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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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Seymour rockslide: more than your average community effort

In my role as Member of Parliament for North Vancouver, I am often amazed by how committed and caring a community I represent. I often experience this at events, but also on ordinary days doing ordinary things. There is one thing of which I have become convinced - North Vancouverites are not ordinary people. I saw a great example of this on July 10th when I participated in a ceremony celebrating work done on the Seymour River rockslide.

Four and a half years ago, on a cold, December day, 80,000 cubic meters of rock slipped off the west bank of the Seymour River, creating a blockage that reshaped the river and created an impediment to salmon and steelhead passage. Despite presenting very significant challenges for the fish, it helped to coalesce a community in ways not previously imagined.

Shaun Hollingsworth, a resident of North Vancouver, was at the time the newly elected chair of the Seymour Salmonid Society. Shaun, though a full-time electrician, was about to undertake the project of a lifetime.

Mitigating a catastrophic rockslide

The December 7th landslide blocked the flow of the river, creating a lake upstream, compromising Twin Bridge and taking out trails. Shaun and his colleagues at the Salmonid Society - a community-based organization that operates the salmon hatchery in the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve - realized action was needed to save the naturally-occurring salmon runs in the river.

Initially, they tagged both juvenile and adult salmon travelling both ways in the river to determine if fish could navigate the slide area. They found that no fish could get through alive in either direction - potentially meaning an end to salmon spawning if nothing was done. Fortunately, BCIT Rivers Institute - led by Dr. Ken Ashley, also a North Vancouver resident - came to the rescue by securing funding for a study of the situation and potential options to mitigate the rockslide.

Several groups came together to discuss and determine the best course of action. Participants included municipal governments, the Squamish and Tsleil Waututh First Nations, Metro Vancouver, the Province of BC and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. They concluded that a viable pathway for fish would have to be forced through, created by rock breaking along the course of the blockage. Engineering assessments, done by Northwest Hydraulics (NHC) engineer Barry Chilibeck, suggested it would take two to five years and cost more than \$1M. The long-term answer would thus require a lot of fund raising and considerable time commitment.

In the meantime, fish would have to somehow move past the blockage if they were to spawn. This is when the community as a whole really stepped up. During the first migration season, community volunteers rallied to literally carry mature spawners upstream. Salmon were trapped, put in wet bags and carried on people's backs to waiting trucks equipped with tanks, then driven upriver to be released to spawn naturally, or taken to the hatchery to provide stock for the season. It was hard, hot work, but folks from all walks of life, from numerous organizations and from local homes and businesses all pitched in to make it happen. Over 300 fish were successfully carried upriver that first summer.

Meanwhile, low-velocity rock breaking began to shatter the bus-sized boulders into microwave-sized rocks. The engineering survey had come up with an innovative solution - don't completely alter the natural state of things; instead, let nature help, by sorting and moving smaller

rocks and eventually recreating a new channel that the fish could navigate. The work had to be done carefully and slowly, not all at once, in order to maintain the natural environment within the river system.

Galvanizing necessary resources

I became involved in the project fairly early on, during the period I was MP and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Shaun had come to see me to discuss the slide and determine what assistance and funding the federal government was able to provide. He has been a regular visitor to my office since then.

By the summer of 2016, a floating fish fence had been designed, built and installed on a section of the river bordering the Squamish Nation Administration area. The fence allowed for much less traumatic capture of adult fish swimming upstream. Fish continued to be trucked to an area above the slide over the next two years. Over the course of this project, more than 1000 fish have been transferred upriver to spawn.

The Seymour Salmonid Society is one of many amazing community organizations, operating with a largely volunteer base and managing on a very small annual budget. Just as Streamkeepers and dozens of local hatchery organizations across the province, the Society does remarkable work to maintain and enhance the natural state of the river and to operate an important hatchery facility.

In my current role as Canada's Minister of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, I am very pleased that DFO and its dedicated staff have contributed to the work being done on the Seymour River, including:

- Managing permits and approvals for the actual rock breaking and fence installation;
- Designing the fish fence and trap, and helping with its installation;
- Supplying funding support;
- Organizing planning meetings;
- Participating with fish capture and transport;
- Providing important technical and biological support.

A colossal accomplishment

The ceremony last week was a celebration of the achievements of a colossal combined effort aimed at saving a river's natural fish stocks and assuring the sustainability of this local ecosystem for generations to come. Other organizations that made important contributions include local First Nations, Streamkeepers, the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC, the Steelhead Society, the Coho Society, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, Supersave Group, local firefighters, media and all levels of government. These groups, alongside many individual local volunteers, pulled together to accomplish what no single entity could have done.

They came together to save our local salmon and steelhead, to restore a key local watershed - an extraordinary effort by a remarkable community of people. North Vancouver really is a special community that I continue to be honoured to serve.

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