

“Crusader for Wild Salmon in Financial Straits Following Channel Clean-up”

In a summer of oil spills, disappointing salmon returns and slack fishing lines, there is some good news for salmon on the West Coast. The Glendale River, a major pink salmon stream on the B.C. mainland, is in tiptop shape thanks to the determination of Blake Covernton of Pro Plan Services in Nelson, and his crack team of spawning channel gravel cleaners, who worked closely with dedicated fisheries guardians from local First Nations to restore the Glendale spawning channel. The only downside to the story is that Covernton is now left holding most of the tab – about \$100,000 – and is looking for help.

“The Glendale was on the verge of serious trouble,” says Covernton, who was previously a commercial fisherman and is now a project scheduler with big oil clients in Alberta’s booming tar sands. “I knew the DFO wouldn’t be able to deal with it before the salmon returned this August and by next year it might be too late. I knew I could do something about it, so I put the team together and we went to work”.

The Glendale River has of late been the only significant producer of pink salmon throughout the Broughton Archipelago and Knight Inlet area, situated between N.E. Vancouver Island and the BC mainland. In 1988, Fisheries and Oceans Canada built a spawning channel to help augment salmon runs near where the river runs into Knight Inlet. Wild salmon coming from the Glendale River provide a major food source for grizzly bears that frequent the area, drawing thousands of tourists each year. With local bear viewing operations and local First Nations concerned about the state of the spawning channel, it seemed crucial to conduct a survey of the Glendale Channel and to act on the expected results. Victor Ewert, a former DFO employee and now a fisheries consultant with Redfish Services (Hedley), was hired to do an assessment in June.

“[Spawning channels] cannot remain productive without a certain degree of maintenance and management,” Ewert says. The spawning gravel was clogged with brown organic matter, which chokes salmon eggs. During the assessment, Ewert says he observed massive amounts of dead eggs in the muck covered gravel.

“Merely walking on the gravel created large plumes of brown organic matter,” he wrote in his report. “Based on my assessment of the current gravel bed conditions in the Glendale Channel, I highly recommend that a cleaning operation take place.”

That was on June 27th, and pink salmon were going to start entering the river in mid-August. The DFO did not take any immediate action, but Covernton did. He pulled together a crew comprised of Vic Ewert at Redfish Services (Hedley) Pacific Erosion Control Systems (Sointula) as the general contractor; and Alfred Coon and James Speck Jr. from DMT Fisheries Society (Alert Bay).

“I’ve had a vision now for over a decade that all people who rely on wild salmon will work together to ensure healthy wild salmon stocks in BC,” states Covernton (see www.wildbcsalmon.ca). With permission granted in record time from local DFO officials, the Da’naxda’xw First Nations and BC government, the clean up operation was mobilized immediately to get to work during a narrow window of opportunity dictated by tides and the arrival of adult spawners.

With controlled water flows, the channel gravel was cleaned and mixed prior to the arrival of spawning salmon. “This project will help ensure the survival of not only the Glendale River pink

salmon run, but could also serve as the seed stock for other Mainland pink runs that are now severely depressed," Covernton says. The project was completed ahead of schedule by July 15 and came in slightly under budget.

The Glendale River is in the Da'naxda'xw First Nation's traditional territory. Their resource manager is Fred Glendale, who toured the project site with Tim McGrady, Operations Manager of Knight Inlet Lodge.

"Initially we were very concerned about this gang rushing in here without much communication," comments Fred, "but we very quickly realized the intent of this Covernton fellow. I went up to the site and witnessed the importance and the quality of the work being performed on a project that is well overdue. Our people give this team praise and have asked them to discuss further salmon restoration work at a meeting this fall with our Chief and Council."

In total, the clean up operation cost \$163,927. With virtually no time in which to raise funds, Covernton paid most of the invoices out of his own pocket. Responding quickly to Blake's requests for financial assistance were the BC Wilderness Tourism Association, (an organization comprised of tourism operators) and the BC government's Pacific Salmon Forum, who contributed \$11,500 and \$50,000, respectively. Covernton covered the shortfall of \$102,427 himself, with a combination of his own cash and loans from friends.

Covernton remains passionate about the project. "Essential efforts are now aimed at fundraising as I can't afford to carry this financial burden myself, and I am very hopeful that other people will share my concern and contribute to these actions taken to reverse the reduction in wild salmon populations."

When will we see the results of Covernton's selfless act? It won't be until next spring. "No matter what happens with the financing, I am confident I contributed to the survival of pink salmon on the BC coast." And he adds, "that means a lot to me. I will never regret the decisions I made this summer. If we are going to make a difference we have to get on with the work, perhaps thinking a bit more like salmon than like people! "

For Covernton, the future is all about bringing industries, governments and concerned groups together to ensure the health of a precious resource.... Wild Salmon !

Please send donations to:

Watershed Watch Salmon Society
1037 Madore Ave.
Coquitlam, BC V3K 3B7

Tax receipts are issued for all donations. Charitable registration #86948 9476 RR0001
(Please Mark Your Donations for the **Glendale Channel Project**)

Lori McQuid, WWSS Administrative Coordinator: 604-936-9474

Pictures are available. For more information contact:

Blake Covernton: 250-354-9054 email: proplan@shaw.ca
Brian Gunn, Wilderness Tourism Association of BC: 250-286-4080 email: mbg@unserve.com