



April 2006

News update for residents

Welcome to the first issue of *Recovery Update*, a newsletter for residents of Squamish and nearby communities describing the recovery work underway by CN and its partners on the Cheakamus River. New information is becoming available, and our intention is to share with residents the ongoing recovery plans that will bring the river system back to its pre-spill state. Stay tuned for more updates in future.

State of the river

CN is fully committed to restoring the Cheakamus River to its pre-spill condition. That recovery is well underway. The river and its tributaries were declared safe for human and recreation use within days of the spill on Aug. 5, 2005. There are no residual effects from the spill and no human health impacts. Testing last summer showed no impacts to local well water.

Aquatic life has returned to the river, and fish stocks are slowly rebuilding. The rotary screw traps and electrofishing/trapping studies show coho, pink, chinook, stickleback, lamprey, and rainbow trout/steelhead juveniles present. Adult steelhead are currently being enumerated on the river while chum salmon spawners over the winter were within typical population ranges. Bottom dwelling organisms, or benthic invertebrates, are an important fish food source and are present.

State of fish populations

Some residents have expressed concerns about how certain fish populations were affected by the chemical spill into the Cheakamus last summer. Different fish species were impacted in different ways by the spill. Here is a summary:

Chinook salmon: 25% of juveniles from the 2004 spawning population may have been affected, as were 50% of the 2005 spawning population. For **chum salmon**, no juveniles were affected nor was the 2005 spawning population. For **pinks**, juveniles were not affected but 3 - 10% of the 2005 spawning population was affected. For coho salmon, the 2005 spawning population was not affected, but 50% of juveniles from 2004 spawners were estimated to have been affected.

Most severely impacted were steelhead – 70 to 90% of mainstream juveniles from 2003 to 2005 spawners were affected. The 2006-2007 steelhead spawning populations were not affected.

Other species on the affected list include Dolly Varden/ bull trout, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, lamprey (2 species), sculpin and sticklebacks.

CN recovery programs underway

CN has a number of programs underway to fund fish recovery and habitat enhancement programs on the Cheakamus. These include:

Cheekye Bridge Rehabilitation - CN is preparing to modify a concrete apron at the base of its rail bridge to improve fish access. Work is expected to be done this summer.

Mamquam Blind Channel– CN is investigating the feasibility of installing a culvert beneath the yard to connect the Central Channel to Wilson Slough. If feasible, this project would provide better access for fish to estuarine rearing habitat.

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North Vancouver Outdoor School - CN is examining proposed projects at the NVOS to determine applicability with target species and anticipates undertaking some work in 2006 and future years. CN will be looking at other opportunities NVOS has for projects such as new channel developments targeting chinook and steelhead and potential additions of LWD.

Fish Habitat structures - CN has invited proposals to undertake a risk analysis and feasibility study for the installation of fish habitat structures in the Cheakamus mainstem. The study will examine risks versus benefits and identify suitable areas.

Fertilization - CN is actively reviewing past water quality studies to determine the nutrient status of the Cheakamus River and the anticipated biological benefit of undertaking test fertilization studies.

CN Funding Program - CN is also looking at a partnership arrangement with existing funding programs to provide a funding source for groups and agencies to submit projects targeting the restoration of the Cheakamus. This initiative would likely begin in 2007.

CN to comply with Ministry decision

Although CN supports modified short-term fish culture options for steelhead, it will comply with the decision of the BC Ministry of Environment in favour of natural recovery for steelhead in the Cheakamus River.

Ministry experts have given assurances that a natural recovery will occur much quicker than originally believed. However, to ensure the river returns to its pre-spill state as quickly as possible, CN will fund a number of habitat enhancement projects.

Committee oversees recovery plan

Shortly after the August 2005 derailment, a group was formed to develop restoration strategies to return the river to its pre-spill state.

Known as the Cheakamus Ecosystem Recovery Technical Committee (CERTC), this group has met monthly to review expert advice and provide recommendations to a Steering Committee. It is made up of representatives from CN, District of Squamish, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, BC Ministry of Environment, and Squamish Nation. More information on the committee structure is available on its official website: www.certc.ca

Stakeholder Team holds second meeting

Representatives from interested organizations and others with local knowledge and experience with the Cheakamus River will attend their second official meeting as members of the Cheakamus Stakeholder Team on April 27.

This new advisory group provides input into the programs that are being developed to monitor and restore the Cheakamus ecosystem. They will help communicate comments and recommendations from interested parties to the Technical Committee. The Team will also receive updates on CERTC activities as the information becomes available. First meeting of the Team was March 25.

Open house planned for summer

A third community meeting is planned for this summer, at which time residents can again question biologists and other experts on the progress of the recovery and next steps.

In March, some 175 local residents attended an open house at the Squamish Adventure Centre hosted by the CERTC. Visitors talked to committee members and other experts on the work done to assess the impact of the spill, and review plans for river recovery.

Questions or comments?

Readers who have questions or comments about the Cheakamus recovery are encouraged to send their comments or questions via email to: comments@certc.ca. Questions and answers of general interest will be posted on the website.