

# Skeena Salmon Management Report Card *2008*



 **SkeenaWild**  
CONSERVATION TRUST

# INTRODUCTION

Wild salmon are critical to the cultural, economic, and ecological well being of the Skeena watershed and its communities. It is therefore essential that the management agencies responsible for salmon and salmon habitat make decisions that are in the best long-term interest of the entire watershed. With this objective in mind, SkeenaWild Conservation Trust has taken on the task of compiling an annual report card on Skeena salmon management.

With this report card we hope to provide Skeena watershed residents with an “at-a-glance” overview of how well Skeena wild salmon are being managed. We began by breaking salmon management into seven focus areas, and within each asking, “*what is required to make the Skeena watershed a global model of wild salmon management?*” These requirements are posed in the form of questions in each focus area, and letter grades assigned accordingly. We also provide a brief explanation of what happened in 2008 and suggest opportunities for future improvement.

## SUMMARY

<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>
Harvesting	E
Habitat	D
First Nations	E
Economy	C
Enforcement	C-
Communication	C+
Collaboration	D



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## HARVESTING

## E

### ***Were 2008 harvest levels set low enough to adequately to protect endangered salmon stocks?***

#### **What happened in 2008?**

There were minor reductions in 2008, however, Canada's aggregate exploitation rate on Skeena sockeye salmon was 42%, well above the 20 – 30% total Canadian exploitation rate recommended by the Skeena Independent Science Review Panel. The exploitation rate on endangered Kitwanga River sockeye was 50%, well in excess of DFO scientists' own recommended maximum of 34%. Other endangered stocks with similar return timing, such as Slamgeesh sockeye, also likely experienced serious overharvesting.

#### **What needs to change to improve this grade?**

Weekly harvest rate caps need to be set that protect endangered Skeena salmon stocks. As an example, this would explicitly mean reducing the total exploitation rates on endangered Kitwanga River sockeye to well below 34%, as recommended by the management agencies own fisheries biologists.

## HABITAT

## D

### ***Is critical wild salmon habitat being protected from loss or degradation?***

#### **What happened in 2008?**

The Auditor General of Canada released its report on Protecting Fish Habitat which states: "Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Environment Canada cannot demonstrate that they are adequately administering and enforcing the Fisheries Act, and applying the Habitat Policy and the Compliance and Enforcement Policy in order to protect fish habitat from the adverse impacts of human activity."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the federal government significantly reduced the reach and effect of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

#### **What needs to change to improve this grade?**

To assess the state of the Skeena Watershed's fish habitat, information needs to be gathered, habitat indicators need to be developed, and those indicators need to be objectively monitored. The public needs to be shown that any new development in the Skeena will not pose a serious threat to the region's \$100 million/year wild salmon economy. Habitat policies such as the No Net Loss and Pollution Prevention need to be properly monitored and enforced.

1 [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_cesd\\_200905\\_01\\_e\\_32511.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_200905_01_e_32511.html)

***Is Canada meeting its constitutional obligation to provide Skeena First Nations with access to wild salmon for food, social and ceremonial purposes?***

**What happened in 2008?**

Since 1970 Gitanyow people have voluntarily stopped harvesting Kitwanga River sockeye due to low returns to this system. Despite this, DFO continues to allow excessive marine commercial harvest on this endangered population. Again in 2008, Wet' suwet' en people voluntarily did not fish their food staple, sockeye salmon, due to concerns over endangered Nanika sockeye. The Wet' suwet' en did not meet their chinook salmon needs, and are concerned about the impact of sport and commercial harvest had on Bulkley and Morice River stocks.

**What needs to change to improve this grade?**

The marine and downstream harvest of these endangered populations needs to be set low enough to protect and rebuild these stocks so that the Gitanyow and Wet' suwet' en can once meet their food, social and ceremonial needs.



## ECONOMY

C

### ***Is the Skeena wild salmon economy providing optimum benefits to the residents of the Skeena watershed, and are these benefits equitably distributed?***

#### **What happened in 2008?**

Marine commercial, in-river commercial and sport fisheries all took place in 2008 for a variety of salmon species, contributing over \$100 million to our local economy. DFO still does not allow secure access to in-river commercial fisheries which could target only strong salmon stocks and provide significant benefit to local aboriginal communities. Further, the high mortality rates incurred on by-catch species such as coho and steelhead by the marine commercial fishery continued to impact the regional sport fishing economy.

#### **What needs to change to improve this grade?**

In-river selective commercial fisheries need to be guaranteed a percentage of the salmon harvest each year. An effort needs to be made to increase selectivity in the marine commercial fisheries. DFO needs to assist the commercial sector in implementing new market design approaches, and species diversification opportunities in an effort to increase the economic viability of the net fleet.

## ENFORCEMENT

C-

### ***Are fisheries regulations and policies being adequately monitored and enforced?***

#### **What happened in 2008?**

DFO had 20 full time enforcement staff located in 4 offices throughout the watershed in 2008. Illegal sales of fish were a priority issue for them. They saw illegal guiding, killing of non-retention species, and barbed hooks continuing to be a problem in the sport fisheries in 2008. Non-compliance of revival tanks on commercial gill net boats, and issues with ramping fish in the seine fleet were common.

#### **What needs to change to improve this grade?**

DFO needs to change its enforcement priorities from where it can find the most violations to where it can conserve the most salmon – particularly endangered stocks. This requires reassigning and, perhaps, increasing enforcement staff presence on the recreational and commercial fishing grounds. Deterrence of the current high illegal salmon losses requires stricter enforcement of license conditions, including maximum fines, and revoking the licenses of repeat offenders.

## COMMUNICATION

C+

### ***Is communication between fisheries managers and communities clear, consistent, accurate and timely?***

#### **What happened in 2008?**

Pre-season and in-season communication between DFO and interest groups improved in 2008 through the initiation of the collaborative Skeena Watershed Initiative process, and regular in-season updates. However, there remained inconsistency in the access different interest groups had with the management agency.

#### **What needs to change to improve this grade?**

Need more consistent communications among DFO, interest groups, government agencies, and aboriginal groups. Potential to improve communications with public, through improved web site design and information.

## COLLABORATION

D

### ***Are the agencies responsible for managing wild salmon collaborating effectively across jurisdictions?***

#### **What happened in 2008?**

DFO and the BC Ministry of Environment continued to have difficulties communicating effectively with each other over implementing regulations and policies in the marine commercial fleet to reduce interception of steelhead and endangered salmon stocks. Collaboration amongst other government agencies is also deficient. In environmental assessment processes, DFO appears to take a development-facilitation role rather than a salmon-protection role.

#### **What needs to change to improve this grade?**

There needs to be sufficient pre-season and in-season communications and cooperation between the agencies such that salmon and steelhead stocks are adequately protected. The health of wild salmon and their habitats is dependent on cooperation among all provincial and federal agencies, interest groups and the public in making land-use and harvest management decisions in the Skeena. It is critical that communication and cooperation become the key priority at all levels of government. The primary management agency for wild salmon (DFO) needs to take the lead in initiating discussion amongst agencies and interest groups.