

For Immediate Release

Low salmon returns threaten wildlife and wilderness tourism

(September 24, Campbell River, BC) While British Columbians are celebrating the massive returns of Fraser River sockeye salmon, other key BC salmon runs are experiencing a drastic collapse. In the Glendale River in Knight Inlet it is expected that less than 20,000 pink salmon will return. This is from 4.8 million pink salmon fry that left the Glendale River in the Spring of 2009.

“We are seeing a disturbing trend”, said Dean Wyatt, owner of Knight Inlet Lodge. “In 2004 we had pink returns of about 660,000. That number dropped to 182,000 in 2006 and 15,000 in 2008. And now it looks like less than 20,000 are coming back to Glendale, similar to 2008. With 4.8 million fish leaving the Glendale in 2009 a worst-case scenario should have seen 40,000 salmon return.” Howard Pattinson who owns Tide Rip Tours, a company that also brings visitors to the Glendale, reported that a tour group witnessed a mother bear eating a cub last week, likely due to hunger. “The bears are so hungry they are eating muscles off of beach rocks and old salmon cannery pilings”, said Pattinson.

The chum salmon return is also expected to be dismal this year in the Glendale and similar drastic returns are being experienced in other rivers in the Broughton Archipelago and up the Central Coast of BC. In Bella Coola, Leonard Ellis of Bella Coola Grizzly Tours has reported very few salmon in the Atnarko River. “The situation is reminiscent of 2008 when barely any salmon showed up, and 20 starving bears had to be destroyed”, said Ellis. “This current situation is occurring just when Bella Coola is starting to make headway with tourists who come to see the wonderful scenery and wildlife.”

What is the cause of the drastic declines? “We don’t know exactly”, said Brian Gunn, President of the Wilderness Tourism Association. “Nobody seems to know including the DFO because they do not monitor the salmon after they leave the rivers and spawning channels. We believe that one possible cause in the south coast is the presence of open net caged fish farms on the migration routes of the young out migrating juvenile salmon. We had the collapse of the Broughton Archipelago pink run in 2002, which was followed by an extensive fallowing of the farm sites in the area in spring of 2003, during the out migration of the juvenile salmon. This effort led to a rebounding of the pink stocks in the Broughton in 2004 (over 650,000 in Glendale), which has since deteriorated again to our current critical situation. We don’t think ocean conditions or climate change are a factor because of the large variances in the returns of different stocks.”

“The low salmon returns will have a major impact on the wildlife that depend on them as well as threatening our wildlife viewing tourism businesses” said Gunn. “In 2008 our operators were saved at the last minute by a good run of chum salmon, but it doesn’t appear that this will be the case this year. This is a crisis for our industry and we need action to address the potential impacts.” “We continue to ask that fish farms be removed from the salmon migration routes”, said both Wyatt and Pattinson. “With such a control in place at least we will have a clearer idea of what isn’t impacting salmon.”

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