

# Working Together

## for Clayoquot Salmon

Clayoquot salmon are in trouble. Despite past efforts to restock streams and millions of dollars spent fixing spawning grounds, wild salmon populations are still declining in Clayoquot Sound. Just why this is happening and what communities can do about it was the subject of the Clayoquot Salmon Roundtable, which took place in Ahousaht on February 4.

"Nobody knows exactly what's causing the declines," said Uu-a-thluk biologist, Katie Beach. "There's very little harvest on certain stocks. Habitat is also fairly good in some places, but they're still not coming back."

Known as potential limiting factors, the environmental pressures affecting salmon recovery include predation, food availability, overfishing, disease, climate change, and loss and destruction of habitat. A few of these issues became the subject of technical working groups during Thursday's meeting.

"We developed sub-committees to move forward on issues like enhancement, harvest management, and ecosystem health," Beach said.

Since this was only the second roundtable meeting to take place on the subject, participants continued the lengthy process of developing terms of reference and determining priorities for the group. Administered by Uu-a-thluk and West Coast Aquatic (in partnership with Nuu-chah-nulth Nations), the group has been welcomed by all sectors.

"People were calling for an inclusive process to address what's happening and also to create strategies to address some of the issues," Beach said. "The decline has been going on for decades, but before this, no group was mandated to take this on."

One reason for the new group's inclusiveness was to avoid sectoral conflict. "The roundtable allows face-to-face discussion," Beach said. "Once you sit down together and hear others speak, you might realize, 'Oh, I didn't know that about sport fishing,' or, 'I didn't understand that about First Nations rights.' When everyone is represented, you can see a broader perspective."

That broader perspective is imperative to make the drastic changes necessary to save Clayoquot salmon. Saya Masso, who attended the roundtable on behalf of Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, agreed.

"We have a lot of authority and opportunity to govern our homelands, but there's nothing more powerful than taking that power and turning it over to the people," he said.

Masso went on to talk about the protests in Clayoquot Sound in the 1990s, and how those resulted in similar roundtables, roundtables that led to concrete actions for forestry reform. "This is shaping up to be like that situation," he said.

Bringing people and interests together is never easy, but both Masso and Beach see the benefits over the long term. "There's already lots of people taking action," Beach said. "Each Nation has their own plan...People from fishing companies are doing work. Salmon enhancement groups are doing work. The roundtable brings all that under one umbrella so we can pull in resources and work together."

*Inlets* like the ones found in Clayoquot Sound are crucial habitat for emerging young salmon as they adapt to the ocean environment. Yet according to recent studies, many B.C. salmon are disappearing once they enter these inlets. In the Kennedy River alone, research performed over the last decade suggests a 40% loss of sockeye spawners and a 90% loss of chinook spawners. Other research says B.C. salmon are dying within their first 40-60 days in the ocean. Logging, salmon aquaculture, disease, climate change, overfishing, and loss of habitat are some of the issues the Clayoquot Salmon roundtable will work to address.



Organizations like local streamkeeping groups play an important role in the recovery of Clayoquot salmon.



Nuu-chah-nulth Nations and businesses have been working to understand the factors causing salmon to decline in Clayoquot Sound for many years. Pictured here, a sea lice survey of juvenile wild salmon.



Salmon populations in the Upper Megin River have been declining along with other systems in Clayoquot Sound.

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