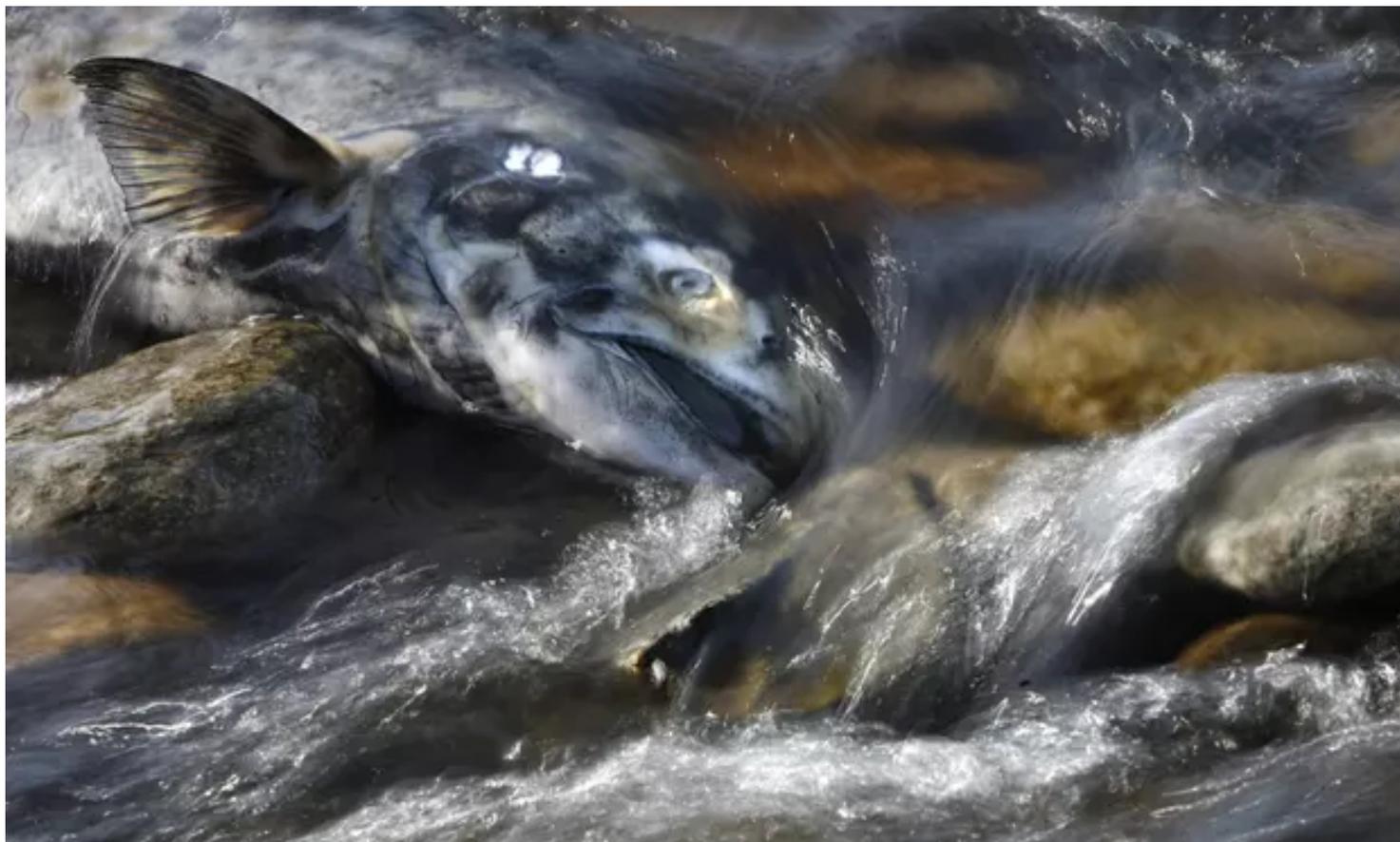


'We're sounding the alarm': half of Canada's chinook salmon endangered

Prospects for species look dire as federal science body finds that only one of the country's 16 populations is believed to be stable



A dead chinook salmon lies in fast waters of the Adams river in British Columbia. Photograph: Andy Clark/Reuters

Leyland Cecco in Toronto

Wed 5 Dec 2018 09.00 GMT

Half of Canada's chinook salmon are endangered, with nearly all other populations in precarious decline, according to a new report, confirming fears that prospects for the species remain dire.

The report by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada concluded that eight of the country's 16 populations are considered endangered, four are threatened, one is of special concern and the health of two remain unknown.

Only one population, which spawns on the Thompson river in British Columbia, is believed to be stable.

"For those of us who have been working on recovering chinook salmon runs in British Columbia, we knew they were in terrible, terrible shape for quite a while now," said Aaron Hill of Watershed Watch, an organisation that monitors ecosystem health. "It was actually good to see it finally recognised by this federally mandated science body, because this hopefully initiates more serious protection efforts from the government."

Watershed Watch has renewed calls for chinook to be listed under federal legislation which would afford the ailing populations more robust government protection. But similar calls were made last year, when the same committee of scientists found that one-third of sockeye salmon are endangered, and the federal government has yet to take action.

"There are some [rivers] where there are thought to be fewer than 200 fish still remaining," committee member and biologist John Neilson, told the Canadian Press. "At that level, there would be concern about those stocks. That's why we're sounding the alarm."

Chinook salmon have long been a critical part of the ecosystem in British Columbia. During spawning periods, millions of fish can travel up waterways, providing a critical source of food for eagles, bears, seals and sea lions.

No single culprit has been identified for the decline. Some blame a surge in populations of seal and sea lion, which feast on salmon, while others fear ocean temperatures are warming too much for the highly sensitive fish.

“The really big overarching stressor is climate change,” said Hill. “That’s creating less favourable conditions for our fish in the ocean and the freshwater - and that’s exacerbated by all these other stressors.”

Chinook salmon are also a critical source of food for the endangered south resident killer whale, which the federal government has spent millions of dollars attempting to protect.

“We need to look after the region in its entirety, from headwaters to the ocean,” said Megan Leslie of the World Wildlife Fund Canada. “We need to act quickly to reduce threats to wildlife, and prioritise actions that have the best chance of success.”

As 2018 draws to a close....

... we're asking readers to make an end of year or ongoing contribution in support of The Guardian's independent journalism.

Three years ago we set out to make The Guardian sustainable by deepening our relationship with our readers. The same technologies that connected us with a global audience had also shifted advertising revenues away from news publishers. We decided to seek an approach that would allow us to keep our journalism open and accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live or what they can afford.

More than one million readers have now supported our independent, investigative journalism through contributions, membership or subscriptions, which has played such an important part in helping The Guardian overcome a perilous financial situation globally. We want to thank you for all of your support. But we have to maintain and build on that support for every year to come.

Sustained support from our readers enables us to continue pursuing difficult stories in challenging times of political upheaval, when factual reporting has never been more critical. The Guardian is editorially independent - our journalism is free from commercial bias and not influenced by billionaire owners, politicians or shareholders. No one edits our editor. No one steers our opinion. This is important because it enables us to give a voice to those less heard, challenge the powerful and hold them to account. Readers' support means we can continue bringing The Guardian's independent journalism to the world.

Please make an end of year contribution today to help us deliver the independent journalism the world needs for 2019 and beyond. **Support The Guardian from as little as £1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian



Topics



- Canada
- The Age of Extinction
- Wildlife
- fish
- Americas
- news