

River paying big dividends

By LISSA ALEXANDER
NEWS REPORTER

Snorkel surveys are presently being done to count the fish in the Englishman river and although the numbers could be better, the results so far have been fairly positive.

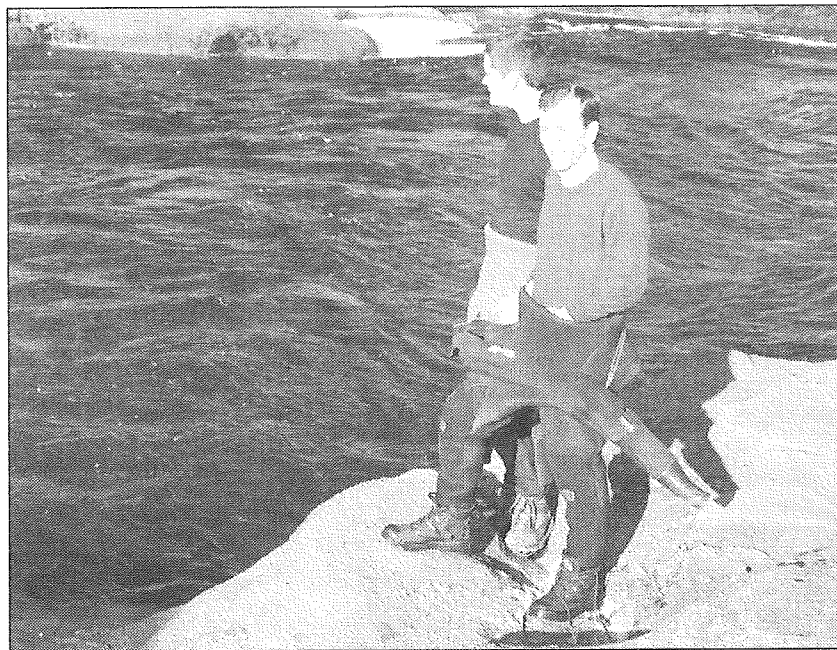
"These numbers are certainly good, it's a pretty good year," said James Craig, one of the project managers with Living Rivers Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island (LRGB/VI).

"It's certainly not as high as historically, there's room for improvement. But the numbers are growing and I'd say the fisheries managers would be encouraged by the results so far."

Living Rivers Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island's vision is for healthy watersheds and sustainable fish populations through shared responsibility, stewardship and wise use of water.

Initiated by the The B.C. Conservation Foundation, The LRGB/VI Partnership and Steering Committee is made up of non-profit foundations, provincial and federal governments, First Nations, environmental stewardship, recreational fisheries and the private sector.

Living Rivers partnered with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)



James Craig, project manager with Living Rivers Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island, assesses the Englishman river before a snorkel count last week.

to compete the snorkel surveys this season. Craig said besides checking the overall health of the river, the surveys are done to evaluate Coho salmon returns to measure the success of recent investments by B.C.'s Living Rivers Trust Fund, and other partners, in large side-channel extensions in the Englishman River Regional Park.

"It's very important to monitor these kind of projects in order to know that the investments that are being made in the water shed are indeed paying off," Craig said, adding that the latest counts indicated the investments are generating good results.

Coho especially like these smaller, side-channel, habitats

for rearing, Craig explained, and their numbers have generally been lower than what DFO would like to see.

"Having them rear in protected off-channel habitats is most ideal," he said, "you get the greatest number of smolts per spawner generated in these high quality off-channel habitats," he said.

He explained the main goal was to maximize the number of smolts (young salmon) being generated back to the ocean.

Although the Coho numbers increased from 764 to 2386 in just ten days, Craig said Living Rivers was not necessarily surprised by the numbers.

The increase in Coho numbers are expected this time

of year — peaking in November — and especially with a recent freshet (sudden overflow of a stream.)

Because of funding issues, no counts occurred last year, but a collaborative effort from groups within the Englishman River Watershed Recovery Plan made the project possible this fall.

Craig stressed that these are not complete numbers (as the snorkelers only swam the lower eight kilometers of the 15 km long river), and instead just minimum counts.

DFO will generate the final estimate and add them to their permanent database.

These can be viewed at <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/gis-sig/maps-cartes-eng.htm>.

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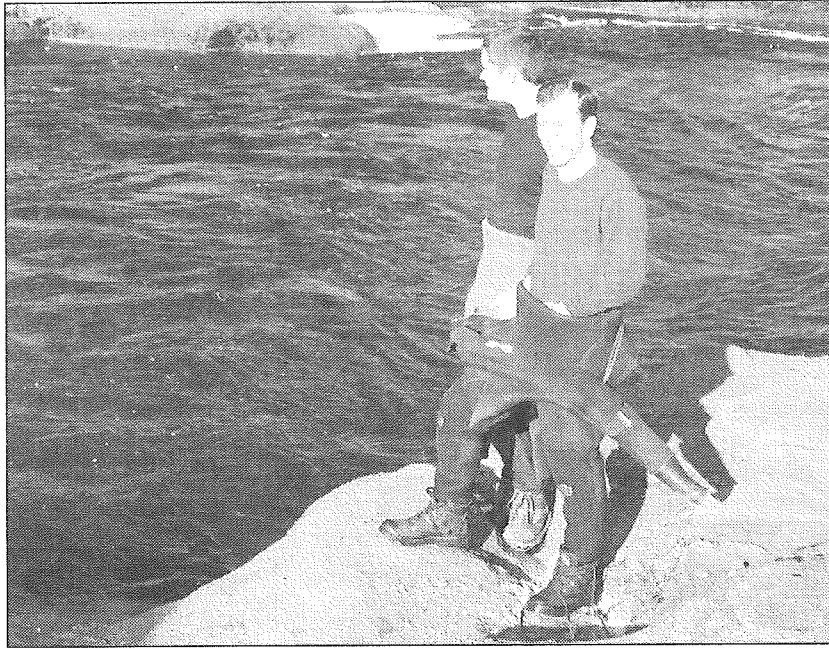
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