



## THE UCLUELET SALMON LADDER DERBY



# A Fish-Off, Festival and Fundraiser

By Amy Hancock

The Ucluelet Salmon Ladder Derby is a fishing event that runs for four months in Ucluelet on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The sports fishing community of Ucluelet comes together every year to organize this unique summer-long derby and give visitors and locals the chance to win some serious cash and prizes totalling over \$60,000.

Initiated by the Ucluelet Salmon Enhancement Society, all proceeds of the Ucluelet Salmon Ladder Derby are donated to local salmon enhancement projects, specifically the nearby Thornton Creek Hatchery.

How does it work? Derby tickets are purchased for the day, multi-day, or the season. This year, participating anglers fished from May 1st to September 7th, bringing their catches to the weigh in station which is open daily. The top 15 fish caught each month, along with the top 50 of the entire summer, are all entered into the Fish Off. This year's Fish Off ran September 9th through 11th, with another round of cash and prizes rewarded for the top fish of the Fish Off.

\$8000 dollars is rewarded each month divided among the top three fish. This year, \$2000 each month was donated directly to the Thornton Creek Hatchery, a local salmon enhancement project that releases hundreds of thousands of salmon into local waterways each year.

"We had an exciting summer and saw lots of big fish," said Lisa Brisco, Derby Coordinator.

The largest fish weighed into the Ucluelet Salmon Ladder Derby was 49 pounds 5 ounces and caught by 16 year old Erik Brownell who was visiting from North Vancouver in early August.

"We had people coming in from all over the western states and provinces to fish in the derby all summer long."

In fact, the winner of the Fish Off was Rich Allen, a visitor from Mount Vernon in Washington State. He landed a 41 pound 9 ounce Chinook with Pacific Waters Sport Fishing on the second day of the Fish Off winning a prize valued over \$10,000, which included a \$6500 cheque.

"The participants were so excited to be in the Fish Off last weekend. These fishers were extremely competitive throughout the summer trying to get into the top 15 with a spot on the ladder and qualify for the Fish Off." Brisco

added, "They brought fish, after fish, after fish..."

Those who did qualify for the three day Fish Off lined up at the fuel dock in the Ucluelet Harbour, eager for the 7:00AM air horn start. From there a fleet of sport fishing boats headed out to the Hyason and Starfish Banks just 15 miles from Ucluelet's shores to take advantage of the bite.

The fishing grounds were watched by a Derby Patrol who was also able to photograph a piece of the fishing action from the water. On the first day, within the first 15 minutes at the grounds, a fish over 38 inches long was called into Derby Headquarters, a fish that placed its catcher in 4th place overall. From there it snowballed with fish landing in boats several times an hour for three exciting days in a row.

"The energy out on the water and at the weigh in dock was so positive!" said Brisco. "These fishers were having a great time. Lots of laughter and jokes, congratulating each other, and even dancing on deck as the boats were coming in!"

In 2nd place was Bill Weber from Lethbridge, Alberta with a 41 pound 3 ounce catch. In 3rd was local Kenneth Nakagawa at 41 pounds 15 ounces, 4th place was Scott Reed at 38 pounds 7 ounces and the derby's youngest participant, 11 year old Billy Buhler, came in 5th with his 35 pound 7 ounce fish.

The Fish Off wrapped up with the Ucluelet Salmon Festival. This event included the rewards ceremonies, salmon barbeque, live musical entertainment, a marketplace, beer gardens, and children's activities. It was well attended by the derby participants, their fishing guides, and the local community of Ucluelet. Proceeds from the Ucluelet Salmon Festival are also donated to the Thornton Creek Hatchery.

The total amount raised for the Thornton Creek Hatchery was \$6000. That money will go towards operations, much need equipment repairs, and the construction of a viewing platform at the creek for visitors to watch the salmon spawn. The Ucluelet Salmon Ladder Derby is proud to support salmon enhancement and to help maintain sustainability of the west coasts most precious resource.

Thank you to all of the sponsors of the 2011 Ucluelet Salmon Ladder Derby. Your sponsorship went towards operations, staffing, prizes, and donations to the Thornton Creek Hatchery. To become a sponsor in the 2012 Ucluelet Salmon Ladder Derby, to make a donation, or for more information visit: [www.uclueletsalmonladderderby.com](http://www.uclueletsalmonladderderby.com)

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