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Highly productive steelhead stream in the Squamish River watershed is getting help this summer and fall to restore habitat from past damage.

SQUAMISH: Stage one of the Brohm River in-stream habitat restoration project began this August and September in a 1.3 km stretch of the lower river downstream of the canyon area. The primary objective of the multi-year initiative is to restore salmonid habitat productivity. Work will include the stabilization of eroding banks, increasing over-winter holding and spawning habitat by the placement of large woody debris structures, boulder clusters and introduction of high quality spawning gravels.

The Brohm River is a tributary of the Cheekeye and Cheakamus Rivers located approximately 14 km north of Squamish. "Studies show that despite its small size (4km), Brohm River supports one of the highest concentrations of juvenile steelhead within the Squamish River watershed," said Kenji Miyazaki, Fisheries Technician with the BC Conservation Foundation who is overseeing the work.

The restoration treatment is based on a recently released report detailing past habitat impacts and work required to repair the stream. The report authored by Pat Slaney of PSlaney Aquatic Science Ltd,* indicated the Brohm is three-fold more productive than typical coastal steelhead streams and the most significant steelhead nursery stream to the Cheakamus River (www.livingrivers.ca). Adult steelhead returning to the Brohm also hold in the Cheakamus mainstem until migration conditions are right, and some may spawn in the mainstem if they cannot migrate through the Cheekeye and into Brohm.

The intensive fish habitat assessment conducted in late winter of 2008 demonstrated that salmonid habitats remain impaired as a result of past land use impacts, with several sites at risk of further degradation from past logging. Additionally, highway encroachment has occurred over a high proportion of the length of Brohm River, and it significantly confines the stream's channel, reducing juvenile salmonid rearing habitat and spawning gravel retention. A previous report identified the Brohm River as a productive "at risk" salmonid habitat system. Coho appear to have been extirpated from the river over the last 15 years. The Squamish Streamkeepers had been spearheading efforts to reintroduce coho salmon into Brohm River for the past several years.

Poul Beck of the Steelhead Society of BC maintains, "The Squamish/Cheakamus watershed has had a long history of unique and quality steelhead and salmon recreational fishing, dating back to the period of water-only access." He added, "the Cheakamus River and its key tributary, Brohm Creek, have always provided the largest and most resilient of these fish."

The habitat restoration work is a joint project funded by Ministry of Transportation (MoT), CN Railway Company (CN), Terasen Gas, BC Conservation Corps (BCCC), Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, and Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island program.

Involvement of community groups and First Nations is an integral part of the restoration project.

Stage one of the project in 2008 will see development of 16 large woody debris (LWD) structures, five areas of boulder clusters and two Newbury Riffles to improve fish passage through existing road culverts.

Stage two is slated for 2009 with the main objective being the development and complexing of a 400-450m long side channel, along with further rearing improvements.

A crew of four, including two members of the BC Conservation Corps and Squamish Nation workers will aid BCCF fisheries technicians in conducting restoration work in 2008.

The project is supported by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and Squamish Nation. "The Brohm watershed's fish, wildlife and vegetation have continued to be well used by Squamish Nation peoples for sustenance, materials and medicines, and for several thousands years before the arrival of European settlers," said Randall Lewis of Squamish Nation. He added, "These collaborative efforts are small steps but are very important. At the end of the day it becomes a win-win for the rivers, a win-win for the watershed, and a definite win-win for our future generations who will see evidence of this work when we are gone, but the fish will be here."

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* Brohm River Restoration BCCF Report BR0-2008b by PSlaney is available at www.livingrivers.ca