

a History of the Salmo River Watershed

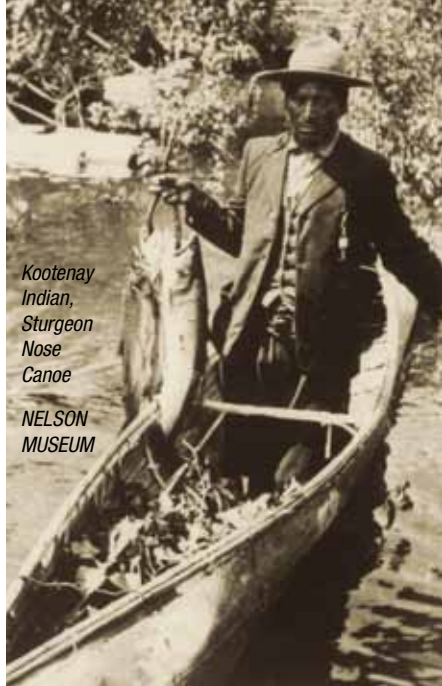
An overview
of events that
have had an
effect on our
river ecology.

researched & written by
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Pre-1807 💧 The Sinixt Nation live in this area in a sustainable relationship with nature. Twice a year, 200–300 people of the Kalispel Tribe travel to harvest salmon from the lower Salmo(n) River. (Harvests have been calculated at over 70,000 lbs.!) Their economy leaves no mark on the landscape. Sinixt peoples use the Salmo(n) River for fishing and the Salmo(n) Valley for berry harvest, hunting and as a route to the Grohman area on the Kootenay River. Historical and ethnographic sources indicate salmon and sea run steelhead were primary subsistence for First Nations people using the area. The salmon harvested include chinook (first to arrive in spring), sockeye (next to arrive in July) and coho (last to arrive in October).¹

Early accounts suggest that prior to European arrival the Salmo(n) River basin was primarily composed of (up to 70%) old-growth western red cedar and hemlock.²



*Kootenay
Indian,
Sturgeon
Nose
Canoe*

*NELSON
MUSEUM*

1807-1811 💧 David Thompson, perhaps the greatest explorer of all time, is the first white man to explore this region. He travels the Kootenay River, as well as the full length of the Columbia, via the Pend d'Oreille River.¹

1825 💧 Fur trader Alexander Ross notes an abundance of salmon, along with other accounts of a significant salmon harvest site, at the mouth of the Pend d'Oreille River.³

1856 💧 The Hudson's Bay Company capitalizes on placer gold discoveries at the mouth of the Pend d'Oreille River (onset of gold rush). Significant land clearing is done in the area—planned but uncontrolled burns provide easy access to bedrock.³ Surface drainage, overland flow, landslide activity and general hydrology are all affected.

1857 💧 Construction begins at Fort Pend d'Oreille, is completed in 1859 and renamed Fort Shepherd. A Sinixt settlement site located there had a population of 200–300, plus a burial ground.³

Late 1850s 💧 Prospectors, including many Chinese, work the Salmo(n) River and its tributaries.⁴

1859 💧 John W. Sullivan, of the Palliser Expedition, prospects and finds gold on the Salmo(n) River. It takes five days to reach the summit between the Salmo(n) River and the Kootenay River from the confluence of the South Salmo(n) River.⁵

1860s 💧 Placer mine settlement established (at Ymir) and recorded as Quartz Creek.⁶

1863 💧 Gold discovered on Wildhorse Creek in East Kootenays.⁴

1865 💧 Dewdney Trail from Victoria to Wildhorse Creek is completed, going through the Salmo(n) River Watershed. John “Jolly Jack” Thornton builds a wing dam at the mouth of the Salmo(n) River. About 200 Chinese men leave Edgar Dewdney’s team and join several hundred others washing gold on the Pend d’Oreille River.⁴



Catching Salmon HEARN FAMILY COLLECTION

1866 💧 Gold is discovered on Forty-Nine and Forty-Eight Creeks—the trail goes up North Fork (Erie Creek) over to Toad Mountain.⁴

1867 💧 Large numbers of prospectors come to Pend d’Oreille by boat, and some overland.⁷

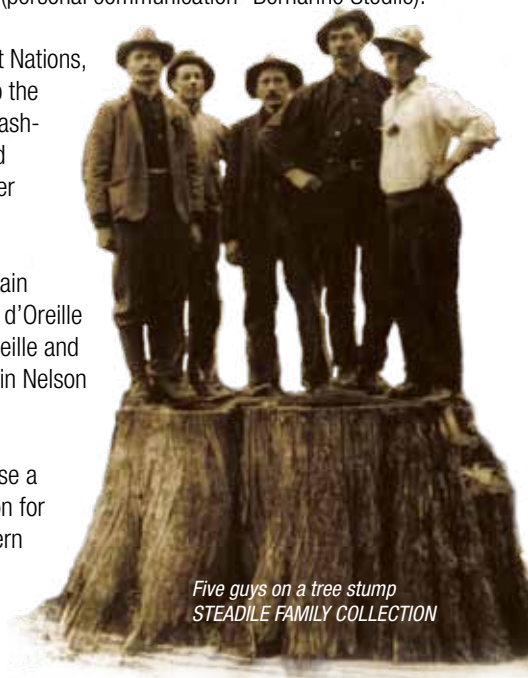
1870 💧 Fort Shepherd closes and then burns down in 1872,⁴ marking the end of the fur trade era in the West Kootenays. The loss of influence of beavers likely had a profound effect on the habitat and biodiversity of riparian and aquatic ecosystems.² Within 60 years of the arrival of the first Europeans, the pristine ecology of the watershed has been greatly transformed to support economic development and resource extraction.

1882 💧 William Feeney, Stagleap Ranch prospector/timber cruiser, is one of the first, if not the earliest permanent settler to the area. (personal communication -Bernarine Stedile).

1886 💧 The Hall brothers, who were First Nations, lead a 14-man gold prospecting expedition up the Salmo(n) River and tributaries from Colville, Washington. First lode claim for silver ore is on Toad Mountain (Kootenay Bonanza Company & Silver King Mine).⁸

1887 💧 30 claims staked on Toad Mountain (Silver King). The Hall brothers move the Pend d’Oreille ferry downstream to Metaline Falls. Pend d’Oreille and Salmo(n) River trails provide access to claims in Nelson area.

1888 💧 Porcupine and Quartz Creeks raise a gold flurry. Silver King Mines begins exploration for hard rock mines. Land is cleared up the western slopes of the watershed.



*Five guys on a tree stump
STEDILE FAMILY COLLECTION*

Late 1800s to early 1900s 💧 Horse logging activity harvests cedar and white pine. Many forestry operations in existence—sawmills are located on Clearwater, Lost and Erie Creeks, and in the Salmon Siding (Salmo) area.⁹

1890 💧 Railway is organized to run between Fort Shepherd and Nelson. Hall Creek is a busy site of placer mining; Nelson Camp is also active.¹⁰

1892 💧 Nelson and Fort Shepherd (N&FS) Railway is granted 10,240 acres of land per mile of laid track.⁴ Pend d'Oreille River placer miners rediscover gold prospects on the Salmo(n) River.⁴

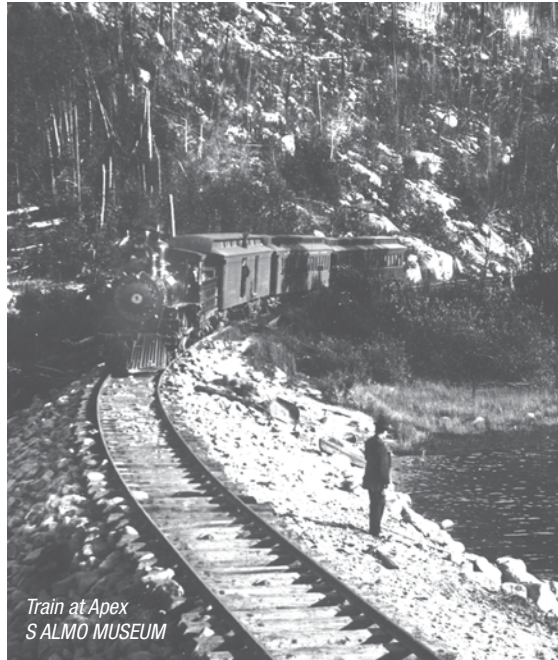
1893 💧 Steven Corbett's N&FS Railway lays tracks through Salmo(n) River valley to Mountain Station in uphill Nelson, completing the last section in December. Salmon Siding is renamed Salmo when the railroad goes through the area. There are 15 placer claims on the Salmo(n) River.¹⁰ Salmon Siding (Salmo) opens largely as a lumbering operation.

Historical wetlands near Apex Creek area are impacted by railway infilling and riparian logging—a 10% loss. Permanent and ephemeral wetlands (4 ha.) lost between mouth of Hall Creek and Hall Siding, due to bank stabilization. Permanent and ephemeral wetlands (5 ha.) compromised on Barrett Creek, due to channelization. Permanent and ephemeral wetlands (2 ha.) compromised by bank stabilization and channelization of Quartz Creek. Ephemeral wetlands on east and west side of river at Hidden Creek compromised. Labyrinth Mill site ephemeral and permanent wetlands (6 ha.) compromised. Area between the Salmo River and railway lands, from Salmo to 3 km. north, historically patchy ephemeral wetlands.²

In terms of ecological and aesthetic damage, channelization is described as second only to impoundment. It contributes to loss of “habitat complexity” and related needs for fish to survive.¹¹ Highway, railroad, private landowners and the Province of BC have channelized approximately 20% of the Salmo River from Barrett Creek to South Salmo River.²

1894 💧 Record snow accumulation of 22 feet causes significant flooding in the region.

1895 💧 Ymir Gold Mine is the first claim staked on Huckleberry Creek by Jerome and Joseph Petrie and Oliver Blair. From 1895 to 1970, 7,314 lbs. of gold and 24,866 lbs. of silver, as well as lead/zinc values, are produced.¹² Prospecting takes place on the south side of Iron Mountain around Salmo and Erie Creek, and up Sheep and Lost Creeks.¹³



1896 💧 Gold is discovered up Sheep Creek, Yellowstone Mine staked by T. Bennett.¹⁴ Ymir Hotel and Saloon erected.

1897 💧 100 placer claims along the Salmo(n) River.⁸ Quartz Creek flourishes—name is changed to Ymir. Nelson's population estimated at 3,000. Fern Mill installed on Hall Creek and Porto Rico Mine property on Barrett Creek, each consisting of a 10-stamp amalgamation mill and cyanide plant. Mills powered by wood-fired boilers—Ymir Mine uses one cord of firewood every hour of operation. Timber is cut and hauled from lower elevation,⁶ causing loss of riparian structure, likely alteration to channel morphology and corresponding loss of habitat complexity.

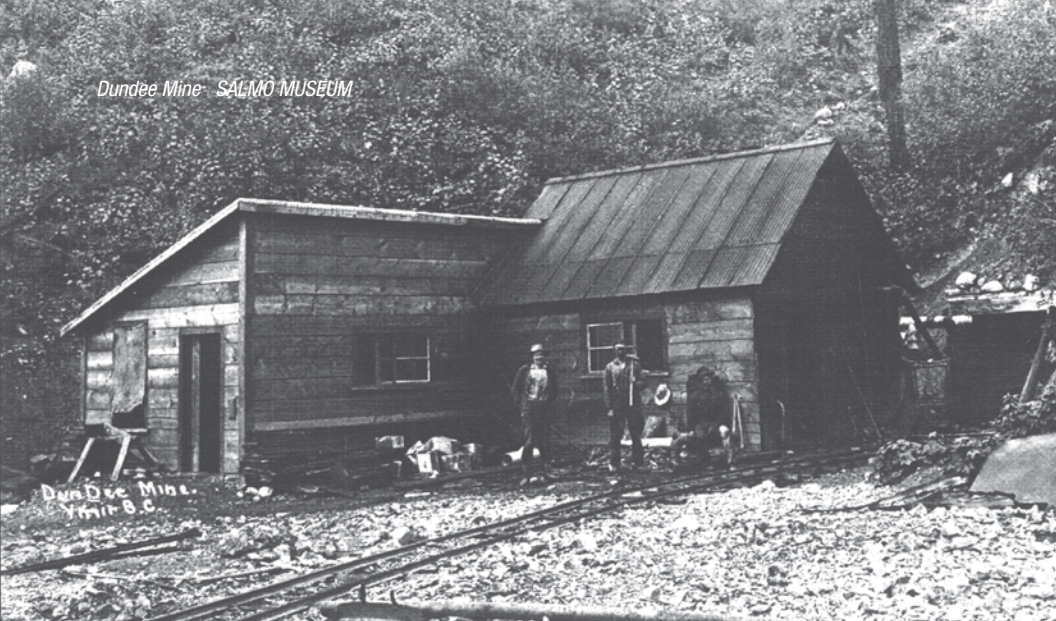
1898 💧 Second Relief Mine staked; Erie Creek Camp's population is 110. Lumbering is the main activity in Salmo; Lavin's sawmill shuts down.⁴ (May indicate significant alteration to confluence of Erie Creek and Salmo(n) River.) Wagon road built up Sheep Creek.

1899 💧 Sheep Creek Camp opens Yellowstone Mine.¹³ Settlement at Erie Lake grows to 200 people; settlement begins at Second Relief Mine. Watercourse of Erie Creek moved 0.5 km. to the south, infilling of wetlands, dyking and channelization. Historic inundation of floodplain lost to settlement development.⁴

Arlington Mine—Crown granted production from 1900–1913 and 1932–1970. 69,823 tons of ore recovered—1,700,339 gm. (3,795 lbs.) gold, 4,334,578 gm. (9,675 lbs.) silver, 520,420 kg. lead and 456,920 kg. zinc.¹⁵

2nd Relief Mine, early 1900's STEADILE FAMILY COLLECTION





1900 💧 Yellowstone Mine (Sheep Creek) installs a 10-stamp mill. Queen property begins production; ore is treated by amalgamation at the Yellowstone Mill. Ymir Mine builds an 80-stamp mill (largest in the British Empire at the time)⁸ and “state-of-the-art” sand leaching cyanide plant, powered by wood, steam and water, likely causing significant alteration to Huckleberry/Wildhorse (Ymir) Creek. Salmo’s population is 75 (45 men, 13 women, 17 children)¹⁶ Ymir Waterworks built, capable of 50,000 gal./day. Ymir Brewery and Electric Company starts.¹⁷ Ymir’s population estimated at 1000.⁸

1903 💧 Kootenay Shingle Company begins operations in Salmo. Land clearing continues to accommodate mining, prospecting and population growth.

1903-1905 💧 Memoir of D.H. Norcross, manager, Hunter V Mine: “From 1903—1905 we lived at the Hunter V Mine at Ymir. The mine was at about 5,000 ft. elevation and connected to the train by tram. From here an excellent view was obtained of the Salmon River Valley, and I still remember seeing the Great Northern Railway trains looking like tiny toys working their way up and down the valley. Also the Ymir mill, Wilcox mill, Porto Rico and Fern mills were all operating and the tailings entering the river had a result that it appeared as a white ribbon in the distance.”¹⁸

NOTE: At one time there were 11 stamp mills located in the Salmo(n) River Watershed—the river was said to carry waste and be coloured from these for decades.¹⁹

1906 💧 J. Waldbesen develops lead ore Emerald Mine/Jersey property (evolves to CanEx Mine) 11 km. southeast of Salmo. CanEx Mine tailings now cover 3–4 ha. historic wetlands (some patches still exist). From 1949 to 1970, Jersey produces 6.4 million tons ore—115,000 tons lead, 263,000 tons zinc and 21,500 kg. silver.²⁰

1907 💧 HB Mine, staked by Horton, Billings, Benson & Ross, is the first mine to hire women. First optioned by Cominco in 1911 (which still owns the mineral rights and is

still obligated to monitor the tailing ponds). The HB Mine produces 6,656,101 tons of ore, recovering: 29,425,521 gm. silver, 49,511,536 kg. lead, 260,431,646 kg. zinc, 2,019,586 kg. cadmium, 105,412 kg. copper and 6,159 gm. gold.²¹

1908 💧 Queen Group of Sheep Creek (four claims) eventually erects a 50 tons ore/day mill in 1935, which runs continuously till closing in 1951. The Queen property produces 653,165 tons of ore, recovering: 9,453,383 gm. (21,101 lbs.) gold, 3,121,527 gm. (6,968 lbs.) silver, 7,769 kg. lead and 3,063 kg. zinc.²²

1909 💧 Ymir Mine slows production, fading from attention as a big producer. Tailings are known to sit directly on the southwest bank of Wildhorse Creek and the Salmo(n) River. Kootenay Belle begins production via a four-stamp mill.^{13,23}

1912 💧 Salmo Hotel is erected. In Alaska, Mount Katami erupts—an ash cloud settles on the Kootenays four days later. Relief Mine stops operation.²³

1913 💧 Yankee Girl Mine (located by J.H. Graham, D.E. Grobe and D. McLeod on October 30, 1899) begins production in earnest after years of start/stop, owner/operator changes and becomes a stalwart of the region.²³

1914 💧 Last year of mining at the Silver King Mine. Placer operation set up on Sheep Creek to recover gold; tailings from Queen Group Mines are deposited directly into the creek from Yellowstone Mill. Significant factors of turbidity and suspended solids are present in Sheep Creek, along with many other toxic compounds.

1915 💧 Motherlode Mine runs steadily from 1906, producing 61,336 tons of ore. It consists of a 100-ton stamp cyanide mill erected on Sheep Creek, able to process 125 tons ore/day—the first of its kind in BC. ²⁴ All mines/mills generate tailings that may source contaminates to rivers.

1916 💧 Sheep Creek production ends due to fixed gold prices and production costs. Sheep Creek town site remains active until WWII.

1919 💧 Iron Mountain Ltd. completes concentrator mill on Emerald property and produces 1,100 tons of galena. Fire at Second Relief Mine destroys 40-stamp mill, flotation separator and the camp.

1920 💧 Ymir's population reduced to 300.

1922 💧 Nugget Mine discovered in 1907, produces 21,409 oz. of gold and 4,836 oz. of silver from 36,665 tons of ore. The Sheep Creek Mining Camp, worked by the Enderby family and others, ranks as the sixth largest gold producer in BC's history, producing 727,000 oz. of gold from 1,744,000 tons of ore.²⁵

1924-1930 💧 Brook trout (108,227 fry and eyed egg) 6,000 eyed egg cutthroat trout stocked into Salmo(n) River and its tributaries.²⁶

1926 💧 Large forest fire in upper Salmo(n) Valley destroys forest not yet cut by Porto Rico Timber. Sawyer and logger Frank Rotter arrives in Salmo from Washington State,²⁷ and becomes a major land-owner and prominent local businessman. He owns the mill located at Sheep Creek



and old road (1937–1974), and is the contractor involved in significant channelization and alteration of the Salmo River using a D9 dozer and other equipment instream.

1927 💧 Second Relief Mine revives production for galena using diamond drilling. Oscarson Mining Company builds a 75-ton 15-stamp mill that uses elemental mercury in an amalgamation gold extraction process.²³

1928 💧 Kootenay Shingle Company ceases operations; this may signify loss of economic production or timber resources following a forest fire. Consolidated Mining & Smelting takes 12,000 tons of ore from Hunter V Mine.¹³ Emerald Mine renews gold production.²³

1929 💧 Operations suspended at Second Relief and Arlington mines.²³ Reno Gold Mine installs a 25 ton/day cyanide processing plant.¹³ Yankee Girl ceases production. If dates of the Yankee Girl operation are correct, the tailings pile has been a point source of contaminants directly into the Salmo River for more than 75 years.

1930s 💧 The Sheep Creek town site, located at the confluence of Waldie Creek, is estimated at 111 houses. The town site is partially built on tailings. Today, a forest recreation site exists near the old town site location, along with several relics of concentrator mills. Sheep Creek experienced extensive alteration over the course of area mine production.

1931 💧 West Kootenay Power strings 63kv #7 line, providing electricity to Ymir and Salmo.

1931-1934 💧 Rainbow trout (25,000 fingerlings) stocked into Salmo(n) River and tributaries. Stocking since the 1920s may indicate a conscious effort to revive the fishery resource. The impact of stocking on resident species is unknown.²⁶

1932-1933 💧 Motherlode Mill is reconditioned to ball mill to treat Reno ore. Accounts suggest that tailings are washed directly into Sheep Creek.²⁸ Reno Mill is destroyed by fire.

1934 💧 Great BC Forest Fire burns Iron Mountain and Reno Mines surface plants. Crowsnest Pass road (942 miles) completed between Medicine Hat and Vancouver, providing easier access to the Salmo(n) River Valley. The last known ocean salmon is caught near



Nelson at Slocan Pools. This signifies an extreme shift in the ecology of the entire watershed based on the nutrient recycling capacity of anadromous fish after spawning.

1935 💧 Cyanide processing plant is added to Second Relief Mill, and is in operation until 1948.



Queen Mill Flume 1936 SALMO MUSEUM

1936-1953 💧 Rainbow trout (461,000 fry; 370,000 eyed egg) stocked into Salmo River and its tributaries.²⁶

1939 💧 Forest fire rips through Beaver Creek Valley near Fruitvale. Emerald Mine produces 200 tons/day of tungsten ore during WWII.

1940 💧 Dundee Mine ore is treated by a 50-ton concentrator at 1,000 m. elevation on the north side of Oscar Creek. An estimated 360,000 tons of waste material is produced. Dundee and Yankee Girl amalgamated.²⁹

1940-1941 💧 Kokanee (170,000 eyed egg) stocked into Salmo River and its tributaries.²⁶

1940-1942 💧 Brook trout (80,000 eggs) stocked into Salmo River and its tributaries. Expansion of the forest industry results in construction of road networks farther into hills. This signifies changes in runoff, sedimentation, creek crossing and functional riparian habitat.

1940-1950s 💧 Construction of Albeni Falls Dam and Box Canyon Dam in the US.

The Kalispel Tribe contends that dams caused shift in fishery resources to a greater portion of non-sport fish—squawfish (now known as northern pike minnow), perch and sucker.¹ Loss to resident rainbow trout fishery.

1941 💧 Great Northern Railway suspends passenger service between Nelson and Fort Shepherd.

1942 💧 Grand Coulee Dam construction is completed, permanently blocking salmon runs. This is the era of Boundary Water Commission and flood control efforts on the Kootenay River at Grohman and Granite.³⁰

Grand Coulee Dam G. NELLESTIJN



1945-1949 💧 Brook trout (50,000 eyed eggs) stocked into Salmo River and its tributaries.²⁶

1946 💧 Salmo incorporates as a village.

1948 💧 Great flooding in BC, causing extensive damage along the Columbia River from Trail to Oregon. Also presumed to have caused damage to channel morphology and hydrology in the Salmo River Watershed.

1949 💧 Spruce beetle infestation in the southern Kootenays. May signify loss of forest health in the region due to significant alteration, fire suppression, and shift in ecology and species composition. CanEx ceases milling tungsten at Emerald Mine and converts to concentrate lead and zinc.



Waneta Dam TECK COMINCO

1950 💧 Clearcut logging as a practice starts in earnest in Canada in the 1950s. Impacts include increased road building, runoff alteration, increased water temperatures, quicker snowmelt and rainfall run-off (freshet) leading to “flashier” more turbid high water events.

1951 💧 HB Mine and Camp constructs a 1,000 ton/day concentrator close to the confluence of Sheep and Aspen Creeks.²¹ Consolidated Mining and Smelting (CM&S) initiates construction of Waneta Dam.

1953 💧 CM&S completes Waneta Dam on the Pend d'Oreille River (500 m. upstream of Columbia River). Salmo River Watershed drainage and fish populations are completely isolated. CM&S completes a concentrator mill at HB Mine.

1958 💧 CanEx shuts down Emerald Mine and mill.

1960s 💧 Fishery kill limits on the Salmo River are 15 fish a day.²⁶

1963 💧 CanEx constructs "Car Body Runs"—car bodies cabled side to side to prevent tailings from eroding into the river. By 2006, this protection had rotted out; Streamkeepers/Fortis and the Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program partner together to construct bank stabilization/fish enhancement structures.

1966 💧 Cominco Ltd., formerly known as CM&S, shuts down HB Mine operations.²¹

1967 to Present 💧 Pluto Darkwoods Forestry Ltd., owned by the Wurttemberg royal family of Germany, buys extensive land holdings (136,000 acres) in the upper eastern end of the Salmo River Watershed. Other German princes buy up land in the area as well. Significant industrial logging starts in the high country.

1970 💧 Sheep Creek waste piles from the Queen, Motherlode and Yellowstone Mines are shipped to Cominco's smelter in Trail for silica extraction.

1971 💧 Canadian Exploration Ltd. (CanEx) ceases operations at Jersey Mine. Two 4+ ha. tailings remain close to the shore of the Salmo River.

1972 💧 Flooding occurs due to above average snow pack. Second highest maximum daily flow at 351 cm/second.

1973 💧 Jersey town site is auctioned off piecemeal and mine reclaimed.

1974 💧 Frank Rotter sells Sheep Creek Mill to Idaho Forest Products. Mr. Rotter dies the following year.²⁷

1978 💧 HB Mine and Camp closes.²¹

1979 💧 Seven Mile Dam is completed (reservoir >1,000 acres). Lower several km. of Salmo River is transformed into a reservoir, leading to increased water temperatures and extreme changes in aquatic biodiversity (increased non-sport fish), and alteration to the hydrological regime.

1980s 💧 Several more tailings piles are shipped to Cominco's smelter at Trail.

1988 💧 Seven Mile Reservoir reaches full pool.

1994 💧 Report by Klohn Crippen of Second Relief Mine tailings (mercury contamination) considers contamination conditions typical of abandoned mine sites throughout the Kootenay region. Private land logging in Porcupine Creek does not recognize Mountain Caribou habitat. Clear cutting causes a shift in hydrology, increased sediment deposition and overland runoff.³¹

1998 💧 The Salmo Watershed Stream-keepers Society (SWSS) incorporates and begins working to increase aquatic ecosystem health in the Salmo River Watershed and the Columbia River Basin.

2000 💧 The Ministry of the Environment conducts water and sediment sampling of Yankee Girl tailings. Sections of the tailings pond flood seasonally during freshet, leading to contaminant flushing into the Salmo River. Elevated levels of cadmium, arsenic, iron, manganese and zinc all exceed provincial Water Quality Guidelines.³¹

2003 💧 DFO "Inspector's Direction" engages Ministry of Agriculture and Lands Contaminated Sites Branch to "stabilize tailing and prevent deleterious substances from entering the Salmo River at Yankee Girl tailings site." Work to proceed in 2006–2008 to complete containment and partial treatment of this site.

2003-2005 💧 Reports are prepared by URS Canada and SNC-Lavlin Morrow Environmental regarding restoration of Yankee Girl tailings.

2006 💧 SWSS, in partnership with the Columbia Kootenay Fisheries Renewal Partnership, completes The Salmo River Watershed-based Fish Sustainability Plan. This multi-stakeholder initiative, funded by Columbia Basin Trust, includes industry, politicians, government agencies, landowners and community groups. SWSS works in partnership with stakeholders and others to research data gaps relating to aquatic ecosystem health and, with the Plan in hand, is moving toward restoration and other activities.³³





Yankee Girl Tailings Site GERRY NELLESTIJN

2007 💧 Mining exploration begins in earnest again in the Salmo River Watershed. Yankee Girl contaminated tailings site “restoration” starts in earnest. “Lifestyle” settlement increases in the Salmo River Watershed.

2008 💧 Pluto Darkwoods Forestry Ltd. change forestry operations to meet conservation objectives as determined by the new owners, the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Respect river health and water purity by maintaining a 30 metre no development buffer.

We're All Downstream.

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Timeline—Handwritten notation: Salmo Museum started 1987. 3 pages.

NOTE: Some information for this story pole of the Salmo River Watershed was adopted from the timeline on the Crowsnest Highway website: <http://www.crowsnest-highway.ca/timeline.pl>

