

Advocacy group claims salmon populations could be lost forever

## Global conference to study dwindling Pacific salmon

By Sandra Thomas, Vancouver Courier  
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An international conference in Vancouver next week brings together experts from around the globe to help stop the dramatic decline in Pacific salmon stocks.

Conference co-chair Brian Riddell, division manager of salmon and fresh water eco-systems for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, said the conference deals primarily with Pacific Rim nations, including Canada, Russia, Japan, the U.S. and Korea. It's the second international conference hosted by State of the Salmon, a coalition of scientists and researchers from those countries.

At the conference Riddell will present a panel response regarding conservation principles and salmon conservation measures, such as Canada's wild salmon policy. Riddell will also address the effects of climate change on salmon stocks.



The Bringing the Future into Focus conference focuses on the conservation of Pacific salmon throughout their native range. According to State of the Salmon, depleted Pacific salmon populations could be lost forever, and the best wild salmon ecosystems could face unprecedented threats. The conference stresses that while the exact approach to successful management may vary in locations around the Pacific Rim, the results should not. Organizers hope the conference will move the members from discussing conservation principles to immediate action.

"It's an opportunity to bring experts together to determine what's happening," said Riddell.

Some of the data is unusual. While salmon stocks are declining in waters around B.C. and northern Washington State, the numbers of some species, such as Russian pink, are being recorded at levels never seen before. Riddell credits initiatives such as a large hatchery program in Japan, as well as proper management of the sockeye fishery in Alaska, for those rising stocks.

"All together they're setting all-time records for catchments and escapement," he said. "But that's not the story here where there's no strong catchments of pinks and chums and sockeye are majorly depressed."

Riddell said when stocks are low the DFO has to limit those fisheries, which is tough on fishing communities that depend on the industry for their livelihood. He added managing fish stocks while they remain in fresh-water streams is not difficult, but when those stocks hit the ocean the DFO loses control. "In that case we're up against the unknown," he said.

The conference, which runs Feb. 2 to 5 at the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel, includes speakers from organizations such as the David Suzuki Foundation, the Hokkaido Fish Hatchery and Korea National Fisheries Research and Development Institute. Local environmentalist David Suzuki is a keynote speaker.

For more information go to [www.stateofthesalmon.org](http://www.stateofthesalmon.org).

"There are five major players when it comes to fisheries and stock management in the Pacific," said Riddell. "It's important to know what the other people involved are doing."