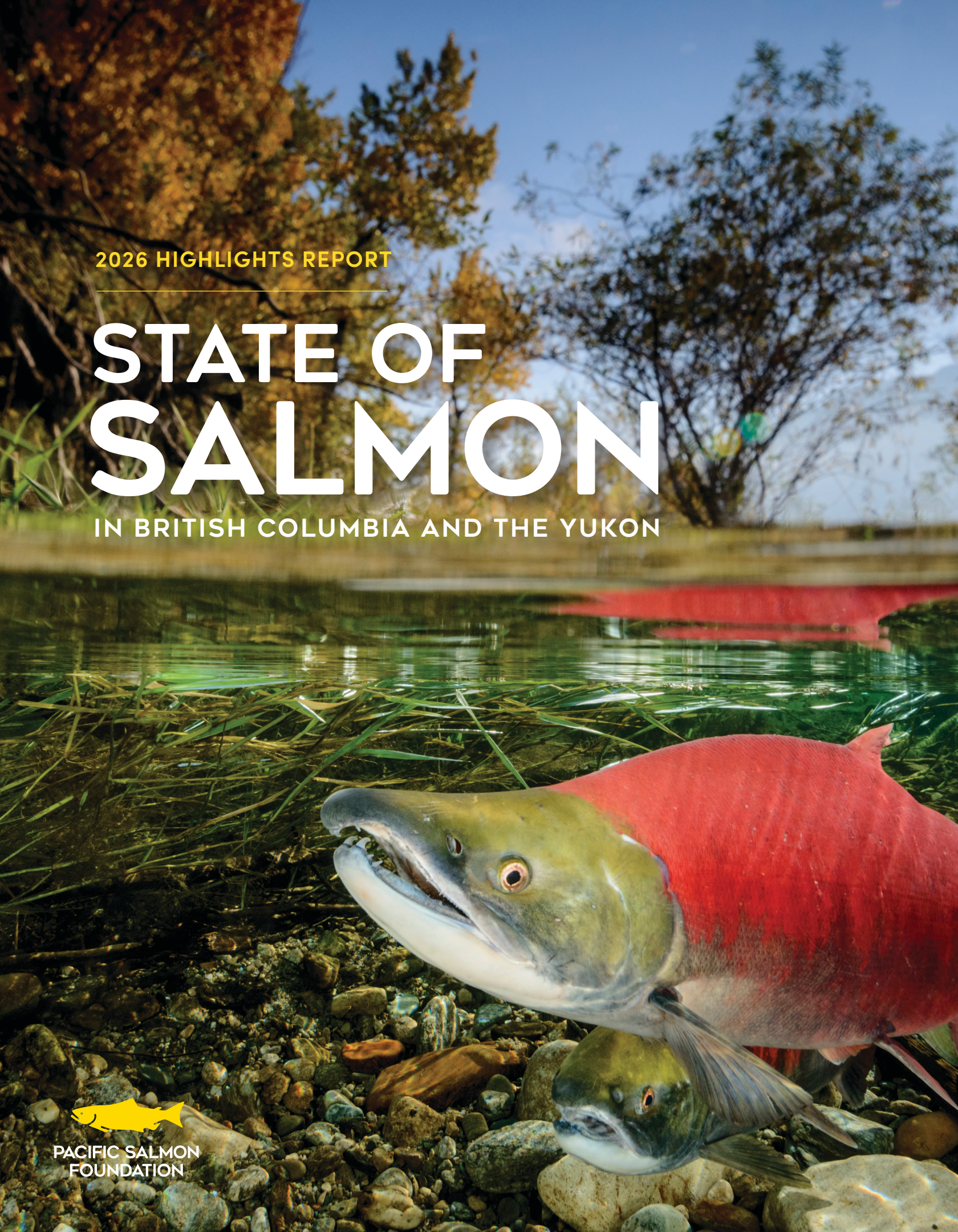


2026 HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

STATE OF SALMON

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND THE YUKON

PACIFIC SALMON FOUNDATION



INTRODUCTION

PHOTO CREDIT: EIKO JONES

SUMMARY

The Pacific Salmon Foundation's (PSF) State of Salmon 2026 Report provides a data-driven overview of the state and trends for all six species of Pacific salmon, including steelhead, throughout British Columbia and the Yukon. PSF first published the State of Salmon Report in 2024 and has since updated its findings annually.

This Report critically examines the best publicly available data across salmon species, providing a clear picture of their current state and trends to inform dialogue and action. The State of Salmon Report helps shape PSF's work, from on-the-ground initiatives to broader efforts to advance salmon recovery. By clearly communicating the state of salmon, the Report provides decision-makers, First Nations, local stewards, journalists, and the public, with information to better understand where salmon are doing well, where they are struggling, and where action is needed. Ultimately, it helps build awareness and inform efforts to support recovery and resilience of salmon populations for generations to come.

The state of salmon remains precarious, with approximately half of regional Pacific salmon populations in B.C. and the Yukon below their long-term average spawner abundances. Some populations, such as Fraser sockeye, saw impressive returns in 2025, and abundances across several regions and species have improved relative to previous years. However, these short-term gains have occurred against a backdrop of sustained declines over the past two decades. Early indicators from 2026, including a dominant-year Fraser sockeye run that fell well below forecasts, reinforce the need to view recent improvements cautiously and in the context of the longer-term trends.

WHAT'S NEW IN 2026

Now in its third edition, PSF's State of Salmon Report remains a go-to source for information on salmon abundance and trends in British Columbia and the Yukon.

The 2026 Report fills previous data gaps for two regional populations – Northern Transboundary steelhead and Haida Gwaii chum salmon – while continuing to improve data quality, and incorporate newly available information.

This year's Report also expands beyond documenting the state of salmon to examine what is driving change. Across their complex life cycle, salmon face multiple pressures that accumulate and interact to influence survival. We synthesize current knowledge on six human-driven factors affecting salmon: aquaculture, climate change, fisheries, hatcheries, industrial development, and urban development.

Since its launch in 2024, the State of Salmon Report has highlighted a growing concern: widespread, long-term declines in salmon populations. In 2026, PSF also looks ahead with a new Path Forward, reflecting on how we got here and outlining a more coordinated, collaborative approach to address widespread declines and support salmon recovery and resilience.

This Highlights Report provides a high-level summary of the full State of Salmon Report. Visit stateofsalmon.ca to explore the complete findings, factors affecting salmon, and the path forward.

Special thanks to the Province of British Columbia and Sitka Foundation for supporting the 2026 State of Salmon Report.

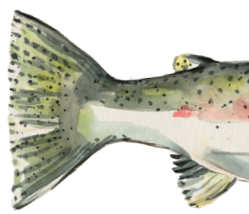


KEY FINDINGS



The state of salmon remains precarious, with approximately half of all salmon populations across British Columbia and the Yukon below their long-term average.

Viewed over the longer term, Pacific salmon are in decline. Yet we have seen incremental improvements over three years of reporting, with some populations moving from just below to just above their long-term averages: sockeye and pink showed relatively strong returns in 2025, even as chum and steelhead remain below average in most regions.



Sockeye had above-average spawner abundance in all but one region – East Vancouver Island & Mainland Inlets.

Strong returns in 2025, including a Fraser sockeye return that exceeded forecasts, were encouraging. However, lower-than-expected returns in 2026 reinforce the importance of interpreting any single year with caution. Salmon abundance can vary considerably from year to year, and changing ocean conditions are adding uncertainty about future returns.

Coho populations are up in some southern regions, while most northern populations remain near or below average.

Positive trends in the Fraser and East Vancouver Island & Mainland Inlets reflect strong marine survival and a broader shift towards increased productivity for populations residing in the Strait of Georgia. These gains have not extended farther north, where regions such as Haida Gwaii continue to experience declines.

Steelhead are in serious decline with below-average spawners in nearly every region.

Some steelhead populations are approaching record lows. Thompson River summer steelhead in the Fraser are of particular concern, with no steelhead observed in the 2025 test fishery. In-season reports from the Skeena suggest returns in that region may be better, but significant concerns remain. Monitoring for steelhead continues to be sparse, and research suggests angler catch data may underestimate the severity of declines.

ILLUSTRATIONS:
AIMÉE VAN DRIMMELEN

BY THE NUMBERS

The following chart shows the current state of salmon for each species across British Columbia and the Yukon. Values represent the per cent anomaly of current **spawner abundance** over the most recent generation compared to the long-term average.

WHY REPORT ON SPAWNER ABUNDANCE?

'Spawner abundance' refers to the number of salmon that return to their spawning grounds and survive to reproduce. Tracking spawner abundance helps us understand how many salmon are contributing to the next generation and provides important information for conservation and fisheries management.

The full State of Salmon Report also assesses 'total abundance', where data are available. Total abundance includes returning spawners as well as salmon caught in fisheries or lost to en-route mortality, providing a broader picture of the total number of salmon returning.

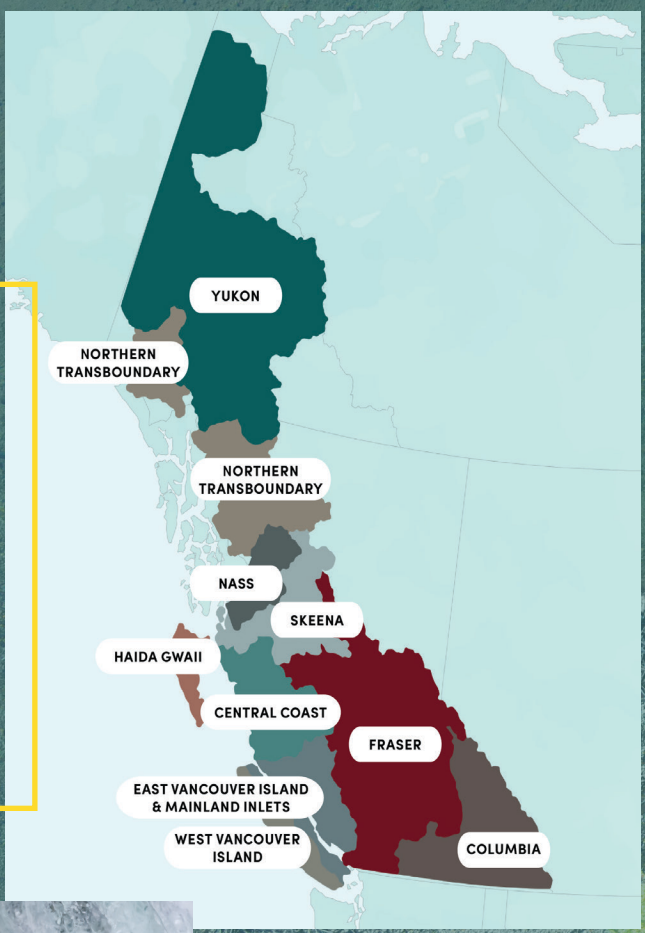



PHOTO CREDIT: PETER MATHER

	Chinook	Chum	Coho	Pink	Sockeye	Steelhead
Yukon	-53%	-74%	?	Species Not Present		
Northern Transboundary	-38%	-44%	-14%	-66%	+47%	-19%
Haida Gwaii	+11%	-74%	-78%	+25%	+14%	?
Nass	-9%	+93%	+65%	+439%	+60%	+6%
Skeena	-45%	-84%	-13%	+294%	+73%	-44%
Central Coast	+7%	-28%	-1%	+112%	+5%	?
East Vancouver Island & Mainland Inlets	+276%	-49%	+16%	+269%	-10%	-41%
West Vancouver Island	+28%	-41%	+7%	-90%	+24%	-31%
Fraser	+60%	-4%	+115%	+273%	+60%	-79%
Columbia	!	Species Not Present			+137%	!

PHOTO CREDIT: FERNANDO LESSA

SPECIES AT A GLANCE

Pacific salmon have diverse life histories, and their abundance varies widely across species and regions. The State of Salmon Report reveals where salmon are doing well and where they continue to decline. The following snapshot summarizes the current state of each of the six Pacific salmon species found in British Columbia and the Yukon relative to their long-term average abundances.



Chum

Chum salmon have experienced the steepest declines of any species, with spawner abundance below the long-term average in every region except the Nass.

The largest declines are in the northernmost regions, including the Yukon, Northern Transboundary, Haida Gwaii, and Skeena. Historically, chum salmon were a mainstay of Canadian commercial fisheries, providing the greatest annual catch by weight of any salmon species. The causes of these widespread declines are not fully understood. However, the crash in Canadian rivers suggests that broader changes occurring in the North Pacific Ocean may be contributing to their decline.



Sockeye

Sockeye spawner abundance is above average in all regions except East Vancouver Island & Mainland Inlets.

In the Fraser, spawner abundance is well above the long-term average following a strong return of nearly 10 million fish in 2025. However, much larger returns occurred regularly in the 1990s, and despite the recent increase in spawners, total abundance remains well below average. The 2026 Fraser sockeye run is a dominant year in the typical four-year cycle, but preliminary estimates indicate returns are far below initial forecasts. On West Vancouver Island, both spawner and total abundance are above average. In contrast, spawner abundance remains below average in East Vancouver Island & Mainland Inlets, where returns to rivers such as the Nimpkish have been relatively weak. The Columbia, where warm waters challenged sockeye migration in 2025, is the only region where the current state of sockeye spawners did not improve compared with last year's Report.



Steelhead

Steelhead have the lowest abundance of all six species and are below the long-term average for spawner abundance in every region except the Nass.

In the Fraser, the test fishery for Thompson River summer steelhead caught no fish in 2025 — a first in the 40-year history. Similarly, Columbia steelhead are assessed as "critically low" with only one natural-origin spawner recorded in 2025. Skeena steelhead are also well below average, with 2025 spawner abundance less than half the long-term average, although in-season reports suggest a stronger return in 2026. Across all regions, steelhead abundance data remain sparse. No abundance data were available for Haida Gwaii or the Central Coast, leaving their current state unknown. New research from PSF and collaborators suggests that relying on angler catch data may underestimate the severity of steelhead declines. With significant gaps in monitoring, declines in some steelhead populations may therefore be going undetected.



Chinook

Chinook have increased in abundance in southern regions but are still below average in much of northern British Columbia and the Yukon.

Both spawner and total abundances are well-above the long-term average in West Vancouver Island and East Vancouver Island & Mainland Inlets. Following an exceptionally high return of Chinook to the Fraser in 2023, the last two years saw smaller — but still above-average — abundances, largely driven by ocean-type Chinook that migrate to sea early in their first year. In contrast, Yukon Chinook have declined dramatically since the mid-1990s. Chinook spawners in northern regions including the Skeena, Nass, and Northern Transboundary also remain below average, although have improved over the three years of State of Salmon reporting. Further inland, Chinook abundance in the Columbia remains critically low.



Pink

Pink salmon abundance is well-above average in most regions, despite 2025 returns falling short of expectations in several regions.

Pink salmon have a short two-year lifecycle, and their abundance can fluctuate considerably in response to changing ocean conditions. Favourable ocean conditions may have contributed to strong pink salmon returns in recent years. With the addition of 2025 data, spawner abundance shifted from below to above the long-term average in Haida Gwaii and the Central Coast. In the Fraser, the exceptionally large return forecast for 2025 didn't materialize, but spawner and total abundances still remained well above their long-term averages. Northern Transboundary and West Vancouver Island are the only regions where pink salmon remain below average, although pink salmon have historically been less abundant in both regions and monitoring is sparse.



Coho

Coho are thriving in southern regions, but northern populations from Haida Gwaii to Northern Transboundary remain near or below average.

A widespread coho crash occurred in the late 1990s, associated with poor ocean conditions and low marine survival. By the early 2000s, many populations were recovering, although total abundance and commercial catches have remained relatively low. More recently, trends have diverged among regions. Current abundance is below the long-term average in the Northern Transboundary, Haida Gwaii, Skeena, Central Coast and above average in the Nass, East Vancouver Island & Mainland Inlets, West Vancouver Island, and Fraser. In the Fraser, increases over the last generation have pushed abundances to levels not seen since the late 1990s. Harvest reductions introduced through Interior Fraser Coho recovery efforts may have contributed to these improvements. At the same time, increases in Chinook and other salmon species residing in the Strait of Georgia suggest that early marine conditions may also be playing an important role.

PHOTO CREDIT: JASON CHING

FACTORS AFFECTING SALMON ABUNDANCE

The salmon life cycle extends from freshwater streams and lakes to the North Pacific Ocean, exposing salmon to numerous pressures that can accumulate and interact to influence survival.



Climate Change

Climate change is the greatest threat to salmon across their life cycle. Pacific salmon have adapted to environmental change over millennia, but today's changes are unfolding at an unprecedented pace, making it increasingly difficult for salmon to adapt. Warming oceans, along with more frequent and severe droughts, floods, and wildfires in freshwater habitats, are challenging salmon survival, disrupting migration, and altering critical salmon habitats. Emergency measures, such as fish salvage efforts, are becoming more common, but they provide only short-term relief. Building salmon resilience to climate change ultimately depends on protecting the diversity of salmon populations and the habitats that sustain them.



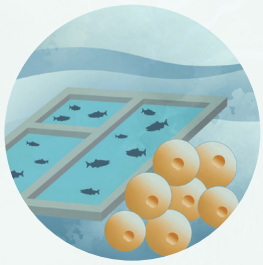
Aquaculture

Dozens of studies have linked open-net pen salmon farms to health risks for wild Pacific salmon, including exposure to viruses, bacteria, and parasites. Evidence shows open-net pens can amplify pathogens and increase opportunities for transmission between farmed and wild salmon, with consequences for wild salmon health and survival. Canada has committed to ending open-net pen salmon aquaculture in British Columbia by 2029 – a promise worth keeping.



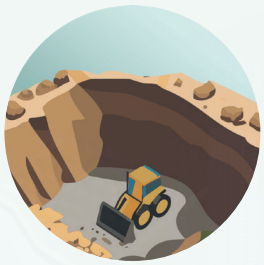
Fisheries

Pacific salmon fisheries have evolved over time, with industrial fishing driving catches upward until the mid-1980s. Since then, commercial catches have declined by 85% as salmon populations have struggled to sustain high exploitation rates alongside climate change and other stressors. How salmon are harvested also matters. Mixed-stock fisheries can unintentionally overharvest at-risk populations, while fisheries that selectively harvest larger fish can contribute to shifts toward smaller, younger salmon. Terminal fisheries can reduce these risks by harvesting salmon closer to their spawning grounds, where specific populations can be more selectively targeted.



Hatcheries

Hatcheries are part of the salmon recovery toolkit, but different types of hatcheries have varying risks and benefits for wild salmon. Large-scale production hatcheries, concentrated in Russia, Japan, and Alaska, release billions of salmon into the North Pacific where they can compete with wild salmon for limited food and resources. Closer to home, hatchery supplementation can increase salmon returns and may be a critical intervention for populations at risk of extinction. However, if not carefully managed, hatcheries can reduce genetic diversity and the fitness of wild populations.



Industrial Development

Forestry, agriculture, mining, and dams have significantly altered salmon habitats across B.C. and the Yukon. Forestry affects nearly every salmon watershed in the province, dikes have cut off 85% of Fraser Valley floodplain habitat, dams can block migration routes, and mining can place pressure on water supplies and increase the risk of contamination. These impacts can accumulate across watersheds, but proactive planning, stronger management, and habitat restoration can help reduce impacts and maintain healthy watersheds and salmon populations.



Urban Development

Hundreds of salmon streams in B.C. have been lost to urbanization, buried in pipes or beneath pavement. Waterways have been transformed by pollution from road run-off, including the tire-derived chemical 6PPD-Q, and altered water flows associated with Urban Stream Syndrome, which can contribute to flooding and leave habitat dry during low-flow periods. Salmon-friendly approaches are gaining traction, including daylighting buried streams and building green infrastructure, such as rain gardens that filter toxic runoff before it reaches salmon streams.

THE PATH FORWARD



The institutional systems responsible for managing and protecting Pacific salmon in Canada are no longer fit for purpose. Designed decades ago for a different set of challenges, they have struggled to keep pace with today's realities. With approximately half of Pacific salmon populations falling below their long-term average, there is an urgent need to rethink how salmon are managed and recovered.

PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL STEEVES

SALMON RECOVERY

Salmon face a dramatically different reality today than when many of our institutions, policies, and management approaches were established. In the 1980s and 1990s, fisheries management largely focused on maximizing harvest. Today, conservation, rebuilding depleted populations, and protecting the biological diversity that underpins resilience have become defining priorities.

Meeting these challenges requires a different approach – one that enables people, science, technology, and communities to work together more effectively.

We already have a wealth of knowledge, dedicated people, innovative science, and strong community leadership. What's missing is a coordinated recovery system built around a common strategy, clearly defined roles, shared responsibility, and collective accountability across Crown governments, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, and community stewards.



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

The challenge is not simply how we manage salmon. It is how we manage ourselves. The Path Forward requires rethinking our institutions, governance, and ways of working together. While dedication to salmon runs deep, efforts have too often been fragmented and disconnected. We need to shift toward a watershed-based recovery system — locally led, coordinated across regions and jurisdictions, informed by science and Indigenous knowledge, and sustainably resourced for the long term.

CHOICES AHEAD

The need for action is urgent. If we continue relying on systems designed for yesterday's challenges, we risk allowing today's declines to continue. But there is another path. At the Pacific Salmon Foundation, we believe this transformation is both possible and necessary. The fate of wild salmon will not be determined by the challenges they face alone. It will also be shaped by how we choose to respond.



BUILDING THE SYSTEM FOR RECOVERY

A coordinated recovery plan

Recovery begins with a shared plan. We need a coordinated framework across watershed, regional, and provincial scales that sets clear objectives, priorities, roles, timelines, funding, and accountability. Planning should be driven from the watershed-level up while aligning regions and governments.

Monitoring salmon and their habitat

We cannot manage what we do not measure. Sustained monitoring is needed to track salmon abundance, diversity, distribution, and productivity alongside changing environmental conditions. This information allows us to detect change, measure progress, and adapt management.

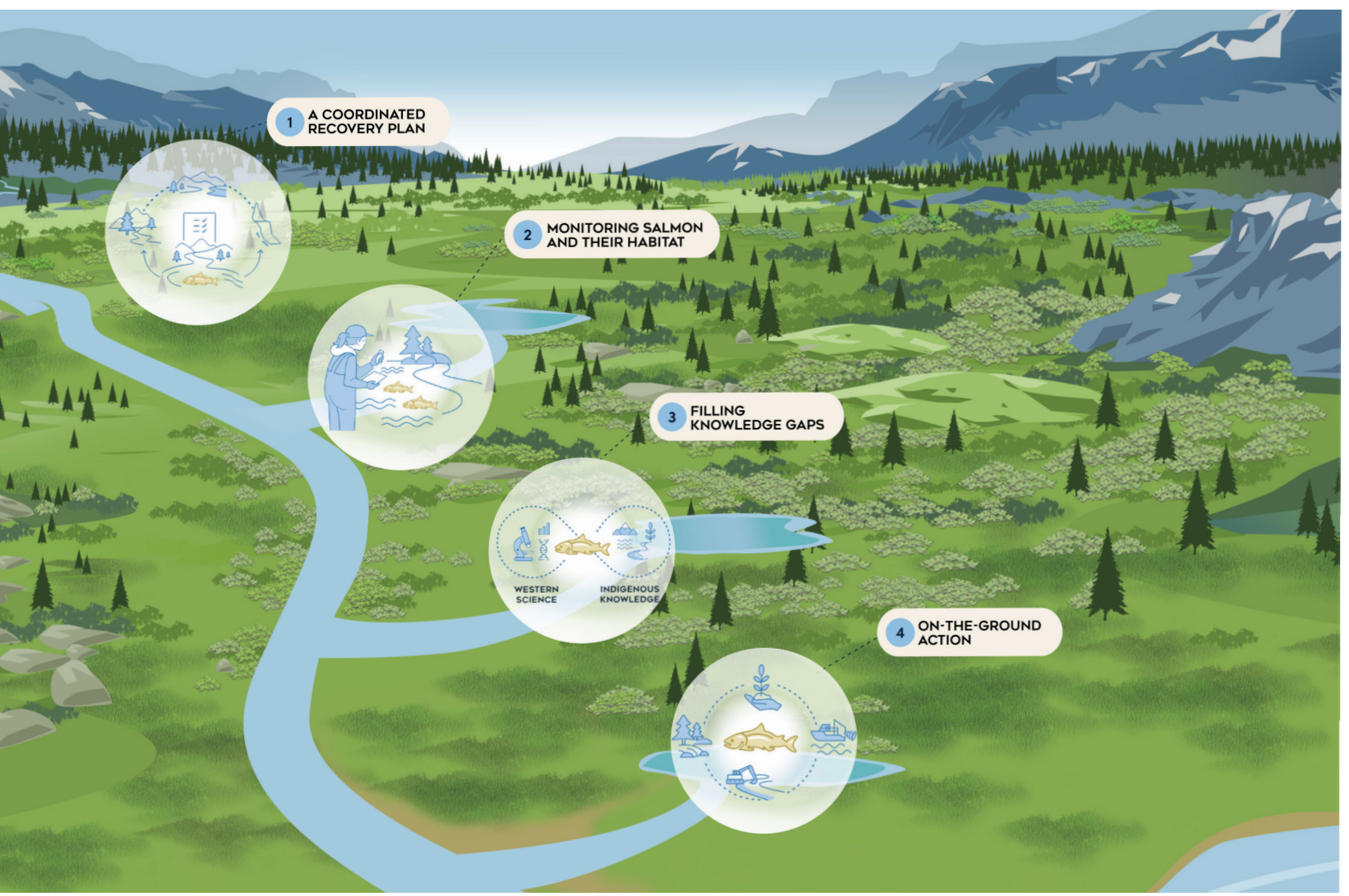
Filling knowledge gaps

Monitoring shows how salmon and their habitats are doing; science and Indigenous knowledge explain why. Together, they identify threats, guide actions, and show where investments matter most. New technologies like AI, genomics, and remote sensing can accelerate that understanding.

On-the-ground action

Knowledge only matters if it informs action. Recovery efforts must focus on interventions most likely to improve outcomes for salmon — from habitat restoration and improved water management to adapting fisheries, removing migration barriers, and responding to climate extremes.

SALMON HAVE SHOWN AN EXTRAORDINARY CAPACITY TO RECOVER WHEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY. IF WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR THAT RESILIENCE TO FLOURISH, THERE IS EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE THEY CAN DO SO AGAIN.





FRONT + BACK COVER
PHOTO CREDIT: EIKO JONES

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