

ECONEWS

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Promoting the Vision of a Sustainable Vancouver Island

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SALMON ARE SACRED

The wild salmon have been living in BC's waters for 8,000 years, providing sustenance for the First Nations, and more recently for BC's new settlers, who found such an abundance of salmon that they talked of being able to walk on the ocean on the backs of the salmon.

Since the new settlers arrived this abundance has seen a terrible decline, due to mixture of overfishing, migratory rivers being blocked by dams, river habitats being destroyed by logging, agricultural pollution, and fish farms.

In 2004, the Fraser River sockeye run collapsed. In 2005, researchers from the Raincoast Conservation Foundation found that 75% of the salmon runs in northern BC streams were depressed.

In 2008, the Fraser sockeye returns collapsed again. The same year, the Sacramento River, so few chinook returned that the US federal government declared a fisheries disaster.

In 2009, California cancelled the entire coastal salmon season. A study found that only 10% of the chinook were wild salmon - the rest had been raised in hatcheries. In the Sacramento River, where once there had been 800,000, only 6,000 wild salmon returned.

In BC, in 2009, the north coast chum salmon returns collapsed - the main species the grizzly bears depend on. On the Fraser, instead of 10.5 million forecast sockeye, only one million returned. Is the ominous silence of the east coast's cod fishery, which collapsed and has never returned, soon to be heard on the west coast?

Everyone wants to blame someone else, but on one factor, the science seems to be clear:

"Salmon are thriving in Alaska where there are no salmon farms. They're thriving in the western Pacific where there's no salmon farms. But

everywhere in the world these Norwegian salmon farms exist, wild salmon are going extinct - Norway, Scotland, Ireland, eastern Canada. The only people who're denying it are government, and industry."- *Alexandra Morton.*

Salmon farms throw such a wrench into the biological stability of the species that they are threatening its existence. (I am using material from Alexandra Morton's website, www.salmonaresacred.org.)



The science shows that when you hold large schools of farmed salmon stationary in the ocean, it breaks the biological balance, enabling local diseases and parasites to infect wild fish at levels they cannot survive.

In the wild, when a fish gets sick, it begins to slow down and swim at the edge of the school, where predators remove it, causing disease epidemics in the wild to be extremely rare.

When farmed fish get infected with sea lice and diseases, however, the pathogens breed and reproduce at exponential rates with no predation.

When large numbers of farmed fish start dying, the companies use drugs to try to keep some alive, to get them to market. BC's enhancement hatcheries must kill their sick fish to prevent the spread of disease; the fish farms face no such requirement.

In 2002-2003 the BC government allowed Norwegian fish farmers to hold

12 million IHN virus infected fish on BC's largest wild salmon and herring migration on the inside passage of Vancouver Island. The 2005 Fraser River sockeye, which collapsed, swam through that epidemic as they went to sea.

The steelhead are in decline wherever they migrate through fish farms. The chinook salmon in Clayoquot are collapsing despite excellent river conditions. The Broughton pink salmon collapsed until fish farms started reducing their sea lice. The wild salmon and sea trout in Scotland, Ireland and Norway went into steep decline as the salmon farms in the lochs and fjords got larger.

So now, the big action. Alexandra Morton is walking from Sointula Island to Victoria in the Get Out Migration - a call to action to make the federal government in Ottawa aware that we want wild salmon to take higher priority than farm salmon. Farms belong on the land, not in the ocean.

Hundreds are joining her, with salmon flags, placards and artwork. "Unless we all stand up, our fish will continue dying of politics that no longer serve the people, nor our living world."

On Wed May 5th, they're on Gabriola. On Thur 6th they're walking to Duncan, with a 5pm evening event at City Square. On Fri 7th, they're walking from Duncan to Mill Bay for the 4:10 ferry, and a big presentation at 7pm at the Mary Winspear Centre in Sidney.

And on Sat 8th they're walking from Sidney to Victoria's Centennial Square at 3pm, then on to the Legislature for the grand finale, with MP Fin Donnelly, the west coast Fisheries Critic.

Alexandra is urging you to join her, to show the federal government that we want action to remove the fish farms from the ocean waters. For the details, see www.salmonaresacred.org.

Guy Dauncey