



## **Emergency Salmon Task Force Situation Report - August 12, 2024**

A major landslide occurred on the Tsilhqox (Chilcotin River) the night of July 30. Increased sediment, debris, and flows to the Chilcotin and Fraser Rivers have and will continue to dramatically impact this year's returning sockeye and Chinook populations to the Chilcotin watershed, which were already predicted at near record-low returns in 2024.

### **Salmon Emergency Task Force initiation:**

In response to the slide, TNG quickly initiated the establishment of a tripartite Salmon Emergency Task Force to assess the impacts on Tsilhqot'in-bound salmon populations. The task force includes members from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the Province of BC, the Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA), and several external technical experts; members were selected based on their high level of expertise and experience as members of the Big Bar landslide response process, which began in 2019. All parties have expressed their strong commitment to working collaboratively on a coordinated slide response. Members are committing to short- and longer-term roles to address both the immediate and long-term impacts of the slide.

- The task force had its initial meetings last week and is now in the early stages of defining the structure, scope, terms of reference, communications, and engagement approach for the process; this includes the development of a soon to be announced coordinated and collaborative process for other First Nations impacted by the slide and concerned about the salmon.
- The task force has initiated a thorough investigation of the slide and its impacts on salmon, fish passage, and habitat, and is working to answer key questions and identify/advance technical priorities.

### **Fish passage monitoring:**

The task force is working to address the main question: **When will we have salmon passage through the Chilcotin River slide?**

An array of SONARs have been installed and are monitoring fish location throughout Tsilhqot'in Territory.

- TNG and Ecofish Research with assistance from DFO installed a new SONAR just above the slide site (at Hanceville) on August 8 to detect when fish start to pass through. The SONAR is operating continuously and staff are reviewing and reporting on results in near-real-time.
- We also have SONAR monitoring in the Little Chilcotin, Taseko, and Chilko systems.





### Other actions being initiated by the task force:

- Real-time hydrometrics (water levels and flow) upstream and downstream of the slide;
- Camera monitoring for 24-hour eyes on the site;
- Turbidity (water clarity) monitoring upstream and downstream of the slide;
- Drone survey to map water velocities around the slide;
- Terrain stability monitoring at Farwell Canyon. There are other locations on the Chilcotin where there has been evidence detected of terrain instability and risk of future slides; these areas are being monitored and assessed;
- Emergency works planning – early investigations to assess safety and feasibility for access and potential earth works at the slide site;
- Mitigation planning – DFO salmon enhancement program has been engaged to assess potential fish passage mitigation in the event that salmon are not able to migrate through the slide, including emergency enhancement and trap and transport.

### Salmon migration, status, and impacts:

We are putting monitoring systems in place to conclusively assess fish passage at the slide, but unrestricted fish passage seems unlikely based on observations by technical experts.

#### Taseko sockeye:

- Highest conservation concern right now due to their timing; severe impacts are likely.
- This is a key critically endangered stock at high risk of extinction. Emergency enhancement has been initiated since 2021 and is planned prior to the Chilcotin River slide, in response to Big Bar.
- **Good news:** a few were detected by the Taseko SONAR back on July 24, so some have already reached their spawning system.

#### Chilko sockeye:

- **Critical conservation concern**, as most are still downstream of the slide.
- The peak of the return is expected Aug 25-26 based on current information from ocean and lower Fraser test fisheries.
- Already a record low predicted ocean return in 2024 – only around 100,000 fish.

#### Chilko Chinook:

- May experience less severe impacts based on their migration timing; however, information is still being collected for a more thorough assessment.





#### Chilcotin Chinook:

- **Good news:** Upper Chilcotin Chinook reached their spawning grounds prior to the slide.
- This is a key critically endangered stock at high risk of extinction; emergency enhancement was planned prior to the slide and has been in place since 2020.
- Brood stock collection was completed by TNG Fisheries in July – in coordination with the UFFCA and partners, and brood stock has been transferred to the Quesnel River Research Centre (QRRC) conservation hatchery.
- Most of the Little Chilcotin Chinook population made it past the slide; there are approx. 800 Chinook in the system now.

#### Elkin Creek Chinook (Taseko system):

- The spawning population is typically in the range of 100-400 fish with later timing like Chilko Chinook.
- They could be severely impacted by the slide; information is still being collected for this population.
- Emergency enhancement is being considered but has not been confirmed.

#### Others:

- Interior Fraser coho and critically endangered Chilcotin steelhead are expected to reach Tsilhqot'in Territory in a few weeks.

#### Communications:

- The task force will share situation reports weekly at a minimum, and more frequently as needed to share key developments and milestones.
- TNG has released a statement regarding the formation of the task force here: [www.tsilhqotin.ca/tsilhqotin-national-government-initiating-emergency-salmon-task-force](http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/tsilhqotin-national-government-initiating-emergency-salmon-task-force)
- TNG is posting regular landslide updates at [www.tsilhqotin.ca](http://www.tsilhqotin.ca) and [www.tsilhqotin.ca/our-territory/fisheries/communications](http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/our-territory/fisheries/communications), and on their Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/Tsilhqotin](http://www.facebook.com/Tsilhqotin).
- For questions please email [tngsalmontaskforce@tsilhqotin.ca](mailto:tngsalmontaskforce@tsilhqotin.ca).

