

## Groups call for emergency corridor for wild salmon smolts, closure of three fish farms

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A host of environmental, recreation and tourism organizations are calling on Ottawa to shut down three fish farms to create an emergency corridor for out-migrating wild salmon smolts.

"In light of the collapse of most Fraser River sockeye stocks in 2009, and a suggested link to impacts from disease and sea lice from salmon farms, we the undersigned call on the Federal government to implement emergency measures required to protect migrating wild salmon in 2010," states a March 1 letter to federal Fisheries Minister Gail Shea from Alexandra Morton, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Georgia Strait Alliance, the Living Oceans Society, the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC, the Raincoast Conservation Foundation, the Ritchie Foundation, the Save Our Salmon Marine Conservation Foundation, the T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation, the Watershed Watch Salmon Society, and the Wilderness Tourism Association. "The finfish aquaculture regulations, as they currently exist in BC, are inadequate to protect wild salmon, as they do not address the impacts that open net cage salmon farms have on the wild salmon stocks. For example, there are no requirements in the current provincial regulations for the salmon farming industry to monitor the health of juvenile wild salmon for impacts due to disease and sea lice around farms during their out-migration."

The groups acknowledge DFO is developing new finfish aquaculture regulations which could be in effect October or November 2010, but they say the most threatened stocks desperately need government action now to protect the 2010 out migration of juvenile wild salmon. The groups want Shea to implement three emergency interim measures.

1. Establish an emergency migration corridor by requiring immediate harvesting of adult Atlantic salmon at Marine Harvest's Okisollo/Sonora and Cyrus Rocks farms, as well as Mainstream/Cermac's Venture Point farm.

"There are currently five active open net cage salmon farms in the Wild Salmon Narrows of northern Georgia Strait," the letter states. "The farms of most concern for the 2010 migration are the three farms containing adult salmon.

This emergency risk management measure will reduce the pressure of sea-lice transfer in at least one passage through the northern Georgia Strait on this year's juvenile Fraser River salmon making their way to the open ocean."

2. Establish and fund a wild fish monitoring program for the Discovery islands during the out-migration period in order to gain a better understanding of the impacts of sea lice on migrating salmon. The program findings will need to be transparent and fully accessible to independent scientific analysis.

3. Establish a wild fish sea lice monitoring program with funding from the aquaculture industry.

"Over the long term, sea lice on all BC salmon farms need to be controlled such that sea lice levels on adjacent juvenile wild salmon do not exceed natural background levels at any time during the juvenile out-migration periods," the group states. "We recommend that a special committee comprised of representatives from First Nations, federal and provincial governments, industry and non-governmental organizations be established now to advise on the design of the long-term monitoring program and the selection of scientist(s) to lead the program. Multi-stakeholder participation in such a committee will be necessary to ensure the program's findings are fair, independent and verifiable.

"We believe the emergency measures set out in this letter are the minimum actions that are required to protect the most threatened wild salmon stocks through the 2010 migratory period. We urge you to give this matter your immediate attention. The health and survival of wild salmon, and the people, economies and environment on the west coast that depend them are counting on you."

Last week, Ruby Berry of the Georgia Strait Alliance said action on getting the farms out of the way of the out-migrating salmon has been very slow.

"There's been a lot of delay, inaction and denial about what's going on," she told the Courier-Islander. "After the astounding collapse of the Fraser Sockeye last year, we'd like to see at least one farm-free migration route through the northern Georgia Strait for the out-migrating smolts that are coming through in a couple of months. If these farms are emptied, then that passageway will be relatively clear of sea lice and potentially disease, over the course of the out-migration."

It's not a solution. There are many other farms in the area but this at least reduces the pressure. It something that can happen to reduce that pressure before this next out-migration.

"The last thing we want to see is another devastating collapse of the Fraser River sockeye."

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