

A fertile future for the Ash River?

Port Alberni, BC

Fish habitats near Port Alberni received a boost last year, thanks to a project that received \$14,030 in funding from the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP) — a partnership between BC Hydro, the Province of BC, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, First Nations, and local community groups.

The Ash River Nutrient Enrichment project was completed in March 2019 and was a partnership between Hupačasath First Nation, Ecofish Research Ltd. and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation. The project involved salmon carcass distribution and developing a plan to guide future restoration of the Ash River, which is an important tributary of the Stamp River. The plan involved input from biologists with the provincial government and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.



Photo: Hupačasath First Nation members distributing salmon carcasses in the Ash River in October 2018.

As part of the project, approximately 1000 salmon carcasses were added to the Ash River watershed by Hupačasath First Nation. The action was designed to mimic the benefits provided by natural accumulation of salmon carcasses, which occurs throughout BC in the fall and provides important nutrients to sustain coastal ecosystems. Over 5,000 kg of fish biomass were added to the ecosystem, thanks to a donation of carcasses from Robertson Creek Hatchery. The work focused on improving habitat for juvenile steelhead and it supported the wider Ash River Watershed Action Plan, which addresses footprint impacts from hydropower development in the watershed.

Hupačasath biologist Graham Murrell confirmed that the work was completed successfully and was expected to increase fish production in the river. “This project restarted restoration work that we began in the early 2000s but hadn’t undertaken for about 10 years” Graham said. “Adding salmon carcasses to the river increases nutrients, providing food for young fish of species like steelhead and Coho Salmon. We hope this will be a step towards partly addressing historical declines in fish production, but we recognize that more restoration work is needed.”

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