

For Immediate Release
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High Quality Salmon and Steelhead Spawning Gravel to be Placed by Helicopter in Elk Falls Canyon of the Campbell River

CAMPBELL RIVER, BC: In celebration of the Roderick Haig Brown Centenary, the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) will continue a fish habitat restoration project in the Elk Falls Canyon of the Campbell River that first began in 1999. Under supervision of BCCF and the Ministry of Environment, approximately 150 cubic meters of high quality gravel will be placed by Helifor Canada Corp. at two selected sites in the upper canyon on Tuesday, July 29.

Since the mid 1990s, winter steelhead returns to the Campbell/Quinsam system have been at or near record lows. The Campbell's salmon stocks have recently fared better (particularly pink and chum), although mainstem Chinook numbers have remained between 10 and 20% of Fisheries and Oceans' (DFO) target escapement.

For decades, DFO considered the 2km long canyon reach "gravel poor" following construction of BC Hydro's John Hart Dam in the late 1940's, limiting Chinook and other salmon spawning potential.

Rejuvenation of the canyon's fish habitat began in 1998, when Hydro agreed to release improved conservation flows from John Hart Lake. This single measure effectively increased the river's accessible length to salmon and steelhead by 40%.

The addition of gravel and improved flows to the canyon is part of a joint strategy to significantly restore the river's spawning capability. Since July 1999, BCCF and its key funding partners (Bridge-Coastal Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure) have introduced more than 400 hundred cubic meters of high quality gravel to the upper canyon to enhance the production of wild salmon and steelhead.

"The process of artificially adding gravel to the canyon simulates a natural river process that will lead to gravel recruitment into downstream habitats, similar to what occurred before the dam was built more than six decades ago," said Kevin Pellett, Fisheries Project Coordinator for BCCF. "In time, this should lead to substantial increases in smolt production and adult salmon and steelhead returns," he added.

Similar to spawning gravel placements completed in previous years, this project will see the addition of 100-150 cubic meters of washed and screened gravel, precisely installed in predetermined locations in the upper canyon using Helifor's heavy-lift helicopter.

Due to safety concerns, public access to areas of Elk Falls Provincial Park will be restricted from 8 am to 5:30 pm. on July 29. Pellett added, "An extreme rock fall hazard related to construction activities will exist during this window and the public is asked to refrain from using the Upper and Lower Elk Falls day use area, Millennium Trail from the lower day use parking lot to the Canyon View Trail, and the Dean Martin Trail (off Brewster Lake Road on the north side of John Hart Dam)." This closure does not affect the Canyon View trail or trails adjacent to the Elk Falls campsites on the Quinsam River.

Traffic control will also be present on Brewster Lake Road near John Hart Dam. Short delays will occur when the helicopter is in the immediate gravel loading area.

Funding for the 2008 project is coming from BC Hydro's Bridge-Coastal Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program and Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island. Other key partners include BC Parks, BC Hydro (John Hart Generating Station), Helifor Canada Corp. and the A-Tlegay Fisheries Society.

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