

Project ensures water for salmon

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Young salmon in the Little Qualicum River have a better chance of survival now an adequate supply of water year-round is guaranteed.

It took six years and \$350,000 to install a better system of releasing water from Cameron Lake into the river, but the benefits will be apparent this summer, said James Craig, project manager with Living Rivers-Georgia Basin, a division of the B.C. Conservation Foundation.

The project is a first for the group, and a "bit of an example of what we can do," Craig said. "The intent was to provide more water for fish in the Little Qualicum River in the summertime, when habitat shrinks and competition is high, in order to produce more wild smolts," he said Friday.

Rivers along the east side of Vancouver Island see low flows in summer that threaten young salmon. Young coho stay in rivers for 12 to 18 months before heading out to sea, and juvenile steelhead take two or three years before they leave. "At this time, there are two generations of coho and three generations of steelhead juveniles in the Little Qualicum River that are going to be benefiting this summer," Craig said.

Living Rivers got a licence that allowed for more water to be stored upstream at Cameron Lake to supplement low flows through the dryer months.

A weir, built in the 1970s, was raised and made more efficient by radio-controlled valves.

"We are able to remotely control the water flow by VHF radio and very accurately release exactly what we want in order to optimally use the storage there," Craig said.