



November 6, 2002



BACKGROUND

PACIFIC SALMON ENDOWMENT FUND SALMON RECOVERY PLAN FOR RIVERS AND SMITH INLETS

Introduction

The Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund (PSEF) has selected Rivers and Smith Inlets on the Central Coast of BC as the next priority region to receive attention in its salmon recovery planning process.

Background on Rivers/Smith Inlets

Rivers and Smith Inlets are located on the Central Coast of BC and were, until recently, a key commercial fishing area in the province. The annual Rivers Inlet sockeye population averaged about 1.5 million fish during the first 90 years of the commercial fishery. (i.e. 1884-1974). The average annual catch was just over 1.0 million with the balance to escapement. In the 1950's and 1960's as many as 1150 gillnet vessels would fish the peak of a run.

Many salmon stocks in the Central Coast area are in conservation crisis. In the 1990's catches of all salmon species, except chums, declined to the lowest levels since the commercial fisheries became operational. Despite closures of the Rivers and Smith Inlet fisheries, total returns of sockeye still remain well below target levels.

The Rivers/Smith Inlets Recovery Plan

Recommendations for a recovery plan for Rivers and Smith Inlet sockeye was prepared by Fisheries and Oceans Canada in 2000. Building on this plan, the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund will specify targets and projects to assist in the recovery of salmon in that area. The plan will cover a number of watersheds and the surrounding marine area with a special focus on sockeye stocks in the Inlets. A recommended list of projects will be complete by early 2003 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 Rivers and Smith Inlets, the Nimpkish River 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 Rivers/Smith Inlets, the PSEF Technical Committee focuses on developing and implementing key activities that are consistent with the recovery plan and PSEF goals.

Public Participation – The Rivers/Smith Planning Group

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. In the case of Rivers/Smith Inlets, the Rivers/Smith Planning Group will serve as the Local Advisory Group for the Plan .

The Rivers and Smith Planning Group (RSPG) was formed in 2000 to address great concerns over the the demise of the Rivers and Smith area sockeye runs. The group is comprised of representatives from local, regional, provincial and federal government agencies, First Nations, the forestry sector, and commercial and sport fish organizations. The purpose of the RSPG is “to protect and advance the sustainability of the Rivers Inlet and Smith Inlet systems of watershed, focusing on but not restricted to fish populations and habitat, recognizing that salmon species are ‘keystones’ reflective of the ecological health of whole systems.” And “to provide a forum for constructive dialogue among diverse government and stakeholder groups whereby common ground on watershed sustainability can be found and recognized thereby permitting cooperative planning and action to protect and advance sustainability.”

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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