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## 'Night swims' for salmon begin

**The Times**  
Published: Friday, February 20, 2009

Ministry of Environment and B.C. Conservation Foundation staff members are gearing up for night swims in the Alouette Rivers to assess juvenile salmon and steelhead use of restored fish habitats.

Steelhead and coho populations in the Georgia Basin have been in serious decline since the mid 1990s, mainly due to reduced ocean survival, combined with freshwater habitat loss and degradation.

Over the last nine years, the Ministry of Environment and BCCF, with other major partners, have been involved in dozens of habitat restoration projects in streams on Vancouver Island and in the Lower Mainland.

These projects have varied in scope but include developing water storage, spawning gravel placements, side-channel construction, sediment control and rearing habitat complexing using large woody debris (LWD) and boulder placements.

The night snorkel surveys in waters averaging about 2°C will rely on tested science-based techniques to determine mid-winter fish use of LWD structures.

In mid-winter, night swims are used because juvenile coho and steelhead hide within log jams during the day, but emerge at night to feed in eddies and pools closely associated with the installed wood structures.

"For juvenile salmon and trout, over-wintering is a critical stage in their life history," said James Craig, B.C. Conservation Foundation project manager.

"Significant mortality can occur during the winter if high quality over-wintering habitat (LWD, boulder clusters) is lacking. What our work has attempted to do is rebuild the stable debris jams that used to exist in many coastal rivers before industrial development, urbanization and large flood impacts."

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