

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

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BC First Nations call on Canada and BC for immediate action to restore and protect wild salmon populations

Coast Salish Traditional Territory/Vancouver: BC First Nations gathered last week at the Wild Salmon Summit in Musqueam Territory to discuss and express continuing frustration over the federal and provincial governments' current, inadequate strategies to protect, enhance and manage wild salmon.

Salmon runs, which were historically abundant, have been diminished to a point where many First Nations have been unable to fully, nor consistently, exercise their social, cultural and economic food harvesting rights.

Wild Salmon Summit delegates indicated that the federal Indigenous Program Review, currently underway, must outline pathways for the implementation of First Nations Rights to self-determination and self-governance as they relate to fish and wild salmon. Fisheries legislation, programs and policies require extensive modifications that recognize and respect Aboriginal and Treaty Rights within the meaning of Section 35(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and the standards set out in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

"Inaction by the Federal Government relating to Aboriginal Title and Rights, as determined by the *Sparrow*, *Gladstone*, *Ahousaht* and *Tsilhqot'in* court cases, has delayed the development of desperately needed shared management structures for fisheries, fish habitat and waters in BC," BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee reflected. "As many BC First Nations have significant interests regarding the conservation and management of wild salmon, there has been some engagement and progress has been made, but major challenges persist, including the lack of consultation with First Nations to determine decisions for salmon conservation closures."

Significant resources are required to develop and implement First Nations innovative programming and planning, including an Indigenous Fisheries Guardian Program and a technical body to conduct and disseminate research on wild salmon, monitor environmental impacts and fully realize Traditional Ecological Knowledge. In addition, First Nations must develop a shared position and priorities amongst key political representatives, including hereditary Chiefs, and the numerous Indigenous fisheries organizations that exist in BC. Pathways must be in place for these policies to be brought to the highest political levels for implementation.



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The issues surrounding salmon are complex. Major efforts, the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge, and full, respectful Nation-to-Nation collaboration will need to take place to implement effective action to protect and foster the abundance of wild salmon in BC.

“The governments of Canada and BC have both endorsed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Article 18 recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to be decision-makers in matters that would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures,” said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “The depletion of wild salmon stocks and other aquatic resources has had an adverse effect on the Aboriginal fishing rights of BC First Nations and requires immediate action by all levels of government. We call on Canada and BC to establish collaborative decision-making processes and mechanisms with First Nations, and to provide the necessary funding resources to implement strategies to protect and enhance wild salmon.”

“It is vital that Indigenous governments, the provincial government, and the federal government work in full, unadulterated partnership to develop immediate actions to protect our wild salmon, in ways that respect the UN Declaration and Aboriginal rights,” said Chief Bob Chamberlin, Vice-President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “The diminishment of wild salmon populations due to human-created conditions such as climate change and resource extraction will soon become irreversible if we do not implement immediate actions. We must act now to protect wild salmon for the sake of our cultures, our livelihoods, and our future generations.”

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

The Wild Salmon Summit was organized by the First Nations Leadership Council with generous support from the government of British Columbia.

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