

Forum on Conservation and Harvest Planning for Fraser Salmon

SPECIAL TECHNICAL SESSION

May 18, 2010 • Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel • Richmond, BC

ATTENDANCE

Dave Antoine
Aaron Gillespie, Secwepemc Fisheries Commission
Jeff Thomas, Snuneymuxw First Nation
Susan Anderson Behn, Vancouver Island FRAWG
Kelsey Campbell, A-tlegay Band
Tracy Sampson, Nicola Tribal Association
Kevin Cook, Snuneymuxw First Nation
Mike Jimmie, Sto:lo Nation
Brenda Morgan, Matsqui First Nation
Kim Charlie, Chehalis Indian Band
Ken Malloway, Kwaw Kwaw Apilt
Ernie Crey, Sto:lo Tribal Council
Murray Ned, Sumas First Nation
Neil Todd, Nicola Tribal Association
Margo French, Takla Lake First Nation
Gord Sterritt, NSTC
Andrew Meshue, Williams Lake Band
Marilyn Camille, Secwepemc Nation
Saul Terry, ITO/St'at'imec Nation
Steve Carpenter, Heiltsuk First Nation/FNFC
Ross Wilson, Heiltsuk First Nation
Jay Forsythe, Tsleil Waututh First Nation
Chris Cook, Namgis First Nation
Ian Bruce,
Randy Lewis,
Les Jantz, DFO
Christina Ciesielski, CSTC
Greg Wadhams, Namgis First Nation

Opening Prayer – Jeff Thomas, Snuneymuxw First Nation

BACKGROUND (Pat Matthew)

- At the last Forum meeting in Tsawout, First Nations put forward some recommendations to DFO on Spring 4₂ Chinook. There was some unfinished business related to sockeye. Various conservation and harvest issues of concern were identified by Forum participants. These issues will be discussed, along with recommendations for management options that First Nations can put forward to DFO at the Tier 2 Forum session on May 20.
- DFO also put forward a series of questions related to principles for sharing fish in times of low abundance. Without a clear political mandate, it becomes difficult for First Nations participants to answer these questions through the Forum process, as they are linked to title and rights, consultation issues, etc. Issues related to mandate and representation will be discussed at the Roadmap process.
- First Nations and DFO continue to use the Forum as a process for learning, developing structure, working together, building relationships, etc. As First Nations learn about each other's fisheries, it becomes easier for them to understand how fisheries management actions affect communities in different areas of the river in terms of harvest and conservation goals.

EARLY STUART

- Margo French delivered a message on behalf of the Takla First Nation. Last year fewer than 100 Early Stuart returned to some of the creeks in the Takla Lake system. In the 80s there were 23 stocks returning to those creeks; now there are only 7. Takla is requesting 100% protection for Early Stuart sockeye.
- It was stated that DFO should be managing sockeye according to conservation units and not aggregates.
- Les Jantz provided technical background on Early Stuart. These fish have been a stock of concern for 20+ years. Directed fisheries have been few and far between. DFO has developed an approach where they try to protect 90% of Early Stuarts, with the understanding that their timing overlaps with more abundant early summer and summer stocks. If the goal was to protect 100%, all fisheries would have to remain closed into August in most years, preventing access to more abundant stocks. The approach DFO has taken in the past is to implement window closures of 3-4 weeks while Early Stuart are present (still working on finalizing 2010 closure dates). Long-term average exploitation for Early Stuart under this management approach is between 5% and 15%, depending on timing.
- It was recommended that a planning tool showing the migration timing of all stocks should be developed to show when fisheries should be open or closed (showing peak dates and window closures for all species).
- Early Stuart will be managed according to the P25 level, which uses the most conservative abundance estimates.
- Monitoring and compliance for sockeye and other species was raised at the Forum meeting in Tsawout. DFO will be working on putting together a monitoring and compliance workshop, probably in the fall.
- Proposed closures will apply to main stem fisheries only; terminal fisheries on stronger stocks can still occur based on negotiations between DFO and First Nations communities.

EARLY SUMMER

- Nadina, Bowron, Taseko and Pitt have been identified as stocks of concern. Scotch and Seymour are expected to have high returns.
- The key management issue with early summers is how to harvest more abundant stocks (Scotch and Seymour) while they are migrating with stocks of concern.
- In the past, DFO has implemented window closures to protect early summers. One option to protect early miscellaneous stocks is to extend the Early Stuart closure window by approximately one week. Also need to consider how to deal with a longer migration (longer window closures?).
- Stocks of concern in the early summer group should be protected from recreational fisheries.
- First Nations are often concerned when FSC fisheries are shut down while recreational fisheries are occurring in other areas of the river.
- Protecting stocks of concern is important, but also need to look at reasons for the decline (habitat issues, etc.).
- Specific dates for window closures are not identified in the IFMP because it can change in-season depending on migration timing and various other factors. However, conservation objectives are included in the IFMP, which are achieved through window closures. Information that DFO uses to plan fishing openings and closures is communicated to First Nations through the weekly technical conference calls, etc.

SUMMER

- Stellako and Late Stuart have been identified as stocks of concern; their timing overlaps with Chilco, a stronger summer stock. Quesnel sockeye have also been returning in smaller numbers than expected.
- With the current forecast, summers have an upper harvest allowance of 60% according to FRSSI TAM rules. 60% exploitation raises serious concerns for Stellako and Late Stuart; an exploitation rate of closer to 10% was recommended by CSTC to protect stocks of concern.
- 10% exploitation on summers would shut down all recreational and commercial fisheries on sockeye. First Nations would need to develop sharing arrangements, as the TAC would not meet FSC needs. This will be discussed by political representatives at the Forum meeting.

- Need to determine the impacts on coastal First Nations before they can provide input.

LATE SUMMER SOCKEYE

- This is a dominant year for Adams sockeye.
- The key management issue is that Adams overlap with Cultus, a stock of concern.
- Cultus is undergoing rehabilitation through enhancement, predation control, etc.
- It was expressed that Cultus sockeye are distinguishable by size, and could be conserved through selective seine fishing.
- Measures to protect summer sockeye will impact harvest opportunities on lates.
- Soowahlie First Nation needs to be involved in discussions concerning Cultus sockeye. Their recommendation will be brought to the Forum meeting.
- DFO is consulting on exploitation rates ranging from 20% to 30% for summer sockeye.
- Closures to protect Cultus sockeye will impact harvest for bands below the turn-off (Vedder confluence) for those fish leaving the main stem river. This will be discussed at the Forum meeting.
- Secwepemc recommends that decisions about Cultus sockeye be left up to lower Fraser First Nations who will be affected by management actions (e.g. Soowahlie).

EVALUATION OF MEETING PROCESS

- Discussing fisheries issues and recommendations together is an educational process. It helps First Nations to learn about each other's fisheries. Understanding the issues throughout the watershed will help with fisheries work at the local level.
- Addressing issues by timing group helps to focus the discussion, and will help to guide discussions at the Forum meetings over the next 2 days.
- Fisheries are about culture and tradition, not just food.
- DFO staff (Les Jantz and Ann-Marie Huang) were acknowledged for their technical support. It is helpful for First Nations to receive technical information in advance of the Forum meetings. It provides a good basis for management discussions.
- How do First Nations reconcile their world view with western science? Incorporating ATK into the current management regime remains an issue.
- Better follow-up from DFO is needed (as discussed at the Tsawout Forum meetings). First Nations want to see the rationale for DFO's management decisions, especially when they do not follow recommendations from First Nations.
- First Nations feel that a formalized process is needed, with TOR and long-term funding, in order to be effective.
- Political meetings without the technical background are not effective. First Nations expressed that they support having a technical session as part of the Forum meetings.

Closing Prayer – Jeff Thomas, Snuneymuxw First Nation