



December 17, 2019

Honourable Doug Donaldson
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Donaldson,

The membership of the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORC), which includes anglers, conservationists and outdoor recreationists, is deeply alarmed by the collapse of interior Fraser River steelhead stocks. These stocks which once numbered in the thousands are now down to an estimated 89 spawning steelhead in the Thompson River system and while only 39 are anticipated to return to the Chilcotin system. These iconic and genetically unique fish are literally on the brink of extinction unless urgent recovery actions take place.

We were extremely disappointed that the Federal Government decided not to list the Thompson and Chilcotin River Steelhead under the Species at Risk Act (SARA). This decision ignores the recommendations of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) which in February 2018 concluded that the two populations of sea-going steelhead breeding in the Thompson and Chilcotin river systems in British Columbia are at imminent risk of extinction. Both populations were assessed as Endangered, and COSEWIC has recommended an emergency listing order under SARA.

Given the seriousness of the imminent extinction crisis of the interior Fraser River steelhead (other southern steelhead stocks are not faring much better), the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC ask that your government takes urgent action to instigate an independent review of steelhead management in BC based on the best available conservation science which is co-managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Province of BC with input from all sectors and First Nations. This review must take all possible recovery options into consideration to save these iconic fish. With so few fish returning this year, what we're witnessing right now is functional extinction of steelhead stocks that are genetically unique.

It's well known that interception fisheries are a major factor that impacts the steelhead. For the coming year, the Outdoor Recreation Council supports the expansion of the non-fishing window during steelhead migration while also launching a plan to develop a truly selective fishery that will not inadvertently intercept steelhead in the pursuit of sockeye and chum.

It is unethical to not use strong language for what's unfolding. The looming extinction of the steelhead is not in isolation from other species. We are witnessing an unprecedented extinction crisis in BC and on a global scale. Each time a species goes extinct; this leads to the demise of others bound to that species in a complex ecological web. Unless we take bold and decisive action, the numbers of extinctions are likely to snowball in the coming years. Failing to steward a species as highly regarded and valued as the steelhead will have serious ecological, economic and social consequences. However the threats confronting the steelhead can be addressed if there's a will, as has been seen with other recovery successes, however we must take action quickly.

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC is a registered charity and works on behalf of more than 50 provincial and regional member organizations (100,000 individuals) to protect and promote responsible outdoor recreation. Specifically we work to encourage British Columbians to actively participate in outdoor recreational activities that will enhance their physical, social and mental well-being; advocate for and facilitate access to public lands and waters for outdoor recreation; build bridges between outdoor recreation groups; and encourage the safe and responsible use of the outdoors through education programs promoting safety and outdoor ethics.

Thank you in advance for considering our request.

Sincerely,



Louise Pedersen
Executive Director

Pc: Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change.