



November 20, 2017

Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1A 0A6

Minister LeBlanc:

We are writing to express our grave concern with the dire wild steelhead runs on the Thompson River and to strongly encourage Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to take the requisite steps to safeguard these endangered fish. Thompson River steelhead, arguably one of the most revered among all of British Columbia's world-renowned wild steelhead, are on the brink of extinction and will likely meet that undesirable end without your help.

From the moment a steelhead egg hatches to the time it returns to that same riverbed years later to spawn, these critically endangered fish are under constant threat – everything from predation to ocean acidification. After completing their years-long journey and surviving a litany of threats, for these imperiled fish to meet their demise as lethal bycatch at the hands of a low-value, anachronistic fishery is cruel and irresponsible. These fish are on the brink of ensuring the propagation of their threatened population and deserve that we exercise precaution and help ensure their spawning success.

We know that conservation-minded management is something DFO understands and appreciates given that it closed both commercial and First Nations fisheries to protect Chinook and sockeye salmon runs in the Fraser River. These two salmon species are imperiled, but their populations are far more abundant than wild steelhead. As a result, we do not understand why you would ensure these protections for Chinook and sockeye but not for the far less abundant, far more endangered wild steelhead.

While we respect the rights of First Nations and commercial fisheries to operate in the Fraser River, it is clear that the single most identifiable and manageable factor influencing steelhead decline is their indiscriminate net fishing. Gillnets are a non-selective fishing technique that has high rates of lethal bycatch, yet they are the primary harvesting method sanctioned by DFO to target co-migrating salmon. The sanctioning of this indiscriminate and deadly fishing practice that has the ability to deplete a significant portion of the returning steelhead population is irresponsible and is something that must change.

At this point late, it is too late to reverse the devastating decisions made in 2017 and improve the fortunes of the lowest wild steelhead return on record. However, we can ensure that we do not



repeat these mistakes in 2018 and that we take the necessary steps to facilitate the highest possible return of Thompson River wild steelhead.

To make that happen, we request the federal government to ban the use of gillnets and other non-selective fishing methods prior to the 2018 Thompson steelhead migration. Moreover, we encourage the government to work with First Nation and commercial salmon fisheries to help them develop and implement selective salmon fishing practices. We are confident that, if done well, this transition to selective gear will enable these fisheries to operate for a longer season, catch more fish, and dramatically reduce their impact on endangered wild steelhead.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Stumpf". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jonathan Stumpf
Chair of Board of Directors
Wild Steelhead Coalition

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "RICH SIMMS". The signature is written in a bold, blocky, sans-serif style.

Rich Simms
Founding Member/Past President
Wild Steelhead Coalition