



November 6, 2002



## BACKGROUND

### PACIFIC SALMON ENDOWMENT FUND SALMON RECOVERY PLAN FOR THE NIMPKISH RIVER WATERSHED

#### Introduction

The Nimpkish River Watershed on Northern Vancouver Island has been selected by the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund as the next watershed to receive attention in its salmon recovery planning process.

#### Background on the Nimpkish River Watershed

The Nimpkish River Watershed is located on North-Eastern Vancouver Island and drains north into Broughton Strait directly across from Cormorant Island (Alert Bay). With a drainage area of nearly 1800 sq km, the Nimpkish is one of Vancouver Island's largest watersheds. The Nimpkish and its tributaries traditionally supported major runs of four salmon species: sockeye, chum, chinook and coho. The system also supports a significant steelhead population.

The Nimpkish Valley is the traditional territory of the 'Namgis First Nation and is historically an important fisheries and forestry area. Damage to the Nimpkish River basin has been both natural and anthropogenic and has occurred over decades of use. Significant salmon escapement declines have occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the mid-1900s, salmon escapement often topped 250,000 fish per year, and the Nimpkish River was among the top four sockeye producers in BC with escapements averaging over 150,000 annually. Today's salmon escapement has declined by as much as 95% and has resulted in the loss of entire stocks from nursery lakes, the disappearance of an early-run sockeye run and the closure of once prosperous aboriginal and commercial fisheries.

#### The Nimpkish Watershed Recovery Plan

The Nimpkish Resource Management Board released a Watershed-based Fish Sustainability Plan in July 2002 for the Nimpkish and Kokish Watersheds. Building on this plan, the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund will specify targets and projects to assist in the recovery of salmon in that area. A recommendation of projects will be complete by the end of 2002 with implementation of the recovery plan due to begin shortly thereafter.

#### Background on PSEF

The PSEF is an innovative and permanent long-term source of funding that was established with the federal government's contribution of \$30 million – part of the Pacific Fisheries Adjustment and Restructuring Program announced in 1998. The fund's investment interest is used to support salmon recovery in priority areas of BC and the Yukon.

In March 2001, the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund Society Technical Committee – consisting of representatives with key technical backgrounds from the science community, provincial and federal government, – announced that the initial focus of the fund would be on targeted watersheds within three main priority regions of the province – the Thompson River Basin, Georgia Basin and Rivers/Smith Inlets on the Central Coast. At that time, two initial recovery plans were announced: the Coldwater River and the Englishman River.

In addition to the Nimpkish River, Rivers and Smith Inlets has recently been selected for the Fund's process of salmon recovery.

#### Recovery Planning

The recovery plan process is being led by the Pacific Salmon Foundation, Program Manager for the PSEFS. Similar to Stage II of the provincial government's Watershed-based Fish Sustainability Planning Guidelines, the PSEF recovery plan process begins with the development of a watershed profile to detail current conditions of the watershed and fish stocks. Objectives, targets and strategies are then developed to guide recovery. Finally, a monitoring and assessment framework is established to provide an evaluation mechanism.

Where recovery plans already exist – such as that for the Nimpkish River, the PSEF Technical Committee focuses on developing and implementing key activities that are consistent with the recovery plan and PSEF goals.

### **Public Participation – The Nimpkish Resource Management Board**

The PSEF planning process relies heavily on the active participation of the local community who are familiar with the conditions of the watershed and salmon stock and are eager to engage in activities conducive to salmon recovery. Public meetings provide stakeholders an opportunity to offer input and to help guide the salmon recovery process. Local representatives from all levels of government, First Nations, non-profit organizations and the business community are consulted during recovery plan development. A local recovery planning team is formed to provide ongoing consultation and guidance.

In regions where fish conservation partnerships already exist, the PSEF builds on such relationships. The Nimpkish Resource Management Board will serve as the Local Advisory Group for the Plan in this area.

The Nimpkish Resource Management Board (NRMB) is a partnership of stakeholders committed to the well being of salmon stocks on Northern Vancouver Island. Formed in 1987, the NRMB is comprised of a diverse group of individuals and organizations, including: The 'Namgis First Nation, Canadian Forest Products, Timberwest Ltd., three community hatcheries, the Inner Coast Natural Resource Center, Simon Fraser University (Biology), the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The community members came together in response to the decrease in the escapement of salmonid species within the Nimpkish Watershed. With the goal of “fish first”, the NRMB has completed many projects aimed directly at the re-establishment of the Nimpkish salmonid stocks.

### **For more information:**

Additional information on PSEF is available at <http://www.psf.ca/02psefs/index.html>

Or for more information on the Pacific Salmon Foundation and PSEF's Recovery Planning Process, please contact:

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