

## Ryan Viers

Raising net pen Steelhead anywhere in the Pacific Northwest is an absolute disaster waiting to happen. Raising net pen Steelhead outside of the Skagit River watershed should have been shoot down long before it got to this stage.

The Skagit River was once a fabled Salmon and Steelhead river. Now it is a fraction of what it once used to be. There are many reasons of why the Skagit River saw declines of Salmon and Steelhead. That is not the point, the point is that there is, and has been, an active move to conserve these fish in this river (and others in the Puget Sound). There was a full on cancellation of Steelhead fishing season for a decade, that has only re-opened twice in the last 3 season, and one of those openings was a partial opening. The reason, to let wild Steelhead recover and repopulate.

Now lets rewind a couple years when Cooke had a net pen failure that saw tens of thousands of Atlantic Salmon (which are non-native to the Pacific Ocean and it's watersheds) swimming freely in the Sound and making their way up the Skagit River, as far as Rockport. A failure which by the way, Cooke tried to initially blame on big tides caused by an eclipse. Nice job on stepping up and taking ownership. Ultimately, if net pens with farmed Steelhead are allowed in Puget Sound outside of the Skagit River...it will fail, at some point. And, when it does fail all of those farmed Steelhead will do exactly what the Atlantic Salmon did, find a river to swim up. When that happens the farmed Steelhead will try to spawn with wild Steelhead. Maybe the farmed Steelhead are all sterile, that's what we are told anyway. But, how do we really know? A failure like this from a company that we already know tries to deflect responsibility could undo years, decades, of recovery of the fish that made the Skagit River known world wide.

Having farmed Steelhead on my plate is not a compelling enough argument to put a net pen, any net pens, in Puget Sound outside of the Skagit River. The state of Washington should not even be considering this. What should be considered is eliminating net pens altogether in Puget Sound, removing dams and hatcheries, and letting the fabled wild Salmon and Steelhead that made the Pacific Northwest what is, recover.