

How to get fish back in Coquitlam River?

With Hydro grant, WWSS aims to study watershed

By Diane Strandberg
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Finding the best way to bring the once-plentiful sockeye salmon back to the Coquitlam River is the goal of a project being funded by BC Hydro's Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program.

Watershed Watch Salmon Society's Craig Orr said his group wants to determine if a hatchery would be necessary to augment the run, which now amounts to a handful of returning fish, or whether a fish ladder to get smolts out of the Coquitlam reservoir would be enough for a healthy run. With \$42,800 in grants, his group will hire a consultant to study the matter.

"The real problem that we have is getting smolts [young salmon] out of the system because the structures aren't really conducive and only a handful of smolts exit," Orr said.



"The question is, do we have to put in a hatchery or not?" he said, acknowledging that a hatchery comes with its own set of issues, such as cost and sustainability because it has to be maintained. The project is supported by the Kwikwetlem First Nation and other groups that want to see the traditional sockeye return as it was once an impor-

tant species for the river, which was named for the red-scaled fish.

The project is part of a 10-year study to see if it's practical to bring back the run to the reservoir and river, which is also used for hydroelectric power and drinking water. Orr said studies have shown that a small run could be accommodated without causing any problems with

drinking water.

Currently, only a handful of sockeye return each year and are trucked from a fish trap to the reservoir. BC Hydro is considering putting in a fish ladder to help the fish make their exit and return but the study will see if there are any other impediments to the plan, Orr said.

The sockeye aren't the only salmon spe-

cies benefiting from B.C. Hydro funding: Chum and coho are beneficiaries of a \$80,598 grant to the North Fraser Salmon Assistance Society, which will build new rearing habitat on the Coquitlam river, including putting in beaver-resistant culverts and adding spawning gravel to riffles within Coquitlam River Park.

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS

These photos from Watershed Watch Salmon Society show the Coquitlam River watershed, which the non-profit is aiming to study to determine the best way to restore a long-depleted salmon run on the river. Top, a salmon smolt. Above, a fish trap below the BC Hydro dam on the river.