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Wild Salmon Economy - Twyla Roscovitch

The Economy is generally the central theme around elections, which is why I wonder why nobody talks about the thousands of jobs the wild salmon economy creates—sports fishing, tourism etc. Maybe it's because we've forgotten about the bounty of wealth the wild salmon used to bring to the coast, the billions of dollars that pour into the province when they return in full force.

Proponents of salmon farming cite the number of jobs that industry creates, but they neglect to mention the immense economic drain the industry is having on BC.

A decline in our wild salmon began at the same time the farms appeared in narrow, shallow channels of the wild salmon migration routes and the onset of major disease outbreaks in these fish feedlots. For several years, the science has been out on the impacts of sealice. However, the more recent discovery of several serious viruses in BC salmon helps to further explain the 'mysterious decline' of our wild salmon.

BC farm salmon are now testing positive for three serious European viruses—the Infectious Salmon Anemia virus (European strain ISAv), Piscine Reovirus and Salmon Alpha virus. ISAv, the deadliest salmon virus worldwide, is an internationally reportable virus that closes borders.

Government is doing back-flips to come up with creative ways to deny the multiple positive test results for ISAv in BC salmon from various labs. It's easy to see the reason why: the Canadian Food Inspection Agency testified at the Cohen Commission that if ISAv is confirmed in BC it will close the border to the trade of farmed salmon.

As government protects corporate trade interests, our wild salmon bear the cost, yet again. By denying the existence of European viruses and allowing these feedlots to pour pathogens into the migration routes of the wild salmon, we are effectively killing our wild salmon economy. It's a bad trade and it makes no economic sense.

Besides losing our wild salmon economy, Canadians pay for this industry in many ways. When fish farmers are ordered to cull their diseased salmon, they are eligible for government compensation for the market value of those fish, including the costs related to the destruction and disposal of the fish. On the east coast of Canada, Cooke Aquaculture received over \$100 million in government compensation for their ISAv outbreaks. This virus was not a problem before salmon farming. ISAv was a benign virus that mutated into a deadly form once it got into

a crowded feedlot situation. Taxpayers pay for the deadly viral strains that the salmon farming industry is creating. Here in BC, we are also paying market value compensation to farms for their disease outbreaks. However we don't know how much as the public doesn't have access to figures. It's an example of public wealth being transferred into the hands of private corporations.

Ninety-eight percent of BC salmon feedlot industry is owned by three Norwegian multinational companies, while the wild salmon economy is comprised of hundreds of small businesses like saltwater and freshwater fishing charters, lodges, commercial fishing ventures, value-added salmon processing, first nation fishing, whale and bear-watching wilderness tourism.

Wild fish are worth eight times as much to the BC economy as Aquaculture (BC Stats). The wild fisheries employ five times as many people and pay out five times as much in wages. As farmed salmon production has risen dramatically since 1990, the number of jobs has not changed (1,700 jobs). This means as the BC environment has paid the price of absorbing the waste of million and millions of farm salmon, the people of BC have not been the ones to benefit.

The most sensible way forward is to transition the workers and get the industry off wild salmon migration routes. Every time there has been an opportunity to study the effects of removing salmon farms from wild salmon migration routes, the fish that go through farm-free routes show exceptional survival rates.

Our coast is a natural salmon-producing powerhouse without us having to lift a finger. This coast is covered with thousands of salmon rivers and streams that could be full of salmon, if they didn't have to contend with a multitude of amplified, exotic salmon-farm pathogens.

If we removed salmon feedlots from wild salmon migration routes we could have millions of wild salmon without having to run generators 24-hours a day, ship fish from southern oceans across the continent to feed them, use multitudes of lice control chemicals, dyes, antibiotics, and vaccines.

Why are we allowing our government to do this? If it is deemed in the public interest, the Province has the power to terminate the License of Occupation of each salmon feedlot on a wild salmon migration with 60-days notice and no compensation. It is that easy to fix this.

This is something we should be asking our political candidates to do in this election. ☞

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