

A Word from the new FRAFS Executive Director

As of June 1, 2003, I have been hired, under contract, as the Executive Director of the Fraser Watershed Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat. I am very excited and honored to be chosen for this somewhat experimental position. I realize that the year ahead, and the accomplishments made will inevitably be the judge as to whether or not this position, and indeed the Fraser River Process, is worth saving. I realize the constitutionally protected priority to the fishery for food, social and ceremonial purposes, and the obligation to consult are all part of the rights, we as Aboriginal people have. As there are no agreements in place between Fraser First Nations to guide us on matters of mutual concern and interest at a watershed level, this is very disconcerting and ultimately the reason behind the creation of this position. I believe it is in the best interest of Fraser First Nations, to build a strong First Nation – to – First Nation relationship to tackle issues, which are watershed in scope. Fractured politics have created an impasse and prevented any meaningful engagement; consequently, DFO has taken it upon itself to act as mediator; a function it was clearly never designed to do.

Luckily, for me there is a large body of work currently circulating out there including, but not limited to the following: The Yeremchuck Report, the Gaertner Report, the Bob Brown Report, Coyote Breaks the Dam, the work produced by the current IEC, and the 1989 Fisheries Treaty of Mutual Trust and Support. In addition, there are other fisheries models out there that have been developed which Fraser Tribes can draw from, Fraser First Nations have a rich body of work that may help inspire something unique for the Fraser. My goal for the remainder of the year is to simply draw, and to some extent implement some of the ideas developed from these bodies of work, while actively participating with Fraser First Nations, and the members of the IEC. I want to work with those that are driven, focused, and ready to take some

risks; people who really want to make something happen, those who want change, and are willing to put the time and energy into making it happen...for better or for worse.

It is generally recognized that the First Nations communities on the Fraser have limited scientific capacity to deal with local, regional, and watershed level issues; also there is no way for First Nations to have meaningful input with respect to their traditional ecological knowledge, which increases the gap between those that do have some capacity, and those that don't. Currently the FRAFS has three very committed biologists with diverse backgrounds and a multitude of talent. These human resources can provide invaluable services to Fraser First Nations and help to solidify our position as co-managers of the resource; however, they must be given clear direction with clear reporting mechanisms, and accountability. To date it has been very difficult for the independent stock coordinator and the assistant to know exactly what is expected from them. Part of the challenge for these positions is to develop parameters in which they can function; parameters that give a level of comfort. The IEC have recently met and put some thoughts into developing a framework/ outline for a work plan for these positions. The outline gives me the possibility to sit down with the each of the biologists and get into detail, as to what is expected from each, and ask what their respective expectations are in return and hopefully an efficient and workable plan will be developed; a plan that will move some of the Gaertner and Brown recommendations forward.

I feel it is imperative that the hard work and thought that has gone into these reports needs to be implemented. This will be the first year since the inception of the FRAFS that the people who work for it will have very clear direction as to what direction they are expected to move, and what exactly is expected from each.

A lot of the work I will be focusing on will be about building a strong technical process

relating to the development of the IFMP and the Conservation & Management Plan and how the two will interact/interface. I will probably work closely with Brenda Gaertner, or someone in her capacity, and Fraser First Nations to raise awareness and to get further feedback. I will need to develop a new TOR for the additional work that will be expected to be carried out over the next ten months. Development of the FRAFS web site, to make it more relevant and timely, is also a task that needs to be worked on. I will also try to develop an interface with the Fraser Basin Council to be able to lend expertise and assist in the development of a functional watershed process.

At the last Tier 1 meeting, Ko'waintco Shackelly took on the task of working with Regional Vice Chief, Herb George of the Assembly of First Nations to assist in the development of a political process that may bring the leaders on the Fraser to a table for further development of a treaty. I would work with both in whatever capacity needed to move this approach forward to some conclusion.

In short, there is an incredible amount of work to be done over the next ten months if the FRAFS process is to succeed. Having a part-time executive director focused specifically on these tasks, which in the past, have been done by committed volunteers like, Fred Fortier, or other volunteers should provide more focus and allow everyone a bit more breathing room, and hopefully, allow Fraser First Nations to tackle the harder issues that have prevented us from moving forward.

I will be providing more information as the weeks progress, in the mean time please contact me with any of your thoughts, at any time, I sincerely look forward to helping in way I can. I may be reached at **(250) 562-6279** or by email at mshepert@cstc.bc.ca