

## **First Sockeye in 100 Years Finally Makes it Home To Coquitlam**

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**For Immediate Release**

**Coquitlam and Kwikwetlem** - The first Coquitlam sockeye in more than 100 years finally made it back to Coquitlam Lake today, thanks to the vision and efforts of the Kwikwetlem Nation and the Kwikwetlem Salmon Restoration Program (KSRP).

The lone fish to return so far—the sex still to be determined—entered a fish trap below the impassable Coquitlam dam on July 16. A ceremonial release of this fish into the lake was scheduled for 11 a.m. today.

“Our people are named after the sockeye,” said Glen Joe, Kwikwetlem Fisheries Manager. “Kwikwetlem have waited more than 100 years for sockeye to return, so this is an important day for us,” Joe continued.

The Coquitlam River was dammed in 1905, and after a century deprived of sockeye, Kwikwetlem actively engaged in efforts to restore this culturally-important salmon. The returning sockeye is the fruit of a smolt-release program facilitated by BC Hydro and the KSRP. The smolts came from the sockeye which have been trapped behind the dam for more than a century.

George Chaffee, Kwikwetlem Councilor, said, “Our elders told us to look after the health of the river. They said, get sockeye back. We’ve done it, and now everyone benefits. We still need more sockeye, but we’re thrilled to have one finally come home after so long.”

The Kwikwetlem acknowledge the help of Albert Phillips of Chehalis, former Kwikwetlem Chief Marvin Joe, BC Hydro and Hydro’s Bridge Coastal Restoration Program, Metro Vancouver, Fisheries and Oceans, Watershed Watch Salmon Society, consultant John Pritchard and many others who helped make this historic day possible.

### **For more information:**

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## **Backgrounder – Kwikwetlem Nation and Coquitlam Sockeye**

- ❖ The Kwikwetlem Nation and the City of Coquitlam are named after the river's once-abundant sockeye salmon, literally translated as “Red Fish Up The River.”
- ❖ In 1899, Kwikwetlem's Chief Johnny writes the federal government opposing the B.C. Electric Railway Company's (BC Hydro predecessor) proposed dam at Coquitlam Lake, calling the river the Kwikwetlem's “cupboard.”
- ❖ This special race of early-migrating sockeye is wiped out by the construction of two Coquitlam River dams in 1905 and 1913, the latter a 30-m tall barrier to fish. Sockeye typically require access to a lake to successfully reproduce.
- ❖ In 2003, BC Hydro's Bridge Coastal Restoration Program agrees to assess the feasibility of restoring Coquitlam sockeye; in 2004 a multi-stakeholder salmon restoration committee forms to guide studies. Two expert scientific panels are also financed to assess potential risks to drinking water from returning sockeye.
- ❖ The first juvenile sockeye out-migrant is observed in the river below the dam in the Spring of 2002; some 84 fish make it to safety below the dam in 2004.
- ❖ In 2005, BC Hydro sanctions start of annual spring flow releases to help baby sockeye pass through the dam; nearly 1500 juvenile sockeye survive the dam that year, with numbers dipping in subsequent years to 800 (2006), 280 (2007), and 49 (2008) juvenile sockeye.
- ❖ In the Autumn of 2007, the first two adult sockeye in nearly a century—both females—return to the river. Both die at the base of the dam.
- ❖ The Kwikwetlem Salmon Restoration Program committee issues a February 4, 2008 media release with historic news that all parties agree on a plan to restore sockeye to Coquitlam Lake; any sockeye returning in 2008 will be trapped and then trucked to the lake.
- ❖ On or around the morning of July 16, a healthy single sockeye weighing just under two kg enters a live-trap below the dam, triggering the agreed-to release plan.