



PACIFIC FISHERIES RESOURCE CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Conseil pour la conservation des ressources halieutiques du pacifique

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO WILD SALMON IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

What the Council Heard: North Coast Public Meetings
March 6–8, 2007

MARCH 2008

PREPARED FOR
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1. THE PFRCC'S APPROACH TO DISCUSSING 'WHAT'S HAPPENING TO WILD SALMON IN YOUR COMMUNITY?'

1.1 BACKGROUND

Since its inception, the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC) has sought to hear from communities, First Nations, commercial and recreational fishing interests, stewards and other interested groups and individuals around British Columbia on the state of wild Pacific salmon and their habitat. Communities of place and interest have a wealth of knowledge, with local and regional perspectives that are critical to understanding and managing issues relating to wild salmon. Council members have recognized the value of such dialogues. The knowledge thus derived is invaluable in helping the PFRCC to develop strategic work plans that address issues of interest and concern for B.C.'s wild salmon stocks, and reports that advise the federal and provincial Fisheries Ministers and the public on the state of wild Pacific salmon stocks and habitat.

1.2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT

The North Coast meetings represented the third PFRCC regional tour so far in an ongoing series that seeks to share information with communities and to receive their knowledge and views on the state of wild Pacific salmon and their habitat. The current series began with a tour of Vancouver Island during March 2006, with public meetings in Port Hardy, Campbell River, Duncan and Port Alberni. A visit to the BC Interior in October 2006 included public meetings in Penticton and Kamloops. The March 6-8, 2007 North Coast tour included public meetings in Smithers, Terrace and Prince Rupert. Times and venues for the public meetings were promoted through local contacts and groups, e-mail, posters, media advisory and press releases. PFRCC will continue its community meetings at various locations in BC during 2008 and beyond.

The goals of PFRCC's 2006-08 community meetings are to:

- Share information on natural and human influences on wild salmon;
- Gather local knowledge; and
- Compile information and ideas to help PFRCC develop and provide advice to government and the public and to help shape future Council activities.

1.3 MEETING FORMAT

Agendas for these public meetings are designed to provide a variety of opportunities for comment and discussion. The formal portion of each public meeting is preceded by an hour-long open house, with poster presentations and opportunity for informal one-on-one discussion with PFRCC members and staff.

The formal meeting begins with introductions and a very brief PFRCC presentation highlighting issues relating to wild salmon, including climate change, land and water use, and a sampling of known local salmon stock and habitat issues. Participants are then invited to comment on local issues, with a PFRCC reporter on hand to record and synthesize this feedback. Council members moderate this portion of the meeting to encourage participation and ensure a fair opportunity for any participant who wishes a chance to speak.

1. THE PFRCC'S APPROACH TO DISCUSSING 'WHAT'S HAPPENING TO WILD SALMON IN YOUR COMMUNITY?'

Participants are then invited to work in groups, using large table maps to identify areas of interest, record comments and prioritize local wild salmon issues and solutions. PFRCC council members and staff facilitate table discussions and each group is invited to briefly report back. The information recorded on the table maps is later collated.

Comment sheets provide further opportunity to address the following four key questions and to add further remarks:

1. How are wild salmon stocks doing in your area relative to other parts of the coast?
2. How are changes in the marine and freshwater environments affecting salmon stocks in your area? (e.g., increases in water temperatures, stream and river flows, salinity, etc.)?
3. What is the impact of changes in water use and land use on salmon stocks and their habitat?
4. What does this mean for salmon management? What needs to be done to adapt to these changes?

Finally, participants are also invited to provide additional comments directly to the Council recorder, to Council members and staff present and/or to provide written or e-mail submissions to address issues and concerns not covered in the public meetings.

Council members have found these discussions to be candid and valuable. This report provides a summary of the feedback captured at the North Coast meetings, highlighting many of the important ideas and themes that were heard.

2. SYNOPSIS OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

The following summarizes participation and feedback from the three North Coast community meetings in Smithers, Terrace and Prince Rupert.

2.1 PARTICIPATION

- Smithers, March 6, 2007: 37 participants
- Terrace, March 7, 2007: 61 participants
- Prince Rupert, March 8, 2007: 55 participants

The three meetings drew interest and participation from a variety of groups and individuals (Table 1). Relative to public meetings on Vancouver Island and the BC Interior, there was significantly higher representation at all three meetings from individuals and organizations concerned about the impacts of industrial development and aquaculture on regional wild salmon stocks, habitat and fisheries. Meetings in Smithers and Terrace drew relatively greater participation from First Nations and the sport fishing sector, while Prince Rupert heard from more commercial fishing interests.

TABLE 1. Identified affiliation (%) of community participants in North Coast meetings (some participants did not record their affiliation; some also recorded multiple affiliations).

Affiliation	Smithers %	Terrace %	Prince Rupert %
Salmon stewardship	5%	3%	4%
Hatchery	3%	3%	
First Nation	8%	11%	5%
Sport fishing	14%	7%	7%
Commercial fishing	8%	5%	20%
Environment/conservation	14%	3%	9%
Community group	8%	5%	
Prov / Fed / Local government	5%	5%	2%
Business/industry		2%	
Elected / political officials	3%	2%	5%
Public		2%	7%
Media	3%	2%	3%
Other	3%		

2.2 EVALUATION OF THE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

In addition to completing comment forms, all participants were strongly encouraged to complete an evaluation form. Ten evaluation forms were submitted for the Smithers meeting, along with 28 for Terrace and 29 for Prince Rupert. On average, participants rated all three meetings as Satisfactory to Very Good overall. Most also reported that the agenda and purpose of the meeting were clear (56 of 60 responses), although some felt there could have been more clarity about next steps and how the information provided would be put to use. Meeting aspects that received the highest satisfaction ratings were the discussion and the opportunity to share local knowledge and concerns (Satisfactory to Very Good, on average). Poster displays received the lowest ranking (just Satisfactory, on average). The most frequent positive comment was that the meeting was informative (39 votes); the most frequent negative comment was that it was too short (9 votes).

Some participants said they would have preferred a more in-depth or less simplistic Council presentation and/or more time for community input. However, several also expressed appreciation for a format that focused most available time on listening to participant input. Suggestions included the need to encourage broader representation at such meetings, such as individuals representing commerce and industry, local government and other Ministries whose mandates affect wild salmon.

2.3 HIGH PRIORITIES ISSUES FOR COMMUNITIES

Comments from communities on local salmon stocks and habitats were compiled into tables and maps as a summary of all dialogue heard by PFRCC (Appendix I, Tables A1-A and A1-B, Maps A1-A and A1-B). Comments on local and regional salmon stock and habitat issues were assigned a low, medium and high level of priority. Priorities were set based on:

1. Frequency with which comments were heard;
2. Priority assigned by participants themselves; and
3. Lack of disagreement/evidence of consensus

High priority issues reflect high levels of expressed concern, a status for salmon stocks and habitats which is seen as poor relative to historic levels, and/or the perception that management and information are insufficient to address serious risks. Medium priority issues reflect some public concern that salmon stocks and habitats need attention, that stock and habitat status are declining or at risk and that there may be insufficient information or resources to fully understand and address the issue. Low priority issues reflect comments that problems in salmon stocks and habitats exist, but that the issues are being addressed or else do not pose significant risks at this time.

The council heard the following high priority comments during community meetings.

SMITHERS

Public feedback in Smithers suggested that industrial development (especially plans for mining and coal bed methane development) and aquaculture are very high priority issues. Concerns include pollution and impacts on water quality, habitat and local salmon populations, as well as the resulting impacts on resource-dependent communities and especially First Nations. Many participants voiced concern about the failure to consider cumulative impacts of a massive proposed expansion in industrial development, along with shipping, pipelines and rail traffic, plus logging, agriculture, mixed stock fishing, etc. Many also felt that neither the Province nor

2. SYNOPSIS OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

DFO were living up to obligations to manage risks from industrial development in ways consistent with the desire to conserve wild salmon populations. Particular concern was expressed about proposed coal bed methane development and other industrial development in the Telkwa and "Sacred Headwaters" regions.

A number of participants also expressed concern about significant cutbacks in monitoring and assessment of wild salmon populations and inadequate support for local stewardship.

On stock status, most concerns focused on declining Chinook stocks in the upper Skeena tributaries, such as the Morice, Bear and Bulkley Rivers. Several also reported some chum, coho, pinks and/or sockeye runs being down in the smaller systems, but in general most felt that stocks overall were doing quite well, apart from Morice Chinook. Concern was also voiced over commercial fishing impacts on steelhead and Provincial policies that permit tagging but not enumeration of returning steelhead.

TERRACE

Feedback in Terrace indicated that cutbacks leading to inadequate stock assessment, and impacts associated with commercial and recreational fisheries and logging practices were high priorities. Impacts of proposed development, including aquaculture, mining, pipelines, oil and gas and increased shipping traffic were also repeatedly cited as high priority concerns.

Recreational tidal water catch limits and fishing practices (coho fishing derby, lodges, guided helicopter fishing in the headwaters, back trolling for Chinook) were cited as concerns, along with impacts of commercial mixed stock fishing on steelhead in particular, and inadequate enforcement. Many speakers conveyed concerns about growing pressures on local resources for the benefit of outsiders, with local communities and especially resource-dependent First Nations paying the price. Frustration was expressed that no one was listening to local voices and that political will was lacking to address these concerns. A recurring theme was the failure of governments to consider the total capacity of river systems and address cumulative impacts of all these pressures, especially in context of added risks posed by climate change.

Again, comments indicated participants viewed current stock status for most populations as mostly good, with some exceptions. Several Skeena sockeye stocks are down, including Kitwanga and Lakelse sockeye, which was identified as the third most endangered. Declining populations in Lakelse Lake and surrounding creeks was blamed on logging and habitat disturbance. Some problems were also noted for pink and chum, along with a sharp decline in steelhead in Kitimat.

PRINCE RUPERT

Feedback in Prince Rupert reflected many of the same high priority concerns, including plans for aquaculture, port/shipping expansion, oil & gas and other large-scale industrial development, as well as ongoing impacts from logging. Once again, participants emphasized that current processes do not consider or address the cumulative impacts of such developments, plus the new pressures and uncertainty posed by climate change. Once again, there was also much concern about all this happening in the context of declining ability to monitor and assess stocks and to understand what is happening in the natural environment.

Participants in Prince Rupert also voiced many concerns about fisheries management, management policies and approaches, and the ability to manage fisheries in general. Several again complained that the Coho fishing derby held the previous summer was inappropriate, after so much effort was put into rebuilding coho stocks.

Again, many participants also expressed concern that local voices weren't being heard and that local resources were being "sold out". There were appeals for less emphasis on money, more effort to manage risks, a more

2. SYNOPSIS OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

balanced, holistic approach to management and development that is sustainable, consistent with wild salmon conservation and more focused on benefits to local communities.

Several participants also expressed concern about growing predation from whales, seals and sea lions. A common theme underlying many comments was concern about the declining commercial fishery and the resulting impact on dependent communities like Prince Rupert. Some felt that commercial fishermen were being unfairly blamed and penalized for problems caused by other factors, such as upstream logging impacts.

Again, feedback in Prince Rupert reflected a general sense that most stocks were doing well relative to other parts of the province. The rebuilding of coho was cited as a success story, though there were some concerns about commercial impacts on summer-run coho. Kitwanga sockeye recovery was cited as another positive initiative, with returns back up to 5,000 despite run timing that coincides with the commercial fishery on enhanced Babine sockeye. Declining Lakelse sockeye was again noted as a key concern.

2.4 IMPORTANT ISSUES RELATING TO WILD SALMON POPULATIONS

Issues of importance that participants reported as affecting or potentially affecting regional wild salmon populations can be summarized under the following key themes:

- **Industrial development:** Concern about the risks posed by numerous and/or large-scale industrial development proposals for the region was heard repeatedly in each of the three communities. Concerns included impacts of mining, oil and gas development (including offshore oil and gas and coal bed methane), new pipelines, port development, shipping/tanker traffic and expansion of rail traffic. Comments reflected a lack of confidence in government's ability and will to regulate and manage risks, concern about failures to consider the views of local communities and First Nations, incompatibility of plans with conservation of wild salmon populations, and a perceived need for more sustainable development and more holistic, balanced approaches.
- **Fish farming:** Participant comments were almost universally opposed to open net pen fish farming, and it was noted that opinion polls show very high regional opposition to salmon aquaculture. One participant however noted that resource-dependent First Nations communities might have no other choice, if access to traditional fisheries continues to be reduced.
- **Logging:** Logging impacts on salmon habitat, stream hydrology and water quality were cited as concerns, along with management approaches that emphasize self-regulation by the industry. Participants said logging impacts were found to be a key contributing factor in placing populations such as Lakelse sockeye at risk.
- **Salmon fisheries:** Most concerns focused on impacts of fishing practices seen as exploitative, irresponsible or overly intensive, in both the commercial and recreational fisheries. Concerns relating to commercial fisheries included mixed stock fishing impacts on weak stocks; greater efficiency of commercial fleets and new pressures from boats moving north; impacts of mesh size on population genetics; and impacts of troll and seine fishing. Recreational fishing issues included tidal water limits, coho fishing derby, expansion of guided and lodge fishing, helicopter fishing in upper tributaries and practices like back trolling for Chinook. There were also concerns over management of the commercial fishery and reduced commercial fishing opportunities, with resulting impacts on dependent communities like Prince Rupert and many First Nations. Nisga'a fisheries management was cited as a successful model.

2. SYNOPSIS OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

- **Cumulative impacts:** This was a recurring theme, with many participants concerned that existing approaches to managing fisheries and development are inadequate in that they consider impacts of particular activities too narrowly, with no consideration of cumulative impacts, upstream/downstream impacts and/or total river capacity.
- **Funding:** Many participants voiced concern about reduced funding for local monitoring, assessment and stewardship activities, and reduced resources for science in general. There was concern about a reduced ability to identify and understand potential problems at a time when wild salmon populations face growing risks.
- **Climate change:** A number of participants also noted climate change as a significant new challenge that would enhance uncertainty and risk in efforts to manage and conserve wild salmon.
- **Local control:** Many participants saw community stewardship and collaborative, watershed-based community management as critical to addressing challenges and conserving wild salmon populations over the long term. However, a recurring theme was a sense of frustration that local voices were not being heard and that local knowledge and local advice was not being considered in decision-making.
- **Governments' ability to protect salmon:** Many participants expressed the view that both the Provincial and Federal governments lacked the political will and/or capacity to successfully manage development and risks to wild salmon. DFO's Environmental Protection Modernization Process, for example, was perceived to be about lessening protection to facilitate development. Provincial forestry management and the environmental assessment process were other areas of concern.
- **Ecosystems:** A number of participants expressed concern about the need for better understanding of ecosystems. One participant stressed the complex and dynamic nature of the Skeena ecosystem, while others noted the need to study the marine environment and for more consideration of biodiversity. Concerns about ecosystem imbalance were also reflected in comments about unusual numbers of whales, seals and sea lions and associated predation impacts.
- **Stock status:** In general, most participants felt that most regional stocks were doing relatively well, compared to elsewhere in the Province. Areas of particular concern included declining Chinook returns to upper Skeena tributaries like the Morice; some Skeena sockeye stocks, particularly Lakelse Lake sockeye; and steelhead.

2.5 LOCAL SOLUTIONS

The council also heard examples of success, suggested solutions and potential approaches for better management of wild salmon and their habitat. Below are listed the key themes.

- **Local control:** One of the strongest recurring themes in all three communities was an appeal for more local control of resource management for the long-term benefit of local communities. Proposals included collaborative watershed management approaches that include all stakeholders, including industry, forestry, etc. Models included the North Coast Fisheries Council established under the Fisheries Renewal program and an initiative in which 92 First Nations came together to manage issues on the Yukon River. Nisga'a fisheries management was also cited as a very successful example. Many participants felt that local voices were not being heard in fisheries management and especially in regional development planning, and that greater local control was the key to managing development and resources sustainably for the long-term benefit of local communities.

2. SYNOPSIS OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

- **Collaboration:** Many participants called for greater collaboration among local interests that have traditionally competed with each other. Several cited examples of successful collaborative efforts, such as an initiative involving the Wetsu'wet'en, a local hatchery and DFO to restore a local stock. A similar collaborative effort that was cited as a successful model was the Lakelse sockeye recovery initiative.
- **Holistic approaches:** This theme was restated in various ways, with appeals for more balanced or holistic approaches to development planning and fisheries management, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and ecosystem/watershed approaches. Participants stressed the need to develop a better understanding of complex ecosystems, particularly in the context of new challenges from development and climate change. Some urged more emphasis on biodiversity and consideration of salmon as an indicator of broader ecosystem health, not just a resource. There were also numerous calls for new approaches to managing development and fisheries impacts on wild populations that would consider upstream/downstream and cumulative impacts. For example, the Headwaters Initiative, a community-based effort, is currently mapping proposed developments in the region to highlight cumulative impacts.
- **Improved monitoring/assessment:** All communities expressed concern about cutbacks and urged more resources to support stock assessment and monitoring, along with more emphasis on science and local community stewardship. Several challenged Provincial policies that permit tagging, but not enumeration, of steelhead. Participants argued that without better monitoring and assessment, it will be impossible to manage salmon sustainably at a time when threats to wild populations in the region are increasing significantly.
- **Fisheries practices:** A number of participants were concerned about conservation impacts of both recreational and commercial fisheries and fishing practices and called for more selective, responsible and sustainable approaches. Commercial fishing representatives said great strides had been made in avoiding weak stocks and several expressed the view that the commercial fishing sector was being unfairly blamed and penalized for impacts of logging and development. Participants also called for better enforcement.
- **Climate issues:** A number of participants commented on climate change impacts as introducing new risks to salmon populations and greater uncertainty to management. Participants saw a need for more assessment, more understanding of complex ecosystems and more precautionary approaches that consider the combined or cumulative risks to wild stocks and habitat.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

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The PFRCC has benefited from listening to comments and perspectives on local salmon issues during our meetings. The Council appreciates the passion and ideas that communities have shared and the issues we face in maintaining healthy salmon stocks and habitats. The PFRCC will continue this discussion with other communities across B.C. in support of healthy salmon populations and high quality habitat, and will share the information obtained with federal and provincial fisheries ministers and with the public.

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

A summary of public comments received during North Coast meetings in Smithers, Terrace and Prince Rupert. Tables and mapped comments represent public comment recorded on PFRCC community maps.

Comments on local and regional salmon stock and habitat issues were assigned a low, medium and high level of priority. Priorities were set based on:

1. Frequency with which comments were heard;
2. Priority assigned by participants themselves; and
3. Lack of disagreement/evidence of consensus.

High priority issues reflect high levels of expressed concern, a status for salmon stocks and habitats which is seen as poor relative to historic levels, and/or the perception that management and information are insufficient to address serious risks.

Medium priority issues reflect some public concern that salmon stocks and habitats need attention, that stock and habitat status are declining or at risk and that there may be insufficient information or resources to fully understand and address the issue.

Low priority issues reflect comments that problems in salmon stocks and habitats exist, but that the issues are being addressed or else do not pose significant risks at this time.

Summary of comments, assigned priority, and numbered maps for items shared in (A) Smithers and Terrace and (B) Prince Rupert.

TABLE A1-A. Smithers and Terrace public comments, March 6 and 7, 2007.

Map #	Priority	Public Concern
1	Medium	Overcrowded angler docks need to be relieved by adding more boat launchers or by re-opening previous angler sites (i.e., Exchamsika River)
2	High	Negative impacts of increased numbers of fish farms on salmon and salmon habitat (i.e., spread of sea lice, polluted waters)
3	High	Impacts of proposed pipeline development on salmon-bearing streams (i.e., CBM Pembina and Enbridge pipelines)
4	Low	Near Tahsta Lake—closure of well-managed forestry campsites
5	Low	Houston pump—impact of garbage from Smithers being dumped near rivers
6	High	Unregulated, out-of-control commercial fisheries impact on salmon stocks, especially coho
7	Medium	Low steelhead numbers
8	Low	Hecate Strait—oil/gas development impacts on salmon stocks
9	Low	Cumulative impacts of chemicals from human activities (i.e., pesticides, industrial waste) entering oceans
10	Medium	Increased CN traffic to port and poor derailment record; needs improved track maintenance
11	High	Smithers—Blue Pearl molybdenum mine releasing discharge (i.e., Arsenic) into Bulkley River
12	Medium	Copper mining and tailing pond discharge into salmon-bearing streams
13	Low	Skeena River—cumulative impacts of difference mining activities on water characteristics
14	High	Bulkley River—impacts of agriculture (i.e., cattle in rivers, pesticide discharge into rivers, habitat loss) on rivers
15	Low	Smithers—sewage leaching from old mills and logging practices into salmon-bearing streams
16	Medium	Increase in diseased salmon (i.e., sea lice, cysts), especially coho and pink
17	High	Increase in coal bed development and coal bed methane
18	High	Salmon stock management issues, especially coho, chinook and sockeye; need to use tags to track source of salmon fishery
19	Medium	Impact of unregulated sport and aboriginal fisheries on salmon stocks
20	Medium	Impacts of logging on river characteristics (i.e., runoff times, riparian zones)
21	Low	Houston—contamination of country foods (i.e., heavy metals, endocrine-disrupting chemicals)

MAP A1-A. Summary of comments and priorities heard by the PFRCC in Smithers, March 6, 2007 and Terrace, March 7, 2007.

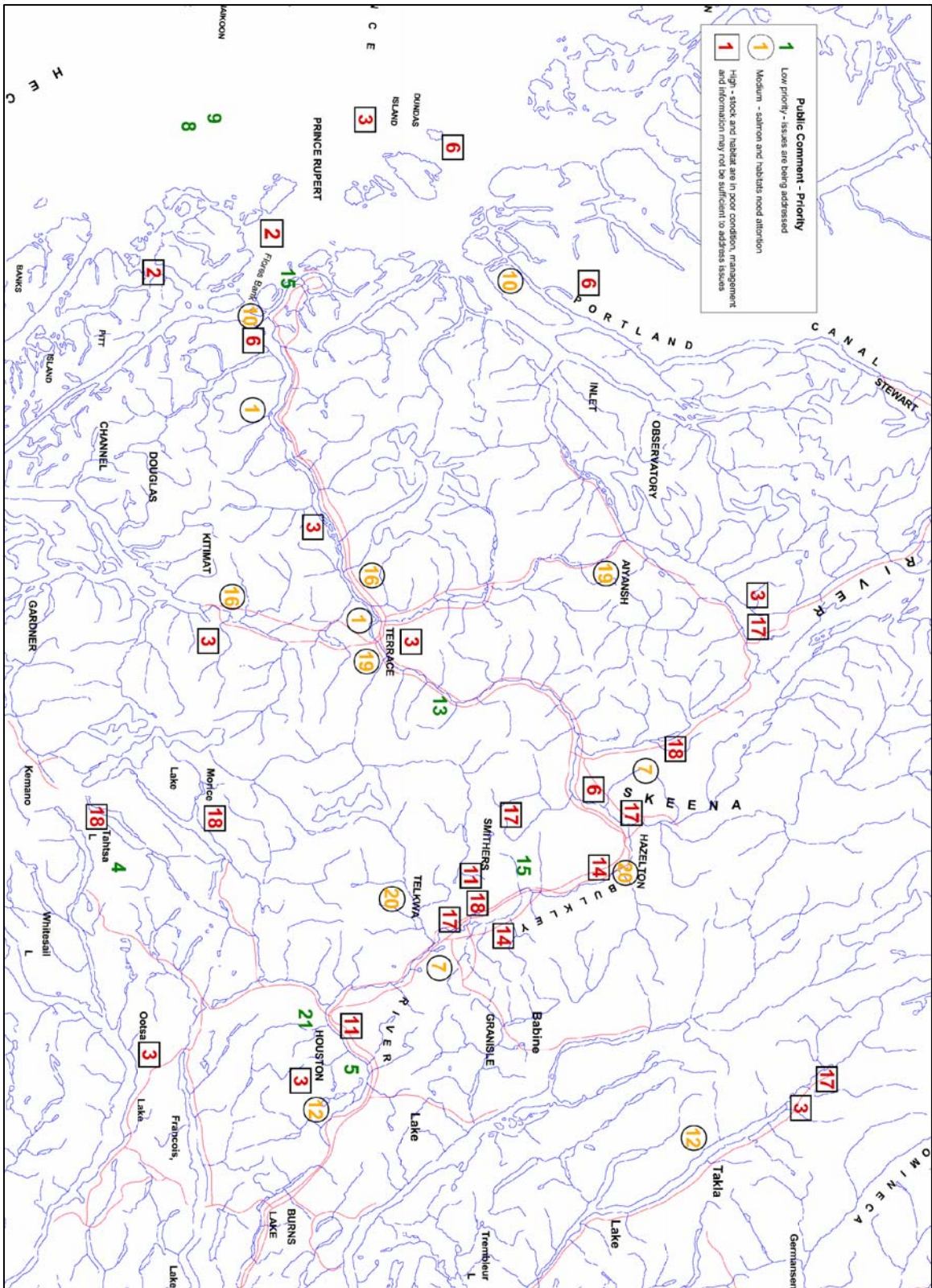
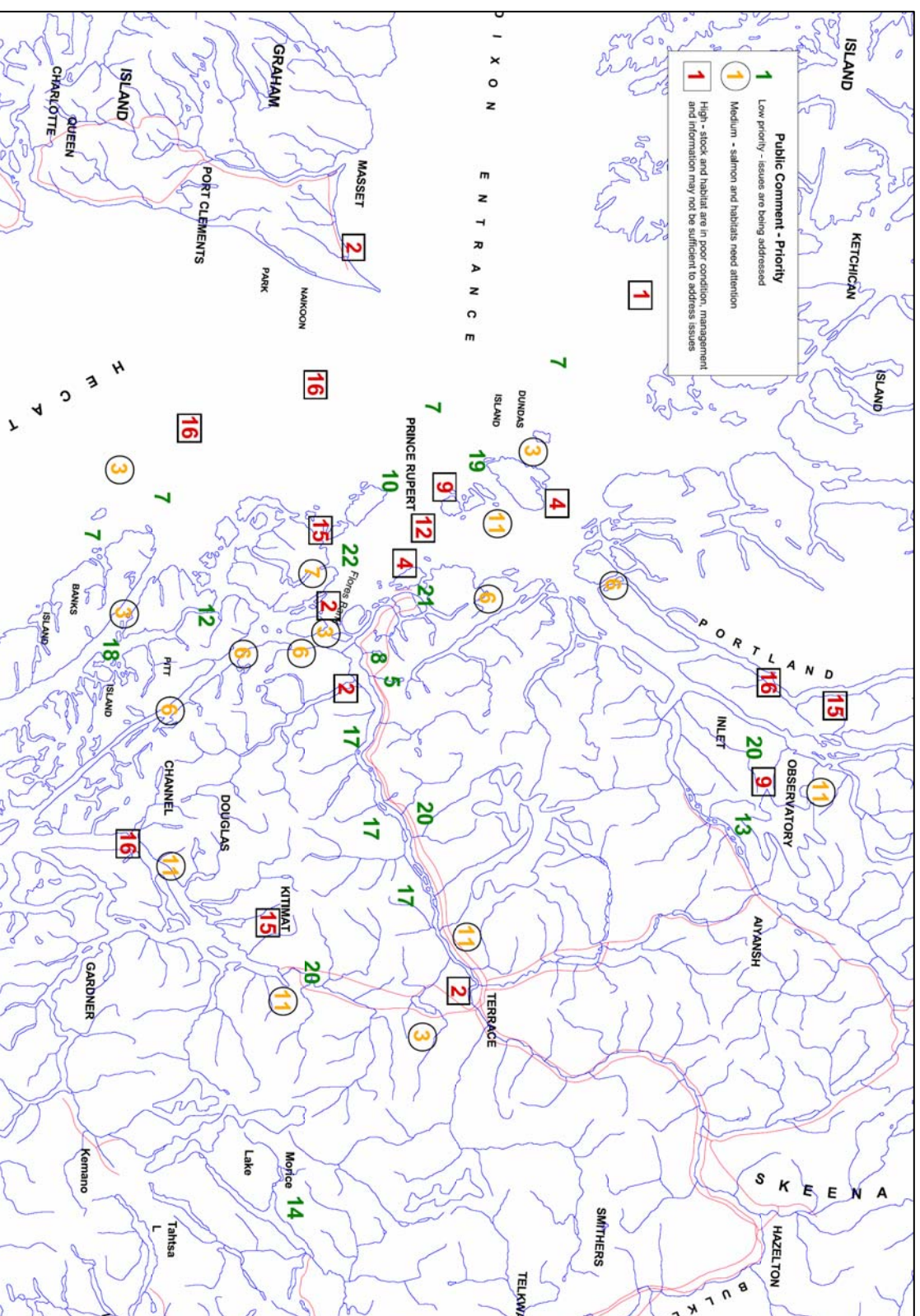


TABLE A1-B. Prince Rupert comments, March 8, 2007.

Map #	Priority	Public Concern
1	High	Lack of collaborative management of salmon fisheries between the BC and Alaskan governments
2	High	Significant increase in sea lion population size impacts salmon stocks
3	Medium	Low salmon stocks (i.e., coho, sockeye, pink), especially at the juvenile stage; need to make use of local management models (e.g., Alaska's management model) to manage stocks effectively
4	High	Limitations need to be set on sport and aboriginal fisheries, especially halibut and coho
5	Low	Skeena River mouth—impacts of ATV use around salmon-bearing streams
6	Medium	Lack of fish-bearing stream classification and mapping along coast
7	Medium	Need for creating a thorough inventory of salmon stocks through monitoring programs along coast and in salmon spawning streams
8	Low	Skeena River mouth—impacts of high numbers of sport fishers in single area; need to create more fishing areas by stocking lakes
9	High	Need for more hatcheries and more funds for existing hatcheries
10	Low	Prince Rupert—lack of enforcement of salmon habitat regulations impacts on salmon stocks
11	Medium	Degraded salmon-bearing streams need to be enhanced (e.g., Skeena River)
12	High	Impacts of open net pen fish farms on wild salmon stocks; need to be replaced by land-based fish farms
13	Low	Naikon Park—need to establish local research facilities
14	Low	Morice Lake—potential pipeline development impacts on juvenile salmon rearing habitat
15	High	Port developments impact juvenile salmon rearing habitats
16	High	Increased vessel (e.g., cruise ships, tankers) traffic impacts on juvenile salmon rearing habitat
17	Low	Skeena River—highway/rail corridors impacts on juvenile salmon rearing habitat
18	Low	Pitt Island and Banks Island—proposed oil/gas and wind farm developments impacts to wildlife and important salmon spawning streams
19	Low	Dundas Island—corridor study on euchalon showed the importance of euchalon as a food source to salmon; need to protect euchalon habitats
20	Low	Lack of logging buffers near salmon-bearing streams impacts stream characteristics (i.e., runoff)
21	Low	Prince Rupert—minimize the commercial fishing of by-catch steelhead and coho; stocks are decreasing
22	Low	Prince Rupert—commercial drag fishing impacts inshore water habitats

MAP A1-B. Summary of comments and priorities heard by the PFRCC in Prince Rupert, March 8, 2007.





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