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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

June 16, 2021

The fight to save Pacific salmon

For thousands of years without disruption, the local rivers of the North Shore have played host to a dramatic and captivating spectacle - salmon returning in the millions to spawn.

Today, the numbers are at historic lows. The decline has been steady and unyielding for more than a generation due to a combination of habitat disturbance, harvesting and accelerating pressure from climate change.

Warming oceans have created changes to the marine food web as well as warmer freshwater conditions, and more extreme rain and drought. These factors are contributing to current trends in salmon numbers.

Bold, transformative action is required to stabilize, protect, and rebuild West Coast salmon stocks for the ecosystems and communities that depend on them - before it is too late.

In my previous role as Canada's Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, I was deeply involved in several significant initiatives in support of salmon recovery. This included the Wild Salmon Policy 2018-2022 Implementation Plan, the Coastal Restoration Fund, the BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund, the Salmon Allocation Policy review, implementation funding for the renewed Pacific Salmon Treaty, and the renewed Fisheries Act.

Largest-ever investment

Last week, on World Oceans Day, I joined my successor as DFO Minister - Bernadette Jordan - to announce the guiding principles of the federal government's \$647.1 million Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative (PSSI) first unveiled in Budget 2021. This is the largest-ever government investment in efforts to save Pacific salmon and to help rebuild their populations.

The PSSI will build on, support, and continue the years of work and wisdom that grassroots organizations, Indigenous communities, scientists, and others have already devoted to this cause. It will transform the harvest sector providing greater economic certainty and support the many BC communities whose jobs and way of life rely on salmon.

This is a deeply personal issue for many British Columbians. As the MP for

North Vancouver, I've visited classrooms where kids are raising salmon fry and releasing them into McKay Creek. I have watched how North Vancouver community members have come together to literally carry salmon past the rockslide on the Seymour River. And I've spoken to Elders and First Nation community members about the devastating impacts that salmon decline, and most recently, the Big Bar landslide, have had on their ways of living.

For a long time, we've approached the problem through a series of less than fully connected actions. A crucial part of this strategy will be to break down silos, increase communication, and share data, expertise and resources so that every time an organization or a government makes a conservation effort, we can maximize leverage from the value of their work.

Helping Mother Nature

Shaun Hollingsworth, Chair of the Seymour Salmonid Conservation Society, describes the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative as hitting a reset button. Says Shaun, "It's going to take several generations of fish before we see the benefits but there is still time to heal the wounds of past errors. Mother Nature will help us if we help Mother Nature."

"More should have been done sooner but late is better than never," says Keegan Casidy, President of North Shore Streamkeepers. He gives the PSSI a "cautiously optimistic 10 out of 10."

His optimism is fueled, in part, by the resiliency of the species - evidenced by the results of a recent habitat restoration project on Lower Mosquito Creek. Last September, the Streamkeepers documented a 350% increase in returning adult salmon over any salmon run in the last 25 years.

As the past year of pandemic has proven, Canada works best when all of us work together. The fight to save our West Coast Pacific salmon is another collective battle that demands all our best efforts.

We now have the funding, the determination, a deep well of combined expertise and we continue to gather the necessary science. As grim as the prospect of Pacific salmon extinction is, it is still within our grasp to again witness on the North Shore the natural miracle of the return of the salmon.

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