



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Critical Salmon Runs at Risk of Collapse:
*Tsilhqot'in Nation Calls on BC and Canada to Escalate Action
to Address the Crisis at Big Bar Slide.*

Williams Lake: After two catastrophic seasons for returning Fraser River and Chilko salmon and Steelhead Trout populations, the Tsilhqot'in Nation is calling on BC and Canada to escalate emergency measures at the Big Bar Slide before a third season of disrupted runs pushes these stocks even closer to collapse.

Since the Big Bar landslide was discovered in June 2019, Fraser River and Chilko salmon and steelhead trout have faced a crisis, further impacting runs that were already returning in the lowest numbers on record. And for this reason, the Tsilhqot'in have elected over the past two seasons not to exercise their Aboriginal Right to harvest salmon due to their stewardship responsibilities and commitment to conservation. The catastrophic declines in returns, made worse by the Big Bar landslide, have damaged the spawn return for all salmon and steelhead trout, which the Tsilhqot'in and the natal ecosystems depend upon for sustenance, health and well-being, and cultural practices. Despite the extreme measures taken by the Tsilhqot'in Nation, DFO permitted recreational fishing and commercial by-catch of Chilko stocks, over the objections of the Nation and contrary to the constitutional rights of the Nation to have a priority fishery, second only to conservation.

Although there has been a significant amount of work on the ground to mitigate the devastation of Big Bar, the landslide remains a threat to Tsilhqot'in fisheries and the fisheries relied upon by many other First Nations. Many of the salmon stocks spawning upstream from Big Bar cannot support fisheries, and in fact are scheduled for emergency intervention measures as a last resort to prevent complete collapse and extirpation.

The Tsilhqot'in Nation supports ongoing work to permanently and completely mitigate the effects of the Big Bar landslide. However; as the Tsilhqot'in and other First Nations face a direct, immediate threat to their food security, their way of life and their cultural identity, it is apparent that more needs to be done. It is alarming and unacceptable that a third season is approaching after the Big Bar slide with no assurance or confidence that it will not continue to devastate these runs, which are already struggling for survival.

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T̓SILHQOT̓'IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation calls on BC and Canada to take immediate action to protect these iconic fisheries and the Indigenous peoples that depend on them for their way of life. This means addressing the crisis at Big Bar landslide as the national emergency that it represents and taking all actions necessary to ensure safe passage this season. Canada must close all downstream and marine fisheries which pose any impacts to the Chilko stocks, especially in the case of Chinook, Sockeye and Steelhead Trout, to give these struggling runs every chance at survival. As stewards of the salmon spawning within Title Lands of the T̓silhqot̓'in people, we call on Canada to uphold the priority harvest rights of the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation and to protect these fish as they return.

Quotes:

Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chair, T̓silhqot̓'in National Government

"BC and Canada are not treating the Big Bar Slide like the emergency that it is. We are approaching the third year of the Big Bar Slide, which is compounding the catastrophically low returns and it doesn't seem to be being met with urgency from BC or Canada. In 2019, the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation declared a State of Local Emergency as result of Big Bar Slide and this declaration continues because the situation at Big Bar continues to not be addressed effectively. Meanwhile, BC and Canada have not declared Big Bar a provincial or national emergency, which it is. Our peoples Aboriginal Rights to harvest continue to get hit by crisis after crisis. The impacts of the 2017 wildfires made it so that our people have had to rely more heavily on salmon for sustenance, well-being and traditional cultural practices, and now that is being destroyed also. When does it end? It's an entire lifestyle that is just evaporating. Rightfully, our people have had enough and are upset. DFO needs to demonstrate leadership. When our people must continue to sacrifice our priority Aboriginal Rights to harvest, as protected by the Constitution, you better believe that is a problem for BC and Canada, and they should be taking every possible measure to resolve this crisis quickly."

Nits'il?in (Chief) Jimmy Lulua, Xeni Gwet'in First Nations

"For years both the salmon and the Steelhead Trout stocks have been mismanaged, resulting in lower stock returns of these vital resources to their spawning grounds located in Title Land, my home and the caretaker area of the Xeni Gwet'in. Minister Jordan (Fisheries, Oceans and Canadian Coast Guard) and Minister Rankin (Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation) have accepted our invitation to discuss government-to-government future steps in the management of these fish. DFO has had its turn, and we have seen the results of its management. It's time for T̓silhqot̓'in management to take over to ensure that these fish continue to be a resource that benefits our people now, and for generations to come."

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