

Dear MP,

Congratulations on your election to the House of Commons. My colleagues at the Pacific Salmon Foundation (PSF) and I look forward to working with you in the future. I also write to outline several important policy and budget priorities that we ask you to consider in the 43rd Canadian Parliament.

Following a divisive political season, I believe we should acknowledge that Pacific salmon are of concern to a wide spectrum of business, political, community and Indigenous leaders, and their conservation can be an issue of “collective resolve” for citizens and MP’s across partisan divides.

PSF’s vision is two-fold. First, healthy, sustainable and naturally diverse populations of Pacific salmon for the benefit of ecosystems and Canadians for generations to come. Second, effective stewardship of natural resources in B.C. and the Yukon that involve communities in decisions affecting Pacific salmon.

This has been a particularly challenging year for Pacific salmon, leading many to the conclusion that we are in a “salmon crisis.” Sockeye returns to the Fraser River this year are the lowest on record. Certain Chinook stocks from the B.C. Interior were predicted to return in such dwindling numbers that widespread fisheries closures were established in the spring. The tipping point came in July with the Big Bar rockslide in the Fraser River near Kamloops, which obstructed the passage of thousands of salmon trying to return to their natal streams to spawn.

Despite the challenges, there are reasons to be optimistic. First, Pacific salmon are resilient and have been adapting for millions of years. Second, British Columbians are passionate about sustaining Pacific salmon, with more than 35,000 volunteers across the province who regularly volunteer on important conservation and restoration projects. Third, we have a world-class “salmon network” of scientists, conservation organizations and Indigenous leaders with the knowledge and wherewithal to work hand-in-glove with governments to sustain Pacific salmon for future generations.

Recent commitments to Pacific salmon made by the federal and provincial governments, such as the B.C. Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF), represent significant steps forward. Still, what we need now and most urgently is the political leadership to do much more for Pacific salmon. This will mean major increases and on-going investments by the federal government that expand programs like the Salmon Conservation Stamp, DFO’s Salmonid Enhancement Program, and the Oceans Protection Plan, including the Coastal Restoration Fund and BCSRIF that directly support communities and non-governmental organizations like PSF.

It will be up to *all* MP’s from *all* parties in British Columbia to make Pacific salmon an urgent priority. We have no time to waste given the state of many Pacific salmon stocks. PSF is calling on our B.C. MP’s to urgently advance federal government policies and a 2020 budget that will address the crisis situation faced by Pacific salmon.

Here are several recommendations for you and other B.C. MP's to advance in Ottawa.

- **URGENT ACTION ON BIG BAR SLIDE:** The Big Bar obstruction in the Fraser River is *the* major and present issue for Pacific salmon in British Columbia. We recently communicated with the Minister of Fisheries calling for continued urgency and vigilance to remove this major obstruction before salmon start returning next spring. Affected salmon stocks that spawn above the obstruction are already of critical conservation concern, prompting significant fishing restrictions last year. The federal and provincial government have worked hard and in a coordinated fashion to open some passage for Pacific salmon. We understand that large numbers of salmon did make it past the rockslide, but that the main factor that allowed passage was the drop in water levels that occurred naturally in late August. While this was good news for a few salmon populations, the impediment to salmon migration during higher flow periods remains and continues to pose a serious migration risk for salmon in 2020. There has not been a problem of this proportion for Fraser River salmon in the last 100 years, since the Hell's Gate rockslide in 1914! Failure to fully restore salmon passage will have serious biological, economic and socio-cultural consequences that will have repercussions for years to come. ***This situation should be considered an on-going national emergency that merits every government and private sector resource at our disposal to open this obstruction before winter weather makes such an effort impossible.***
- **RESTORE ADEQUATE BUDGET FOR STOCK ASSESSMENT:** Quality stock assessment data is fundamental in order to properly manage conservation of Pacific salmon and maintain fisheries. Unfortunately, DFO's ability to meet well-established salmon assessment programs has experienced significant reductions during the last decade with deleterious effect. For example, lack of stock assessment data was cited recently by the Canadian Pacific salmon industry when it voluntarily suspended its Marine Stewardship Council eco-certification of B.C. chum, pink and sockeye, including Fraser River sockeye. Funds have been provided by the current government to restore some of the shortfalls in meeting DFO's obligations. Still, we estimate that the DFO Pacific region's current stock assessment budget is down by roughly 25%. The result is a decreasing number of assessment projects and activities further fueling the public unease that DFO is not adequately tracking fish status nor on top of the events affecting fisheries sustainability. Dramatically improving DFO stock assessment of Pacific salmon will also be required for the implementation of the recently renewed Pacific Salmon treaty with the United States.
- **MORE RESOURCES FOR DFO'S SALMON ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM:** The federal Salmonid Enhancement Program (SEP) needs a major infusion of new funds to support community enhancement and conservation of Pacific salmon. This program works closely with PSF and focuses on vulnerable salmon stocks, provides harvest opportunities, and improves fish habitat to sustain salmon populations. It does so by empowering people in Indigenous and community organizations across British Columbia. Despite many successes, the SEP budget has had no inflationary adjustments for 15 years, resulting in a loss of about \$6M in annual spending power over that time. A ripple affect is that PSF's network of thousands of volunteer salmon stewards are struggling to maintain stewardship programs and community enhancement infrastructure. ***More is urgently needed amidst salmon declines to upgrade small-scale community hatchery infrastructure, build more spawning and rearing habitat, and expand low-cost innovative technology and citizen science.***

- **INCREASE SALMON CONSERVATION STAMP TO AT LEAST \$10:** An important companion step is to increase the cost of the federal Salmon Conservation Stamp from \$6 to at least \$10 for the support of community-based Pacific salmon conservation, enhancement and restoration. Funds from this user fee are granted by PSF to a network of 340+ volunteer salmon stewardship groups across British Columbia and every \$1 from the Stamp generates another \$7 in value with local fundraising and volunteerism! This is a user-fee adjustment, thus no direct cost relative to the federal budget. The minimum \$4 adjustment accounts for inflation compounded since 1996, as well as increased demand from community-based grantees. This adjustment will generate another \$1 million annually (based on past Salmon Stamp sales), with an expected \$6 million in leverage. ***PSF needs MP support to encourage DFO to proceed with the consultation required by the Services Fee Act as soon as possible.*** (See attached proposal.)
- **MOVE TO CLOSED-CONTAINMENT SALMON FARMING:** The new Government has committed to a transition from open-net-pen to closed-containment salmon aquaculture in British Columbia by 2025. PSF called for this transition in 2018 because of the combination of three key considerations: the report of the B.C. Minister of Agriculture Advisory Committee on Finfish Aquaculture; the results of our own research (Strategic Salmon Health Initiative); and the chronically low abundance of many wild Pacific salmon populations. We look forward to learning more about next steps and, in the interim, will continue to strongly encourage that DFO's management of aquaculture put the health and well-being of Pacific salmon first.

All of us at the Pacific Salmon Foundation and thousands of "salmon stewards" in British Columbia look forward to your leadership on behalf of Pacific salmon during the 43rd Canadian Parliament. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas and to work with you to urgently address the challenges facing Pacific salmon.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Meneer
President and CEO
Pacific Salmon Foundation