



## **Federal government measures failed to protect endangered Chinook salmon in 2019**

### **Protection under Canada's Species at Risk Act needed for Fraser River salmon**

**February 5, 2019** VICTORIA — Many more endangered Fraser River Chinook salmon were killed in fisheries last year than promised by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Despite a commitment to reduce Fraser spring and summer Chinook mortality to less than five per cent, recent analyses using the federal government's own data suggest this limit was far exceeded and that a full fisheries closure would have allowed at least 25 per cent more endangered Chinook salmon to spawn. Last year marked the lowest return of Fraser River spring and summer Chinook on record: fewer than 14,500 reached their spawning grounds.

"Federal fisheries managers failed in their commitments to protect these endangered salmon and increase the availability of these Chinook for endangered southern resident killer whales," says David Suzuki Foundation senior science and policy analyst Jeffery Young.

"If the government's primary objective is to avoid extinction of endangered Fraser River Chinook salmon, the first step must be to ensure that as many reach their spawning grounds as possible," says Watershed Watch Salmon Society senior fisheries advisor Greg Taylor. "Meeting the five per cent mortality cap in 2020 will require most fishing be closed in times and areas when endangered Fraser River Chinook are present."

"In 2019, much of the fishing mortality occurred where recreational catch-and-release of Chinook salmon was permitted. To ensure these endangered Chinook salmon are protected, they must be listed under Canada's Species at Risk Act," says Raincoast Conservation Foundation Salmon Program Director Misty MacDuffee.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada lacks adequate monitoring to fully assess fishing mortality of Chinook, but for three of the 10 fishing areas, there is enough data to show that at least 4,000 spring and summer Fraser Chinook were killed. The number of spring and summer Fraser River Chinook that successfully made it to their spawning grounds in 2019 was less than 14,500 — the lowest number on record.

“While millions of tax dollars were being spent to fly salmon in helicopters around the Big Bar landslide, our government was allowing thousands of these fish to be killed on their way into the Fraser River,” MacDuffee says.

Management measures put in place in 2019 were intended to significantly reduce deaths of endangered Chinook. The measures faced fierce objections from recreational fisheries. However, despite these objections, total Chinook catch on the South Coast actually increased by over 15 per cent in 2019, as compared to the 2014-2018 average.

Seven Fraser Chinook salmon populations are “endangered” according to the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, a federally mandated science body. These fish are key in the local ecosystem, providing a vital food source for endangered southern resident killer whales.

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