



January 2010: Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC) Advisory on the implementation of Canada's 2005 Wild Salmon Policy

Background

The PFRCC

The Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC) was established in 1998 to provide advice to the Governments of Canada and British Columbia and to the public on matters dealing with the conservation of Pacific salmon and steelhead populations and their freshwater and ocean habitat.

Canada's Wild Salmon Policy

In 2005, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) formally adopted its Wild Salmon Policy (WSP), a significant achievement that followed several early drafts and many years of extensive discussion, consultation and revision. The policy seeks to implement a significant new approach to conservation of wild Pacific salmon, representing a commitment by DFO to "maintain healthy and diverse populations of salmon that will support sustainable fisheries now, and meet the needs of future generations." The policy specifies clear conservation objectives and outlines six key strategies intended to ensure that choices about salmon conservation would reflect societal values and that conservation of salmon and their habitat would be the first priority in resource management. To date, at least some progress has been achieved on implementing each of the six strategies, although none has yet been fully implemented. The six strategies are:

- Strategy 1: Standardized monitoring of Wild Salmon Status
- Strategy 2: Assessment of Habitat Status
- Strategy 3: Inclusion of Ecosystem Values and Monitoring
- Strategy 4: Integrated Strategic Planning
- Strategy 5: Annual Program Delivery
- Strategy 6: Performance Review

Action Step 6.2 of Strategy 6 states: "*An independent review of the success of the WSP in achieving its broad goals and objectives will be conducted within 5 years of its adoption. On the basis of the review, the implementation of the policy will be revised to address shortcomings that may be reducing its effectiveness.*"

This year marks five years since the formal adoption of the WSP and therefore represents an important milestone in assessing progress in implementation and/or identifying shortcomings or obstacles to full and effective implementation.

PFRCC's role in developing and implementing the WSP

Since its inception, the PFRCC has highlighted the importance of having a clear and effective Wild Salmon Policy and has played a leading role in providing information and independent advice to support the development and implementation of such a policy. PFRCC's 2003 aquaculture advisory, for example, urged the government of Canada to "proceed immediately to formulate and implement a comprehensive wild salmon policy that explicitly states that wild salmon will be given priority in government decision-making." Council recommendations in 2000 and 2005 helped guide revisions to early drafts of the proposed policy. One of seven recommendations in

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Council's 2005 advisory on the draft WSP stressed the need for regular, independent audits assessing the effectiveness of policy implementation, conducted by a body external to DFO. Advice on overcoming obstacles to WSP implementation has been a key feature of almost every PFRCC annual report.

In 2005, Council published a major report offering a cost-effective approach to implementing the habitat and ecosystem components of the WSP. The report outlined an eight-step adaptive framework for monitoring the status of salmon habitat, assessing threats, invoking management actions to respond to threats and monitoring the effectiveness of those actions. The report also reiterated another key theme that PFRCC has consistently emphasized: DFO needs more resources to properly implement policies and strategies intended to conserve wild salmon populations in accordance with the goals of the WSP.

At DFO's request, in 2009 the PFRCC commissioned a report summarizing the advice of conservation groups on a recommended framework for undertaking an independent evaluation of WSP implementation, as required in 2010 under Strategy 6.

In 2009, the PFRCC also played a leading role in advancing an innovative new model for wild salmon conservation, by developing recommendations for applying the concept of wild salmon strongholds in Canada. In doing so, Council noted that this approach could support and reinforce efforts to implement the WSP by providing a strategic approach to identifying and maintaining strong and healthy salmon stocks, protecting key habitats, supporting assessment and monitoring efforts, and by offering new models for coordination, information exchange and consensus-based planning by local stakeholders.

Council recommendations on WSP implementation

In 2010, DFO is obligated to undertake an independent evaluation of the success of the WSP in achieving its broad goals and objectives, and, based on the results of that review, to revise the WSP implementation plan if necessary to address identified shortcomings that may be reducing its effectiveness.

Over the past year, the Council has received feedback from various stakeholders regarding both the upcoming evaluation as well as the implementation of the WSP more generally and believes that this is an opportune time to put forward the following recommendations:

1. That the independent evaluation be conducted in a thorough and inclusive manner that adequately considers all views and perspectives.
2. If DFO is to move ahead and fully implement the WSP, additional resources over and above current levels of funding will be required.
3. Adequate funding is also needed to undertake needed assessment work in both the marine (including near shore and open ocean) and freshwater environments. There is also a clear need to undertake additional research in marine settings. For example, there is currently no set of Fraser sockeye-specific parameters that are consistently monitored in the Georgia Strait.
4. Identifying important salmon habitat is critical to efforts to conserve wild salmon populations. While it is recognized that government may not have the resources at present to identify all key habitats, there are other ways to advance and support progress, such as supporting partnerships to identify and develop wild salmon strongholds as was recently carried out along the Harrison River.