

Wilderness Tourism Association



"Ensuring the ongoing viability of the wilderness tourism industry through leadership, advocacy, promotion and education."

For Immediate Release

Date: May 1, 2008

Campbell River – BC Wilderness Tourism Association calls on government to take action to save wild salmon in light of recent research indicating a widespread sea lice problem.

The BC Wilderness Tourism Association (WTA) has deep concern about new scientific information, which indicates that the impacts of open net cage fish farming to BC's wild salmon are more wide spread and more systemic than we thought. A letter was sent to government today urging them to take action.

Open net cage fish farms are causing a deadly collision between the vulnerable young salmon and sea lice. We are now discovering that the problem may not only be specific to pink salmon in the Broughton Archipelago". Recent research published online by the North American Journal of Fisheries Management reports that infestations of sea lice have spread to juvenile pink, chum, and sockeye salmon as well as juvenile herring near fish farms throughout the Discovery Islands (Morton, Routledge and Krkosek). In 2005 researchers found four times as many wild juvenile salmon were infected with sea lice near fish farms than distant from the farms. Then in 2006 when most of the farms were empty, the sea lice declined. This is a similar pattern as found in the Broughton Archipelago. This new evidence is alarming and is a strong indicator that the devastating impacts of fish farms are much more far-reaching than we had thought.

Nature-based tourism in British Columbia is worth approximately \$1.4 billion and the industry is very much dependent on salmon resources. The continued operation of open net-cage salmon farms puts the future of this significant sector at risk. "We need government to implement urgent policy that protects wild salmon and all the economic sectors that depend on it. So the WTA is calling for the immediate removal or fallowing of fish farms from identified wild salmon nursery areas where research has shown impact. Based on the new research we need to assume that the problem exists throughout coastal BC. So we are also calling on government to immediately conduct research on the conditions around the fish farms, and impacts to wild salmon, at all sites throughout the coast to assure us that the impacts to wild salmon from open net-cage fish farms is not widespread and systemic as the independent research suggests," said Brian Gunn, President of the WTA.

Government and the fish farm industry's current mitigation measure is the excessive use of the unapproved drug Slice. The WTA does not support the use of this drug in areas used by tourism operators due to the unknown impacts it might have on the surrounding ecology and food sources. "Ultimately the only real measure that is going to work to fully protect wild salmon and *our* industry is separating the farm and wild salmon. This can only be achieved by complete closed containment technology, but this goal is years away from implementation. In the meantime fish farms must be moved off salmon migration routes," added Gunn.

In a letter sent to government today the WTA is urging them to take immediate action to save wild salmon and protect our nature based tourism industry. Go to www.wilderness-tourism.bc.ca/issues.html for a copy of the WTA position paper on this important issue.

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