

Green Scene: Season of the Salmon

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Fall rains replenish vital flows in our creeks and rivers, allowing mature salmon to return and start a new generation. *I. McArthur photo.*

This Sunday is Rivers Day which started in 1980 when Mark Angelo from BCIT and other volunteers cleaned trash from the Thompson River. By 1993, this initiative had grown to become a provincial event called BC Rivers Day that celebrated our wonderful rivers and the wild salmon they support. In 2003, BC Rivers Day transformed into a national event and, in 2005, the proclamation of World Rivers Day made it an annual international event.

The last Sunday of September is a wonderful time to enjoy and appreciate our rivers in BC. By the end of September, the summer drought is typically over and clouds are again dumping their life-giving moisture onto the mountains. This replenishes vital flows in our streams and attracts mature salmon returning from long migrations in the North Pacific to start a new generation in the places of their birth.

The life cycle of the salmon is a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of our ecosystems. Salmon need silt-free streams where their eggs incubate over winter, unobstructed and insect-rich waterways where juvenile salmon can be gently guided downstream, unpolluted estuaries where they gain strength and a healthy ocean where they can spend several years in

their continuing quest for food. Sadly, in all of these places, the human imprint has often degraded their habitat and threatened their survival.

The testimony presented to the Fraser River Cohen Commission during this summer has revealed how little we still understand about what determines the destiny of our wild salmon and how, despite this lack of knowledge, we have been so quick to place impediments such as salmon feedlots in their path. That other great salmon river on the eastern rim of the Pacific, the Columbia, has been so destroyed by dams that it now seems more like a series of bathtubs than a wild and roiling river.

I once took considerable patriotic pride that at least Canadians understood the true value of a priceless resource such as the wild salmon of the Fraser. But this summer, I was dismayed to learn how our government refuses to allow federal scientists to undertake the necessary research to determine the source of the disease that now appears to affect so many Fraser River sockeye salmon. Equally appalling, the federal government forbids these scientists to speak to the press while the provincial government withheld the health records of salmon farms until public pressure resulted in the release of this information. What will future generations think of us if wild sockeye populations continue to plummet and we deliberately choose to suppress such vital dialogue and research into the cause of their demise?

As much as I am disappointed by these actions of government, my spirits are always lifted by the stalwart efforts of local volunteers to protect our streams and foster public appreciation for salmon. Through several recent Shoreline Cleanup events, volunteers have removed trash from local waterways just as Mark Angelo's group did when they started Rivers Day over thirty years ago.

This Sunday, volunteers with the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society will be removing invasive plant species from the riparian areas next to two creeks on the Riverview Hospital grounds and the City of Port Coquitlam will be hosting their annual Rivers and Trails Day where people can enjoy a nature walk along the Pitt River and other activities. The Fraser River Discovery Centre on the Westminster Quay is also holding a number of events this weekend including a new display on the Heart of the Fraser (for more information, see www.fraserriverdiscovery.org). Even if you don't have a chance to partake in an organized event, why not take a stroll along any one of the many trails beside the beautiful Coquitlam River. We are lucky to live in a community so rich in salmon streams and an autumn day can be a fine time to experience them.