

Letter in Science Highlights Serious Underestimate of LNG Terminal Risks to Skeena Salmon

LNG terminal poses risks to salmon and fisheries throughout Skeena watershed

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New research reveals that a controversial proposed terminal to load fossil fuels in the Skeena River estuary has further-reaching risks than previously recognized.

The [letter](#), which is published in the August 7 issue of *Science*, is authored by fisheries biologists and leaders from First Nations from throughout the Skeena River watershed and a Simon Fraser University professor.



Hundreds of millions of juvenile salmon use the Skeena estuary as nursery habitat every year. Photo credit: Tavish Campbell

The Skeena River supports the second-largest run of salmon in Canada, but is located between fossil fuel reserves in interior Canada and ocean-access to Asian markets. Its estuary acts as nursery for hundreds of millions of young salmon annually as they graduate from freshwater to the sea. First Nations have fished for salmon in the Skeena for over five millennia; these fisheries are protected by the Canadian constitution.

“We discovered that salmon from over 40 populations that are harvested in at least 10 First Nations territories rely on the Skeena’s estuary habitat that would be altered by the fossil fuel terminal. However, industry proponents and the Canadian government have only recognized the interests of a fraction of these First Nations, and have not taken into account the true scope of potential impacts,” says Jonathan Moore, (Associate Professor and Liber Ero Chair of Coastal Science and Management) the lead author.

Lake Babine Nation is one of the groups that stands to be impacted but was not consulted during terminal assessment. “The new data from the estuary is evidence that the proposed LNG terminal could pose risks to our fish and fisheries. Lake Babine is the largest of the Skeena sockeye lakes, with millions of adult sockeye returning in some years,” says Donna Macintyre, a co-author on the paper and Fisheries Director for Lake Babine Nation, located over 350 km upstream from the estuary.

“We live in the headwaters of the Skeena and Fraser River watersheds where salmon are our way of life. We expect the environmental assessment process to take into account both scientific and traditional knowledge to assess the significance of impacts on our rights as Takla people. We applaud this research and expect follow up from Canada, BC, and proponents of LNG projects to meaningfully address our concerns,” says Chief John Allen French, Takla Lake First Nation, unaffiliated with the study.

Decisions affecting a single location can have far-reaching environmental and cultural consequences when they impact migratory species like salmon. “Salmon don’t care about boundaries. Degradation of salmon habitat can impact ecosystems and people as far as salmon can swim,” says Glen Williams from Gitanyow First Nation, a co-author of the letter.

“The Flora Bank region in the Skeena estuary is like Grand Central Station for salmon,” says Allen Gottesfeld of Skeena Fisheries Commission, a co-author of the letter.

Previously, some of these researchers discovered that the Flora Bank region, where the Pacific NorthWest LNG terminal is proposed, contains higher abundances of juvenile salmon than other locations in the estuary, published in the journal [PLOS ONE](#). “Our field crews have captured tens of thousands of juvenile salmon in the area proposed for development,” says Charmaine Carr-Harris, of Skeena Fisheries Commission, the lead author of the PLoS paper and co-author on the Science letter.

The letter calls for the use of science to realign the scales of environmental decision-making with the true scales of natural consequences and human rights.

“This research offers an opportunity for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to use science to get the scale right so that they consider the true vast risks to environment and culture as well as economy,” says Jonathan Moore. “The unintended consequences of locating this terminal in the Flora Banks region could have watershed-wide impacts.”

Citation

Moore, J.W., C. Carr-Harris, A.S. Gottesfeld, D. MacIntyre, D. Radies, M. Cleveland, C. Barnes, W. Joseph, G. Williams, J. Gordon, B. Shepert. 2015. Science. Selling First Nations down the river. <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/349/6248/596.1.full.pdf>

Photographs and other supporting materials for media

<http://moorelab.wix.com/moorelab#!rights-and-salmon/cdko>

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