

For Immediate release
2009LR-GB/VI-0010
February 2nd, 2009

Using innovative equipment and technology, fisheries technicians on Vancouver Island are now able to remotely assess stream conditions and augment water flows to improve fish habitat conditions in the Little Qualicum River.

CAMERON LAKE, BC: The British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF), in partnership with Department of Fisheries and Oceans, (DFO) are ready to test the remote operation of a flow control valve on the weir at Cameron Lake, the headwaters of the Little Qualicum River.

The test scheduled for Monday February 2nd, is the culmination of a 6-year project aimed at improving wild fish production downstream of the lake.

James Craig, BCCF Project Manager said “Summer droughts such as those experienced in 2002, 2003 and 2006 in east coast Vancouver Island rivers and streams have accentuated the need to protect or enhance summer base flows where cost-effective projects exist.” He added, “Stream flow is a critical factor controlling fish production, particularly for stream-rearing species like coho and Chinook salmon, as well as steelhead and cutthroat trout.”

Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island (LR-GB/VI) is striving to help south coast communities meet the objectives of British Columbia’s new Water Plan, **‘Living Water Smart’**, announced in June 2008.

Living Water Smart recognizes the threats of climate change to salmon and steelhead populations in coastal watersheds, including more intense floods and more frequent and severe droughts. Consequently, with direct funding from Living Rivers and its partners a series of water conservation projects have been launched since 2006 to deal with this new reality.

Retrofits of the weir and fishway at Cameron Lake began in the late summer of 2006. Additional water storage on the lake is now used to augment flows in the Little Qualicum during dry summer months. The gate is designed to release up to 2.5 m³/s at full storage, and can be finely adjusted to meet federal/provincial target flows downstream. With the installation of automated equipment at the weir, fisheries technicians located at the Big Qualicum Hatchery will be able to remotely control water releases when low levels dictate increased flow is necessary to sustain salmonids in the river.

Funding for the project was provided through the LR-GB/VI program, Pacific Salmon Commission, BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, and the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. The DFO and the Ministry of Environment made significant in-kind contributions.

Senior Fisheries Biologist, Craig Wightman said, “We’ve identified 30 watersheds in Georgia Basin that could potentially see small scale water storage projects that will benefit not only fish populations, but also the communities that depend on these resources.” Along with key partners, LR-GB/VI has begun the process of investigating water storage feasibility options that could be implemented over the next five years.

Added Wightman, “This project is all about water storage for fish and ecosystem sustainability. I believe it is one of the most effective applications of BC’s Living Rivers’ funding.”

- 30 -

CONTACTS:

Craig Wightman, RPBio. Senior Biologist
Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island
BC Conservation Foundation
Nanaimo
Office (250)716-8776; Cell (250)713-2810

James Craig, Project Manager
Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island
BC Conservation Foundation
Office (250)716-8776; Cell (250)714-3088

Backgrounder:
www.livingrivers.ca