

Rebuilding the salmon

Canada has been engaged, since 1977, in a \$150-million effort to rebuild salmon and steelhead trout stocks to the levels of the turn of the century. The Salmonid Enhancement Program, as it is called, includes the clearance of blocked streams, restoration of habitat and production of salmon in hatcheries. Planners of the program hope it will increase the total Canadian salmon catch from an annual average of 72 500 tonnes in 1980-83 to 100 000 tonnes in the early 1990s and even higher totals beyond that.

In recent years, following ominous declines in salmon stocks, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans introduced special measures, including catch limits, to conserve and rebuild the wild salmon stocks.

Herring

The story of B.C.'s herring industry is one of many and varied fortunes. From the late 1870s to the 1930s the British Columbia industry built a healthy herring export trade to the Orient. Then, world economic depression cut production by nearly two-thirds. The industry pulled itself out of the slump by building up a market for animal and poultry feed (fishmeal) made from herring. Catches climbed steadily to over one quarter of a million tonnes in the 1960s, before the stocks collapsed in 1965. In the early 1970s, with stocks recovering under careful management, the industry found yet another new herring product line and market — sales of herring roe (eggs) to Japan, whose own stocks of herring were in severe decline. Herring roe — a “high-ticket” item — has now become a major B.C. fishery product line responsible, in 1984, for \$40 million in landed value (i.e. fishermen's earnings) and a wholesale value of \$82 million. So intense and closely-managed is this fishery that annual fishing seasons have been opened and closed by gunshot signals 15 minutes apart.

Another important stock is halibut which, earlier in B.C.'s history, was second only to salmon in landings and value. Landings peaked in the 1920s. Then overfishing caused the collapse of the stocks. In 1923, Canada and the United States formed an international commission to manage the halibut stocks. Although halibut recovered until the early 1960s they are now again in a state of decline. Experts estimate that it will take a decade of strict conservation measures to rebuild the stocks.

With catches of some 62.7 thousand tonnes a year, the Pacific coast's groundfish industry is far smaller than its Atlantic counterpart but catches have tripled over the past 20 years. The main species in the catch are Pacific cod, ocean perch, hake and sablefish.

Smaller but highly promising Pacific coast fisheries have developed on shellfish and crustacean species, notably geoduck, oysters, crabs, clams, shrimp, prawns and abalone.