

Wilderness Tourism Association



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PO Box 423 • Cumberland, BC • V0R 1S0 • (250) 336-2862 • www.wilderness-tourism.bc.ca

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Wilderness Tourism Association urges the federal Government not to weaken the Fisheries Act

(March 28, 2012; Cumberland, BC) The Wilderness Tourism Association of BC (WTA) is urging the federal government to put an end to any plans to weaken the Fisheries Act.

“We understand that the federal government is planning to weaken the habitat protection powers of the federal Fisheries Act by removing a key section of the act that deals with the protection of fish habitat, namely section 35”, said Brian Gunn, President of the Wilderness Tourism Association of BC. “The Conservative government is taking this action in part to speed up the environmental approval process for many large resource development projects. We also understand that these actions could be implemented as early as this Thursday, March 29 when government will introduce its financial budget and associated legislation for the year.”

The WTA represents British Columbia's nature-based tourism operators who conduct business worth about \$1.6 billion a year and employ 26,000 people full-time. These businesses depend on the protection of fish and wildlife habitats as their customers specifically come and pay for experiences in BC where they expect fish and wildlife populations to be bountiful and plentiful in our lakes, streams, estuaries or oceans.

“Section 35 of the Fisheries Act has been an important tool in providing protection against the potential destruction of fish habitat, which includes the habitat of threatened salmon populations”, said Gunn. “We believe that the removal of this habitat protection tool will drastically affect the fish, birds and wild animals who depend on a healthy fish habitat and we can not possibly support any action that would weaken the ability to protect the important habitat on which these species rely and therefor threaten our businesses.”

The WTA sent a letter to the federal government today urging them to reconsider any plans for removing section 35 from the Fisheries Act or taking any action to weaken the protection of fish habitat. “The harm to our industry and economy as a whole will be much greater than any perceived benefits of speeding up the approval process for resource development projects”, said Gunn. “Simply put, if we don't protect fish habitat, we will not have fish. Without fish we also lose the many species – from bears to orcas, and the communities and economies that rely on fish. Instead government should be putting all efforts into strengthening the Fisheries Act, and its salmon policy, to support healthy marine and freshwater ecosystems across the country.”

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For more information on this issue and the WTA please contact Evan Loveless, WTA Executive Director at 250-336-2862 or evan@wilderness-tourism.bc.ca