

BC Federation of Fly Fishers (BCFFF)
Position Paper on Sustainable Salmon Aquaculture
MAY 2013

The BC Federation of Fly Fishers (BCFFF) was founded over thirty years ago. Its membership of 700 is composed of clubs and individuals from all regions of British Columbia (BC). Many of our members fish for salmonids in fresh and salt waters.

Over the years the BCFFF has followed the increasing weight of evidence that suggests open ocean net-pen salmon farming can have negative impacts on wild salmon and ecosystems. Many non-government organizations, academics and individuals have published numerous peer-reviewed scientific papers illuminating the potential problems that can arise from this type of fish farming. These include risks from escaped fish, parasites such as sea lice, pathogens, disease, and pollution.

In recent years, numerous non-government organizations have been ringing the alarm bell as studies indicate problems for wild salmonid stocks, and their habitats, from open ocean net-pen salmon farming. What is surprising to us is that both the federal and provincial governments seem determined to ignore the implications of these studies. At the same time they profess, in various planning documents, that they are taking a “precautionary” approach when managing for the protection of wild salmonids.

Evidence shows that herring larvae, juvenile pink, chum and sockeye salmon that swim near open-net salmon farms become infected with sea lice. Studies have concluded that farms amplify sea lice levels in marine waters and can have negative effects on pink, chum and coho salmon. The evidence that supports a connection between salmon farms, sea lice and negative impacts on wild salmonid is not limited to BC. In Europe, sea trout and Atlantic salmon have also been affected by farm derived sea lice. A recent 2012 European study estimated a loss of 39 % of adult wild Atlantic salmon recruitment as a result of sea lice that were likely acquired during early marine migration in areas that host large open net-pen salmon farms.

Recently, the \$26 million dollar federal judicial inquiry into the decline of Fraser Sockeye (Cohen Commission) concluded and released their final report. Much evidence was presented on the risks of pathogen introduction and amplification by open ocean net-pen farmed salmon. Justice Bruce Cohen concluded “that the potential harm posed to Fraser River sockeye salmon caused by salmon farms is serious or irreversible.”

Given the European experience with salmon farming, and current studies on the situation in BC., the BCFFF view is that there is ample evidence that substantiates open ocean net-pen salmon farming as a serious threat to wild B.C. salmon. Governments should be taking a precautionary approach - one that limits the operation of some farms and eliminates others. There must be a moratorium on all new open ocean net-pen salmon farming operations and a move to land-based closed containment with treated effluent.

The responsibility for wild salmon and oversight of aquaculture is a Canadian federal jurisdiction. Justice Bruce Cohen recognized that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has a mandate to promote salmon farming and this creates a “risk that DFO will act in a manner that favors the interests of the salmon-farming industry over the health of wild fish stocks.” The BCFFF feels that decisions should err on the side of conservation. Given the stress that wild salmonids are subjected to from; escalating habitat loss; the unknown effect of climate change; and a decline in ocean survival; the need to pursue a conservative and precautionary approach, using closed contained salmon farming methods, has never been more important.

Therefore, it is the BCFFF position that:

- A moratorium on additional fish farm tenures should be in place and no increases in production from existing facilities should happen until policies and regulations are developed that eliminate the risks posed by escapes, sea lice, disease and pollution, and ensure the viability of wild salmon.
- There must be an increase in monitoring and regulations enforcement of farmed salmon sites. We believe self-monitoring by this industry is currently inadequate and fraught with the opportunity to conceal information. Self regulation is not an option.
- There is a need to explore and develop other options such as land-based closed containment to replace the current practice of using open ocean net-pens. This would better control the spread of pathogens and parasites to wild salmonids, and greatly reduce ocean pollution.