

Bear Witness Fall 2006

For those of you new to this list I am writing because events on this small piece of coast I inhabit are symptomatic of our era. Ecosystems are being systematically dismantled while the urban population is skillfully misinformed. Corporate behemoths are selling off the energy-rich sparks that give life to our planet. As the living world dies around us it is no time to feel powerless. Nature always has an ace in the hole and I suspect we are it for this salmon coast. We are a force of nature's own making that could bring life back to us. So I ask you to bear witness with me.

Industrial salmon producers significantly reduced sea lice leaking from their Broughton pens this spring by drugging their fish. But it became apparent even a few sea lice on millions of industrial salmon are a problem. We watched the young wild Knight Inlet pink salmon flood into Tribune Channel and stall for weeks around a cluster of industrial farm sites. As a result, the wild salmon were slowly infected with sea lice and just as long strings of louse eggs ripened on them these salmon headed west bearing a plague. Lice bloomed around them and they infected the remnant runs of Ahta, Wakeman and Kingcome Rivers. It became grimly clear drugs are not going to make the difference between life and death for our wild salmon. Places where young wild salmon congregate are dangerous places to site industrial salmon.

In 2002, the Norwegian government proposed their national salmon rivers receive unequivocal protection and are removing fish farms from fjords and coastal areas near these rivers. Most of the companies raising industrial salmon in BC are from Norway. Our governments are allowing the exact same damage by the same companies that Norway is trying to recover from.

This fall many BC wild salmon populations are suffering the collision of natural and unnatural disasters: drought *and* the plague of industrial lice. Our rivers became skeletal, drying pools. Wild salmon eggs became stranded and died. Miraculously wild salmon are built to take this. Their natural genetic variability ensures some survive.

However, a paper I co-authored (Krkosek et al PNAS 2006) makes it clear Broughton's wild salmon are no longer playing with a full genetic deck. When sea lice eat 91% of a salmon population, the genetic variability salmon require to survive is eliminated.



Ahta River October 5, 2006

Some Broughton salmon will hatch in March, a trickle will enter seawater and there, sea lice from salmon farms will kill some percentage of them. The number of wild salmon that survive everywhere there are salmon farms on this coast depends on same Norwegian corporations that are competing on the market with wild BC salmon.

Many accuse me of crying wolf. I can only say that I am here. I am watching our wild salmon, following them, counting them, touching them, measuring their success and failure. Is it any surprise that I am going to be among the first to see them falter? If industrial salmon are not a problem why did the Norwegian government move them away from important young wild salmon?



Wild BC salmon have become industrial aquaculture by-catch. No one, corporate or otherwise, is allowed 91% by-catch of a wild salmon population. Even as special prosecutor William Smart denied my charges against Heritage Salmon for release of sea lice he agreed prosecution would be in the public's interest and that sea lice from salmon farms appear to be killing our wild salmon. This is a significant legal opinion.

There are technical solutions to this juggernaut; we could have both wild and industrial salmon. We could build closed containment facilities in coastal communities creating permanent jobs. Market those fish *only* in winter, keeping both wild and industrial salmon prices high. Use the state-of-the-art farm salmon processing plants to value-add many wild BC fish such as shrimp, urchins, pink salmon etc. Use the legion of men and women now trained in salmon husbandry to reestablish wild salmon habitat. B.C. would prosper from the far greater diversity of wild and industrial salmon. By the 2010 Olympics B.C. could be a world leader in wild and sustainable industrial salmon.

We should not have to go to court or plead with government to preserve our fish. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is already mandated to preserve our wild fish. Legally and constitutionally government should terminate any license that results in the killing of wild salmon. There is a long history of DFO canceling commercial fishing and other licenses in the past, and DFO has the legal authority to do so now. It's not a matter of can't, it's a matter of won't. But if anyone suggests removing a farm to rescue one wild salmon population government insists we pick a new site...sacrificing another wild fish population, as if cleaning up this industry is somehow not an option. I desperately want to save Broughton, but not at expense of anyone else's home waters.

Have we made progress? On October 18, 2006 Minister Pat Bell (MAL) wrote a letter to John Cummins (MP) arguing, "*the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the agency*

responsible for managing wild fisheries, has found no evidence that salmon populations are being adversely affected by sea lice.” This is not correct, Fisheries and Oceans has freezers full of **evidence**. Canadian universities are publishing every few months on the enormous impact of industrial salmon on wild salmon. Research defining impact out weighs the neutral papers 17 to 1. DFO is shamefully behind. Why would Bell wait for the one horse that will never come out of the gate? Consistent with a long list of leaders before him, no one is ever willing to inconvenience this industry, even though it is clearly killing off wild salmon across the Northern Hemisphere. I believe this is because powerful lobbies want to claim BC’s wild rivers, harness them, sell the energy and water and wild salmon are in the way. If BC were to accept industrial salmon as the only salmon, many large corporations would benefit. Already three hydro projects are proposed for Knight Inlet rivers.

Tiny black eyes are looking up towards the belly of Broughton’s rivers as I write. Once as numerous as the pebbles these pink translucent orbs of life are the first pulse of another cycle of life and prosperity. They are few but they are strong, the best of millions and millions, a 10,000-year steady heartbeat. In a few months they will be swept into marine waterways used to flush effluent from industrial marine feedlots...essentially sewer pipes. Whether these last wild salmon survivors live or die depends on the whim of Norwegian corporations with no interests in wild BC salmon and whose product competes on the market with wild BC salmon.

I suggest you
demand
Safe Passage
for wild salmon.



Move corporate salmon feedlots behind closed doors immediately, where the only fish they kill are their own. Our children and their children need us to recognize that we are a powerful force of nature and essential to the continuance of wild BC salmon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexandra Morton".

Alexandra Morton
Echo Bay