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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Environment

### **SCIENCE SUPPORTS BLENDED WILDSTOCK-HATCHERY SOLUTION**

SQUAMISH – An independent scientific report commissioned by the Ministry of Environment has concluded that hatchery steelhead can be used to augment the wild population and help its recovery in the Cheakamus River, Environment Minister Barry Penner announced today.

“I believe all voices in the debate have legitimate concerns,” Penner said. “That’s why I asked staff for an independent scientific review to help guide my decision.”

At the request of the ministry, Dr. Marc Labelle, an internationally respected fisheries biologist, reviewed the scientific reports and data concerning the Cheakamus steelhead recovery plans and concluded that natural habitat restoration combined with short-term hatchery supplementation was a sound and viable option in this case.

The CN spill last August killed almost half a million fish in 90 minutes, including steelhead fry, parr and smolts, many of which were projected to mature and return in 2009 and 2010. Local stakeholders advocated using hatchery-reared steelhead to speed up the natural recovery process facilitated by habitat enhancements proposed by the ministry.

Labelle supported the natural recovery plan, but he concluded that each approach had its own merits and that social and economic imperatives supported considering short-term hatchery supplementation as well.

He also observed that short-term hatchery supplementation will likely not jeopardize the genetic integrity of the Cheakamus steelhead population. Efforts will now be made to collect 40 mature adults in the Cheakamus River over the next few weeks. The progeny will be hatchery-reared to produce at least 20,000 smolts, which will eventually augment the wild adult spawners in 2009 and 2010.

“We asked Dr. Labelle to look at all options available to ensure the steelhead population recovers as quickly as possible. In this specific case, natural recovery augmented by short-term hatchery supplementation is the best way forward,” said Penner. “I’ve said from the very beginning that our actions must be based on the best scientific analysis.”

The short-term hatchery supplementation option will be presented at a public meeting Thursday

evening, April 27 in Squamish. During the meeting, feedback will be sought regarding the draft Recovery Plan for the entire ecosystem, including steelhead.

CN Rail is responsible for the costs associated with the rehabilitation of the Cheakamus River. The Ministry of Environment will be monitoring the recovery to completion.

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