

October, 2014 SSBC Roundtable Report

By Eric Carlisle

At our June meeting, I commented on the apparent low numbers of coho returning to Capilano River. Since that time, the numbers of coho have improved, but thanks to the fishing practices of the Squamish Nation (weirs which blocked fish access during summer low flows), hardly any salmon and steelhead were able to migrate upstream. Only a one day rise in river level on July 24 and, due to recent rainfall, a rise in river level starting on September 24, have allowed any coho and other species to migrate upriver from tidewater.

While the numbers of returning coho improved starting in mid-June, throughout August and early September these fish changed their behaviour and became almost uncatchable. Throughout the summer I participate in the shore fishery, casting various lures for the returning coho. Shore anglers' results for June and July were acceptable; those people who knew what they were doing and who put in the time caught some coho. But in August and part of September, the fish simply "turned off" and very few were caught by shore anglers. Similarly, boat anglers reported that lots of coho were present from the river mouth west past Navy Jack Point, but these fish rarely showed any interest in the anglers' offerings. Whether warm water played a role or the fact that these coho are hatchery fish is unknown, but a normally tough yet often productive fishery became much tougher. At times, I was casting lures which have a track record of catching these coho in this fishery; some of these lures had caught 20 or more coho over a number of years. But this August, other than three coho I hooked and lost the coho ignored my offerings. Fortunately, in the latter part of September and early October some coho have shown interest in anglers' lures at the river mouth and, since September 24, in the river.

Throughout the summer, I heard reports from a variety of locations about improved Chinook numbers and fishing. It did not matter where, anglers reported Chinook fishing was great. In my own experience this summer, I found consistent Chinook fishing in the Chilliwack-Vedder for the man made run of July red springs. I do not know if that run was all that numerous, but I found fish every trip (five trips) and hooked some of these Chinook in locations in which I had not found them in past years. From July 21 to 26, shore anglers at the Capilano mouth landed four Chinook.

One was taken in Sewer Bay, between the river mouth and Lions Gate Bridge, and the other three were caught at Ambleside. This was unheard of--shore anglers often come up with one Chinook in July but not four in one week. Shore anglers found only the occasional Chinook in August, but throughout September Chinook appeared in anglers' catches on a fairly regular basis. While the return to Capilano is made up mostly of white springs, many of the fish caught were the prized reds. Capilano's Chinook are the so-called Chilliwack whites, which originated at Harrison River. But there are reds in both the Chilliwack and Capilano fall Chinook populations, and I wonder if the numbers of reds are increasing. I also gave Furry Creek two tries for Chinook heading for Squamish River. Here I was unsuccessful, but I did see a few fish show. I have been told that anglers who picked good days (this fishery can be good one day, slow the next) did well on these migrating Chinook.

I understand that in 2014, Capilano Hatchery will be obtaining its Chinook eggs from Chilliwack Hatchery and will not be using returning adults for brood. This action, which also occurred in 2013, is an attempt to remove red Chinook from the population and produce white Chinook only. The white fall Chinook have a higher survival rate than the red Chinook, so if budget problems mean reduced Chinook production, adult returns similar to present adult returns should occur. Frankly, I feel this attempt to eliminate red fall Chinook is doomed to failure. Even if adult Chinook used for eggs for Capilano are carefully screened (i.e., use white adults only) at Chilliwack Hatchery, one or both of a pair of white adults still may have red producing genes and that red flesh colour will appear in some of their offspring.

I sent you a link to an article I found re the Cowichan River situation. Recent rainfall in that area was light and, according to the article, added only 9 days of flow. So, fish in the Cowichan are still at risk due to drought and possible excessive spilling of water from Cowichan Lake earlier in the year.

One issue the Steelhead Society is facing is dealing with a warning letter received from Canada Revenue Agency. This letter, like similar letters sent to a variety of charitable organizations, warned about charitable organizations spending money on political activities. The Society is developing a protocol to follow the rules governing charitable organizations. A charitable organization cannot support any political party or member of a political party. Directors can engage in political activities but cannot

support a specific party or candidate. Issues have to be directly related to steelhead issues in B.C. Several SSBC directors wondered if the CRA letter was an attempt by the Harper government to muzzle critics like the SSBC and other similar organizations.

Another issue the SSBC has worked on is commenting on the Draft Provincial Framework for Steelhead Management in British Columbia. This was a discussion topic at the August Directors' Meeting and the Society's comments were prepared and sent to the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. Many other organizations and individual anglers prepared and sent in their comments on the Draft Framework document.