

CHIEF

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EDITORIAL

Howe soundings

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Last year, a grey whale made its way up Howe Sound to the Squamish River estuary, the first recorded visit by a grey whale to our waters in approximately 100 years. This year, orcas have been spotted in the northern reaches of the sound, and dolphins (presumably the Pacific white-sided variety) have been seen as far north as Watts Point.

While biologists say a number of factors are likely responsible for the return of marine mammals to the northern reaches of the sound, the two most often cited are the cessation of most large-scale industrial activity (culminating with the closure of the Woodfibre mill in 2006) and human efforts to restore and/or enhance habitat for herring to spawn. Since large populations of herring serve as food for marine mammals and other aquatic species, the thinking goes, there's ample reason to believe dolphins and whales are coming back to feed on the herring.

In 2006, the Squamish Streamkeepers — after it was learned that fossil-fuel-based creosote is toxic to herring eggs — began wrapping the creosote-covered wood pilings on the Squamish Terminals dock with non-toxic landscape fabric. As well, the Streamkeepers, the Squamish River Watershed Society and Squamish Nation began re-planting and restoring eelgrass in the estuary. Historically, areas rich in eelgrass along the bays and shorelines of Howe Sound have been prime herring spawning habitat.

The impact of those efforts was felt almost immediately, and continues to be felt. But it's an ongoing effort — just last weekend, a group of Streamkeepers spent 2 ½ hours removing and cleaning the 400-foot floatline that extends under the Squamish Terminals East Dock. The line “doubles the surface area of the wrapped pilings under the same dock,” and helps to further facilitate herring spawning, according to a group email sent out by the Streamkeepers' Jonn Matsen.

Unquestionably, the demise of most industrial activity along the northern shores of Howe Sound (Squamish Terminals being the most notable survivor) is an unfortunate development for the economic health of our community. Attracting and/or building new industries that will bring good jobs back to Squamish remains a challenge for present and future generations.

It's also important, though, that we celebrate the benefits to human health, tourism and the environment that flow from efforts to restore natural habitat and bring back species that historically have thrived in our region. Kudos to those whose tireless work has made that possible.

It's also vital that we clear away hurdles to potential future progress. For example, while the development of Squamish's Oceanfront holds great promise, it must be carried out in a manner that minimizes any impacts on terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. As well, the community has yet to find out who made the decision, when the project to replace old, deteriorating pilings in Squamish's small

craft harbour was in the works, to use creosote-coated pilings. We have yet to hear from the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans on that one, and in the meantime, we think it's imperative that the community take steps to ensure that that mistake isn't repeated.

— David Burke

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