


BIG BAR LANDSLIDE UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 18, 2020

 Response Webpage

 BC River Forecast



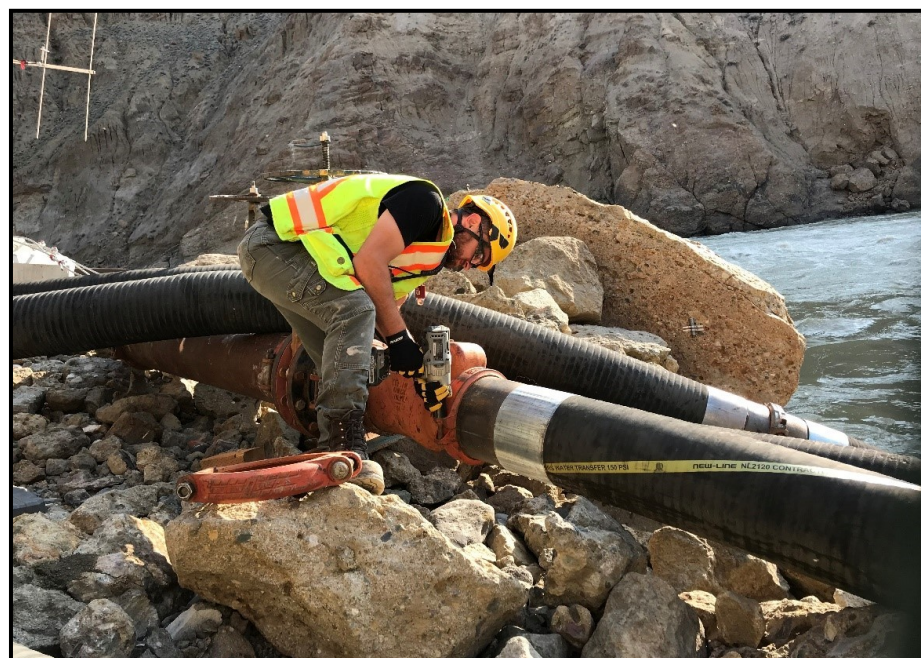
COHO SALMON EXPECTED TO ARRIVE AT BIG BAR LANDSLIDE SITE



This past week marked the arrival of coho, the last of the migrating salmon, at Lillooet on their way up-stream. With water levels remaining low along the Fraser River, coho are expected to migrate past the slide site on their own.

The concrete fish ladder that attracts fish to an elevated holding pool will remain on standby for the remainder of the coho migration season. If river levels rise drastically, crews will assist the passage of coho via 'truck and transport'.

Over the last several weeks, monitoring teams have confirmed that fish are migrating past the slide site without any assistance. As a result, Whooshh Passage Portal™ operations concluded as of September 8 and preparations are underway to disassemble the system.



TOP: All monitoring data over the last several weeks confirm that fish are migrating past the slide site without any assistance.


BOTTOM: With the majority of fish swimming past the slide site on their own, the Whooshh Passage Portal™ is now being disassembled. Here, a crew member disconnects the flex hose that supplied water to the Whooshh™ and concrete fish ladder.

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As of September 2020, the Big Bar Landslide Response Information Bulletin will be published on a bi-weekly basis to coincide with the scale of operations onsite.

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LEFT: A fish technician applying a radio tag to a large chinook. **RIGHT:** Radio tagged chinook released back into the Fraser River.

UPDATE ON FISH MONITORING


In the past two weeks, the fish wheel operation led by the Gitxsan Watershed Authorities in collaboration with St'at'imc Eco Resources has been relocated from the slide site to Lillooet and positioned approximately 5 km downstream. It is now being used to capture fish for the radio tagging program.

Fish wheel operation began on September 8 and, to date, 44 chinook, 133 sockeye and 46 coho have been radio tagged. All tagged salmon appear in good condition and a few larger than expected chinook were also tagged this past week. The fish wheel will be in use until late October, when the majority of coho are expected to have passed through Lillooet.

In recent weeks, hydro acoustic monitoring indicates a decrease in the number of fish moving past the slide site as the chinook and sockeye migration upstream slows between now and late September. As of September 16, over 145,000 salmon have been observed at the Churn Creek sonar site. In the last week, Jack chinook and sockeye have been detected in large numbers at both sonar sites. These are male salmon that mature and return one year early. Jack chinook have been observed throughout August at the Lillooet seining site and at the fish wheel this past week.

UPDATE CONTINUES ON PAGE 3

BIG BAR SALMON COUNTS

	SALMON RADIO TAGGED BELOW BIG BAR LANDSLIDE	SALMON USING ALTERNATIVE FISH PASSAGE		SALMON 40 KM UPSTREAM OF BIG BAR LANDSLIDE
		WHOOSH PASSAGE PORTAL™	TRUCK AND TRANSPORT	
TOTAL TO DATE	758	8273	1527	145219

[Daily updated counts online](#)



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COHO – BIG BAR'S LAST MIGRATING SALMON SPECIES

Coho, the last of the salmon species expected through the Big Bar landslide site this season, are finally making the long journey up the Fraser River towards their natal streams.

They migrate up the Fraser each year between mid-September and early November where they spawn until early winter, right behind their “cousins” – the chinook, sockeye and, in alternating years, pink stocks. Of all the coho spawners on the Fraser and Thompson rivers, only 10 to 15 percent migrate through the Big Bar area. The majority are found throughout the Thompson River, the largest watershed in the Fraser River system. Tsilhqot'in National Government and Northern Shuswap Tribal Council, in partnership with DFO, are undertaking work in the Chilcotin and Quesnel basins to improve coho monitoring.

When fry emerge from the gravel in the spring, juveniles rear in side-channels, stream margins and occasionally lakes. They remain in freshwater for a year and then migrate downstream as smolts, spending time in the Fraser estuaries before swimming towards the ocean. Interior Fraser coho spend 18 months at sea before returning to freshwater in the autumn, completing their three-year life cycle.

Fraser River coho salmon are known to migrate extensively in the Pacific and have been caught in Alaska and California. However, the majority are found near the coast of southern BC and Washington state, and in the Salish Sea. Since 1994, Interior Fraser coho productivity and survival rates have seen steep declines which may be due to a variety of factors such as changing marine conditions and changes in freshwater habitats due to land use and climate change.

The Committee on Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has assessed many of the Fraser



PICTURED: The concrete fish ladder will remain in place to support 'truck and transport' operations, if required, throughout the coho migration season.

salmon populations and has designated the Interior Fraser coho as threatened. The work being done at Big Bar to restore natural fish passage is key to ensuring the long term survival of these stocks.

Adult coho weigh approximately 2-5 kg and measure 45-70 cm, rivalling their sockeye “cousins” in size despite being the younger of the two. They are known fighters and given the current low water levels along the Fraser, coho are largely expected to migrate past the slide site without the support of alternative fish passage systems.

They may be the last to arrive, but coho, like all salmon, play a life-sustaining role within the ecosystem in British Columbia. Coho in particular serve as the last source of critical nutrients for the rivers and the wildlife that rely on them before winter begins. Together with our First Nations and provincial partners, we remain committed to protecting these iconic species.

