

## Media Release

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*Watching Out for BC's Wild Salmon*

### **Vancouver – Watershed Watch Salmon Society supports bold recommendations of the Skeena Independent Science Review Panel, urges government to act.**

The Watershed Watch Salmon Society urges government to heed the warnings and implement the fisheries recommendations outlined in the report of the Skeena Independent Science Review Panel, recently submitted to the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and the BC Ministry of Environment (MOE).

“This comprehensive and rigorous report raises many alarms about the past care and future prospects of wild Skeena salmon,” said Dr. Craig Orr of Watershed Watch. “Bold changes are required to improve our chances of saving those salmon, including dramatic harvest reforms, better information, improved governance, and more care in the face of climate change and other environmental threats,” Orr continued.

The panel of four fisheries experts issued 23 recommendations, including the need for an explicit public decision on acceptable losses of biological diversity caused by fishing.

“The report also focuses on the overdue commitment by government to an operational wild salmon policy,” Orr said. “The panel estimated that roughly one-third of the original biodiversity of Skeena salmon was likely lost prior to the 1950s. We cannot overstate the importance of maintaining genetic diversity and the resilience of salmon in the face of environmental change and habitat loss.”

The report also states that, in order to prevent overharvesting of any Skeena salmon conservation unit, two major structural changes are required in the harvesting system for Skeena salmon. The first is a marine harvest reduction of 50% for sockeye, and the second is holding marine harvests of coho “to levels not much higher than those during the coho crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s.” The panel also noted a need for Canada to achieve equitable reductions in Alaskan exploitation rates of Skeena-bound salmon.

Other important recommendations include:

- General improvements in catch and escapement monitoring (detailed in report);
- Implementation of selective fishing practices such as tangle nets;
- Substantial improvements to MOE steelhead stock assessment practices and application of the wild salmon policy to steelhead management;
- Better communication between/among management agencies (DFO, MOE, Alaskan Dept. of Fish and Game), First Nations, and all Skeena watershed stakeholders; and

- Placing a high priority on establishing a new governance structure, including a mandate to *proactively* evaluate cumulative impacts of past, present, and proposed industrial developments (i.e. coal-bed methane, run-of-river hydropower, oil and gas pipelines, and ongoing forestry) that will impact fish and fish habitat, and a voice in associated federal and provincial land-use management decisions.

**For more information:**

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Panel report: [http://psf.ca/programs\\_initiatives.php?article=skeena\\_river](http://psf.ca/programs_initiatives.php?article=skeena_river)