

Globe and Mail, March 30, 2006: Tally puts value of Skeena wild salmon at \$110-million annually

By Mark Hume

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VANCOUVER -- Wild salmon have long been considered an icon in British Columbia, but until now there have been few hard facts on how much the fish that pour into coastal rivers each year might be worth.

However, in a new study by IBM Business Consulting, the value of wild salmon in the Skeena River system in northwestern B.C. is pegged at nearly \$110-million annually.

The study, commissioned by the Northwest Institute and to be released today, bases its conclusion on an analysis of revenue from recreational tourism, sport-fishing, commercial harvesting, wholesale values, added-value processing, retailing, value to natives and values to Alaska. (Many fish are caught in the Gulf of Alaska as they return to spawn in the Skeena.)

Pat Moss, a director of the Northwest Institute, said she hopes the study will help governments as they weigh the often conflicting interests surrounding salmon rivers.

"It's important to finally have some accurate numbers in terms of what the value is in this region," Ms. Moss said in an interview from Smithers.

"So often the numbers are all on the other side of the debate -- forestry, mining -- but now we have numbers of our own to put forward. Now we have some firm numbers to back up our arguments about how important salmon are to this region."

Ms. Moss said the Skeena system, widely considered B.C.'s second-most-important salmon river after the Fraser, is threatened by resource developments, including pipeline construction, logging and mining.

But the biggest immediate concerns, she said, are provincial government plans to approve fish farming pens in the approach waters to the Skeena. In other areas on the West Coast, concerns have been raised about how densely packed salmon in open ocean farm pens can transmit diseases and lice to wild salmon as they migrate past.

Ms. Moss said three salmon farming licences are up for approval at the mouth of the Skeena and 15 more may be proposed.

"Fish farms are obviously the most immediate threat," she said.

"With this study we can now make the argument that we have a very significant, healthy wild salmon fishery here in the Skeena and we should be doing everything that we can to protect it," Ms. Moss said.

The IBM Business Consulting report states that all study numbers represent only direct revenues to the region and that multipliers and other indirect spin-off values have not been calculated.

The study also does not consider many intangibles, such as the value of salmon as feed for wildlife, or the value the fish resource has in attracting people to move to or stay in the area.

Ms. Moss said that, if anything, the \$110-million value is low.

"The value attributed to first nations is certainly low, because it doesn't reflect the enormous cultural and social importance salmon have," she said.

The salmon species evaluated are sockeye, pink, chum, coho and Chinook. Steelhead are evaluated under the recreational fishing category.

The study calculates the following annual values: freshwater angling (\$9-million); saltwater angling (\$6-million); commercial fishing (\$13.8-million); fish processing (\$32.8-million); added value processing (\$8.7-million); salmon-related tourism (\$7.6-million); natives (\$4.2-million) and Alaska (\$27.8-million).

The complete IBM study and methodology can be viewed at: <http://www.northwestinstitute.ca>.

The Northwest Institute is a non-profit agency with an interest in conservation issues.