

Roundtable Report

June 8-10, 2025, Sunshine Coast

- **SEHAB Member: Janet Lemon**
 - **North coast Area**
- **Community Advisor: Patrick Arkesteyn-Vogler**

Key Issues:

Climate Change

Climate change continues to pose significant challenges across the region. Increased flooding, prolonged droughts, and extreme cold temperatures are disrupting salmon habitats and infrastructure. These environmental stresses have had serious impacts on both wild salmon populations and hatchery operations.

Skeena Salmon Populations

Skeena Chinook populations remain in decline, with an anticipated run of only 26,000 fish this season. Skeena coho returns were average last year, while sockeye returns were strong, supporting a robust sport fishery. Skeena pink salmon numbers remain very strong, and a significant return is expected in 2025.

Nass Salmon Populations

Nass Chinook populations are also under pressure. As a result, the entire Nass watershed—like the Skeena—is currently closed to Chinook fishing. Nass coho returns were average last year, and sockeye returns supported another strong fishery.

Facility Upgrades

Facility upgrades across the North Coast—funded through BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BC SRIF) and the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative (PSSI)—are ongoing and advancing steadily at numerous hatchery sites.

Regional Highlights

Kitwanga Area

Kitwanga sockeye enhancement efforts continue in partnership with the Gitanyow Nation. Broodstock are collected and eggs are transported to Snootli Hatchery in Bella Coola for incubation and rearing to the fry stage. Fry are then returned and released in the Kitwanga area via air transport. Construction of a new hatchery is underway, with site development progressing well as of spring 2025. This project is funded by PSSSI.

Eby Street Hatchery

The Zymacord River coho stock raised at Eby Street Hatchery has been designated as a key indicator stream for the lower Skeena. For the 2024 brood year, over 29,000 coho were marked with coded wire tags. Strong fry production for 2026 release is expected, supporting future sport fisheries. PSSSI top-up funding has enabled site upgrades, including full-site staining and boardwalk redevelopment.

Hartley Bay Hatchery

Significant upgrades are underway at Hartley Bay Hatchery. A new stream-bottom and streamside intake system has been installed, supported by BC SRIF and PSSSI. Re-plumbing and facility repairs are progressing, and the hatchery is projected to resume operations by fall 2025.

Oldfield Creek Hatchery

The hatchery has remained inactive since a 2021 rockslide destroyed its surface water intake. The Prince Rupert Salmon Enhancement Society, in collaboration with McElhanney Engineering, is working to relocate the hatchery. Wolf Creek (Port Edward) has been identified as the preferred site. Efforts are also underway to retrofit the existing facility for limited Kloiya River Chinook enhancement to re-engage local community involvement. Archaeological and geotechnical assessments are completed, and the project is progressing slowly as of spring 2025, with substantial support from PSSSI funding.

Lakelse Watershed Society

The Society continues to monitor water quality and fry outmigration, while advocating for Lakelse to be designated a sensitive water area. Key initiatives include:

- Video monitoring of cutthroat trout in Lakelse Lake spawning tributaries
- Development of the **Thornhill Wetland Interpretive Trail** to educate the public on watershed and wetland values

Stewart Beaver Management

- Beaver dams are being notched once again on Clements Creek to ensure unimpeded sockeye migration

Oona River Resources Association

- This active group continues to do coho enhancement, education, public awareness, stewardship programs and community outreach. The year saw a huge list of upgrades and improvements. This year they plan on actively working with Kitkatla Fisheries Program developing a partnership where the Nation will begin doing active enhancement and restoration work in their territory.e best ever. Coho were abundant in the main Oona River and small tributaries and the mild winter has caused no freezing issues. We have hired 2 summer students who are keen to improve the trails, facility and work on salmon stewardship. The community has seen an increase in young people moving to Oona and starting to homestead there.

Kitimat Hatchery

The hatchery is shifting toward a data-driven enhancement approach for 2024–2028. Key focus areas include:

- Collecting Chinook DNA and scale samples from tributaries and non-historical sites
 - Trapping juvenile Chinook to study stream-type life histories
 - Ad-clipping and coded wire tagging of Chinook and Coho juveniles
 - Modifying adult collection programs for Coho and Chum
- Additionally, the hatchery has updated its aging vehicle fleet with new trucks to support operations.

Northern Branch of the Steelhead Society of BC

The Northern Branch is monitoring a gravel pit along the Skeena River that traps 3,000–6,000 juvenile salmonids when water levels recede. They are exploring solutions to address this issue.