

Tuesday April 8th, 2025

Current DFO Chinook salmon regulations, that are not supported by science, threaten the future of British Columbia's recreational fisheries

New scientific data demonstrates marked selective fisheries will not impact vulnerable Fraser River Chinook

Evidence shows DFO may close Chinook salmon fishing in Southern BC and their reasoning is not conservation

DFO's SRKW recovery plan must stop using its closed to salmon fishing strategy and move to a broad avoidance protocol

Background

- Recreational salmon fisheries are the most valuable salmon fisheries in BC. (\$750 million average 2000-2022: Source-Department of Fisheries & Oceans-DFO).
- Chinook salmon are the dominant species driving these fisheries.
- Since 2000 progressive restrictions have limited access to Chinook. These accelerated in 2019 with Chinook-Non-Retention, coincidental with expansive fishing closures to protect Southern Resident Killer Whales. Both were applied based on questionable science.

- Since 2015 economic activity has declined from \$750 million to \$660 million. Angler participation declined from 250,000 to 200,000 annually.
- Recreational fishing sells the expectation of a catch, and the opportunity (sufficient time) to realize that catch.
- These basic principles crumble under unwarranted and excessive regulations, driving anglers to seek opportunities in places like Alaska, or cease fishing entirely.

The Issues

1-Chinook-non-retention (CNR)

- High value Southern BC Chinook fisheries have been under CNR since 2019 from April 1st to July 31st in most areas. The CNR covers all inside areas from Juan de Fuca Strait to north of Port Hardy, and along the outer west coast of Vancouver Island.
- CNR was intended to conserve weak Middle and Upper Fraser River Chinook stocks.
- Angling advisors knew CNR retention was not scientifically supported in many parts of the affected region, and petitioned DFO for revisions but were denied.
- In 2021 & 2023 some remote or small areas were removed from CNR after reviewing the data.
- Chinook abundance in these closed areas is higher than it has been for decades due to wild stock recovery, and US and CDN hatchery production.
- DFO currently are proposing fishing options that range from modest catch increases to complete Chinook-non-retention; not for conservation but for re-allocation to Fraser River First Nations purposes.

A just released DFO study update titled “Monitoring Chinook Mark Selective Fisheries-Reference Fishery: 2023-2024 supports angler claims that many areas under CNR do not pose a threat to Fraser River stocks of concern – access the full .pdf file at this link <https://publicfisheryalliance.ca/ReferenceFishery>

In this case the ‘reference fisheries’ collected data on Chinook salmon caught by professional guides to determine: Stock of origin, size, condition, and hatchery or wild status. Test fishing was DFO authorized and monitored.

- Reference fisheries were conducted between April and August in twelve popular fishing areas. Some areas were still under CNR, some permitted retention of hatchery Chinook, some hatchery & wild Chinook.
- All Chinook landed were released.
- 2023 reference fisheries recorded 1084 Chinook; 2024 fisheries recorded 2346 Chinook.
- **In 2023 just 1.3% of the 1084 samples were Upper and Middle Fraser River stocks of concern.**
- **In 2024 just 0.5% of the samples were stocks of concern.**
- **These percentages are so small they pose no threat to stocks of concern.** It would be impossible to make these fisheries any ‘cleaner’ other than shutting them down, which would have catastrophic economic consequences in the region, for no justifiable gain under any management scenario.

2-Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW’s) regulations

View DFO SRKW salmon fishing closure map <https://publicfisheryalliance.ca/SRKWmaps>

- SRKW regulations have been in effect since 2018.
- They kick in at the first sighting of whales and remain until November.
- These are no-traffic & no-fishing closed areas.
- They are large and impose significant negative angling impacts.
- In 2024 DFO recommended more closures for Port Renfrew, a recreational fishing dependent community on the SW Vancouver Island Coast, which would have wiped out the summer and fall fishery. They were dropped because the community fought back to save the last safe fishing area on the coastline. However, DFO is seeking more closures in 2025/26.
- DFO’s SRKW working group contends that these closed areas are needed to provide quiet areas where whales can feed without competition.

- Experienced anglers and guides contend the whales are rarely in most of these areas. They prefer to see a “moving avoidance bubble” strategy used instead. This means anglers would stop fishing and move a negotiated distance away from whales while they are there.
- Anglers want SRKW’s to survive but will not be taken off the water as DFO’s sacrificial lambs based on questionable data.
- **Recent preliminary studies suggest the anglers’ assessment of the whale’s frequency of use may be correct. These studies are on-going.**
- **DFO and ENGO’s claim that the whales are starving because of insufficient Chinook abundance. However, escapement data, and regularly reports of high Chinook encounter levels contradict these claims. This view was supported by multiple year studies done by Dr. Andrew Trites, from UBC’s Marine Mammal Unit, which exposed this ‘no Chinook’ narrative as false.**

3-Slow walking Mass Marking (MM) and implementing Mark-Selective Fishing (MSF)

- Mass marking means adipose fin clipping up to 100% of hatchery Chinook and Coho.
- **The US marks almost 100% of their hatchery stocks by law, which should greatly benefit southern BC fisheries, but under current CNR do not in most areas.**
- Canada only marks 10-20% of Chinook and Coho.
- Canadian taxpayers pay for hatcheries yet much of that investment cannot be re-captured because Canada marks a small percent of its hatchery fish, so they cannot be identified for harvest when fishing.
- Marked Selective Fishery is the term for a hatchery-only fishery.

- Slow walking implementing MM and more MSF fisheries further exacerbates the cost recovery problem, while adding more damage to the recreational fishery 's economy unjustly.
- The snail's pace of progress towards MSF's is again due to opposition from ENGO's and some First Nations.

4-There is evidence that DFO may close Chinook salmon fishing in Southern BC and their reason is not attributable to conservation.

- Chinook salmon are the most important salmon species sought by Canadian anglers on the west coast.
- For two decades DFO has increasingly restricted Chinook salmon retention fisheries in Southern BC disguised as a recovery plan to rebuild vulnerable Fraser River Chinook populations
- This regulation regime has decimated the public salmon fishery in Southern BC, which now has mere crumbs of a fishery left.
- In recent years, vulnerable Fraser Chinook runs have been rebuilding due to favourable ocean conditions
- In a recent presentation to the SFAB, DFO fisheries management put forward an options chart, where option five clearly required the shutting down of all recreational Chinook salmon fishing where Fraser stream-type Chinook are found.
- This would be absolutely devastating to BC's fishing community and cause great socio-economic harm to communities that rely on access to the abundant salmon stocks.

**** View slide from DFO presentation where Chinook fishing closure was proposed at this link ... <https://publicfisheryalliance.ca/ChinookClosure>*

5-The Public Fishery Alliance's position on issues threatening the public's access to fishing, and recommended solutions.

- The PFA strongly urges the federal government to stop the slow walking of Mass Marking (MM) of hatchery Chinook salmon and unfairly blocking the implementation of viable hatchery-marked Chinook fisheries (MSF).
- The PFA supports the Reference Fishery study and strongly recommends it be funded further into the future, and that it's scientific data be used to facilitate the opening of more MSF Chinook fisheries in Southern BC.
- The PFA strongly recommends that SRKW recovery measures affecting the public fishery should be changed to avoidance strategies when active whales are present. Closed to salmon fishing areas are unscientific and so far have proven useless. They are unnecessarily disruptive to small craft marine anglers and negatively impact small coastal communities.
- The PFA believes it time to take legal action against Fisheries, Oceans and the Coast Guard Canada for the mismanagement of BC's Chinook salmon fisheries