

SSBC ROUNDTABLE REPORT, OCTOBER, 2013

By Eric Carlisle

As usual, the Steelhead Society of British Columbia has been working on a wide variety of issues. Concerns have been raised about lower than expected returns of summer steelhead to Dean River and reports of net marked fish. A letter was sent to DFO recommending that commercial net fisheries be held close to Bella Coola, where enhancement of chum and Chinook salmon occurs. While there was a reduction of commercial fishing effort late in the season, the damage had already been done.

The Dean River steelhead interception situation leads to another steelhead interception situation on the Fraser. The SSBC, the BCFDF, the BCFFF, the BCWF and anyone else who cares about steelhead are greatly concerned by recent DFO actions on the Fraser. Mid October is the peak run time for Thompson steelhead migrating up the Fraser. Yet, on October 14, DFO announced that an Area B purse seine fishery would occur on October 17. On October 17, DFO said that an Area E gillnet fishery was proposed for October 24. In each of these fisheries, the target species is chum salmon and incidentally caught pink salmon can be retained. However, all coho, Chinook and steelhead must be released. The boats are required to have live boxes for reviving fish. But, in spite of these measures, Thompson steelhead remain in jeopardy. Fish caught in gillnets could have their gills injured as the fish are removed from the nets, and seine caught fish could be crushed when the seine net is brailed. In addition, released fish could be caught again, and there can be cumulative effects even if the fish survive the earlier encounters. Commercial fishermen may not always release the fish swiftly. A video seen last summer showed commercial fishermen taking over two minutes to start releasing brailed fish and releasing the fish by booting them through the scuppers. Apparently, DFO chum fishery managers do not understand that Thompson steelhead are at a conservation concern level and allowing non-selective chum fisheries to occur is totally wrong.

Mike Wallace, who is involved with habitat improvement work in the Thompson system, reported that last year's project on Bonaparte River has been performing well. Wallace said that he will be talking to Sean Bennett of DFO re a project for this coming year. Bennett is recommending a project involving an undercut weir on Deadman River, but the SSBC requires more information. The SSBC plans on holding a fundraiser around November 20 for this coming year's habitat improvement project.

The SSBC has provided Dave Harper, formerly with BCCF, now at BCIT, with funding for stream fertilizer projects. Harper will use BCIT students in these projects, which see solid fertilizer (granulated fertilizer in burlap bags) placed in steelhead rivers. Stream fertilization is a proven technique which assists rearing steelhead juveniles.

As always, the SSBC has been working on a variety of habitat issues ranging from a proposed landfill on Lakelse River to the Northern Gateway pipeline.

Since the June SEHAB meeting, salmon have been returning to BC rivers. We are still in-season, but pink runs on the south coast have been impressive. In my own

experience, pinks contributed substantially to catches by shore anglers (and boat anglers) at the Capilano mouth fishery. However, while a few pinks were caught at Cates Park, most pinks I observed there were showing about 250 meters offshore, not within casting range of the beach. We did not find the hoped for influx of Fraser system pinks along the West Vancouver beaches in September and early October, but some pinks were found at the Cypress Creek mouth area. Most likely the few pinks caught by anglers in September were Seymour pinks, which are later returning Chilliwack stock. Substantial numbers of spawning pinks have been reported in a variety of local rivers and creeks. Coho runs appear to be good, and chums have been showing over the last few weeks.