

# 25 YEARS OF REMARKABLE PROGRESS

Founding chairman reflects on how it all began

BY GEORGE HUNGERFORD, FOUNDING CHAIRMAN, PACIFIC SALMON FOUNDATION

Twenty-five years ago the Honourable Tom Siddon, then federal Minister of Fisheries, asked me to take the lead on a newly created non-profit organization aimed at saving wild Pacific salmon. I didn't know a lot about salmon, but Tom appreciated that I knew a thing or two about fundraising and organizations — two things that would be critical to the Pacific Salmon Foundation.

I had no idea what I was in for. Getting the Foundation off the ground was an awesome challenge. The federal government of the day recognized the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) could not be all things to all people and that communities as well as stakeholders in the private sector needed to become partners in restoring and sustaining wild Pacific salmon stocks. As minister, Tom saw the need for an independent and self-sustaining organization that would be better positioned to lever citizen and business contributions, generate awareness, and support community volunteers throughout B.C. To that end, the federal government provided a \$300,000 start-up grant and said go to it.

Well, \$300,000 doesn't go very far on province-wide salmon conservation and enhancement programs, especially when you have office space to rent, staff to hire and organizational capacity to build from scratch. We were pretty thin at the outset, often working with part-time staff. Sometimes I was it. Nevertheless, we rolled up our sleeves and got down to work.

One of the first things we did was figure out what we wanted to be: a credible organization with organizational capacity, taken seriously by the public and different levels of government. Instead of being another activist group, we opted to be non-political and non-confrontational, working within the existing system to achieve constructive results for Pacific salmon. In keeping with that, we didn't hitch our star to any one political party because governments change and politicians come and go. First and foremost, we needed to be there for Pacific salmon.

Of course, what is best for Pacific salmon depends on who you ask. One of our first challenges was trying to get various Pacific salmon stakeholders — different levels of government, industry, communities and commercial, recreational and First Nations fisheries — all in agreement on common aims and principles. As you can imagine, that was no easy feat. Representatives on our first board of directors came from a range of industries, many of which have not always been in harmony with each other. It took time to develop a board that could effectively work together.

Changing individual perceptions was one thing; changing attitudes across whole swathes of the population was another. As such, we reached out to communities in an effort to generate public awareness and spur involvement. That was a challenge in the late '80s because the environment was not



Founding Chairman George Hungerford (right) pictured in 2007 with Former Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Loyola Hearn (left) and Former Minister of Environment John Baird (standing).

the priority it is today. Most people didn't know about the stresses on Pacific salmon then because commercially fished species seemed an abundant resource that would last forever. As such, there was limited community involvement outside of Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which worked on small-scale salmon hatchery projects. Changing such perceptions required a multi-pronged public awareness effort. We started holding community events and made inroads educating schoolchildren. We underwrote supplies for incubation of salmon in classrooms for children to release into streams and rivers. We figured if we got children interested in salmon, then their parents and grandparents would

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**E.L. (Ned) Pottinger** M.Sc., P.Ag., P.Geo.  
Pottinger Gaherty Environmental Consultants Ltd.  
Chairman

**Peter G. Swinton** CA  
PricewaterhouseCoopers  
Treasurer

**Anne Kinvig**  
Pacific Blue Cross  
Secretary

**Terry M. Lanigan**  
Nexeo Solutions  
Member-at-Large

**W.J.D. (John) Woodward**  
Woodcorp Investments Ltd.  
Immediate Past Chairman

## MEMBERS

**Ian D. Angus**, Finest At Sea Seafood Boutique

**Bruce Bell**

**Ward Bond**, Island Outfitters

**Rick Bourne**, Langara Fishing Adventures

**Bob Cole**

**Anson Frost**, Priority Management - Vancouver

**George Hungerford** O.C., Q.C., Hungerford Group

**David Leonard**, DDB Canada

**Zo Ann Morten**, Pacific Streamkeepers Federation

**George C. Reifel**, Reifel Cooke Group of Companies

**Trevor Scott**, Farris, Vaughan, Wills & Murphy LLP

**Paul Sprout**

**Don Swoboda**

**Thomas A. Toynebee**

**Hon. Bryan Williams** Q.C.

## EMERITUS DIRECTORS

**T.M. (Mike) Apsey** C.M., L.L.D., RPF

**Hon. John A. Fraser** P.C., O.C., O.B.C., Q.C.

**Robert Gayton**, Western Copper and Gold Corporation

**Hon. John L. Nichol** P.C., O.C., O.B.C., Q.C.  
Springfield Investments

**Rob Waters**, Ladysmith Marina

follow. We also worked hard developing a volunteer concept with the Foundation acting as an umbrella organization that could engage, support and co-ordinate with volunteers on Pacific salmon conservation and enhancement programs. We recognized we couldn't accomplish what needed to be done without involvement; over the past 25 years, community groups have become the backbone of salmon habitat conservation, restoration and creation in B.C.

Of course, nothing happens without money, so we began a concerted fundraising campaign, soliciting from individual donors and the business community at large. My wife, Jane, began hosting fundraising dinners in Vancouver, which later served as a model for dinners in other communities. Gala dinners and community events continue to be a pillar of the Foundation's fundraising efforts today — we now host 11 each year in B.C. and Alberta.

We also made several trips to Ottawa to urge the creation of a Pacific salmon conservation stamp to give anglers an opportunity to support salmon restoration and enhancement when they purchased their saltwater fishing licence. The first stamp came out in 1989; and since then, more than \$6 million dollars from the stamp have been distributed by the Foundation to help finance community salmon projects. What is more, communities match donations, and now every dollar donated by the Foundation gets multiplied, on average, eight-fold in the communities that undertake salmon projects.

The Foundation also looked to the business community to take a leadership role on donations. That's because all businesses benefit either directly or indirectly from the environment in which they operate, so they have a responsibility to be good stewards. The Foundation's major donor list now includes the likes of BC Hydro, Port Metro

Vancouver, Rocky Mountaineer, TimberWest, and Goldcorp, to name just a few.

The Pacific Salmon Foundation has come a long way during the past 25 years. It now has significant organizational capacity, a dedicated and knowledgeable staff of professionals, and a range of public awareness programs and fundraising mechanisms to support salmon conservation and enhancement in communities. The Foundation has also formed relationships with the federal and provincial governments and numerous municipalities, the business community, other non-profit organizations, individual donors and some 35,000 volunteers in B.C. Most importantly, the Foundation has built widespread trust — trust that enables amazing work on behalf of Pacific salmon and B.C.'s watersheds.

In so many ways, the Foundation is exceeding the vision we had a generation ago when it was started.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done and myriad challenges persist. With so many competing pressures on Pacific salmon habitat, the future of Pacific salmon is precarious. That's significant because salmon are a key indicator in a range of systems.

My great hope for the Foundation's future is that a new generation of volunteer leaders will step forward and take up the mantle of Pacific salmon. A strong foundation is laid and a great model is in place thanks to many, all of whom I wish I had the space to name. But the next steps are not for my generation to take. It's for our sons, daughters and grandchildren to take, as well as the many newcomers to British Columbia who are coming to know our natural bounty. Only with them can we continue what we have started and adapt to address the complex challenges facing salmon and the environment. 