



MAY 16 2022

Mr. Eric B. Taylor, Professor
Department of Zoology, UBC, and
Former Chair, COSEWIC

Mr. Myles Armstead, President
BC Fly Fishers Federation

Mr. Brian Braidwood, President
Steelhead Society of BC

Mr. Dave Moskowicz, Executive Director
The Conservation Angler

Mr. Rich Simms, Director
Wild Steelhead Coalition

Ms. Louise Pedersen, Executive Director
Outdoor Recreation Council of BC

Mr. Greg Knox, Executive Director
SkeenaWild Conservation Trust

Mr. Aaron Hill
Executive Director
Watershed Watch Salmon Society
< aaron@watershedwatch.ca >

Mr. Kurt Beardslee, Executive Director
Wild Fish Conservancy

Ms. Misty MacDuffee, Wild Salmon
Program Director
Raincoast Conservation Foundation

Ms. Karen Wristen, Executive Director
Living Oceans Society

Ms. Lesley Peterson, Alberta Biologist
Trout Unlimited Canada

Mr. Len Piggin, President
Kamloops Fly Fishers Association

Ms. Gauri Sreenivasan, Director of Policy
and Campaigns
Nature Canada

Mr. Jesse Zeman, Executive Director
BC Wildlife Federation

Dear Mr. Hill and co-signatories:

Thank you for your correspondence of January 24, 2022, regarding Interior Fraser River, Thomson River, and Chilcotin River steelhead populations. The Government of Canada shares your concern about steelhead. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) works with the Province of British Columbia on steelhead management through a Memorandum of Understanding about management plans and objectives for this important species.

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In February 2018, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) provided the former Minister of Environment and Climate Change with an emergency assessment of the Thompson River and Chilcotin River steelhead populations. The assessment found both populations to be endangered and facing an imminent threat to their survival. This triggered the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) requirement for the former Minister of Environment and Climate Change to recommend an emergency listing under SARA.

In July 2019, the Government of Canada decided not to list these populations under SARA, instead using mechanisms within the *Fisheries Act* and using provincial legislation for management and recovery. DFO and the Province of British Columbia announced a joint Steelhead Action Plan for Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead. The action plan was informed by threats identified in the February 2018 COSEWIC emergency status assessment and the subsequent October 2018 Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) Recovery Potential Assessment. It outlines a range of actions that aim to reduce mortality and increase survival of returning Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead, improve freshwater conditions through habitat protection and restoration, and increase science and monitoring activities. The Province's 2019–2021 BC Action Plan and Activities Report provides details and an update on the activities taken to reverse the decline of Interior Fraser steelhead, including the Thompson and Chilcotin populations.

In November 2020, following an emergency assessment under SARA, COSEWIC conducted a full assessment of the Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead populations, as required and subsequently confirmed their statuses as endangered. COSEWIC submitted these assessments to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change in October 2021. Since these species are not listed under SARA, this step initiates a new listing consideration process. DFO will conduct consultations with Indigenous groups and engage the public. The results of these considerations will be shared with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Notably, before the Minister of Environment and Climate Change recommends decisions to the Governor in Council (GIC), he must consult with authorized Wildlife Management Boards, as per section 27(2)(c) of SARA, and take COSEWIC's assessments into account.

Regarding the CSAS process that was used to generate the conclusions of the science advisory report noted above, the peer review considers available evidence and provides the best available science advice in an open and transparent process. Scientists, fisheries managers, stakeholders, and representatives from Indigenous groups and from BC attended the review meeting.

Fisheries management measures also form part of the suite of actions that work to address conservation concerns for Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead. Over the past three years, DFO has taken increasingly stronger measures to reduce the potential impacts of salmon fisheries on co-migrating steelhead stocks of concern, including significant commercial salmon fishery closures. Specific details on conservation measures are described in the annual Southern Pacific salmon Integrated Fisheries Management Plan. Moreover, on June 29, 2021, the former Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard announced significant commercial salmon closures for the 2021 season that aim to provide strong protection for stocks of concern, including steelhead, across the Pacific Region. Details on these closures can be found on the Government of Canada's Commercial Pacific salmon closures webpage.

DFO recognizes that land use, water use, and other factors may affect fish habitat and water quality and must be addressed. The BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF) is a joint federal-provincial program that provides funding for a wide variety of projects that contribute to the conservation and restoration of wild Pacific salmon and other priority stocks. For example, BCSRIF is funding the BC Conservation Foundation to restore a number of priority sites in the Thompson River watershed that will benefit salmon and steelhead. This restoration includes adaptive habitat restoration designs that accommodate the effects of changing ecosystem dynamics in the face of climate change.

It is clear that recovering Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead will require a comprehensive approach with collaboration and involvement from many communities and levels of government. Upcoming opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement will be announced as DFO advances the SARA listing process. Once my colleague, the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, has consulted with me as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the proposed listing recommendation will be published in *Canada Gazette, Part I* for a public comment period of 30 days. The receipt of the assessments by the GIC is announced at the same time. Within nine months of having acknowledged receipt of the COSEWIC assessment, the GIC must make a final decision on whether to add these populations to Schedule 1 of SARA. If a final decision is not made, Minister Guilbeault must make an order to add these populations to Schedule 1 as assessed by COSEWIC.

Thank you again for writing. I hope that I have clarified the Government of Canada's role and actions in managing and protecting these steelhead populations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JM', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Honourable Joyce Murray, P.C., M.P.

c.c.: Distribution List

Distribution List

- c.c.: The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
- The Honourable George Heyman, M.L.A.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
Government of British Columbia
- The Honourable Katrine Conroy, M.L.A.
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and
Rural Development
Government of British Columbia
- The Honourable Josie Osborne
Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship
Government of British Columbia
- Mr. Fin Donnelly, M.L.A.
Coquitlam–Burke Mountain
Government of British Columbia