

THE Watershed's SOURCE

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Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance Society Newsletter

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Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance 2006 Demonstration Fishery Coordination Initiative

By Pete Nicklin,
UFFCA Stock Management Biologist

Note: The following article is a summary of the full report completed by the UFFCA. The full report will be available on the UFFCA website in December 2006.

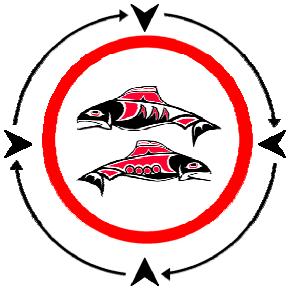
The Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA) is committed to improving the management of Fraser sockeye and exploring opportunities for economic development in the fisheries sector in the Upper Fraser. Demonstration Fisheries projects that target stronger stocks of sockeye, in the areas approaching the spawning grounds, while avoiding weaker stocks are examples of progressive fisheries management consistent with the principles of sustainable use.

Undertaking a Demonstration Fishery in the Upper Fraser requires significant planning, coordination, monetary and personnel resources in order to have the highest chance for success. However, despite the challenges that exist, the UFFCA considers economic development in the fishery resource an important part of co-management and is dedicated to collaborating with member First Nations and providing support in the form of technical expertise in coordination, and providing commercial fisheries advice and a fisheries management role.

Although economic development is an important part of the strategy for the UFFCA, conservation of the fishery resource remains the priority. Therefore, all economic development activities are secondary to sustainable management of the fish stocks.

In June 2006 the UFFCA proposed an Economic Opportunity (later referred to as Demonstration Fishery) model to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) for soliciting and coordinating Demonstration Fishery proposals and projects in the Upper Fraser for the 2006 fishing season. The UFFCA and DFO agreed on the implementation of this model for the proposed Demonstration Fisheries.

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*A fisheries conservation group serving the
Upper Fraser region since 2001.
Incorporated 2005.*

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**Letters are welcomed
& encouraged!**

DFO accepted the UFFCA's Demonstration Fishery model after receiving approval from the Minister to proceed with planning for Demonstration Fisheries. An initial allocation of 30,000 sockeye from the summer sockeye aggregate was granted for successful proposals for Demonstration Fisheries in the Upper Fraser.

The UFFCA solicited proposals from UFFCA member bands via a Request for Proposals at a general UFFCA meeting in June 2006 and the following Request for Proposals letter.

The Northern Shuswap Tribal Council (NSTC) was the only respondent to the Demonstration Fishery Request for Proposal as described by the following proposal submitted to the UFFCA on July 7, 2006. It should be noted that other upper Fraser First Nations and First Nation Organizations considered this opportunity, but declined participation due the expectation of limited returns of other Summer Aggregate stocks in 2006, including the Late Stuart and Stellako sockeye. The IFMP indicated these stocks would be subjected to high rates of marine exploitation, and First Nations had already voiced their concerns regarding the implications of planned commercial harvesting and their ability to fulfill FSC needs.

The UFFCA allocated a specific portion of its budget for the purposes of retaining a Demonstration Fisheries Consultant. The UFFCA also provided the services of the UFFCA Fisheries Biologist to work with the NSTC and the UFFCA during the completion of the project.

During the Demonstration Fishery planning phase, which occurred during the course of the Fraser sockeye return, it became apparent that the forecast return of summer sockeye, and in particular the Quesnel component of the summer run, exceeded the actual return that was materializing. Commercial and Aboriginal harvesting of the summer run sockeye en-route to the Quesnel river, combined with a far weaker return, resulted in the recommendation by the UFFCA and the NSTC to cease pursuit of the proposed Demonstration Fishery project in order to allow for maximum possible escapement to the spawning grounds within the Quesnel system, after Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) harvests had taken place. This recommendation was supported by DFO.

The UFFCA and member First Nations have advocated for pol-

icy and management changes that facilitate and support the development of Near Terminal Harvest sockeye fisheries.

Success in the proposed 2006 Demonstration Fishery project would have met several objectives:

- **Sustainable harvest:** the economic harvest would be completed while meeting spawning escapement targets of the target stock, while eliminating the harvest of weaker or endangered stocks.
- **No Impact on Food, Social and Ceremonial Harvests:** By completing the harvest in the Quesnel mainstream, FSC harvests would not be impacted in any way.
- **Economic viability:** the harvest would, at the very least, pay for itself while providing capacity building and training opportunities, and work experience and employment for the First Nation proponent
- **Capacity Building:** the First Nation proponent and all partners involved in the project would benefit from the experience of a successful fishery, and use that experience to prepare for future projects.

Three recommendations were made by the UFFCA in the final report of the 2006 Demonstration Fishery Coordination Initiative. The recommendations are outlined below.

- The UFFCA is recommending that a full audit of the in-season information and decision process be completed as soon as possible, in order to identify and avoid similar management issues in the future.
- The UFFCA also recommends that Fraser sockeye Fisheries Management adopt a risk-averse, or precautionary, approach to the sockeye fishery in order to ensure conservation and FSC targets are in fact given priority in management decisions, as described in legal precedents and what DFO considers to be its fiduciary responsibilities.
- Demonstration Fishery feasibility studies continue in the upper Fraser

Nechako Sturgeon Report

The CSTC continues to play a proactive and important role in the efforts to recover the Nechako's Endangered white sturgeon population, which was added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* in August of this year. The CSTC's Biologist is a member of the Technical Working Group and the CSTC frequently contributes its program's technical expertise to projects associated with the initiative. In 2006 the CSTC conducted a number of projects related to the recovery initiative with funding assistance from Alcan Primary Metals-BC and PGNAETA, as well as capacity development funding through CSTC's AFS Agreement, and Environment Canada's Aboriginal Capacity Building; Species at Risk Program. These activities started in May with preparations for the pilot sturgeon hatchery in Vanderhoof and adult holding facilities in Prince George, including the setup of the facilities and the collection and spawning of brood stock.

A total of 2 mature females and 3 mature males were successfully captured and spawned. CSTC personnel gathered a great deal of knowledge and experience in the hatchery operations, assisting with all aspects of fertilized egg incubation, and larval and juvenile rearing to release. A total of approximately 4200 marked and tagged juveniles were released back into the Nechako River in September and October.

The Recovery Initiative held an extremely successful public event in Vanderhoof in September when nearly 1000 students released “their own” sturgeon.

The first year of hatchery operations can only be considered a success, and great thanks are in order to James Prince, Cora McIntosh, and Albert Raphael from the CSTC, and Mike Keehn of the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC.

The CSTC also assisted with the monitoring of naturally occurring white sturgeon spawning activity near Vanderhoof, deploying and monitoring egg collection devices, completing radio telemetry surveys and monitoring river conditions.

CSTC crews also completed the third year of an assessment of juvenile white sturgeon in the Nechako, which is intended to lead to the development of an index of juvenile recruitment. The information obtained from the sturgeon captured provides valuable information about existing and past levels of recruitment.

CSTC crews also completed sampling for adult sturgeon in Stuart and Trembleur lakes, and Fraser Lake. A total of 17 sturgeon were captured (12 from Stuart Lake, 1 from Trembleur Lake and 4 from Fraser Lake). Information from these fish and this sampling program will assist with the task of refining the distribution of Nechako white sturgeon and their use of habitats other than the Nechako River mainstream. Reports relating to all sampling programs will be prepared this winter.

CSTC personnel also assisted with research activities relating to habitat issues that may be contributing to the juvenile recruitment problem. This work involved observing larval behaviour in various substrate conditions.

CSTC personnel gained considerable capacity related to sturgeon recovery activities in 2006, and will continue to contribute to this process in the future.

Aboriginal Governments & Tribal Councils eligible for UFFCA membership

T'exelc (Williams Lake First Nation)
 Stwecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe Creek First Nation)
 Tsq'escen (Canim Lake First Nation)
 Xats'ull Cmetem' (Soda Creek First Nation)
 Cariboo Tribal Council
 Lhoosk'uz (Kluskus First Nation)
 Lhtako (Red Bluff First Nation)
 Ndazkho (Nazko First Nation)
 Tl'esqox (Toosey First Nation)
 Ulkatcho't'en (Ulkatcho First Nation)
 Carrier-Chilcotin Tribal Council
 Wet'suwet'en First Nation
 Burns Lake First Nation
 Stellat'en First Nation
 Nadleh Whut'en First Nation

Saik'uz First Nation
 Takla Lake First Nation
 Nak'azdli First Nation
 Carrier Sekani Tribal Council
 Xenl Gwet'in (Nemiah First Nation)
 Yunesit'in (Stone Indian First Nation)
 Tsi Del Del (Alexis Creek First nation)
 Tl'etingox (Anaham First Nation)
 Estdilangh (Alexandria First Nation)
 Tsilhqot'in National Government
 Esketemc First Nation
 Lheidli T'enneh First Nation
 Tl'azt'en Nation
 Yekooche First Nation