Pacific Coast Steelhead Management Meeting

*British Columbia Steelhead Status Review*

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Steelhead are present in streams throughout British Columbia’s 27 000 kilometre (17 000 mile) coastline. More than 430 stocks are estimated to exist in the province, including a small number of which border S.E. Alaska to the north and Washington State to the south. These stocks can be characterized as one of three ecotypes, determined by adult freshwater entry date and migratory distance: coastal winter run, coastal summer run and interior summer run.

Current hatchery releases of 10 K fry and 0.5 M smolts are much diminished from mid-1980’s releases of 1.5 M fry and 1 M smolts - now a dozen programs in total compared to nearly one hundred at that time.

Conservation status tends to improve to the north of the province, a pattern similar to what has been reported previously, and thought to be reflective of marine survival rates. However, there have been recent increases in abundance for some southern stocks. At present, all six indicator streams in the north have abundances estimated to be within BC’s *Routine Management Zone* (RMZ), defined as abundance greater than 0.30 of the maximum adult recruitment relative to a habitat-based maximum smolt production. This reference point is termed the *Conservation Concern Threshold* (CCT).

One of three Central Coast index streams is in the RMZ while the other two have abundances below the CCT, or within BC’s *Conservation Concern Zone* (CCZ). The Interior Fraser indicator stock borders on the CCT. Two of three monitored streams in the Lower Mainland are in the RMZ while the abundance of three of four Vancouver Island stocks places them below the CCT within the CCZ or BC’s *Extreme Conservation Concern Zone*, defined as < 0.15 of the maximum adult recruitment.

Recreational fishing effort for steelhead, as assessed by license sales and the Steelhead Harvest Analysis angler questionnaire, has increased in all management regions while CPUE has increased in all regions but the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. Almost half of BC’s 150 K days of steelhead angler effort is reported in the Lower Mainland followed by a third for the North Coast. More than half of the steelhead catch occurs on North Coast streams while Lower Mainland fisheries contribute a quarter of the 100 K steelhead provincial catch.

BC’s approach to steelhead management, as prescribed by the near complete *Provincial Framework for Steelhead Management in BC* and the *Steelhead Stream Classification Policy* (2005) documents, continues to be very conservative, characterized by wild steelhead release and conservative terminal tackle regulations. Commercial interceptions of steelhead in tidal salmon fisheries continues to challenge BC steelhead managers and recent indications from federal fishery managers signal a return to more aggressive fisheries with associated high by-catch mortality. Recent major industrial project proposals/developments have the potential to significantly alter both steelhead habitat and angler experience in the North Coast area.