Subject: **Pesticides & Collapse of coho spawning streams...**
Date: Fri, 23 Dec 2005 23:46:29 -0800
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Your Worship & Members of Council,

In the Vancouver Sun issue of 22 Dec 2005 we see a veiled attempt (well maybe not so veiled) to blame pesticide use as the cause of of the dramatic drop of salmon to return to their spawning streams. Such claims are highly dubious and in fact it was only the previous day (SUN article by Stephen Hume of 21 Dec 2005 - attached as a pdf to this email) that we found that this drop was likely due to conditions in the ocean - conditions that Jim Irvine, research scientist at the Pacific Biological station in Nanaimo, termed "natural events" as the primary mechanisms of the cause.

So before relating local pesticide use to any salmon or other related health problems (as was alluded to in the 22 Dec article) it is wise to get more facts on this issue.

Finally, such statements as "Any pesticide is toxic" in the Dec 22 article add little to the debate since all substances are toxic - it only depends on the level (ie. dose). Parts per trillion can be found of almost every substance known to man (natural or man-made) on all parts of the planet. Many millions of atoms of mercury were breathed in while you read this article. But this should not cause one to panic as this has always been so and our biological systems were designed to deal with it.

So relax, enjoy the holidays, and not be unduly alarmed.

Yours truly,

Corrie Kost

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Season of death should spawn alarm

All over B.C. once-teeming coho spawning streams are nearly deserted, perhaps heralding an environmental collapse

Stephen Hume
Special to the Sun

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

It was the summer of dead sea birds all along the outer coast from Oregon to B.C.

Emaciated corpses of auklets, murres and cormorants were found in unprecedented numbers. In some places scientists discovered that plankton -- tiny organisms at the bottom of the ocean food chain -- had declined by as much as 75 per cent.

So Jim Irvine, research scientist at the Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo, is not surprised by alarmed reports from all over the Georgia Basin, where streams should be alive with spawning coho, that this fall there is only an ominous silence.

He says changing off-shore wind patterns and warmer ocean temperatures appear to have disrupted the vast seasonal upwelling of cold, nutrient-rich water from the continental shelf that normally makes the north Pacific one of the planet's most productive marine ecosystems.

Coho, one of our prized game fish, appear to be victims of ocean changes which are now occurring quickly and on such scale that scientists don't yet fully understand the mechanisms or their triggers.

One thing they do know. This year only two per cent of the coho hatchlings that headed out to sea in 2002 survived ocean conditions to spawn in Georgia Basin creeks.

"To me it's very clear that it is conditions in the ocean -- natural events, if you want to call them natural," Irvine says. "The fact that it's so widespread indicates that it really is the primary mechanism -- that's the ocean -- that's causing it. I don't think it's a coincidence."

Tom Rutherford, a federal fisheries biologist who advises community streamkeepers and aboriginal bands on the south coast, says they observe a "quantum drop" in coho returns to the Georgia Basin this fall.

At Shawnigan Creek, for example, about 1,100 coho returned two years ago. Last year the number of spawning fish fell to 500. So far this year, he's seen 11. Many streams are barren.

Rutherford says ocean survival seems to have collapsed for coho populations which normally spawn in watersheds on the east coast of Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast and the Lower Mainland. Compounding the problem of low returns is an unseasonable dry spell which has left too little water for fish to get up shallow streams. And, of course, there's the issue nobody wants to talk about -- incremental habitat loss to development, authorized by brainless governments, pushing small populations ever closer to extinction.

"Coho are basically small river spawners," Rutherford says. "We haven't seen any real rain here since early November. That means we have thousands of fish basically swimming around with their legs crossed, if you know what I mean."

However, it's now so late in the season that further coho spawning is unlikely.

Ken Bryden of the West Vancouver Streamkeepers -- they monitor and maintain 20 small streams between the Capilano River and Horseshoe Bay -- reports minuscule coho returns.

"I don't think the public is aware of the gravity of the situation we may be facing -- the disappearance of salmon in the Gulf of Georgia," Bryden warns.

Barrie Peters, another DFO advisor responsible for Vancouver Island from Campbell River to the Tsitika, concurs that coho returns have collapsed.

"Most rivers are showing the lowest coho returns on record," reports Dave Davies, yet another DFO advisor in the Georgia Basin. "On Vancouver Island, this trend extends from Johnson Strait streams all the way to Victoria and around to Port Renfrew."

Like most scientists, Irvine is cautious about linking what look like enormous ecological disruptions in the north Pacific to global warming.

"Climate change takes place slowly," he says. "You can't take one year and say that's evidence. But if you get a succession of years, that would be a good indication."

According to The Washington Post, NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies reported in October that 2005 is now on track to be the hottest year on record.

Five of the six hottest years have now occurred since 1998, four of them in the last five years.

I'd say that pattern, accompanied by these weird anomalies in ocean productivity and rising mortalities across a broad spectrum of wild species from sea birds to salmon, ought to be a loud wake-up call for all of us.

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