

Mar 16, 2011 2:17pm

Partnership to protect Howe Sound herring

Squamish Streamkeepers give herring eggs a second chance at Squamish Terminals

By Susan Hollis - Pique News Magazine

It's not hard to imagine why herring eggs can't prosper when they are clinging to creosote-soaked pilings.

Herring, a cornerstone species that many levels of local ocean ecosystems depend on for food, prefer to lay their eggs in dark, quiet places with few predators. The pilings under the docks at the Squamish Terminals make an ideal location, save for the heavily chemical saturated structures that kill or severely damage their eggs.

To protect herring reproduction and keep the balance of marine life in Howe Sound intact, Squamish Streamkeepers is working with the Squamish Terminals to provide a healthy environment for the eggs. The increased number of herring living in the Sound gives volunteers every reason to believe their project is extremely successful.

Jack Cooley, co-chair of the Squamish Streamkeepers, said they discovered the dying eggs entirely by chance in 2006.

"We were looking around the terminals and we noticed eggs on the bladder rack and the ones underneath were all dying because of the creosote pilings so we decided we better do something so we started wrapping them," he said, adding that after much experimentation they found that a weed control material worked best.

"Herring love smooth, mostly vertical surfaces so the Terminals are quite suitable for that, it's beautiful habitat for them."

Since 2006, the Squamish Streamkeepers has wrapped 171 pilings on the east terminal and have anchored weighted sheets of material through the docks in hopes of providing alternative habitat options for the herring. They will keep wrapping the west terminal until a majority of the herring egg habitat is protected.

Squamish Terminals' vice president Doug Hackett said the company's location on the water means they're inspired to take on volunteer projects that enhance local marine life.

"We try and get involved in a number of projects that involve the habitat that we are in," he said. "The herring is one of the reasons we had whales and dolphins in Howe Sound last year. They have made a huge recovery."

The Squamish Terminals also work with the Tenderfoot Hatchery by providing safe floating net pens for young salmon. Previously, the hatchery was releasing the smolts into the river estuary, where the local gull population promptly picked them off. The company tracked down a number of floating pens and offered them to the hatchery as an alternative place to acclimatize the young fish to the ocean until they're ready for release. Each pen can hold roughly 100,000 salmon that are fed daily by volunteer for two weeks until they're mature enough to be freed.