

The Honourable David Eby, MLA
Premier of British Columbia

via email: - premier@gov.bc.ca



Re: Restoring Cowichan River Flows – A Vital Salmon Spawning Habitat

Dear Premier:

The Sidney Anglers Association (SAA) has for decades supported salmon enhancement initiatives through member actions and funding support for others' projects.

Historical regional development has impacted salmon productivity in the Cowichan River. The SAA, through its continuous fundraising, has supported restoration of the chinook salmon spawning returns in the river from a low of a few hundred adult fish in 2009 to over 10,000 for each of the past 6 years. This important river also supports a strong Coho salmon run and large Chum salmon run which, until recently, was able to support a commercial fishery.

The Cowichan River is the most productive salmon river on south coastal British Columbia (after the Fraser system), with more than 10,000 Chinook salmon returning each year since a strong rebuilding effort over the last 16 years. This fall the fate of 10,000 chinook now in the river depends totally on 20 pumps working night and day to maintain a minimum water flow. The whole problem of severely constrained in-river habitat for the year is due to an aged weir system owned and operated by Paper Excellence Crofton Mill, which is unable to store sufficient water to maintain the designated rule curve flow as set out by the Region 1 Provincial water manager.

This year, and in 14 other years since 1998, the Cowichan Lake water level fell below the level of the current weir. Extended drought and higher temperatures resulted in the required modification of the water flow rule curve yet again, with the resulting low-water flows and higher water temperature causing a large die-off this summer of young trout, steelhead and coho salmon fry. Without the water supplied by 20 pumps, chinook salmon would not be able to enter the river, then would be subject to predation by the large number of sea lions and seals currently lining Cowichan Bay.

Increasing the volume of Cowichan Lake water retained in the spring would allow for continued ecological flow and allow the biologically required flows through future periods of extended drought and warmer climate. Experts and stakeholders now agree that replacement of the existing weir with an increase of one metre elevation at Cowichan Lake discharge in the river is the best permanent solution to sustain summer flows.

The current Cowichan Watershed Management Board has developed a carefully planned and community engaged process to achieve the building of a new, higher weir. The SAA requests your urgent advocacy and active engagement to ensure the sustainability of this important salmon river in southern Vancouver Island. ***We request the Government of British Columbia's intervention to save this river by exercising your jurisdiction, assuming the water license and taking responsibility for the completion of this crucial project.***

Yours truly,



Alex Hyndman
President, Sidney Anglers Association

Our Purpose

To encourage and develop interest in recreational fishing, foster and actively promote conservation, and participate in activities designed to promote habitat restoration, education and salmon enhancement.

Sportfishing * Education * Enhancement

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