

# GOING VIRAL

Biologist Alexandra Morton collects samples to test for piscine orthoreovirus (PRV) at a fish farm in Clayoquot Sound

## Our volunteers are carrying out citizen science work in the Sound

Gazing out from the village of Tofino towards the rainforest-covered mountains of Clayoquot Sound, the view is spectacular. But who would imagine that just out of sight of town, 20 fish farms are tucked away up the emerald inlets, quietly polluting the pristine waters?

One of the challenges of rearing animals in close quarters is that disease can quickly spread through the population, wreaking havoc. We've all heard of avian flu outbreaks. Parents who send their kids to school understand this dynamic all too well.

There is a harmful, highly-contagious disease plaguing salmon farms here in BC. It comes from Norway, where open-net pen salmon farming first began decades ago. British Columbia is lagging behind Norway, but we are beginning to experience the same unsolvable problems they do. Norway has nearly destroyed their own wild salmon runs; but the Pacific Northwest still has marvellous wild salmon runs, unrivalled anywhere else in the world.

This disease is called Piscine orthoreovirus (PRV). Back in 2013 BC's provincial veterinarian reported that 80% of BC salmon farms were infected with PRV. Ecojustice and independent biologist Alexandra Morton launched and won two PRV court cases; in 2015 and again in 2019. The judge ordered the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to use the precautionary principle, which would stop the issuing of licenses which contravene the Fisheries Act. DFO has to date failed to comply.

As we go to press it is unknown whether Fisheries Minister Jonathan Wilkinson will require the companies to test for this disease by the June 4th deadline.

Some things are too important to leave up to government—especially if they're not taking action. Clayoquot Action believes testing for PRV in the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region is such a thing. To this end our Clayoquot Salmon Investigation program (CSI) has launched a new project called *Going Viral*. This summer our volunteers will be out in the Sound, doing citizen science with the goal of establishing whether or not PRV is currently present in Clayoquot, and on how many farms.

Presence of PRV was established in 2017 & 2018 when wildlife photographer Tavish Campbell dove under Creative Salmon's processing plant to sample the blood water gushing out of the fish processing plant into Tofino Harbour. That blood contained fish tissues which tested positive for PRV. The perch feeding on that blood water were also sampled—they too tested positive.

If the *Going Viral* study shows that salmon farms in Clayoquot are infected with PRV, people power can pressure governments and corporations to do the right thing—stop allowing PRV-infected fish to be put into open-net pens in the sea.

Ultimately, challenges such as PRV and the farm-related sea lice epidemic (which is devastating young wild salmon locally) will force companies like Cermaq and Creative to accept the obvious solution—get fish farms out of the sea. This will allow wild salmon populations to rebound, once again creating abundance for everyone living on the coast; from First Nations to bears to ancient cedars.

# We are Salmon People.

Clayoquot Sound is at a crossroads—much like it was thirty years ago, after Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation halted the logging of Meares Island and designated it a Tribal Park. It was clear back then, that the region needed to choose between two alternate visions of the future: whether to become a logged-over wasteland, or a thriving haven of biodiversity in a world of destruction.

Most people who live or visit here now can easily see that the right choice was made—one that has resulted in a flourishing local economy, and a refugium for wild Nature.

All of those conservation victories are now being put at risk by industrial salmon farming. Back then it was understood that ancient rainforest valleys created healthy river habit for wild salmon—summed up in the slogan 'No Trees, No Salmon, No Jobs'. What was not yet understood was the fact that wild salmon returning to spawn in their natal streams actually bring in nitrogen—missing in the shallow soils of the rainforest. This 'nitrogen pump' is one of the few examples in Nature of nutrients moving uphill against gravity, rather than washing down to the sea.

Open-net pen salmon farms are putting wild salmon at risk—by polluting the waters with pesticides and pathogens. Because wild salmon are a keystone species of the rainforest, fish farms are putting everything at risk: ecosystems, economies and cultures.

Clayoquot Action has launched a bold campaign to save wild salmon forever. We have a plan—and you can help make it happen. It's time to get fish farms out of the way, so wild salmon can flourish once again. To rebuild a sustainable wild salmon economy in Clayoquot Sound that can lead the world in solutions. To build government support for retraining workers and restoring damaged ecosystems. Let's create a made-in-BC solution that works for everyone, generating healthy food, great long term jobs, and protecting a healthy ecosystem for future generations.



GetWild! helps to connect you to the healthy and delicious wild Pacific salmon you are looking to enjoy in Tofino. We partner with local chefs and businesses who proudly serve exclusively wild salmon. By choosing to Get Wild! rather than purchasing farmed salmon, you are making the ecologically responsible choice for this beautiful wild coast. Check out the full list of participating restaurants: [getwildsalmon.ca](http://getwildsalmon.ca).

   @GetWild\_Tofino #getwildtofino

## PEOPLE POWER TO WIN!

Please visit [SalmonPeople.ca](http://SalmonPeople.ca) to take the Salmon People Pledge. You'll be the first to hear about the latest developments, and know when you can send letters, sign petitions, volunteer, and more.

**SIGN THE PLEDGE:**  
[SalmonPeople.ca](http://SalmonPeople.ca)



Photo: Bonny Glanbeck

Photo: LummislandWild.com

Salmon People artwork by Joe David