

September 26th, 2017

Fisheries & Oceans Canada
Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, Minister

Dear Minister LeBlanc:

Re: Interior Steelhead -Thompson and Chilcotin Stocks

Our organizations have grave concerns for the future of the Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead stocks. The remnants of these stocks are at the point of "Extreme Conservation Concern". So extreme are our concerns that there has been open discussion and consideration for an application for a Species at Risk Act (SARA) listing on all of these stocks.

These steelhead stocks suffer mortality from non-selective net fisheries as they return to the Fraser River and ultimately their streams of origin. Over the years these fisheries have taken steps to limit by-catch of these stocks. However, their returns have now reached such a low number that they cannot sustain any further interception from non-selective net fisheries in tidal waters of the Fraser River without risking extirpation.

Two actions that are required to address the long term decline of these stocks: 1. reduction to zero of the mortality of all First Nations, commercial and recreational fisheries and 2. long term investment in maintaining functioning watersheds that support these and other important salmonid stocks.

Of immediate concern is the annual Fraser River commercial gill net chum fishery which is completely non-selective and results in the mortality of interior-bound steelhead. This fishery must be eliminated and replaced with more selective fisheries as conducted by First Nations fisheries above Mission BC. We note that recent discussions between the recreational sector and the First Nations Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance were positive. This is significant since both parties have a unifying interest in the sustainability of Fraser River steelhead and other salmon stocks.

The Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead are world renowned and a priceless biological asset that is in immediate jeopardy as indicated by this years test fishery index in the Albion Test fishery which is the lowest on record

Significant investment is required between your agency and your provincial counterparts to address the interception problem in the short term and in the long term restoration and maintenance of watershed functioning of priority spawning and rearing habitat for these and other salmonid stocks. We are encouraged by the dialogue that has begun between Minister Lana Popham and your Parliamentary Secretary Terry Beech on fisheries issues.

Minister, we appreciate your commitment to openness and transparency made at the recent announcement on the Cohen recommendations, particularly the increased investment in science. We believe given these commitments there is an excellent opportunity to address the endangered Fraser Rivers steelhead stocks now as we recently discussed with your Parliamentary Secretary Terry Beech.

We recognize the current total salmon fishing closure on the Fraser River as an important precedent for protecting stocks of concern as were past actions protecting interior cohostocks. Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead stocks are equally deserving of this protection, combined with a unifying strategy to protect and restore watershed functioning.

We recommend a federal provincial round table be established with First Nations and other sectors to deal with the immediate and the longer term concerns for salmon and steelhead stocks.

We look forward to a reply addressing our concerns and suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

Signed,
Harvey Andrusak, president
BC Wildlife Federation
Fishers

Rod Clapton, president
BC Federation of Drift

Brian Braidwood, president
Steelhead Society of BC
Fishers

Rich Ronyecz, president
BC Federation of Fly

Hon Catherine McKenna, Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Hon Jonathan Wilkinson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Terry Beech, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Hon George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
Hon Lana Popham, BC Minister of Agriculture
Hon Doug Donaldson, BC Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

John Rustad, Opposition critic, Ministry of Forest Lands, Natural Resource Operations
Norm Letnick, Opposition critic, Ministry of Agriculture
Andrew Weaver, MLA, Leader Green Party
Rebecca Reid, RDG Fisheries and Oceans