget for other departments and activities that should or could be leveraged and aligned to better support Wild Salmon Recovery. These include Advancing Canada's Climate Plan, Adapting to Climate Change, Protecting Nature, A Healthy Environment for a Healthy Economy, the Blue Economy for the Oceans as examples. All of these have components that seem to have a strong intersection with issues that are also important for wild salmon and the communities that support them.

Wild Salmon Recovery and ongoing sustainable management needs an overarching plan.

There is a need for immediate actions. But there is also a need to develop an overarching, coordinated and integrated plan. All investment should be guided under the frame of a plan, and this plan should be suitable to address short, medium and long term needs and measures. This is not something that can be fixed quickly and the temptation to pursue quick fixes should be avoided. We need to avoid dumping money into "quick wins" and things that make people feel good but don't really help.

The plan should focus on what is needed to support the long term sustainability and natural biodiversity of our wild salmon. The plan should integrate all management functions (habitat, harvest, hatcheries) and be supported by science and assessment. Canada's Policy for Conservation of Wild Pacific Salmon or the "Wild Salmon Policy" was introduced in 2005 and included ideas along these lines, but has never been fully enabled and activated.

There is no simple one-size-fits-all approach. Each watershed or Region needs a plan for the conditions for that watershed and the salmon that live there. What is needed in the coastal rainforest is not the same as what is needed in the desert-like dry interior. What is needed in the rural north is not the same as what is needed in the urban areas in the south.

The plan needs to address the present and future changes from a warming climate, and should focus on forward looking solutions. The natural ecosystem should guide and inform all strategies and priorities.

The plan should include targets, milestones, and accountability. Unfortunately, there has been a repeated pattern of failing to act on and implement advice from past reviews and studies. It would be ideal if this was something that was supported by all parties, and was enduring as it will take time and require political leadership and support as well as leadership and action from DFO and other management and technical entities.

There is a need for coordination. A lot of different groups are trying to do what they can to help. There is no plan that looks at each region or watershed, assess the needs for salmon, establishes priorities, and develops a plan for action and leverages the capacity and cooperation of all the entities that want to contribute.

Washington State has an approach that can be looked to as an example. As BC's neighbours to the south they face many parallel circumstances. Washington leads a sustained, decades-long effort by thousands of people and the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars across the state to restore salmon and the clean water and land that sustain them.

The current system and organizational infrastructure is not designed to manage and solve this problem.

There is a need to take a step back and think about how we got here. For a long time, salmon management in the Pacific Region was about fishing for abundant salmon resources. The entire system is still designed around managing fishing for abundance. But things have changed. Abundance is not the reality we have today, and we have a better understanding of the importance of biodiversity. We are also facing increasing uncertainty about a future under climate change. The reality is that we need to be managing for different things now than we did before, but the management system and DFO is still designed around the past. We need to re-imagine the management system, and equip the public service and others to manage towards the reality of present day and future conditions. The current system and infrastructure at DFO is not set up for the current circumstances facing salmon. Simply investing more in a management system that isn't achieving the desired result is unlikely to get a better outcome. Or, simply doing more of what got us here, isn't good management for the future.

There is a great need and opportunity for increased coordination and collaboration. The federal government and BC lack a coordinating framework for salmon-related issues. While DFO manages salmon and has authority for fish habitat, BC has jurisdiction over land and water. And underpinning the role of the federal and provincial crown are the rights of Canada's Indigenous Peoples. There is currently no reliable and effective governance model where these entities come together to share responsibility and coordinate for salmon.

To add to the organizational and management framework challenges, climate change is driving things and is not going away. While the salmon community can not undo climate change, we can respond to the reality we are facing. As an example, water is becoming an increasingly challenging issue. We are seeing changes that are leading to higher temperatures and lower flows. The well-being of salmon is dependent on water, and this is something that can be managed much better than it is at present. This would require cooperation from federal and provincial entities, and engagement from First Nations. Canada and BC both have legislation and policy that could help with this issue but these tools have not been fully activated. This is just one example of many things that are within our control. We need to turn as many things as possible more in favour of salmon in order to support recovery and future sustainability.

We need to keep the constituencies engaged and connected. We don't want salmon to become an issue that is primarily the domain of conservation organizations and rights holders. The best way to help salmon is to have a lot of people engaged, caring and contributing towards recovery and sustainable management. We have that now with good support from commercial, public and First Nations fishing interests. We don't want to lose any of these, so we need to keep them engaged and supported as we prioritize recovery. This is a major challenge, and also a critically important one, and one that we can address if we make it a priority.

Industry will invest and users will pay more. The private sector has a lot of financial capacity and leverage that can be tapped, but they won't put their money into something unless they see the value and benefit.

Independent advice should become integral to the management system. The current advisory processes tend to orient towards user groups and rights holders. These have an important place in the management system and should continue, but our recommendation is that a non-partisan, non-user group advisory approach that is focussed on Salmon Recovery and Sustainability be established.

Some specific issues:

Hatchery production in the North Pacific needs attention. 40% of the salmon in the North Pacific are from hatcheries, mostly pink and chum from Alaska, Russia and Japan. The science tells us that there are strong indications that the ocean is showing effects of too many salmon for the available food. Canada needs to start showing leadership in changing this.

Open Net Pen Aquaculture. There is a solid scientific basis that the risks are real and present. Enough science has been done to show that transfer of parasites and disease from fish farms can affect wild salmon. We strongly support the federal commitment to transition away from open net pen aquaculture by 2025. The precautionary approach dictates that this is the correct and wise course of action, and this is especially necessary given the poor state of many of our wild salmon populations.

Increase the Salmon Conservation stamp. The salmon conservation stamp is currently just over \$6. In recent years this has generated around \$1.5M that supports grants to community organizations for restoration, enhancement, monitoring and stewardship to support salmon. Increasing the stamp to \$10 would generate an additional \$1M or more, and would cost each angler less than a pack of hooks.

Closing

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. The Pacific Salmon Foundation's sole mission is to support the ongoing sustainability of our Pacific salmon. We believe that by doing so, we are supporting our communities, our ecosystems, and future generations.