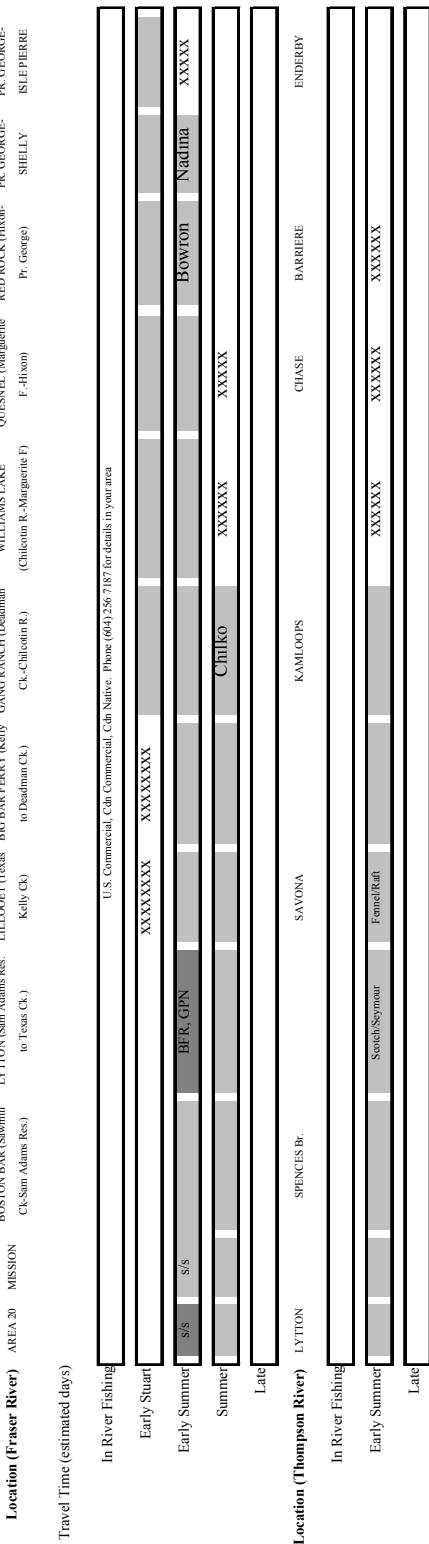


Watershed Talk

— A weekly Aboriginal fisheries newsletter for fisheries representatives and their organizations



Yet Another Bleak Year For Carrier People and Their Way of Life

By Marcel Shepert

With the majority of the Early Stuart sockeye run already through the system, the cold hard reality of yet another conservation closure is beginning to sink in here in Carrier country. Calls are coming in to my office from very upset Carrier people throughout the Stuart watershed. Many are fed up with hearing the same old, same old! The call to stay out of the water for another year is amounting to a form of cultural regression, say fishers. Young First Nations facing another year without a hope of fishing Early Stuart sockeye simply means, yet another year where the youth cannot engage in their cultural activity. People are becoming very concerned, confused, and even angry.

To many fishing families in the Stuart River drainage the question inevitably arises as to why they should always have to bare the burden of conservation? Many First Nations feel If they stop fishing they cease to be Indian; therefore, they feel a very strong urge to just keep on fishing, they will not stop. For many the question remains, what is the price of a culture? If people are to give up fishing

because of conservation concerns, who will decide when and at what price? In today's consumerist, high tech fast paced milieu, it is very hard to maintain cultural practices, now Carrier people have to consider a life without fishing for their winter sustenance fish. Furthermore, when conservation closures are called, how are the people who will ultimately be affected consulted? I noticed in conversation with some fishing families that issues like: escapement targets, fishing planning, rebuilding goals, and assessment are still not completely understood, and I as a fisheries program manager have to take some responsibility for this; however the problem needs to be addressed. The issue of capacity opens the box to many inextricably linked issues surrounding the management of fisheries in Indian country. The lack of understanding at the grass roots level is only exacerbated, of course, when considering the brutal fishing opportunities of the last few years.

From my perspective one of the key areas to focus on is raising awareness, embracing diversity, and understanding the ecological interdependence at the grassroots level, so that we can promote conservation and consequently buy-in on management decisions. Where



do we engage the communities and its members in the watershed planning process, and get involvement in species conservation and monitoring? When people at the community level express their frustration about Early Stuart sockeye, and the management thereof, I feel a pit in the centre of my stomach. Then I realize that First Nations have only been brought into the current management regime within the last 10 years, and that we still have a lot of work to do to bridge the gap between the two cultures and their respective ways of doing business. In short, we have an incredible opportunity to do things differently in the future, and yet the relationship between the two cultures is still in its infancy. Clearly for me the challenge is going to be about getting more community people involved in the planning process so that when issues arise they are in the know and have a level of comfort about decision-making, and maybe they even have a direct say in what happens to stocks in their territory.

As for Early Stuart Sockeye what more can be said? The future is not looking very bright for the fish and the people who have relied on them for centuries. From my perspective the time has come for all central interior people, not just the Carrier Sekani to take a long

hard look at the situation and to begin asking the tough questions that need to be asked. How willing are people to drive a stock to extinction, at what cost, and to whom? How high a price do we put on culture, and to what extent are governments and the people they represent willing to protect a stock of fish, and finally what kind of decision framework do we have in place to engage First Nations and Canadian citizens in general to make some of these difficult choices. Maybe we should all be paying more attention to the Cultus and Sakinaw sockeye situation, maybe there will be lessons learned, lessons we can all learn from.

Sockeye Season Well Underway

By *Mike Staley* at (604) 261-7065 or mstaley@mstaley.com

This week sees a transition from Early Summers to Mid-summers in the outside migration areas. The Early summer run size seems to be near the pre season 50% forecast in aggregate. However, the lower river stocks (Pitt and Chilliwack) seem to be doing better than the upriver stocks. Water temperatures are high throughout the river and are expected to remain high for some time. While flows in the canyon are similar to 1998 the

temperatures are expected to remain a degree or so lower than 1998 hence the enroute loss is expected to be smaller than that year but larger than preseason expectations.

The mid-summer run is in the marine areas in abundance, particularly Johnstone Straights. Low impact commercial fishing began earlier in the week and more intense fishing is expected early next week in Johnstone Straights and Juan de Fuca. Lower river commercial gillnetting could also start early next week.

UPCOMING MEETINGS & TELECONFERENCES

Aug. 6/03: 9:00 AM – Ad Hoc Fraser Technical Committee Teleconference. Chair(s): Ken Wilson/Les Jantz

AUG. 7/03: 4:00 PM - FRAFS Technical Fraser Sockeye Update Teleconference. Chair(s): Mike Staley/Ken Wilson.