

BC'S TOURISM INDUSTRY ACTS TO DEFEND WILD PACIFIC SALMON
#bellyup Campaign Links Health of Wild Salmon to Sustainable Tourism Economy

Victoria -- October 18, 2021 -- The Wilderness Tourism Association of BC (WTABC) is calling for public action to defend BC's endangered wild salmon. The organization says lack of definitive action to remove the open-net fish farms is putting the long term economic viability of the province's multi-billion-dollar tourism industry at risk.

Currently, 10 of 24 Fraser River Sockeye Salmon populations and 14 of 16 Chinook Salmon populations have been assessed as threatened or endangered.

The WTABC campaign, called #bellyup, points out that the wild Pacific salmon are essential to BC's natural environment and, by extension, to the 149,900 tourism jobs that rely on it. The campaign launches today, at the start of Small Business Week In Canada, to draw attention to the 20,000 tourism businesses in BC that collectively drive \$22.3 BN in revenue to the provincial economy.

The wild Pacific salmon are a critical food source to 138 other species, including the eagles, whales, seals, and bears. As the wild salmon disappear and dependent species struggle to survive without them, the WTABC maintains that the destination brand *Super, Natural British Columbia* hangs in the balance.

"BC is known for its pristine natural surroundings," says Scott Benton, CEO of the WTABC. "Visitors come from all over the world to responsibly experience our oceans, forests, and wildlife. British Columbians pride themselves on our environmental stewardship, but we're failing to defend our wild salmon and that is putting everything else at risk."

Working to amplify and complement the scientific research done by dozens of public and private organizations over 20 years, the WTA notes that Oregon, California and Alaska have already banned the open net pens and Washington is well on the way. These pens, which the campaign refers to as "fish factories", emit 65 billion waste particles and toxins into the ocean every hour. The cumulative amount of waste across all the active pens in BC today equates to a city with a population 4 times the size of Vancouver.

"There is an economic argument being made to keep these fish factories operating despite the environmental harm they cause," notes Kevin Smith, CEO and Co-Owner of Maple Leaf Adventures and past WTA Board President. "But the economic devastation caused by retaining the farms will ultimately be much, much greater than the short term benefit of keeping them. If the salmon go belly up, we're not too far behind them. That's what we want to make sure is understood."

There are approximately 60 active fish factories in the Salish Sea today. They are 99% owned by Norwegian companies Grieg and Cermaq (part of Mitsubishi Corporation) and employ 1291 people in BC.

A June 2021 Sierra Club survey shows that 86% of British Columbians are concerned about wild salmon stocks, more than any other environmental issue.

“COVID-19 has given us a glimpse of a future without visitors,” reflects Benton. “We’ve seen what will happen if the salmon go, and we’re asking our political leaders to defend them - and us. Getting the fish factories out of the water is a transaction wholly in the government’s hands. They can do it with a signature.”

For more information about #bellyup visit bellyupbc.ca.

The Wilderness Tourism Association (WTA) is an adventure tourism advocacy organization focused on sustainable resource management and use by all sectors, and maintaining access to crown land for tourism use. The WTA has been active in requesting the government to remove open net salmon factories since 2000, in favour of a more sustainable means of salmon aquaculture, with lower environmental risks.

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BACKGROUND

Pacific Wild Salmon Stats:

- Sixty percent of Sockeye and Chinook salmon populations have been assessed as threatened or endangered (10 of 24 Fraser River Sockeye Salmon populations and 14 of 16 Chinook Salmon populations)([Wild First](#) / [Living Oceans](#)).
- The wild Pacific salmon are a critical food source to 138 other species, including the eagles, whales, seals, and bears ([New York Times](#)).
- A June 2021 Sierra Club survey shows that 86% of British Columbians are more concerned about wild salmon stocks than any other environmental issue ([Sierra Club BC](#)).
- The 75 remaining southern resident orcas are showing signs of malnutrition as their favoured prey, chinook salmon, decline ([David Suzuki Foundation](#)).

Tourism Stats:

- There are 19,748 tourism businesses operating in British Columbia ([Destination BC](#)).
- Tourism in BC drove \$22.3 BN in annual revenue to the provincial economy in 2019 ([Destination BC](#)).
- There are 149,900 jobs in BC’s tourism industry ([Destination BC](#)).
- In 2018, tourism contributed \$8.3 BN to BC’s GDP - more than any other primary resource industry ([Destination BC](#)).

Fish Factories Stats:

- There are approximately 60-to-80 active fish factories in the Salish Sea today ([Pacific Wild](#) / [Wild First](#)).
- The remaining licenses will expire between 2023 and 2046 ([David Suzuki Foundation](#)).

- The fish factories are 99% owned by Norwegian companies Grieg and Cermaq (part of Mitsubishi Corporation) ([Pacific Wild](#)). Half of one BC-based fish factory is owned by a British Columbian ([Friends of Clayoquot Sound](#) / Wild First).
- The annual revenue from BC's fish factories was \$823 M in 2019 ([BC Salmon Farmers](#)), amounting to less than 4% of the contribution of BC's tourism industry.
- Fish Factories employ 1291 people in BC ([BC Salmon Farmers](#)).
- Salmon farming generated \$256.4M in GDP in 2019 ([BC Salmon Farmers](#)).
- Fish factories emit 65 billion waste particles and toxins into the ocean every hour ([CTV News](#)).
- 37 per cent of salmon farms in B.C. exceeded the sea lice limit while juvenile salmon were migrating past in 2020 ([David Suzuki Foundation](#)).
- Seven of Cermaq Canada's Clayoquot Sound farms report elevated sea lice loads up to 10 times Fisheries and Oceans Canada's management threshold ([David Suzuki Foundation](#)).