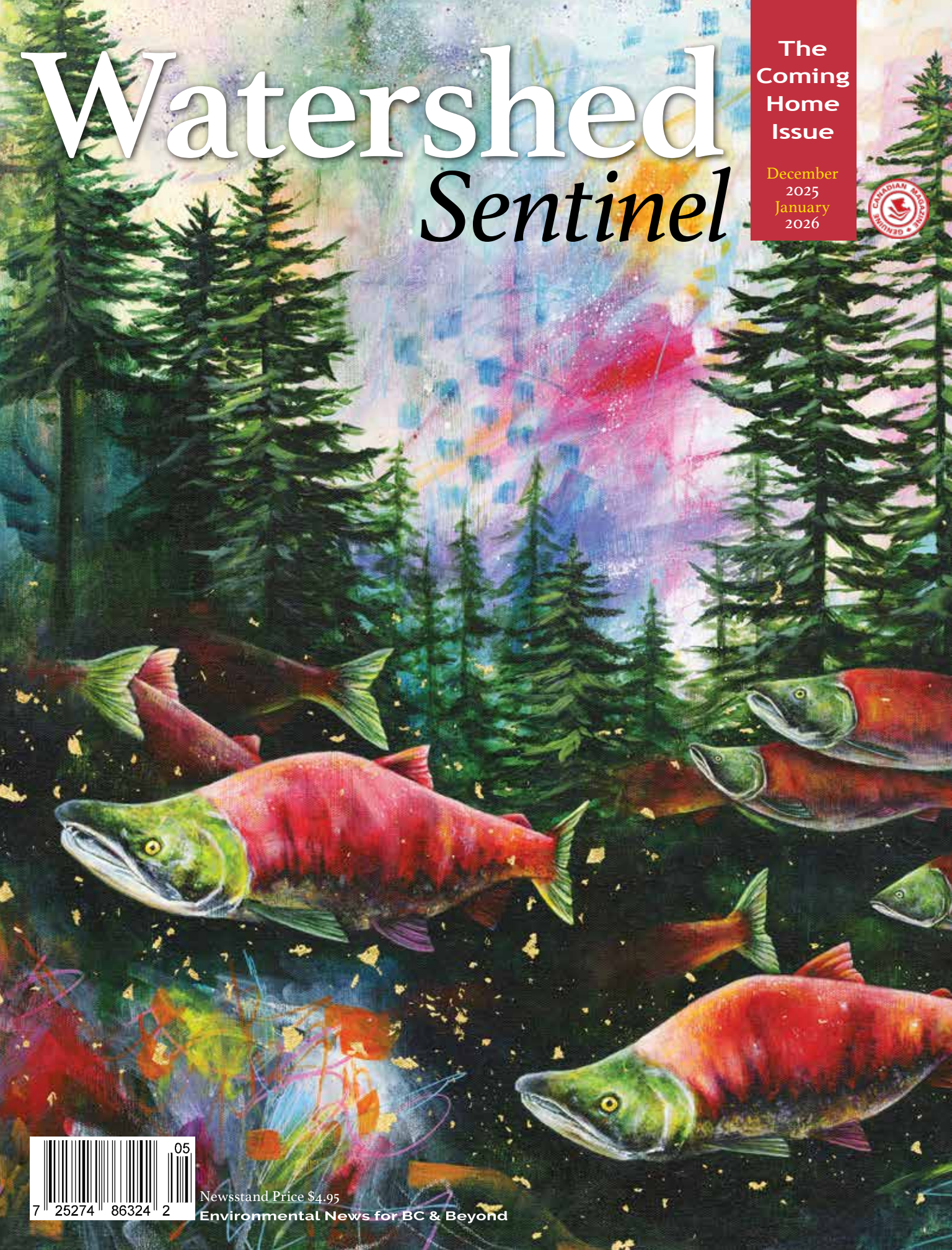


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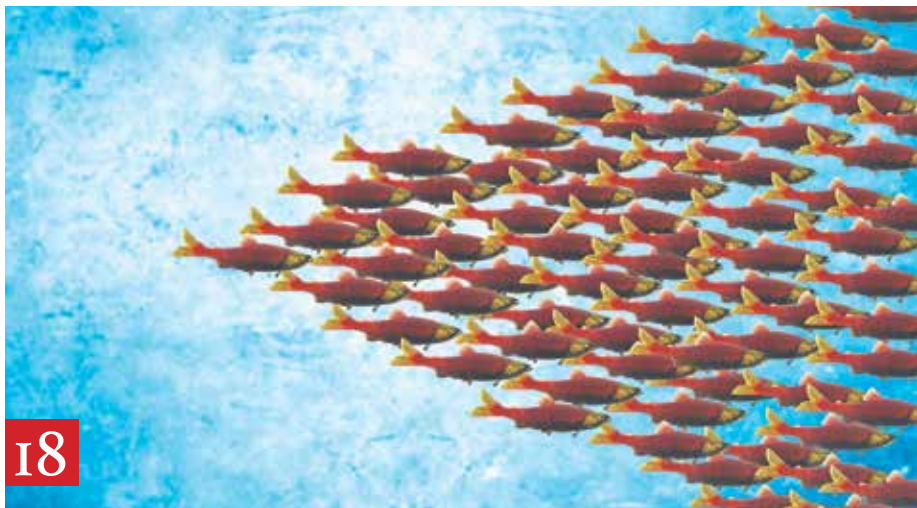
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Watershed *Sentinel*

December 2025 | January 2026
Vol. 35 No. 5

Features



Murrelet Mountain

A new clash is set to erupt over a timber sale in migratory bird habitat on northern Vancouver Island.

Swimming Upstream

When times turn dark, hope is as resolute as a salmon pushing upstream, fighting the odds with every stroke. In times of despair, each step is an act of faith, and every alliance is a moment of respite.

Content

- | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|----|--|
| 3,5 | News Shorts
Fracking transparency, moon shots, AB's AI hype, and more | 12 | Tire Toxins
Local groups monitor water for 6PPDq, deadly to salmon | 16 | Nuclear Folly
Ontario's nuclear expansion is a blunder of epic proportions |
| 4 | Letters
Aboriginal title, incinerator controversy, BC forestry | 13 | New Forest Act
A bold citizen-led proposal for systemic forest reform in BC | 29 | Save the Seeds
Proposed changes would erode farmers' seed-saving rights |
| 8 | Kitimat LNG
Noise, flaring for neighbours of Canada's first LNG export plant | 14 | No Data?
DFO's attempted cuts to salmon monitoring halted – for now | 34 | “Treat + Release”
The Athabasca River is not a tar sands tailings dump |
| 10 | Flaring Danger
Massive LNG plant gas releases at startup aren't monitored | 15 | Zeballos Spill
Is BC's polluter-pay system rigged in favour of industry? | | Cover Credit
“Rooted” Giclée Canvas Print 24x30
©Ariana Zimmermann |



Editorial

Zoe Blunt

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Riding Out the Storm

Hold on, we could be in for a wild winter! Brace yourself for blustery grey days and long icy nights. And don't lose heart – there's a beacon that shines through these dark, stormy months. The warmth of community, connection, and kinship will carry us through to the spring.

It's a season to regroup and prepare for the coming year and renew our commitment to the places we love. It's time to shake off grief for a while and open ourselves to the wonder of the world. The forest, the river, the salmon, the web of life itself is waiting.

We have this brief moment to pause for a deep breath while the seasons turn. A moment to take stock, to dream, to wonder – what will we do to protect our one wild and precious home?

—Zoe Blunt, Sayward BC, November 2025

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Court halts logging in Lapland

Forest Rebellion

Swedish activist group Skogsupproret (the Forest Rebellion) has won a temporary victory for Tjiärnadahkka, one of Sápmi’s (Lapland’s) last old growth forests. When Svenska Cellulosa Aktiebolaget (SCA) started logging despite an ongoing court review, activists blocked the site, buying time for further inventory that revealed the presence of the red-listed three-toed woodpecker. The court then reversed its earlier dismissal of BirdLife International’s claims and imposed a temporary logging ban. Locals applauded the protection of vital habitat for reindeer herding, biodiversity, and climate.

—www.skogsupproret.se
October 27, 2025

Space Race II: dumb ideas never die

Moon Boom

Investors and the US government are looking to the Moon, with its vacuum cooling, solar potential, and “endless real estate,” to locate new data centres and nuclear reactors. In July, CNBC enthused: “putting data centres in space offers a fully decarbonized energy solution.” In August, the Trump Administration directed NASA to establish a 100-kW nuclear reactor on the moon by 2030, proposed increased funding for human spaceflight in 2026, and advocated for major reductions to other programs – including a nearly 50% cut for science missions, which are essential for long-term climate monitoring. A senior NASA official said the new mission “is about winning the second space race,” with China and Russia also competing to be first to land a new generation of astronauts on the moon.

—www.theenergymix.com
August 21, 2025

Frack-chemical transparency win

Go Colorado!

Ten Colorado oil and gas firms are facing enforcement for using illegal toxic chemicals in dozens of fracking wells over the past 18 months. Operators had to disclose the chemicals in response to a 2022 state law requiring companies to notify regulators of all chemicals used “downhole” in oil and gas development.

The measure is among the first in the US to close the loophole – also used in Canada – that allows companies to hide the ingredients in fracking fluids by calling them “trade secrets.” After a rocky start and continued public pressure, the law is starting to work, allowing the regulator to begin building a robust database of fracking chemicals. Public advocates are now returning to their years-long push to persuade officials to actually test the fluid that flows back out of wells, to check whether companies’ self-disclosure is accurate.

—www.capitalandmain.com
October 17, 2025

Big tree surprise in the Amazon

Resilient Roots

A new study has found that the Amazon’s largest trees are growing bigger and more numerous, showing surprising resilience to rising temperatures and drought. These giants, though only 1% of the forest, store half of its carbon and play a key role in water cycling. “It is good news but it is qualified good news,” cautioned one of the authors, as these vital carbon sinks are increasingly at risk from fires, fragmentation, and land clearance caused by the expansion of roads and farms.

—www.theguardian.com
September 22, 2025

Recycling on the brink

Plastic Crisis



A wave of plastic recycling plant closures has hit Europe in recent years, with industry body Plastic Recyclers Europe reporting the loss of nearly one million tonnes of plastic recycling capacity since 2023. High energy and labour costs are two factors in the collapse, along with the low price of virgin plastic. UK-based plastic recycling independent authority RECOUP warns the industry could collapse without urgent interventions. The UK is beginning to plan for specific policy measures, including packaging reforms, public investment, a Return Deposit Scheme set to launch in 2027, and a “Circular Economy Taskforce.”

—www.bbc.com
October 23, 2025

Bridges and buildings = batteries?

Concrete Action

MIT researchers have developed an electron-conducting carbon concrete (ec³) that can store and release electricity, potentially turning walls, sidewalks, and bridges into giant batteries. Using nanoscience, the team boosted energy storage tenfold, allowing a cubic meter of the material to store enough energy to power a refrigerator for a day. Structures made of ec³ could monitor pressure, heat sidewalks, or support renewable energy systems.

—news.mit.edu
October 1, 2025

Letters

Sins of the Forestry Industry

I am impressed with the depth of reporting in *Watershed Sentinel*. I would like to state that the sins of the forestry industry are not forgiven. Fundamentally, overcut original forests, clearcutting, and raw log exports must be done and gone. Competing with US and world markets will only further degrade the vital forests BC and Canada depend on. Our forests are exposed to wildfire and clearcut degradation when they are needed for climate, biodiversity, and the fundamental nature of Canadian culture. Sustenance, shelter, and climate are all at risk. Forestry labour has been distinctly part of the problem. It is only overshadowed by corporate greed and avaricious government.

—John Dajoe
Halfmoon Bay, BC

Incinerator Conflict of Interest

Reading the Burnaby dioxin piece (“Landfill In the Sky,” Oct-Nov 2025), I am wondering whether any residents have thought of taking Metro Vancouver to the Environmental Appeal Board. As both proponent and regulator, Metro Vancouver is in a major conflict of interest. Locals in Surrey took an operator-proponent (zinc galvanizing plant) and Metro to EAB years ago, so long I would have to look it up. When EAB finally rules on this eight-year process to get pollution mitigation technology added to the plant or have its licence rescinded, it’s going to be some kind of precedent and something definitely deserving of an article in your wonderful mag.

—David Riley
*Little Campbell Watershed Society
Campbell River, BC*

Incinerator Media Relations

I’m writing from the Media Relations team at Metro Vancouver regarding your story “Landfill In the Sky” (Oct-Nov 2025). The media release from Zero Waste BC referenced in the story contained misleading information, and since that time Metro Vancouver has met with and responded to ZWBC and Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment.

Metro Vancouver is confident that the dust that ZWBC implied originated from the Waste-to-Energy facility did not come from the facility. Process air from the facility passes through multiple stages of treatment and filtration that remove 99.99% of particulates. The observed particle size and quantity are inconsistent with the particulates originating from the facility.

Metro Vancouver staff have met repeatedly with the owner of the building where the particulates were observed. Given the owner’s concerns, Metro Vancouver has retained third-party expertise for a study to compare the accumulated dust to the emissions from the facility to conclusively determine whether the accumulated dust is from the facility. There are industrial facilities close to the building in question, including sand and gravel processing, not to mention heavy traffic on nearby streets and waterways.

Emissions data, including continuous emission monitoring data, for the Waste-to-Energy Facility is reported to regulatory agencies, and is available on the Metro Vancouver website.

—Greg Valou
*Communications Specialist
Metro Vancouver, BC*

The Watershed Sentinel welcomes letters

but reserves the right to edit for brevity, clarity, legality, and taste. Anonymous letters will not be published.

Send your musings and your missives to:
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From the Editors: Aboriginal Title

The Quw’utsun (Cowichan) Nation says politicians’ statements about its Aboriginal title case are “misleading” and “deliberately inflammatory.” After reading the judge’s decision, the editors agree.

In August, a BC Supreme Court justice ruled that the government must start negotiating to compensate Quw’utsun for taking their former village lands in Richmond. BC and Canada have 18 months to get their affairs in order, but it may take years. Both governments are appealing and a backlash is building province-wide.

The Quw’utsun statement clarifies that the decision won’t “challenge the effectiveness or validity of any title held by individual private landowners.” Private land will not be seized or transferred.

But the government will need to compensate descendants of people whose lands it took, much like it did for Japanese people forcibly relocated during World War II.

The ruling is a stark reminder to landowners and governments alike that Aboriginal title remains unextinguished everywhere in BC except treaty lands.

—Read the Quw’utsun statement online:
www.watershedsentinel.ca

Fish farm misses court deadline

Clearance Sale

A fish farm near Powell River that was fined \$350,000 for operating outside its tenure has missed a court deadline to remove its equipment from Lois Lake, says the Watershed Watch Salmon Society. In 2023, West Coast Fishculture pled guilty to operating outside its licence area, exceeding environmental effluent limits, and producing 1,100 times more fish than permitted. New owners Yieldbridge Properties say removal is complicated by the federal plan to phase out open-net pen farms and a lack of buyers.

—www.biv.com
October 26, 2025

Canada's subsidies for burning trees

Up In Smoke

A report released by the Biomass Action Network found Canada has subsidized the burning of biomass by an average of C\$346 million per year from 2021-2024, a total of C\$1.3 billion. The analysis found governments are funneling billions into burning trees at the expense of renewables – a total of nearly \$250 billion globally from 2002-2024. These figures cover only a handful of major economies, meaning the true scale of global subsidies is likely far larger.

Biomass energy is labelled “carbon neutral” based on future potential regrowth of trees, but first it increases atmospheric CO₂ for decades and turns areas such as the rural southern US and rainforests of Indonesia into sacrifice zones. The report found a direct link between biomass subsidies and increased logging of forests.

—www.environmentalpaper.org
Oct 20, 2025

“Fierce” resistance at Attawapiskat

ON Blockade

The Neskantaga First Nation is building a permanent settlement to block construction of Ontario’s proposed Northern Link Highway to the Ring of Fire mining project. Youth and elders are reoccupying the site at the Attawapiskat River while documenting ancestral burial grounds, traplines, and historic village sites as evidence of Aboriginal title. The Ring of Fire is the first test of Ontario’s Bill 5, passed this spring, which allows the Province to suspend any law in “special economic zones.” Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler promises “fierce” resistance, and nine First Nations have launched constitutional challenges in court.

—www.ricochet.media
August 28, 2025

\$70 billion project is a “mirage”

Alberta AI Stalls

A celebrity investor’s heavily-hyped proposal to build the world’s largest AI data centre is at a standstill nearly a year after the \$70-billion project was announced. The Alberta government says TV personality Kevin O’Leary gave the “Wonder Valley” project a secure commitment, but nothing has been established regarding ownership, financing, or water and power approvals. O’Leary Ventures has yet to start consultations with local First Nations, and it has not purchased the land for the project. Last year, the Province rejected environmental and due process concerns when it declared it would fast-track the now-stalled project.

—www.theenergymix.com
October 30, 2025

Manitoba hunters shut out

Moose Dispute



The Manitoba Wildlife Federation is taking Bloodvein First Nation to court over a highway blockade preventing licensed moose hunters from accessing Crown lands. The First Nation says the road closure is necessary to protect wildlife because of unsafe and wasteful hunting by non-community members. MWF’s legal claim seeks an injunction to reopen Rice River Road, with the Province and Minister of Natural Resources listed as co-respondents

—www.ctvnews.ca
October 23, 2025

Seymour Falls salmon success

Hopeful Returns

Wild salmon are spawning above Seymour Falls Dam in North Vancouver for the first time since 1927, thanks to work by the Seymour Salmonid Society, Metro Vancouver, and local First Nations. Crews used low-velocity explosives to reopen fish passages blocked by a 2014 rockslide. Starting in 2019, mature coho have been transported upstream to re-establish wild runs and replenish the ecosystem. This year’s returns are among the strongest in decades, though hatchery fish still outnumber wild ones.

—www.nsnews.com
September 28, 2025

Murrelet Mountain

A new clash over old growth forests is ready to erupt



by Zoe Blunt

The steep flanks of Tsitika Mountain on northern Vancouver Island are scarred with clearcuts and slash piles almost to the boundary of the Tsitika Mountain and Robson Bight ecological reserves.

When we visited in early November, we were greeted by whiskey jacks whistling, swooping, and peering at us from nearby bushes as we climbed up into the mist, marvelling at the mammoth hemlocks and silvery cedars.

High above the Tsitika River, 34 hectares of towering conifers, cliffs, and waterfalls are on the auction block. This grove, labelled TA 1375 by BC Timber Sales, was recommended for deferral by BC's advisory panel. That would have suspended logging, possibly permanently. But instead, BCTS – a provincial agency – is putting TA 1375 up for sale.

For some reason, the timber auction was postponed. A new auction date has come

and gone, but as of mid-November, we have no news about the fate of this forest.

This wild, rugged terrain would challenge any prospective logger, but that's only the most obvious obstacle. A tiny seabird may turn out to be the most formidable adversary. Independent researchers at Tsitika Mountain made a surprising discovery this year: a Pacific Wild program recorded over 300 marbled murrelets flying through the area in one month. These

elusive seabirds spend their days feeding on fish and marine life, returning each night to nest in high, mossy treetops far from the ocean. The numbers are all the more stunning because the species is listed as threatened.

Despite that designation, murrelets have no protection from the logging companies that continue to clearcut their coastal old-growth habitat. And murrelets can't live anywhere else.

Retired UBC professor Royann Petrell and her fellow birdwatchers are alarmed at the rate of habitat loss. Petrell estimates that on southern Vancouver Island, Teal Jones Group has logged one-quarter of murrelet nesting habitat in Tree Farm License 46, which includes Fairy Creek and thousands of acres of primary forest.

"The forestry company said in its own forestry management plan that the forest will be gone in 15 years. They'll cut it all down except for these few wildlife habitat areas," Petrell told CBC News. "It's not going to last. It's not sustainable."

Asserting land rights

Ernest Alfred, elected councillor of the 'Namgis First Nation, told Canadian Press that he visited the Tsitika forest in July and found that it's "surrounded by clearcuts."

"To take out what has already been sort of left alone, to me is just criminal," Alfred told Canadian Press. "Who's benefiting, and at what cost? Because the environmental damage is far more reaching than monetary value for our people."

The Ma'amtagila Nation is asserting its land rights in the Tsitika Valley and other watersheds on northern Vancouver Island. After decades of being amalgamated un-

der the neighbouring Tlowitsis Nation's band council, the Ma'amtagila Declaration served notice this summer to logging companies and other First Nations that old growth logging on its territory will not be tolerated.

But on paper, the land rights belong to the Nanwakolas Council, a union of six Kwakwaka'wakw nations that includes the Tlowitsis Nation.

"I think the development of natural resources always has to be sustainable. Should we be cutting all the old growth? No," Dallas Smith, Nanwakolas Council's board president, told Canadian Press. "But there is still old growth that has some values that are replicated in other places that we're comfortable with the development of."

Denman Island forest activist Eartha Muirhead is calling for volunteers and donations to challenge the timber sale in the courts. "I formed a group called Vancouver Island Forest Focus and we are ready to roll," she wrote. With the backing of West Coast Environmental Law and a Tsitika Defense Fund crowdfunding campaign, the group intends to compel the government to live up to its commitments to protect ecosystems, migratory birds, and old-growth forests.

Those commitments include establishing protected habitat under the federal *Migratory Bird Convention Act* and implementing recommendations from BC's Old Growth Strategic Review. Five years after its report was released, a key recom-

Murrelets can't live anywhere else.

mendation – legal protection for biodiversity and ecosystem health – is "languishing," WCEL notes, "while BC moves to fast-track resource development."

Worth more standing

BCTS doesn't guarantee any profit will be gained from logging this mountain-side, especially given Trump's punishing tariffs on Canadian wood. Tsitika Mountain boasts giant yellow cedars, but BCTS documents show over ninety per cent of the forest is hemlock and balsam fir, species that are "the lowest value wood of all the species," according to one industry expert.

On the expense side of the balance sheet, the added cost of community opposition – lawyers, security teams, downtime – can be ruinous. Logging companies run on slim profit margins at best. Teal Jones, the company responsible for logging marbled murrelet nesting trees at Fairy Creek, found itself paying heavy penalties: it was forced to petition for creditor protection in 2024 after a massive civil disobedience campaign paralyzed operations for weeks. The company is trying to stay afloat by selling off its US holdings.

Industry insiders have seen this scenario before. They have a special term for places where logging isn't feasible because public protests outweigh profits. The term is "socially inoperable."

Sleepless in Kitimat

Noise and toxic flaring mark Canada's first LNG export plant



by Matt Simmons, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On the morning of September 15, James Smith grudgingly got out of bed to get ready for the day. The weekend, he told *The Narwhal*, had been hell.

“Even this morning, it was like 75 to 80 decibels inside my bedroom,” he said from his home in Kitimat, BC.

The sound was from LNG Canada, the first major liquefied natural gas export operation in the country. Ever since it fired up earlier this year, some residents of the small northwestern community have had their lives upended.

“We maybe got two hours’ sleep this whole weekend,” Smith, whose name has been changed to prevent potential repercussions, said. “I’m just useless now.”

A few days earlier, LNG Canada posted a notification to its website and social media channels, warning locals of a “planned flaring activity” as the facility restarted two of its four turbines. Flaring is burning off excess or waste natural gas, mostly composed of methane. The flame can sometimes get as high as 100 metres.

“We anticipate increased noise and visible emissions from the flare,” the notification said. LNG Canada posted notifications related to flaring 23 times since September last year, including some “unplanned flaring” events.

As the liquefaction plant gets going, “occasional adjustments, fine-tuning and

restarts may initiate flaring activities outside of scheduled or planned events,” a spokesperson said.

Foreign ownership

The companies behind LNG Canada are all from other countries: Royal Dutch Shell, by way of Shell Canada, Malaysia’s state-owned Petronas, the Chinese government’s PetroChina, South Korea’s KoGas, and Japanese corporation Mitsubishi. Together with North American pipeline giant TC Energy, which built the Coastal GasLink pipeline that feeds the plant, the companies represent what has been called the largest private investment in Canadian history.

When construction of LNG Canada started in 2020, most of Smith’s workforce evaporated as his employees went to work building the plant. So he signed on, too. But after witnessing what he described as a “nightmare” of safety issues and endless problems with components sourced overseas, Smith quit working on the giant gas processing facility and went back to contracting.

“I’m at a wit’s end with the noise and the smoke,” he said. “I built this house with my own hands. I dug the foundation, poured the concrete. I put everything I own, all my savings, into it. Now I can’t even sleep in my house, it’s so noisy.”

“At 2:45, my backyard was covered in grey smoke when I was cooking hot

dogs,” Smith said. “It smells like burnt plastic or burnt Styrofoam.”

Another local, Chris Godfrey, told a similar story. Godfrey, 63, was born and raised in Kitimat and said he supports industrial development, including LNG.

But the impacts from LNG Canada so far have been severe, he said, including shortness of breath, black soot covering his property and vehicles, disrupted sleep from the noise, and more.

“I can be sitting in my living room watching TV at night with all my windows wide open and I can smell diesel in my living room, and it’s coming from that plant,” he said.

Smith is frustrated that he and his neighbours are impacted so heavily by an export operation and said Canada could make better use of its resources.

“I’m not anti-LNG,” he said. “I think exploiting our resources is good – but I think there’s better things to do with it than ship it off to China.”

District of Kitimat mayor Phil Germuth previously told *The Narwhal* the flaring was a concern for some residents, but characterized it as the necessary cost of becoming the “LNG capital of Canada.”

Sally Harvie, a radiologist and member of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, said people living near fracking sites and export facilities are at higher risk of health impacts.

“Leaked gas and chemicals in the air near fracking sites and compressor stations ... pollute the air with substances like benzene, formaldehyde and fine particles,” she said at a recent press conference calling on the BC and federal governments

“It smells like burnt plastic or burnt Styrofoam.”

to fund a health impact assessment of the LNG sector.

“I was just reading something the other day that 95,000 people in the US die a year from the petroleum industry,” Godfrey said. “Are we going to be that statistic here in Kitimat?”

Ankur Patel, a registered nurse in Kitimat, said he’s already hearing from residents about health impacts, especially seniors and those with heart disease.

“I’ve heard first-hand accounts of worsening symptoms that coincide with heavy flaring from LNG operations,” he said at the press conference.

LNG Canada maintained its emissions are safe and said the “health of the community, our workers, and the environment ... remains our top priority.”

Cement shoes

LNG Canada sent its first shipment to Asia at the end of June, marking Canada’s entry into the global liquefied natural gas market. In September, Prime Minister Mark Carney signalled the federal government’s support for an already-approved second phase, which would add an additional eight gas turbines to the Kitimat facility.

Meanwhile, BC recently approved another major LNG export facility, Ksi Lisims LNG. That project – a floating facility that will produce up to 12 million tonnes per year – will be built near the mouth of the Nass River, about 100 kilometres north of Prince Rupert. Both Carney and BC Premier David Eby celebrated the approval, touting natural gas exports as a much-needed boon to the economy.

“A lot of the politicians, like Eby and now Carney, they’ve been convinced that this is their saviour, their life raft,” Smith said, “when actually I think it’s a set of f---ing cement shoes.”

Matt Simmons is a writer and editor based in Smithers, BC, unceded Gidimt’en Clan territory.

This Local Journalism Initiative article is reprinted from *The Narwhal* and edited with the author’s permission.



LNG Flaring Danger

Massive gas releases at startup are not assessed or monitored

by Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

The world's first peer-reviewed global study finds 300% more gas is flared during LNG facilities' start-up phase, but LNG companies in BC and Canada are not including those releases in their environmental assessments.

A groundbreaking peer-reviewed research study has found liquefied natural gas export facilities flare three times more gas during start-up operations than during regular operations. Start-up flaring is not properly modelled in environmental assessments for any of Canada's LNG export facilities: LNG Canada, Woodfibre LNG, Cedar LNG and Ksi Lisims LNG.

Flaring is the controlled burning of hydrocarbons with a visible flame. It emits air pollutants, including benzene, particulate matter, hydrocarbons, and oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, all known to harm human health even over short exposure periods. Researchers found the commissioning phase, characterized by the large volumes of gas flared, lasted about two years on average for facilities in the study.

“Our real-world analysis shows that start-up flaring is among the highest-emission phases of an LNG plant's lifecycle and can last for up to two years,” says Dr. Laura Minet, the study's lead researcher and head of the Clean Air Lab at the University of Victoria. “There is a false assumption that the commissioning phase is short, with regulators in Canada and beyond satisfied with relying on

industry-provided flaring assumptions for environmental permitting that do not include modeling for the start-up phase.”

During the start-up phase at LNG Canada in Kitimat, the company issued two dozen community notices about flaring between September 2024 and September 2025. Many warnings lasted for days, weeks, and even months. Each notifica-

“Nobody even monitors emissions during the commissioning phase.”

tion said: “Flaring is a provincially regulated safety measure that ensures the controlled, efficient combustion of natural gas during specific operational phases.”

But in the documents it filed with the BC Energy Regulator, LNG Canada did not include emissions estimates for commissioning flaring, mentioning only “upset,” or emergency, flaring. In Squamish, Woodfibre LNG's documents state that it anticipates flaring in the commissioning phase to last only one month, an extremely unlikely scenario.

“LNG has taken centre stage in the Carney administration's nation-building strategy, and yet we're continuing to discover how poorly regulated this industry really is, particularly with respect to its risks to human health,” says Dr. Tim Ta-

karo, toxicology and public health expert and Professor Emeritus at the Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University. “Why aren't governments requiring LNG proponents to model and track start-up emissions – which we know are significant – given the proximity of many of British Columbia's LNG facilities to residential areas in Squamish and Kitimat and the Vancouver area?”

Dr. Sally Harvie, a radiologist and member of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, says; “The health impacts of LNG flaring are compounded by the magnitude of these greenhouse gas emissions. Nobody even monitors emissions during the commissioning phase, allowing them to go untracked as though they didn't exist. This is yet more evidence to bust the fictitious notion that Canadian LNG is ‘clean.’”

The study – *Analysis of Flaring Activity at Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Export Facilities Worldwide* – is published in the peer-reviewed *Environmental Science & Technology Journal*. The research project is part of an ongoing collaboration between the University of Victoria, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Simon Fraser University, University of Toronto, and Texas A&M University.

Read the entire press release at <https://tinyurl.com/flaring-study>

Grave New World

Dreams of LNG riches give way to grim reality

Commentary by Zoe Blunt

It's a new world — a fracked gas world — and it's much worse than we predicted.

BC has entered the global LNG market at the precise moment the rules changed, according to Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Administration. It's a buyer's market now, Birol says, and oversupply from new production flooding the market caused prices to crash, even dropping to below zero in Canada this fall — something we didn't realize was possible.

Ten years of political decisions have created a provincial economy that relies on fracking, transporting, and exporting natural gas. Like it or not, we're now chained to the commodity-price roller coaster of supply and demand, and we will all suffer the consequences.

Investors and politicians alike were counting on ever-growing demand for LNG to keep prices high and profits rolling in. Instead, fracking operations are cutting back production while Reuters and the *Financial Post* predict a global multi-year supply glut.

When the high rollers lose their appetites, resource economies like ours go hungry. China has little need for Canadian LNG after making a deal for Russian gas, Bloomberg reports. US buyers are balking at Trump's tariffs on Canadian energy. The end result is tonnes of product sitting on the dock, waiting for a buyer.

In Kitimat, on BC's north coast, the LNG Canada plant (which is not owned by Canadians, despite its name) started running in June, and it's nowhere near its export goal. One hundred kilometres north at the Nass River estuary, the as-yet-unbuilt Ksi Lisims plant waits its turn.

Insatiable LNG

Is the LNG boom going bust? Our politicians retooled the entire economy, pushing massive, destructive projects like the Coastal GasLink pipeline, the Prince Rupert Gas Transmission pipeline, the Site C Hydro Dam, and the North Coast Transmission Line to feed the insatiable energy demand for supercooling and pressurizing LNG for export. Even if LNG exports never make a profit, every BC Hydro customer will be paying for it for years to come.

LNG export facilities are not good neighbours. By all accounts, it's like living next door to an industrial-sized meth lab. "Emissions" is a polite term for the filthy petroleum fumes, constant deafening noise, and 100-meter tall flares that can last for days. Toxic smoke chokes residents and covers farms, waterways, birds, and wildlife. The long-term effects will be even more devastating to the planet.

We're told that these operations comply with the law, but the law is full of gaping loopholes.

This fall, the Province approved both the Ksi Lisims facility and its supply line, the Prince Rupert Gas Transmission pipeline, planned to run from the fracking fields in northeastern BC to the north coast.

Rising opposition

Both projects are facing a barrage of opposition. The Metlakatla First Nation has filed for judicial review of the Ksi Lisims decision, saying the approval is based on "speculative economic concepts" and ignores "mounting evidence" that it's not economically viable. Lax Kw'alaams Band filed its own petition citing harm to its rights, lands, and waters "in perpetuity." Ecojustice is taking the lead on two more court actions to quash PRGT approval.

Still more LNG projects are in the works, but Jeremy Valeriote, the MLA for West Vancouver–Sea to Sky, is calling on the Province to cancel future fossil fuel follies, including LNG Canada Phase 2, Cedar LNG, and Woodfibre LNG, which is now under construction.

The world has changed, but the Province, like a gambling addict, is doubling down, with 651 new fracked gas wells approved in the first six months of 2025.

Given the inevitable, irreversible damage these projects will inflict, the quick demise of the LNG economy may be too much to hope for.

Toxins and Salmon

The **hidden poison** in our tires

by Hazel Volk

In the heart of the Comox Valley, the creeks and tributaries of the Millard-Piercy watershed flow toward the Salish Sea, carrying salmon, trout, insects, and all the unseen threads that make a stream alive.

For the past 30 years, a small group of volunteers with the Millard-Piercy Watershed Stewards has tended these streams, restoring habitat, monitoring fish, testing water, and teaching the public how to preserve the health of a creek. But recent years exposed a hidden threat: a tire-derived chemical deadly to coho.

In 2021, during their annual count of out-migrating juvenile coho, volunteers found unusually many dead juvenile salmon near the Comox Valley Parkway, a busy traffic artery. This occurred immediately after rainfalls preceded by weeks of drought. Typical water tests that included measuring oxygen, pH, conductivity, and turbidity showed nothing unusual.

Guided by research from Washington State University, watershed steward Helmut Novak and the team suspected 6PPD-quinone (6PPD-q), a toxic compound formed when the tire preservative reacts with air and sunlight, which is then washed off roads into creeks by rain. All car tires contain 6PPD, added since the 1960s to extend their lifespan. When it is exposed to ozone, the resulting compound, 6PPD-q, is highly toxic, especially to coho salmon.

Two local hotspots

Through collaboration with Dr. Tonya Brown, the BC Conservation Foundation, and Vancouver Island University, the stewards confirmed two contamination hotspots in Courtenay: beneath the Parkway bridge over Piercy Creek and at the Willemar outfall that drains stormwater from Tin Town in west Courtenay. The research has placed the Comox Valley on the map of international 6PPD-q studies.

For coho up to about one month old, the LC_{50} (the concentration that kills half the fish within 24 hours) is about 41 nanograms per litre (T. Brown et. al. 2023); for older juveniles (1+ years), 89 ng/L. To get an idea: 400 ng/L is roughly a quarter teaspoon of 6PPD-q in an Olympic-size pool.

Local runoff samples have reached close to 600 ng/L, and even diluted creek water during storms often held 25–35 ng/L, still lethal for young fish. Disoriented swimming, loss of equilibrium, and gasping are typical symptoms prior to death. Once exposed, they don't recover: the toxin damages organs and the nervous system.

Human exposure

Both 6PPD and 6PPD-q are found in human body fluids, but the health impact is as yet unknown. The Washington State Department of Health states: "Overall, studies in laboratory animals suggest that 6PPD-quinone may be toxic to people, and

some studies have found that 6PPD-quinone is higher in people with certain diseases. More research is needed."

While tire manufacturers explore replacements on a 15-20 year timeline, policy and infrastructure must bridge the gap for now. Solutions exist but require investment and will. Laboratory tests show that natural filtration through soils and compost can remove nearly all 6PPD-q from water, but scaling this up demands infrastructure and maintenance, something few municipalities budget for.

Policy lags behind. While US lawsuits are forcing tire manufacturers to act, Canada has yet to list 6PPD-q as a regulated toxin. Ecojustice is pushing for that change so enforceable limits can follow.

In the meantime, stewardship groups hold the line. They adapt sampling to shifting rainfall, share data, and keep the issue visible. For citizens, small choices matter: drive less, switch tires seasonally to reduce wear, keep water on the land with rain gardens and disconnected downspouts, and support streamkeepers. These are gestures of care that ripple outward.

The future of these creeks depends on elders of the watershed, people like Helmut, passing on what they've learned to new hands. That knowledge is as vital as any instrument reading. Without it, we lose the memory of place and how to tend it. Knowledge, like salmon, must keep moving upstream.

Restore the Forests

The New Forest Act strategy to protect nature and jobs

by Boundary Forest Watershed Stewardship Society

The softwood lumber dispute with the US has exposed what's really wrong with BC's forestry model. It's not about tariffs; it's about a resource base that's running out.

Until provincial policy shifts from extraction to stewardship, no trade office can save the industry.

The Province of British Columbia just opened a forest trade office in London, England to “diversify markets” and “protect jobs.” But here’s the problem: you can’t export what you don’t have.

In 2023, nearly 59% of BC’s forest exports went to the United States, 21% to China, and 9% to Japan. The United Kingdom? Less than one per cent. Even if BC tripled that share, it still wouldn’t make up the loss from the US market.

The coming crash

Why is the government celebrating a new overseas office while harvest levels crash and mills shut down across the province? Because the current forestry model rewards volume over value. Companies get tenure for how much they cut, not how well they manage the land.

The result is predictable: depleted forests, declining revenues, and growing flood and fire costs for taxpayers.

Despite decades of public concern, clear-cutting continues, mills keep closing, and

disasters linked to degraded watersheds keep getting worse.

What’s the best way to actually save forests in BC? There’s a better path forward, built by citizens who refuse to give up.

The New Forest Act is a legislative blueprint written by British Columbians, for British Columbians, to protect nature, water, and local jobs – for good.

**You can't export
what you don't have.**

Let’s be honest: most of the actions people are encouraged to take don’t change laws or stop destructive practices. They raise awareness, but awareness alone doesn’t change the law. That’s why British Columbia keeps repeating the same cycle: cut, flood, burn, rebuild, repeat.

Rewrite the rules

The New Forest Act is built to replace the outdated forestry laws that created this mess in the first place. Instead of fighting one bad logging project at a time, it rewrites the rules for all of them.

The NFA starts with a simple but revolutionary premise: forests aren’t just “resources” – they’re life-support systems.

BC invests billions in bridges, roads, and dikes to keep communities safe. Forests perform those same functions naturally: they filter drinking water, prevent floods and landslides, store carbon, and moderate climate extremes. Yet right now, they’re given away to private companies as if they were disposable.

Under the NFA, forests are recognized in law as essential public infrastructure, and managed with the same seriousness as anything else that protects our lives and economy.

Instead of endless clearcuts, the NFA introduces a three-zone system: Protect – Restore – Harvest. Primary (unlogged) forests are permanently protected. No industrial logging, no roads. Degraded lands are healed through restoration work: road removal, replanting, and hydrology repair. Forests that have already been logged are managed carefully with selective, continuous-cover forestry – where ecosystems can handle it.

This is not “no logging.” It’s smart, selective, long-term forestry that keeps communities employed while safeguarding water, soil, and carbon.

Boundary Forest Watershed Stewardship Society is a grassroots citizens’ society advocating for sustainable forest practices across BC. To find out more about this initiative and how you can get involved, visit www.boundaryforest.org

No Salmon Numbers?

DFO's latest quiet cut to salmon monitoring failed – for now

by Greg Taylor

This August, Stan Hutchings, the long-time guardian for Fisheries Management Area 6 on the central coast, saw his short-term contract expire.

Stan, true to form, kept on working without pay or compensation for his boat and equipment costs. DFO didn't even have the decency to warn him. They just let him keep on working without pay.

It turns out this was happening all around our coast: charter patrol people not getting their usual contracts or having them abruptly terminated in the midst of the salmon spawning season. Our charter patrol personnel, also known as creekwalkers, are the “pointy end of the stick” when it comes to monitoring and assessing our salmon returns. We were looking at having no useful data on salmon spawning abundance and distribution in a large part of coastal BC.

This decision, along with cuts to other essential management programs, was tied to the 50% reduction in DFO fisheries budgets coming over the next two years. If this is a forecast of how these cuts will be managed, weep for our salmon.

Death by a thousand cuts

A September 10 report published in the *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* found that DFO's monitoring in the last decade was the worst on record. According to the study, as summarized by Rochelle Baker in the

National Observer (Sept. 5), nearly two-thirds of historically-monitored salmon returns from the Yukon to southern BC have no reported spawn estimates between 2014 and 2023, making it the worst decade for data since broad scale surveys began in the 1950s.

If this is a forecast of how these cuts will be managed, weep for our salmon.

DFO's choice to abdicate its core responsibility to monitor and assess salmon returns this year was a harbinger of the upcoming draconian budget cuts DFO is set to impose over the next two years. And these cuts are independent of the budget cuts being promised by the Carney government. There has been no communication from DFO on how it intends to implement these cuts and ensure the next decade is not as bad as the previous one.

Aaron Hill, executive director of Watershed Watch Salmon Society, told the *National Observer*, “There are only a handful of stream walkers left on the North Coast who, due to budget cuts and un-renewed contracts as people retire, have taken on more and more surveys with fewer resources over the years.” There is currently an effort to have First Nations Guardians take over monitoring in their territories, Hill said; however, the hand-over process is not yet complete.

“Some of these streams have been walked for decades, so the power of seeing and understanding historical [salmon] trends is being lost as well,” Misty MacDuffee of Raincoast Conservation Foundation told the *National Observer*.

A quick about-face

Raise a toast to the folks at the Marine Conservation Caucus (MCC), led by Watershed Watch Salmon Society, Skeena Wild Conservation Trust, and Raincoast Conservation Foundation, for standing up for our charter patrol personnel around the coast.

After members of the MCC wrote several letters in response to the terminations, initiated a media campaign, then had meetings with senior DFO officials, most charter patrol people's contracts were renewed, sometimes for not as long as in the past, but at least sufficient to provide reasonable coverage for the duration of the 2025 spawning season. Unfortunately, DFO is not making any commitments for 2026 or beyond.

To send a quick email calling on federal decision-makers to fund future monitoring, go to <https://watershedwatch.ca/tell-dfo-to-do-their-job>.

Greg Taylor is the fisheries advisor for SkeenaWild and Watershed Watch Salmon Society. Follow his updates at www.watershedwatch.ca/stories.

The Smell of Diesel

Is BC's polluter-pay policy rigged in favour of industry?

by Stan Proboszcz, Watershed Watch Salmon Society

When 8,000 litres of diesel spilled from a Grieg Seafood salmon farm near Zeballos, BC in December 2024, local shellfish harvesters lost their livelihoods for months. The spill also threatened nearby wild salmon habitat, along with the tourism economy that depends on this spectacular region of northwestern Vancouver Island.

BC's polluter-pay policy requires the polluter to cover the costs for the response and environmental sampling. After the spill, we accessed over 400 pages of provincial documents to shed light on how the response to the disaster proceeded.

The documents reveal troubling delays and control issues. Early sampling after a disaster like this is critical for accurately assessing the damage. The longer they wait, the more time the spill has to dissipate – potentially masking its true impacts. If delayed long enough, sampling could even suggest there were no significant negative effects, a scenario that could provide Grieg Seafood with substantial financial benefits through reduced fines and cleanup costs.

Also of concern were reports that the baseline reference samples used to measure the spill's impact were taken from already contaminated areas, not pristine parts of the coast as they should have been. An anonymous Canadian official who worked in the incident command structure told *Business in Vancouver* (Sept. 4) that without a polluting com-

pany's high-level involvement – a joint-command role companies don't get on the East Coast – the government might make other decisions to test farther afield or take a more precautionary approach.

Provincial staff raise red flags

The documents showed provincial staff involved in the response blaming the company – not the federal government – for the delay. Here are a few excerpts from their emails:

“The main issue seems to be the sudden lack of urgency regarding the sampling. Under different circumstances, there would likely be much more pressure to proceed.”

“There's significant frustration about the lack of an approved sampling and safety plan, especially since people were booking travel and accommodations to work this weekend. Now, with no clear explanation, the weekend work has been canceled, despite the provincial team being ready to go based on the initial plan.”

“Delaying sampling by another two weeks will likely show no impacts, which raises the question: why would we prioritize sampling quickly for other spills if waiting is an option?”

In addition, local governments were sidelined from the spill response, despite repeated requests to be included. Perhaps

if they were at the table, there would be more oversight and rigour to the spill response?

Similar story, different spill

It's important to note that in 2017 a diesel spill from a Cermaq fish farm in the Broughton Archipelago resulted in a \$500,000 fine – far less than the \$1.4 million sought by prosecutors. The judge reduced the penalty largely because no harm to wildlife was proven. This example shows how crucial timely sampling is: the detection (or lack) of impacts can directly determine how much a polluter has to pay. The same concern now hangs over the recent Grieg diesel spill, where delays in sampling could minimize the consequences for the company.

Is BC's polluter-pay policy truly designed to protect coastal communities, wild salmon, and our natural wealth, or does it give industry too much power to rig the system? We'll continue to track this story and see how much Grieg is fined. In the meantime, this is yet another example of why factory fish farms need to be removed from BC immediately.

Excerpted from the original article at watershedwatch.ca/stories (Sept 10).

Stan Proboszcz is Senior Science and Policy Analyst with Watershed Watch Salmon Society. He lives in Qathet, BC.

Nuclear Folly

Ontario's nuclear expansion a blunder of epic proportions

by David Robertson

The last time the nuclear industry got its way in Ontario, the province's erstwhile publicly-owned electrical utility, Ontario Hydro, spent over two decades building 20 nuclear reactors.

It was a mashup of missed deadlines, cost overruns and a troubling pattern of declining nuclear performance. Even more troubling, the last generation of nuclear reactors forced Ontario Hydro to the edge of bankruptcy. It saddled the province with a mountain of nuclear debt that we are still paying off.

The Ford government is now repeating those costly mistakes in what amounts to the largest expansion of the nuclear industry in Canada's history – risking a blunder of historic proportions.

Past debt due

In 1999, Ontario Hydro collapsed under the staggering weight of its nuclear debt. At the time, Hydro's assets were valued at \$17.2 billion but its debt amounted to \$38.1 billion. The government was faced with a stranded debt of \$20.9 billion.

In response, the Province split Ontario Hydro into five separate organizations. Ontario Power Generation (OPG) took over the generating facilities (hydro, coal, gas, nuclear) and Hydro One (later privatized) the transmission grid. The debt was transferred to Ontario families through special charges on electricity bills and the tax system. It was the world's largest nuclear bailout – one we are still paying for.

Ontario Power Generation is now leading Ontario's nuclear resurrection, following a series of government directives that put nuclear onto the fast-track while shouldering clean, cost-effective and safe renewables to the side of the road.

It is an astonishing coup. Without putting up their own money, and without bearing the financial risks, the nuclear industry has captured Ontario's energy policy.

Even a few years ago this would have seemed impossible. Catastrophic accidents at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima had severely tarnished the nuclear safety image. All around the world the cost overruns and lengthy build times of nuclear plants had chilled utility and government interest in new projects. In Europe only one nuclear plant has been built and come online since the late 1990s.

The first generation of nuclear plants clearly demonstrated the failure of the nuclear industry to deliver electricity on time and on budget. It also demonstrated that nuclear reactors couldn't provide affordable electricity. In fact, Ontario Hydro's last public cost comparison (1999) revealed the cost of nuclear energy to be more than six times the cost of hydroelectricity.

Now it seems that all those hard lessons have been forgotten, as the Ford government launches a multipoint nuclear power offensive. It has passed legislation to ensure nuclear is Ontario's energy priority. It has made commitments to build untested and costly small modular reactors. It has decided to refurbish antiquated nuclear plants when there is no business case to do so. And it has opened the public purse to the appetite of the nuclear industry.

Small modular reactor hype

There will be four new SMRs built at the Darlington nuclear location. Site preparation work is already underway on the first one, for which OPG has convinced the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to forego an environmental assessment.

SMRs are not small and they are not that modular. And they are also not that new. The designs have been kicking around for a long time, but no one wanted to build them and investors were loathe to put up their own money. The fate of SMRs changed when the industry convinced governments in Canada to develop a hype-heavy "SMR Roadmap," followed by a federal "SMR Action Plan." The plan includes a wide range of supports, from

relaxing regulatory requirements through public relations efforts to absorbing the financial risks of an untried technology.

The *World Nuclear Industry Status Review* is an annual independent assessment of the global nuclear industry. In its 2022 review it concluded: “SMRs continue to hog the headlines in many countries, even though all evidence so far shows that they will likely face major economic challenges and not be competitive on the electricity market. Despite this evidence, nuclear advocates argue that these untested reactor designs are the solution to the nuclear industry’s woes.”

In the 2024 review, analysts note: “The gap between hype about [SMRs] and reality continues to grow. The nuclear industry and multiple governments are doubling down on investments in SMRs, both in monetary and political terms.”

Mortgaging our future

The Ford government is committing a colossal amount of money to its nuclear gamble, including \$40 billion for refurbishments at 14 reactors, \$20 billion for four SMRs at Darlington, \$75 billion for Bruce C, and \$156 billion for Port Hope.

That is a \$290 billion nuclear gamble. If we add the \$26 billion which is the official preliminary estimate for the deep geological repository of nuclear waste, then we are well beyond \$300 billion.

Three hundred billion is an almost unthinkable amount of money. For most of us it’s hard to get a sense of what those funds could achieve.

Some examples:

- Provide every dwelling in Ontario with a free \$20,000 heat pump *and* a free \$20,000 rooftop solar system
- Replace half of the passenger vehicles in Ontario with a free electric vehicle
- Replace transit fares in Toronto for the next 300 years
- Provide every farm in Ontario with a free 10 kilowatt wind turbine
- Replace all the school buses in Ontario with new electric ones

Expensive nuclear plants produce expensive electricity and those costs are paid for through our taxes and electricity bills. It is already the case that nuclear is one of the most expensive energy options available. The Ontario Clean Air Alliance, using data from the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) and Lazard, has reported that the mid-point cost of new nuclear will be 24.4 cents per kilowatt-hour compared to solar with storage at 10 cents per kilowatt-hour.

There is a global energy transition underway. Renewable power generation capacity is expected to rise from 4,250 GW today to nearly 10,000 GW in 2030 – short of the tripling target set at COP28 but more than enough, in aggregate, to cover the growth in global electricity demand.

The Ford government is clearly on the wrong energy pathway.

David Robertson is a climate activist with Seniors for Climate Action Now. Excerpted with permission from the original at www.canadiandimension.com

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Swimming Upstream

When times
turn dark, hope
returns like salmon,
resolutely pushing upstream,
fighting the odds with every
stroke. Creeks may run dry and dams
block the way, pests may sap our strength;
still, we rise from the sea to the headwaters.

Drawn home to the source of life, we seek the communities that
raised and nourished us: the rivers, the rain, the forests, the soil, the
more-than-human kin. We return to protect the land, the waters, and each
other. Each step is an act of faith; every alliance, a moment of respite.

In times of despair, hope is a daily practice, a steady striving that lays the
foundation for a new generation of life to begin again.



Salmon Coming Home

Years of dedicated work are bringing hope and healing

by Zoe Blunt, with files from Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative

Salmon people are celebrating success and renewing their commitment to restore historic salmon runs in the headwaters of one of the world's greatest rivers, the Columbia.

The Columbia River flows into the Pacific Ocean just south of the Oregon-Washington border. Until 1939, when the United States government completed the massive Grand Coulee Dam hydroelectric project, the river's headwaters in BC's Kootenay region were the spawning grounds of the world's largest salmon runs. Dams have blocked the river to returning salmon for 86 years.

“Our peoples have never stopped working together across colonial borders to call the salmon back,” says kal?lùpaq'n Chief Keith Crow, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, Syilx Okanagan Nation. “The salmon belong here, and with ceremony [and] Indigenous knowledge, combined with western science and determination, we are bringing them home.”

The Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative, part of the Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative, is an Indigenous-led collaboration of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, Ktunaxa Nation, Secwépemc Nation, Canada, and British Columbia. The goal is restoring the upper Columbia's incredible salmon runs that sustained the region for thousands of years.

The release and the return

In 2023, volunteer “salmon warriors” near Castlegar, well upstream from the Grand Coulee Dam, released tagged sockeye fry into the upper Columbia River with songs and ceremony. The young fish thrived in their former habitat and swam downstream over the dams all the way to the Pacific Ocean. This year, volunteers were elated to find the same tagged fish, now adults, returning from the sea and swimming upstream as far as they could – a remarkable accomplishment that confirms reintroduction initiatives can succeed.

“Given the chance,
the salmon know
where they need to go.”

“This proves that, given the chance, the salmon know where they need to go,” says Mark Thomas, Shuswap Indian Band Councillor, Secwépemc Nation, and Chair of the Bringing the Salmon Home Executive Working Group. “This moment is cause for celebration, reflection, and renewed commitment. We do this work for our grandchildren, for the river, and for all of our relations.”

Despite their incredible strength and homing instinct, the returning salmon

couldn't get upstream past the dams to their home waters in BC. That's where future work will focus. In recent years, the Colville Tribal Fish and Wildlife Department has been trapping and hauling adult salmon past the dams and releasing them to spawn in upstream channels.

BC's Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Randene Neill says: “This result confirms the success of collaborative reintroduction studies and the resilience of salmon life cycles once thought lost from these waters.”

In 2024, Canada and the US agreed to new measures to restore salmon and ecosystems under the modernized Columbia River Treaty Agreement-In-Principle, supporting the Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative's mandate to return salmon to the upper Columbia in Canada.

Jason Andrew, ?aqam Councillor, Ktunaxa Nation, adds: “Our ancestors taught us that salmon are part of who we are. Their return signals hope, healing, and responsibility. We will continue advocating for the necessary resources until ultimate fish passage is secured and salmon once again thrive in the upper Columbia.”

Every year, the Columbia River initiative recruits volunteer Salmon Warriors and gives them hands-on training with juvenile and adult salmon. For more info, visit www.columbiariversalmon.ca.

Pain & Reconciliation

Campaigning for justice for women, children, and the land

by Sidney Coles

On the morning Jane Goodall's death is announced, I am in the Yukon interviewing Dorothy Smith, a member of the Ross River Dena Council, about her childhood experiences at Mission Baptist residential school in Whitehorse. It's the day after the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

During a 2023 visit to the Museum of Science in Boston, Goodall said, "One of the most important things we can learn from chimpanzees is that they are really

good at reconciliation after conflict. We don't seem to be very good at that."

Like Goodall, Smith, at 85 years old, does not rest. She has given countless workshops on residential schools, her culture, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to students, government bodies, and even to members of the regional RCMP.

More to the point, she has spent decades working to convince the Yukon Govern-

ment that the people of Pelly Banks First Nation are deserving of their inherent rights and dignity as a sovereign nation after her community (formerly Band 11) was scattered and then amalgamated, along with two other small nations, into the Ross River Dena Council in 1956 – without their consent.

Smith's territory, Gas tua (Salmon River), was abundant in caribou, ptarmigan, moose, foxes, wolverines, and wild salmon. The animals were as much a part



of her world as she and her family were theirs as they moved, according to the seasons, to wherever wildlife resources were most available. That all changed when Smith, aged ten, was loaded into an airplane along with other children from Pelly Lakes and flown to Jackfish Lake. From there, the children were put into the back of an army truck with a canvas cover over it and driven to Whitehorse and the Mission Baptist School. Other children were taken by the same means to Lower Post, one of the most infamous Indian Residential Schools on Canadian record.

Threatened by Indian agents with arrest or a heavy fine for non-compliance, Smith's father was worried that if he were to go to prison, he wouldn't be able to hunt and trap for the remainder of his family and his then-pregnant wife, so he agreed to let her go.

Smith's parents also travelled to support their children. She explains how many parents travelled by boat or dogsled down to Watson Lake be closer to the ones that had been taken to Lower Post. Once they were there though, they were seldom allowed to see them. For years, many parents, including hers, built canvas boats to navigate the Liard River to Watson Lake where they would wait for their kids to return for the summer before returning with them the 100-plus km back up to Pelly Banks on foot.

After several years of this hardship, some decided it was better to just stay down in Watson Lake to avoid the trek or to be closer to their children. Many families never returned to Pelly Banks, which made it easier for the government to pretend they'd never been there in any permanent way. Smith herself never returned to live there. She says her great-

Smith's fight to get the Yukon government to recognize her nation's sovereignty is more urgent than ever.

est sadness is that, for the eight years she was at the Mission Baptist school, she hardly got to see her parents. "I never sit down and really tell my kids what I went through, how lonely it was, what things that I missed in teachings from my parents."

Beyond the rudiments of Christianity, she said, the priests and nuns at the Baptist Mission school and Lower Post provided Indigenous children little education or practical training. Complaints about their circumstances either went unheard or were punished. In Watson Lake the impacts of residential schools manifest in lateral and domestic violence and inter-generational trauma.

"There are a lot of hurts from other people, especially the ones that gone to Lower Post, where they got all that sexual assault from both the nuns and the priests. They're still carrying a lot of hurt inside and they just take it out on other people." Smith says she tries to teach younger people why this is happening, "why there's so much arguments among the people and why they got to do better."

Smith tells me she'll be doing a moose hide tanning workshop with some students at Iron Lake the next day, but she's worried about the cold. It's work they have to do outside. She'd like to bring her granddaughter with her. She sends me a picture of herself wearing rabbit mittens she made along with an old photo of her and her younger brother Alfred Charlie in

rabbit fur outfits her older sister, Tootsie, made. The photograph was taken shortly before Smith was taken to residential school.

Smith's nation, dependent on caribou for sustenance since time immemorial, is now faced with the double threat of Fireweed Metals' Mactung Project, partially funded by the US Department of War (\$22.1M), and Australia-based BMC's proposed *Kudz Ze Kayah* Zinc and silver mine. (*Kudz Ze Kayah* means caribou country in the Kaska Dena language).

Her decades-long fight to get the Yukon government to recognize her nation's sovereignty is more urgent than ever, if the Band is to launch any kind of successful legal opposition to the projects that now threaten the calving grounds of the Finlayson woodland caribou herd on Pelly Banks territory. When I ask Dorothy how she carries everything and does all that she does, she tells me she prays and teaches others.

Like Smith, Goodall's overarching message, especially of late, was one of persistence. She encouraged people to focus locally on what each of them could change at the micro level in their communities, rather than fall into apathy. "It's a way of giving other people hope."

Sidney Coles, PhD, is a journalist and human rights advocate, and lives in Victoria on the traditional territory of the lək'wəŋən people.

After the Broom

Recovering, restoring, and reclaiming a hillside

by Ben Wickham

Ten years ago, I found myself in Scotland looking in awe at the valley of Glen Coe. The valley looms above you, rising in a great sweep like an earthen tide. A wave of reds, browns, and greens, and hints of yellow.

It's here that I found the homeland of one of British Columbia's most intrusive and visible invaders, Scotch broom. Last June, I was perched upon the hill behind our house in the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw people, baking in the mid-Island heat, working hand in hand with my five-year-old daughter in a fight against this Hibernian herb.

The broom grips hard into the crevices of the rocky hillside, its snaky roots twisting deep down into the darkness searching for fertile soil. I brace against the stony slope; my fingers wrapped tightly around the base of the plant. I feel small arms wrap around my right calf, my daughter's important contribution to our eradication efforts. Her small hands are protected in gardening gloves; the gloves themselves decorated in flowers more welcome in our garden and the wild space we find ourselves living in.

With a popping sound, the plant breaks free from the dirt, releasing the aromatic scent familiar to those enlisted in the crusade to rid our island of this invader. We fall backwards, landing gently between the mossy boulders lining the hillside. Looking upwards, the hill still blazes with what looks like a thousand yellow suns – a promise that our work is far from over.

In the late 1850s, Scottish settler Walter Colquhoun Grant brought seeds to Sooke as a garden ornamental. Long before then, Indigenous peoples had shaped and cared for these landscapes; burning, planting, and harvesting in ways that encouraged natural abundance and biodiversity.

Meadows, forests, and shorelines were not “wild” in the settler sense. They were living gardens, shaped by fire, harvesting, and ceremony to sustain food plants like camas and to support balance in the land. Camas meadows, coastal forests, and open

slopes were part of a managed mosaic, alive with food plants and pollinators. Into that balance came broom, a plant as adaptable and ambitious as the settlers themselves.

Hardy, resourceful, and energetic, it became the perfect garden plant, as well as being an incredibly efficient soil stabilizer. New arrivals, seeking stability and ties to their homeland, adopted Scotch broom as their talisman. Work crews carving out roads, bridges, and tunnels discovered the efficacy of this plant in preventing soil erosion, washouts, and landslides. It became a quick, living bandage for disturbed earth. Wherever humans could not make the land safe for settlers, broom could.

Scotch broom, with its delicate and blazing yellow flowers and a deep, vast net of roots, was a collaborator in the colonization of Vancouver Island. It's not possible to drive Highway 1 during the late spring and early summer and not see evidence of this codependent relationship, this mutual parasitism: a vast yellow scar ripping through the landscape. We may no longer be able to see the blemish our roads make in the natural landscape, but in the form of Scotch broom, we see a canary ribbon, slowly tightening around the throat of our ecological biodiversity.

But the same qualities that made the broom useful to newcomers make it an ecological menace. Rapid growth, deep roots, and prolific seeds allow it to crowd out native wildflowers and grasses, alter soil chemistry through nitrogen fixation, and create dense thickets that feed wildfires. In a time where the systems we exist in, both human and organic, are failing at an alarming rate, these hardy plants may appear as beacons of a more fertile future. However, the flowers quickly develop into large green pods with black seeds capable of invading almost anywhere. These seeds can lie dormant in the soil for decades, awaiting the conditions they require. Broken, bare earth and sunshine are all the plant needs to flourish.

The most successful method of destroying this emerald empire is to strike once it's in bloom: allow the plant to concentrate all its hope and dreams for the future into the delicate buds of its

yellow flowers, and then rip it out of the ground. Failing that, you can also make a large cut at its base using shears or a small saw, removing the bulk of the plant and leaving behind a stump that lacks the reserves to survive an ever-warming winter.

It's hard, repetitive work. Focus is required, the kind that is rare in our distracted age, and maybe that's why broom so often wins. It thrives on our inattention. But here, on this hill, attention is what we gave it, hour after hour under the hot June sun, hands in the soil, my daughter and I doing what we can to reclaim one small piece of land.

Several months later, we hike back up the same hillside, our pockets full of native seeds: milkweed, camas, and *Clarkia amoena*. We cast the seeds down onto the fertile and broken soil, hoping they'll grow and take root where the broom once stood.

The hill still blazes with what looks like a thousand yellow suns – a promise that our work is far from over.

I think of the Snuneymuxw people who tended these hillsides for generations. Camas meadows are food, memory, and medicine. Their return can not only heal the land but carry forward that relationship of reciprocity and care.

And so, as the seeds fall, we imagine the hill in spring, blue camas flowers swaying in the wind, bees droning low over the blossoms, the air thick with the scent of the earth and renewal, and the land once again alive with the life that called it home.

Ben Wickham is a writer from Nanaimo, BC with a background in education and public service. His passions for writing and nature come from his father and mother respectively.



Hope Takes Root

Grief, courage, and everyday resistance in the Walbran



by Hazel Volk

In the Walbran Valley on Vancouver Island, protesters block the road to thousand-year-old trees, holding a thin line between what remains and what's marked to fall. They're defying a court order, and enforcement will come. Everyone knows this, and still they stand.

Something in them refuses to go numb before a colonial system that treats living ecosystems as inventory. They come from many places, lineages and politics, not just like-minded but like-hearted, answering a call to protect beauty, protect life, protect what gives life.

At Cougar Camp, life hums with quiet devotion: tending the fire, gate, and kitchen; weaving, hauling water, checking gear, raising a cabin for elders. A communal rhythm: cooking, cleaning, mending, planning, singing, preparing for an uncertain month as enforcement looms. The camp is modest; the stakes aren't. Beyond the gate, cedar, Douglas fir, and Sitka spruce maintain the climate, water, and habitat. The fight is for rivers and salmon, rain patterns and living systems, and for land rights, Indigenous sovereignty, true reconciliation, and the belief that people can still act in solidarity.

Many campers use nicknames. Uncle Rico, a Nehiyawak land defender and the camp's "watcher," reminds everyone: "We all come from land-based teachings and traditional medicines," though "the government has done a good job making everybody forget." When we forget who we are, we get lost.

For Uncle Rico, the blockade is also inner work. "Nothing can change outside until we change ourselves and how we move with each other," she says. Land stewardship is everyone's duty. "Unless you're First Nations, you're not actually

from Turtle Island.” Around the fire, she invites people to name their ancestry, restoring pride and honesty about place.

Pacheedaht elder Bill Jones is a pillar of the movement. His hope is simple: save all old growth and keep working toward that. For many, the call to defend these forests is inseparable from the grief of knowing they may not be saved.

Standing in a broken system

Crusty, 34, has fought for the Walbran for a decade and stood on the front lines at Fairy Creek. The forest is his life force. What once felt harmonious now feels sacrificial; burnout and heartbreak are constant. Tested and exhausted, he’s still here, because stopping isn’t an option.

He points to BC’s contradictions: laws that shield industry over ecosystems, and “reconciliation” that makes Indigenous sovereignty the main path to protection, binding Nations to the colonial economy and forcing a choice between land and livelihood. Out of respect, protesters will not interfere with Indigenous-led logging on Indigenous land, however painful it is to watch. It’s colonial companies on so-called public land they challenge.

At Cougar Camp, Crusty’s role is to turn conviction into competence: training newcomers in safety, law, logistics, and care. They’re building capacity that outlasts any one camp, crews who can organize, resist burnout, and, when needed, hold the next blockade with greater discipline. Muscle spreads like mycelium.

Faces of a movement

The blockade is made up of ordinary people who refuse to look away. Deer, a young content creator, came to listen, and Elder Bill’s stories shifted him from pro-

duction to participation. He’s planning a documentary to widen awareness beyond the valley.

Fog and Philo arrived as travellers and stayed for weeks instead of days, moved by grief and reverence for ancient trees. They hold to a stubborn ethic: even if it’s hopeless, it isn’t pointless; every act matters. They see old-growth logging as a continuation of genocide, forcing communities to sacrifice land and culture for survival in a colonial system.

Nettle, 22, calls herself a guest of this land. She drove 24 hours to do the unglamorous ground work that keeps a blockade alive. She doesn’t speak for trees; she listens and shows they’re heard. Where companies see “wood,” she sees beings who deserve to keep standing.

Together they form a living, like-hearted network, trading distraction for devotion and turning grief into service.

Beyond despair

A thousand-year-old tree holds about forty human generations. When this cedar was a seedling, many European ancestors still lived in relationship with land, fighting colonial expansion into their own sacred waters and groves.

In a century on Vancouver Island, we went from nearly all old growth to under three per cent. Clearcutting doesn’t just remove trees; it destabilizes watersheds, releases carbon, unravels habitats, and breaks soils no plantation can replace. We protect 200-year-old buildings as “heritage” while felling living beings five to ten times older.

Blocking the road interrupts the machinery of loss and makes hidden destruction visible. No one here confuses hope with

odds; a blockade is a sandcastle before the tide.

Hope isn’t optimism but a conscious practice. It’s tending the fire as the storm approaches, remembering that Earth protection is ancestral, our birthright, long overdue in policy. It’s choosing connection over numbness, responsibility over waiting for someone else.

Roots, not slogans

In the shadow of loss, people relearn how to live together, to belong to place and the more-than-human world. When enforcement comes to tear down the camp, what will endure are the bonds, the stories, and the knowledge that life is worth defending. That, more than anything, is where hope takes root.

Forests speak through mycelial webs; the beauty above is sustained by the relationships below. Maybe that’s happening here too: in a rootless world, small camps grow new networks. We need stronger endangered-species laws, protection for remaining old growth, revenue models that don’t pit jobs against ecosystems, and reconciliation that isn’t extraction by another name. The real blockade isn’t only on a logging road; it’s in the growing number of hearts that are saying “Enough!” and organizing their lives accordingly.

Excerpted from a longer article and photo essay at watershedsentinel.ca.

Hazel Volk is *Watershed Sentinel*’s social media lead.

Choosing Aliveness

Moving forward through grief, accountability, and action

by Odette Auger

At Women+ in Climate, a gathering of climate defenders this past summer on Cortes Island, two voices carried a special clarity.

Reverend angel Kyodo williams, a Zen priest and author known as “the change angel,” spoke unflinchingly about the depth of the crisis we all share. Siila Watt-Cloutier, Inuk leader and author of *The Right to Be Cold*, reminded participants that not only is the Arctic melting, but that the melting is unraveling memory and identity. Together, their messages plant the seeds for a framework for moving forward – not through false positivity or clichés, but through grief, accountability, and a willingness to be fully present.

Facing the urgency

Rev. angel’s words invite complexity: “We are the scourge of the earth. And we are also who our ancestors trained – to save us from ourselves.” Our ancestors knew that we would need people fortified in all different ways, she says, and knew “the kind of fire in our belly [needed] to meet the charge of redirecting the acceleration of the demise of our planet ... and everything that we love and we care for.”

She names the crisis for what it is: a pathology driven by “domination, and greed and lack of connection. A wound within people that they seek to fill by extraction, by extermination.” This pathology “comes from being out of relationship



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with one’s own self ... and therefore out of relationship with our home.”

Rev. angel rejects the idea that information or policy alone can solve the crisis. “We are in many ways trying to address that crisis with a technocratic mindset,” she says, in hopes that “if we just overwhelm people in facts and figures, they’ll get up from their sociopathy ... and do something different.”

Inuit wisdom of survival

Where Rev. angel spoke of spiritual fire, Siila Watt-Cloutier continued the conversation in Arctic realities. “In our world, the ice is our life force,” she says. “Los-

ing it is the disruption of memory: of who we were, and how we lived, and how we thrived in this incredible environment where most people would perish in a day.” For decades, Watt-Cloutier has worked to humanize the Arctic at international tables. When global scientists discovered toxins accumulating in Inuit women’s breast milk, she ran with the issue, pressing governments to see it not only as an environmental concern but as a human health crisis. Her leadership helped secure the 2001 Stockholm Convention banning persistent organic pollutants.

“For us, hunting our animals ... is not confirmation of death,” Watt-Cloutier explains. “It is affirmation of life. It is life

giving life. And that has always been the language that I grew up in.”

The fight for ice and hunting culture is a fight for identity, memory, and survival. What happens in the Arctic is not remote – it is the frontline of climate emergency for the entire planet.

Redefining hope

Rev. angel doesn't talk about hope, she says, but instead orients herself “more towards the whole giving of myself to the next thing there is to do.” Whether that action is writing something or standing in protest or drinking tea really, really slowly, she describes the result of that concrete practice as “I don't have room for hope. I just have a fully lived life with no regret and no room for despair.”

Hope, she explains, can become a way to dodge grief. Instead, she urges people to carry grief with them so completely that there is only the present moment, the next step. “Take the grief with you, so completely that there's no room for either hope or despair. There's just what's in front of you.”

Agency, imagination, responsibility

Both leaders insist that agency begins with returning to ourselves, and through that remembering, discarding the systems that keep us disconnected. Watt-Cloutier asks, “How do we get ourselves out of these dependency-producing systems?” She points to Marianne Williamson's reminder that “personal transformation can and does have global effects. As we go, so goes the world.”

Both women also speak of imagination as an urgent tool. Watt-Cloutier recalls Australian environmentalist Tim Flannery be-

ing asked what is lacking in humanity's response to crisis. His answer: imagination. She continues, “Imagine we can innovate differently. Imagine we can treat Indigenous peoples' wisdom differently and accept that as a teaching for all of us.”

Discarding the systems that don't serve us leaves us free to create the kind of world we want to live in, Watt-Cloutier says. “We've got to start producing dependency-liberating programs based on our culture and our wisdom.” She points to on-the-land programming as an example. “The solutions lie right in front of us,” she said – in culture, land, waters, values, principles.

Surrendering to the real

Grief and urgency are the ground from which agency rises – but how do we keep from drowning in the grief, sorrow, and rage, if we try to lean in fully? “You might drown,” Rev. angel says, letting her words drift down and settle on the gathering. “Then you'll be reborn.”

She makes a distinction between surrendering to what is

real, and surrendering to “all of the tension that comes from warding it off.” One death, she says, “is a gentle death that is being called for, for making room for something new. The other one is a violent death that takes other people, situations, and things with you.”

“There's no such thing as choosing to be alive without choosing to be okay with dying,” she says softly. We can forge new futures, by cultivating a “righteous fire ... that sees the path for what needs to be burned or what needs to be protected.”

Odette Auger (Sagamok Anishnawbek) is an award-winning independent journalist and storyteller living on Klahoose territory in the Salish Sea. Follow her work at www.authory.com/OdetteAuger.

“Take the grief with you so completely that there's no room for either hope or despair.”

—Reverend angel Kyodo williams



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Great Lakes Cleanup

The future of cross-border ecosystem cooperation

by Jackson Todd

On a sunny morning in late September, volunteers from a few small Southern Ontario towns come together on a Lake Erie beach to clean up trash.

They work in small groups to pluck water bottles, cigarette butts, and bits of plastic, paper, and rubber from the sand using metal, claw-like grabbers. After each piece of debris is cleared from the beach, a volunteer from the group jots down a tally on their clipboard, recording what was just collected. Looking out over the water, Lake Erie appears to go on forever, though the United States lies a mere 75 kilometres away.

This cleanup initiative was organized by the Great Lakes & St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (GLSLCI), a coalition of more than 350 municipalities on both sides of the border. The stated purpose of this group of US and Canadian mayors and local officials is to foster cross-border cooperation on sustainable development. Six Ontario municipalities came together in this first Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup event, covering four of the five Great Lakes: Kingston and Cobourg on Lake Ontario, Collingwood and Owen Sound on Lake Huron, Thunder Bay on Lake Superior, and Chatham-Kent on Lake Erie.

Protecting the lakes, one piece of litter at a time

Chatham-Kent volunteers headed to Erieau, a small, quiet beach community on a peninsula that juts out into Lake Erie. The event started early in the morning with presentations from local activists, eager to educate volunteers about the importance of protecting the local ecosystem. The topline: The Great Lakes provide more than two-thirds of Ontario's drinking water, and the bioregion is among the most complex in all of Canada.

Meredith Grainger, an environmental science teacher and co-director of the environment club at Chatham-Kent Secondary School, spoke about the need for community education to inspire people to be active in protecting the environment. Several of her students came to support the cleanup, with one expressing surprise at the amount of litter along the berm: "If I were just

coming here for a beach day, I may not even notice the litter. But you see it when you're looking for it."

The students' increased interest in the ecosystem could not come at a better time. Politicians on both sides of the border, President Donald Trump in the US and Premier Doug Ford in Ontario, are pouring cold water on environmental protections as they turn their focus to international trade and the pursuit of economic growth. Among the casualties so far, the Trump administration recently slashed funding for the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, which monitors the lakes' water quality.

Grainger thinks we are stuck with how we conceptualize the environment in politics: "You don't have to choose between the environment and the economy!" She points out that "in many cases, the damage to the environment can hurt the economy."

Chatham-Kent Councillor Anthony Ceccacci attended the cleanup and echoed the sentiment about the urgent need for more environmental initiatives. "Initiatives that employ a knowledge-based approach to safeguard sensitive wildlife and ecosystems are crucial," he says, adding, "we need to do more to ensure environmental sustainability within reasonable bounds. It's time to transition from discussion to action." Ceccacci previously helped pass a local initiative in Chatham-Kent to start a public awareness and education campaign about the challenges facing the region's ecosystem.

Beyond Chatham-Kent, the health of the Great Lakes should be front-of-mind for Ontarians. Not only do they provide most of the drinking water for much of Ontario, they are also home to unique species and ecosystems that don't exist anywhere else in Canada.

Two countries: shared lakes, joined destinies

If not for the curvature of the Earth, the volunteers could look straight across the lake and see Cleveland, Ohio. Instead, the

lake looks like an ocean that goes on forever to the horizon. Before this year, the idea of their neighbours being just a boat ride away was charming, but escalating political tensions between Canada and the US have many Ontarians reacting more skeptically.

While volunteers on the ground were concerned with their local ecosystem and protecting their communities' drinking water, officials involved in the cleanup were thinking regionally. The Great Lakes are the crown jewel of the region's identity; without them, the region would not have the same economy, ecology, or political development.

The lakes are a reminder for both sides of the border: the United States and Canada are interlinked, not just by economic activity and tourism, but by the geography and ecology of the continent itself. And as we continue to face the dire consequences of climate change, we also are obligated to consider the appeal of the region for "blue" development, and that means more serious cooperation across borders.

GLSLCI is fostering a deeper connection with local actors across the binational region. "Our network provides a unique

The Great Lakes are the crown jewel of the region's identity.

opportunity for local government leaders from Ontario, Québec, and the eight Great Lakes States, to work together and learn from each other to protect these vital lakes and rivers," GLSLCI COO Phillippe Murphy-Rhéaume tells the *Watershed Sentinel*.

Cleanup events like this can punch above their weight in their symbolic importance. That is Murphy-Rhéaume's goal. "Given the success of this year's Coastal Cleanup, we hope to do it again next year and broaden efforts across the region – and across borders."

Jackson Todd is a PhD student in political science at the University of Western Ontario.



Youth Climate Corps

Restoring habitat and sharing skills for a cooler future



by Maddie Turene

A new force for climate action has taken root this past summer in the Comox Valley: the Youth Climate Corps British Columbia.

As part of the broader YCCBC program, young people aged 17-30 work together for four to six months to build professional development skills, scale up local climate action projects, and boost their careers. This program addresses the youth unemployment crisis, builds local resilience, and allows youth to meaningfully contribute to projects that reduce emis-

sions, all while making a living wage. YCCBC Courtenay's first season showed that investing in young people builds the capacity of local organizations and increases community climate resilience.

Created in Nelson, BC in 2020, YCCBC runs programs across the province in the East and West Kootenays, Vernon, Squamish, Vancouver, Golden, Kamloops, Kelowna, Northern Vancouver Island, Hazelton, and Courtenay. The program is highly adaptable depending on the needs and priorities of the communities we

work in. Municipalities and partner organizations shape the priorities of each individual program, ensuring that program priorities fit the community's needs.

This means every YCCBC team's work looks different. The Squamish team this year joined air-sealing projects, while the team in Vernon helped the city advance its new climate action plan through community engagement at public events. The Courtenay team spent the majority of the season working on local food security and ecological restoration projects, two

priorities identified by the City of Courtenay.

Partnering with community

YCCBC Courtenay partnered with LUSH Valley Food Action Society, a local food security and agriculture organization with a mission to support the Comox Valley community in gaining food-systems tools, engaging in resilient local food systems, and establishing equitable access to nourishing food. Every week, we worked in their community gardens, helped lead fruit picking crews, and participated in gleaning at local farms. This partnership gives our team's community climate action mobilizers important agricultural skills: plant identification and organic growing practices, managing volunteer fruit pickers, and learning how to effectively install an irrigation system at the community garden.

Our local group also developed a key partnership with the Lake Trail Community Education Society in West Courtenay, a non-profit organization that operates another community garden, plus after-school programs, and weekly community dinners in the garden. YCCBC's crews are developing a new "commons corner" in the garden into an area where students and neighbours can learn about native plants, urban agriculture, and composting. Helping at their weekly potluck dinners gives us the opportunity to grow, harvest, cook, and serve food to community members while fostering new relationships and alliances.

Ecological restoration work was a significant part of our focus this summer. With Project Watershed, we helped with habitat restoration projects at the Kuskus-sum site on the Courtenay River, as well as at the Courtenay Airpark at the K'omoks Estuary. This work has turned

Environmental action is a key antidote to climate anxiety.

two extremely degraded areas into thriving, functional ecosystems that provide habitat for many species, as well as ecosystem services such as flood control, water filtration, and erosion protection.

Our team monitors local stream health during summer low flows and the first fall flush to capture critical seasonal conditions. We collect data on five key parameters: water temperature, turbidity, pH, specific conductivity, and dissolved oxygen. This work helps Project Watershed establish a stream health baseline, alert authorities to any risks the watershed may be facing, and support data-driven decision making in our local watersheds.

Monitoring Morrison Creek

In 2023, a mix of funding from the Comox Valley Land Trust, BC Parks Foundation, and a crowdfunding campaign allowed the land in the Morrison Creek headwaters to be purchased and protected in perpetuity. In partnership with the BC Parks Foundation, our team monitors the Morrison Creek headwaters every week. Since May, our team has been collating citizen science data to establish an ecological baseline that will inform future conservation projects. We deploy trail cams and audio recording units to track the biodiversity of plants and invertebrates in the site.

The work that our Courtenay team accomplished in its first year shows why

the Youth Climate Corps needs to expand across the province and the rest of the country. BC is facing the worst youth unemployment rate in decades, and it's only getting worse. Currently, BC has the second-highest rate of youth unemployment in the country – a staggering 16.6%. The national rate is not much better at 14.4%.

Healing through action

A 2023 poll by Abacus Data shows that the majority of Canadians support the Youth Climate Corps concept, and 65% of young people would consider joining a program like this if given the opportunity. Meanwhile, climate anxiety levels in this age group are increasing. A *Lancet* study of 10,000 people aged 16-25 found the cohort is vulnerable to anxiety, with 60% saying they're "very" or "extremely" worried about climate change. Environmental action is a key antidote to climate anxiety, and a compelling way for people to contribute to a greater cause while feeling both empowered and connected.

An expanded Youth Climate Corps could lead to a reduction in unemployment and transform climate anxiety into real action. The Courtenay team demonstrates that when young people are given paid, meaningful opportunities to work in the climate-action space, their careers, communities, and ecosystems benefit greatly.

Given the challenges of the climate crisis ahead of us, the case for expanding YCCBC is clear. The program can help lead us towards a just, resilient, and climate-adaptive future, while giving young people the tools to thrive.

Maddie Turenne is the Courtenay Program Coordinator for Youth Climate Corps BC.

The **Right** to Save Seed

Proposed changes would further erode this ancient practice



by Cathy Holtslander

Seed is the foundation of our food system. Who controls seed, how new plant varieties are developed, who benefits from seed, and how decisions are made about seed all have big consequences.

Canada's legal framework for seed is complex, with several laws, regulations, and policies. Canada's first *Seeds Act* (1905) was enacted to protect farmers from fraud, prevent plant disease and weed problems, and promote high quality seed. But this public interest-based foundation is being eroded due to pressure

from corporations that want to control seed for their own purposes.

Farmers will have to stand up to these pressures again this fall. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has proposed amendments to Canada's Plant Breeders Rights regulations that make it illegal for farmers to save seed and other propagation materials for PBR-protected fruit, vegetable, ornamental, and hybrid varieties.

Plant Breeders Rights were created in the 1960s when countries started passing

laws that gave plant breeders authority to control access to new varieties and charge royalties for their use for a period of time. Seed companies use this monopoly power to increase revenues from the varieties they develop. Eighty countries now have PBR laws based on models developed by a group that promotes plant breeders' rights, the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV).

Canada's first PBR Act prohibited farmers from selling PBR-protected seed, but did

not otherwise restrict their use of farm-saved seed in any way. But in 2015, Canada adopted a more stringent Act based on the UPOV's 1991 model law. It increased the scope of plant breeders' exclusive rights, lengthened their duration period from 18 to 20 years on most varieties, and made other changes to tighten PBR-holders' control. And it was no longer silent about farmers' seed saving practices. It includes a "Farmers' Privilege" clause allowing farmers to reproduce, condition, and store seeds, tubers, and cuttings of UPOV '91 varieties to grow future crops on their own lands, without the breeders' permission or further royalty payments.

This new PBR law also authorizes the government to restrict or remove the Farmers' Privilege by simply passing new regulations.

The CFIA's proposed amendments to Canada's PBR regulations mark its first use of this option to prevent seed saving. The proposal would remove the Farmers' Privilege for fruit, vegetable, ornamental, and hybrid varieties that are under PBR protection, and extend PBR protection duration from 20 to 25 years for new varieties of potato, asparagus and non-tree woody species (e.g. berries).

Four corporations – Bayer, BASF, Corteva, and Sinochem – control nearly two-thirds of global seed sales. Their lobby group, Seeds Canada, consistently calls for eliminating the Farmers' Privilege. Preventing seed-saving forces farmers to buy seed and pay royalties every year and increases corporate control over plant genetics by removing PBR-protected varieties from the market before they become freely available when the protected period expires.

The industry and the CFIA claim that with annual sales and royalty payments from

farmers, private companies will get a better return on investment, encouraging them to do more plant breeding in Canada. However, nothing requires companies to invest returns in breeding – they can use the money for advertising, pay higher dividends to shareholders or buy up other smaller seed companies to increase their market domination.

Seeds for the public, not profit

By facilitating monopoly control of seed, strict PBR rules incentivize the privatization of our plant breeding system. This also means new varieties will be bred to serve corporate goals such as increased herbicide sales, more control over farmers, and higher seed prices.

Organizations like the National Farmers Union and SeedChange lead public support for farmers' seed-saving rights. Ten organizations submitted a joint response to the CFIA's pre-consultation in 2024, saying eliminating farmers' privilege unacceptably encroaches on farmers' age-old practice of saving and using farm-saved seed to plant future crops.

Seed-saving ensures farmers have secure access to their most important input. Canada imports nearly all our vegetable seed – without Farmers' Privilege, any supply chain disruptions could have severe food security implications.

Farmers' Privilege enables climate resilience through variety adaptation to specific environments and farming practices, and allows farmers to continue using a variety even if it's taken off the market before the PBR-protected period ends.

Eliminating Farmers' Privilege for hybrids encourages seed companies to breed hybrid varieties of cereal, oilseed, and pulse crops in order to prevent seed

saving, which is currently widespread. Shifting from seed saving to annual purchase increases farmers' costs (and companies' revenues) significantly.

Instead of forcing farmers to pay more for seed in hopes that companies will invest in plant breeding for Canadian agriculture, we should invest more in *public* plant breeding to develop varieties that can perform well in our growing conditions. Farmers support public plant breeding work through farmer-directed crop commissions, which fund plant breeding projects that address our farming priorities.

Farmers, including Indigenous farmers, are the original plant breeders, and thanks to them, we have the agricultural biodiversity and genetics that are the foundation of our modern plant breeding system. None of the new varieties would exist without generations of farmer knowledge of plants, agronomy, and seed-saving.

In August 2025, the Canada Gazette published the CFIA's proposed amendments with a 70-day public comment period, the last step before regulations can be enacted. By early October over 6,000 Canadians had signed a Parliamentary e-petition asking the Government of Canada to abandon this regulatory proposal.

We hope Cabinet recognizes that keeping Farmers' Privilege is in the public interest and decides not to enact the proposed regulation.

Cathy Holtlander is the Director of Research and Policy at the National Farmers Union. Read the NFU's full in-depth analysis on the proposed amendments: <https://tinyurl.com/nfu-pbr-submission>

No to “Treat & Release”

The Athabasca River is not a tailings dump

by Keepers of the Water

Communities and advocates downstream from the oil sands are pushing back against weak tailings treatment recommendations from an industry-driven provincial committee.

In early September, the Alberta Oil Sands Mine Water Steering Committee, mostly made up of industry representatives, released a report recommending that the government fast-track the creation of standards that would allow “treated” tailings to be released directly into the Athabasca River.

Then on October 2, two years after downstream communities learned through the media that Imperial Oil and the Alberta Energy Regulator hid years of large toxic tailings leaks to groundwater at the Kearsal mine site, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith released a new environmental mandate letter seeking to “accelerate” a “finalized” oilsands tailings strategy.

This push is coming at a time when important work is already being done to find long-term solutions to Alberta’s massive tailings problem, and First Nations have begun to establish criteria for water quality, including the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation’s Water Policy.

The federal government already facilitates a process known as the Crown-Indigenous Working Group (CIWG), which includes representation from nine Indigenous communities within and downstream of the oilsands area. In February

2025, Environment and Climate Change Canada and CWIG published a discussion paper that explores alternatives to treat-and-release that “avoid, accommodate, or mitigate impacts” to the health and rights of Indigenous communities. Alberta’s decision to pursue treat-and-release ignores and directly undermines the work being done by CWIG, and disregards First Nations’ jurisdiction, rights, and sovereign water policies.

“If the Province wants to move ahead to use these recommendations, we will pull out all the tools we have,” says Chief Allan Adam of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. “The oil industry has been unregulated for decades, which has allowed them to create huge lakes of toxic waste.... ACFN is not planning to sit back and let them try to regulate their way out of this mess without our approval.”

While the provincial committee claims to have met with Indigenous peoples, it is unclear which communities they are meeting with. Meaningful consultation, including free, prior, and informed consent with Cree, Métis, and Dene peoples, is desperately needed.

“Communities are rightfully skeptical,” says Cassie Barker of Environmental Defence, “of claims that this water can be treated to the point that it would be suitable for environmental release ... given that no company has a credible cleanup plan, and that the industry has taken five decades to clean up 0.1% of their mess.”

Tailings contain toxic substances known to cause cancer and harm human development, “including hazardous levels of at least five of the WHO’s chemicals of major public concern,” says emergency medicine physician Dr. Julia Sawatzky. “There is no feasible way to treat billions of litres of this highly toxic water and release it safely into a river that more than 154,000 people depend on for water.”

If technical solutions do materialize, the province should require industry to reuse treated water in their production process, to avoid ongoing freshwater removals. “We expect the Alberta Energy Regulator to create policies that allow for the companies to create a closed loop system,” says Jesse Cardinal of Keepers of the Water, and to “recycle all the treated tailings they are proposing to dump, which will massively reduce the use of fresh water and polluting of our land and waters.”

Treat-and-release is more of a band-aid than a plan, and fails to provide a real solution to the province’s tailings issue. “Albertans deserve more than a shortcut solution to the 1.4 trillion litres of toxic tailings sitting in northern Alberta,” says Pamela Narváez-Torres of the Alberta Wilderness Association. “Dumping ‘treated’ tailings into the Athabasca River should never be considered an option.”

To follow this story go to Keepers of the Water: www.keepersofthewater.ca



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IT IS TIME TO COMPLETE THE REMOVAL OF OPEN-NET FISH FARMS FROM BC WATERS

The unexpected surge in Sockeye Salmon to the Fraser River in British Columbia is a welcome development for First Nations throughout the interior and coastal B.C., commercial fishermen and tourism operators who rely on wild salmon for sustenance and economic growth. The closure of open net pen fish farms along crucial migration routes has contributed to the wild salmon rebounds sweeping across southcoast rivers for the second year in a row.

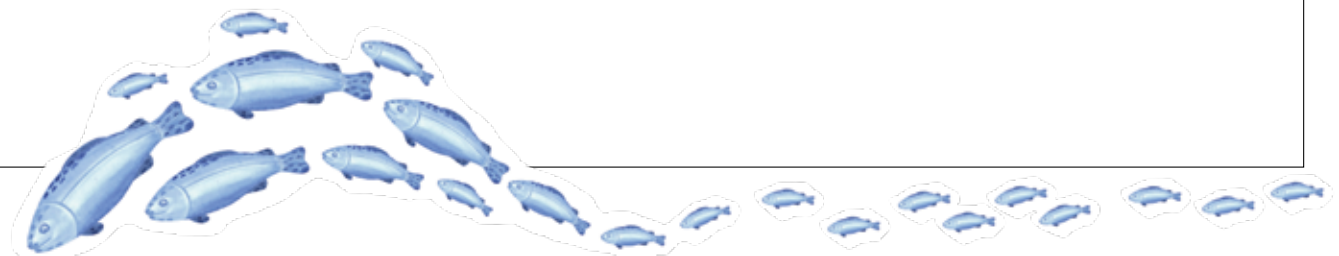
The BC Assembly of First Nations, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the First Nation Summit (collectively, the First Nation Leadership Council), First Nation Wild Salmon Alliance and Wilderness Tourism Association of BC jointly express their gratitude to the federal government for its decision to remove fish farms, particularly noting the efforts of the BC caucus and former fisheries ministers. While 8 First Nations removed 25 salmon farms, the federal government cleared the critical migration route through the Discovery Islands.

The 2012 Cohen Commission Report identified multiple stressors affecting Fraser River sockeye that remain relevant today. Most notably, the report's recommendation to remove open net fish farms from wild salmon migratory routes in the Discovery Islands has been successfully implemented, which is a transformation too significant to overlook.

Individuals and businesses benefitting from the abundance of wild salmon where salmon farms have been removed strongly urge Prime Minister Carney and Minister Thompson to fully implement the government's commitment to close all remaining open-net fish farms in British Columbia's Pacific waters by 2029.

Furthermore, we implore Canada to recognize rebuilding wild Pacific salmon as a "Nation-building project". Such a project would not only advance First Nation reconciliation but also contribute to food security and foster the restoration of traditions and cultures. It would restore the fisheries economy and build tourism as well. Restored salmon stocks will help rebuild forests which combat climate change.

Investment in rebuilding wild Pacific salmon will provide economic and environmental benefits to all British Columbians.



Wild Times

Rules to Live By

by Joe Foy

Prime Minister Mark Carney has been talking a lot lately about Canada's adherence to the rules-based international trade system. What he's really talking about is our reputation.

Reputation. So hard to build a good one. Darn near impossible to repair once damaged. A good reputation is worth its weight in gold, and Mr. Carney knows it and is using it to Canada's advantage on the world stage. Who wouldn't want to make trade deals with us – a country with a rules-based ethic?

Let's talk about trade in wood products, a top-of-mind concern for the government of BC. Specifically, let's look at a class of wood product that I like to call "federally-designated spotted owl critical habitat." Put bluntly – when it comes to protecting federally-designated and mapped habitats of highly endangered forest-dependent species like the spotted owl, Canada has not been the solid rules-based stalwart Mr. Carney likes to portray.

When a Canadian two by four is traded across our border or sold locally, the buyer would do well to consider if it's a simple stick of lumber or the straw that broke the owl's back.

Even though Canada enacted its *Species at Risk Law* back in the early 2000s, consumers likely don't know that the federal government has failed to enforce the law when it comes to forest-dependent species like the spotted owl.

When viewed through the lens of trade – Canada is acting scammy; the opposite of a rules-based fair trader.



©Agathe Bernard

This has consequences for Canada's reputation and also for the spotted owl and other species that are at risk because of habitat logging: the mountain caribou and marbled murrelet who are also under pressure from habitat logging.

Many species are at risk from Canada's failure to enforce its own rules. But it's the spotted owl that is the poster-bird of endangered species in Canada.

At one time there were an estimated 500 pairs of spotted owls and their offspring living in the old-growth forests of BC's Lower Mainland. Now, thanks to BC's uncontrolled logging and federal failure to enforce its own rules, only one wild-born spotted owl and a handful of captive-raised spotted owls remain. And their federally-mapped critical habitat is still being logged under BC permits.

Just this September, BC issued logging permits for mapped spotted owl critical

habitat at Fire Lake – a beautiful area of Lower Mainland old-growth forest that I wrote about recently (*Watershed Sentinel* Oct-Nov 2025). This forest is located near the north end of Harrison Lake with thousand-year-old trees that will make you cry with joy just to spend time there.

The old trees are still standing as I write this. But time is short. Action is required.

How about it, Prime Minister? Can we be a trustworthy country that doesn't quietly slip extinction wood in with our exported and domestic marketed lumber?

Stop the logging at Fire Lake and all federally-mapped species-at-risk habitat. Canada has the power to enforce if it chooses to act. We brag about our rules, so we should live up to them, right?

Joe Foy is the protected areas campaigner for the Wilderness Committee.

Thank You!



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and Wayne Bradley, Dawn Christian, Heather Kennedy-MacNeill, Don Malcolm

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