



Words of encouragement from the Big Bar Landslide First Nations Incident Commander

High noon on weather blessed Saturday July 20th I accompanied DFO and BC Wildfire staff on a 25 minute helicopter flight from the Incident Command Post (ICP) in Lillooet to the Fraser River rock slide incident site just north of the Big Bar ferry. The rock slide has formed a 15 foot (5m) waterfall which has become a partial obstruction for salmon returning to their natal streams.

As the helicopter circled the slide site I was overwhelmed to see the magnitude of the incident. Salmon could be seen below the newly formed falls resting to gain enough energy to try the extreme jump for who knows how many times already ventured. Rock scalars above the tranquil salmon were doing their best to prep the site for upcoming rivers edge rock movement operations to create a natural rock ladder out of large boulders. The boulder ladder's purpose is to provide resting pools so salmon can gradually jump from one step to another, and finally into the relatively calmer waters above the slide where they can continue the spawning journey.

We dropped back and landed on the sandy beach safely below the slide. It was very commendable to see First Nations, land owners, and Provincial and Federal organizations all collaborating to build a holding pond designed to capture and hold salmon for trap and transport to above the falls. After quick introductions with the Northern Shuswap Tribal Council fisheries technicians and the land owner I silently approached the river alone, opened my medicine pouch, and pulled out a tobacco offering for the salmon. My prayers for the struggling salmon flowed like tears as the offering washed through my fingers into the river of life. I leaned over and picked up a flat grandfather stone the size of my palm.

Grandfather Stone in my Secwepemc (Shuswap) culture is lava rock which is revered for its spiritual importance in the traditional sweat lodge. These ancient stones are heated to a red hot glare then brought into the sweat lodge where water is poured on them to create the cleansing steam that will purify the body, mind and spirit. Traditional chants and drum songs call the ancestors and spirit guides into the sweat lodge to pray with us.

Our prayers will help some of the strong salmon get through the slide, but it's the collaborative partnerships of the Incident Command Post and field crews that will put into place the structures to aid in salmon passage for the masses yet to come. Some say let the Creator take care of it. I say let the Creator take care of us while we give Mother Nature a helping hand like she does for us.

All My Relations

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