

Friends of the Cowichan  
Joe Saysell, Box 169  
Lake Cowichan, B.C. V0R 2G0

June 13, 2018

Mr. Doug Donaldson  
Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C. V8V 2L8

Dear Sir:

On behalf of the Friends of the Cowichan, I am writing to you to express concerns about fish stocks in the Cowichan River, especially pertaining to climate change and river flow.

As we know, because of our changing climate, the rainy season produces a lot of rain for short intervals followed by long periods of dry weather. To ensure that the river flows at 7 cubic metres per second during the summer, Catalyst holds back water in Cowichan Lake above the weir at the lake outlet. This results in a shortened fishing period in the spring because of dropping river flows.

This lower water level concentrates the few trout that reside in the river into the few pools or runs that have groundwater-fed colder water that provides these lower-temperature refuge areas. Temperatures in the remainder of the river during the low-water conditions of summer are anywhere from 18°C to 24°C.

Sir, for people to fish the river in these low-water conditions is not only unethical because of fish concentrations in the pools and high water temperatures elsewhere, but it is also harming our precious, dwindling fish stocks.

Our group would like the ministry to change the regulations to include a closure to fishing in the entire Cowichan River from June 15 to September 15. With climate change now a reality, we believe that the ministry has to be very progressive in its approach to river closures and fish populations in general before it's too late. We believe it is better to be overprotective and conservation-minded rather than leave things until our fish stocks plummet beyond the ability to recover.

Coupled with this regulation, we would also like to see a closure of the upper Cowichan River from the 70.2 trestle upstream to the weir at Cowichan Lake from November 15 to April 1. This would protect spawning fish, as this area is where most of the spawning takes place for all species, especially trout, steelhead and chinook salmon. At this time of the year, the fish in this area are dark-coloured and in poor condition because they are recovering from spawning. We believe it is unethical to fish for them in this state. Fishing during this period may also affect their reproductive capability.

This section of the river was closed in the past (pre-1988) for these same reasons, so why not now, especially with the added pressure today which is ten times what it was before 1990? Upon speaking to the conservation officer service about our proposed regulation changes, they welcomed these ideas because it would help them in their job of enforcement, especially with tight budget restraints in their department.

Sir, we urge you to consider both of these regulation changes, and let's think of "fish first" rather than of the angler, as was done in the recent past, especially in these climate-changing times.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Saysell

cc. Sonia Furstenau, MLA  
Alistair MacGregor, MP  
BCWF  
Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable  
B.C. Federation of Fly Fishers