

Friends of the Cowichan
Joe Saysell
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September 3, 2023

Hon. Bruce Ralston, Minister
Ministry of Forests
PO Box 9049 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9E2

Dear Minister:

On behalf of the Friends of the Cowichan, I am writing to you with grave concerns for the Cowichan River after the epic die-off of fishery stocks in the upper Cowichan River. As we all know, this die-off was not only a huge blow to the upper Cowichan's fry populations of steelhead, salmon and trout, but also to the resident rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout populations. Since so many of the larger resident trout species that were lost are part of the breeding component, we believe that this could have a long-ranging effect on those species' populations in the future.

With all the many factors affecting fish population rebuilding – such as prolonged low water, extreme and prolonged hot weather, more human-caused pollution and habitat loss, and a growing number of anglers (both guided and non-guided) – fishing during the winter and spring during spawning and rearing times on the upper river could mean that the population will take years to rebound to past populations.

These die-offs could happen again next year or in the years after, so the fish need to be given every opportunity to rebuild as best they can. Therefore, we were extremely disappointed that your ministry did not close the upper river to angling from September 1 to April 1 when you made the press release on August 24, 2023.

We strongly believe that an angling closure for this time frame on the upper Cowichan is crucial to allow the few remaining large breeding resident trout to have at least one fall, winter and spring to spawn unmolested, in the hope that the population can somewhat rebuild. Then, your provincial fisheries branch can do an analysis to see if fish stocks have rebounded or not in spring and summer. After all, this angling closure would only be for 12% of the entire river, allowing angling on 88% of the rest of the Cowichan River.

We urge you to please think of the fish first over economics, as conservation is your first priority, as stated in all of your ministry's letters or conversations. The provincial freshwater fisheries was proactive and very progressive in the past, when most of the good Cowichan River regulations were made – i.e., 1965, 1975, 1988 the upper river was closed to angling. So please return the ministry to its former mandate of conservation of fish as a real priority over economics and guiding.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Saysell

cc Sonia Furstenau, MLA
Alistair MacGregor, MP
Cowichan Watershed Board
Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable