

For Immediate release: **BC Coastal River Fish Habitat Restoration Effectiveness Monitoring**
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Ministry of Environment and BC Conservation Foundation staff are gearing up for night swims in several Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island rivers this winter to assess juvenile salmon and steelhead use of restored fish habitats.

NANAIMO: Steelhead and coho populations in the Georgia Basin have been in serious decline since the mid 1990's mainly due to reduced ocean survival, combined with freshwater habitat loss and degradation.

"Recent advances in research using innovative monitoring techniques have shown that a combination of freshwater habitat restoration and stream enrichment (fertilization) can improve juvenile survival and increase the number of smolts generated per spawner. Increased freshwater productivity will help compensate for low marine survival rates observed since the early 1990s," said James Craig, BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) Project Manager.

Over the last nine years, the Ministry of Environment and BCCF, with other major partners, have been involved in dozens of habitat restoration projects in streams on Vancouver Island and in the Lower Mainland. These projects have varied in scope but include developing water storage, spawning gravel placements, side-channel construction, sediment control and rearing habitat complexing using large woody debris (LWD) and boulder placements.

The night snorkel surveys in waters averaging about 2°C will rely on tested science-based techniques to determine mid-winter fish use of LWD structures. In mid-winter, night swims are used because juvenile coho and steelhead hide within log jams during the day, but emerge at night to feed in eddies and pools closely associated with the installed wood structures.

Added Craig, "For juvenile salmon and trout, over-wintering is a critical stage in their life history. Significant mortality can occur during the winter if high quality over-wintering habitat (LWD, boulder clusters) is lacking. What our work has attempted to do is rebuild the stable debris jams that used to exist in many coastal rivers before industrial development, urbanization and large flood impacts."

Effectiveness monitoring using night swims will take place in three Vancouver Island Rivers, Englishman, Little Qualicum and Chemainus during February. Lower mainland swims will take place on the Seymour and Alouette Rivers and Silverhope Creek throughout February and early March.

Funding for this program is provided by Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island, Living Rivers Fraser Basin, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and BC Hydro Bridge Coastal Restoration Program.

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Members of the media are invited to participate in a night snorkel on the Little Qualicum River or Silverhope Creek subject to availability of swim gear.

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