

Fraser Sockeye Stock Status Report - by Marcel Shepert

The Purpose of the report is to document the current state of the Stuart sockeye runs and to draw a parallel between the current state of the run to the growing sense of despair, fear, and urgency felt by the Stuart People in whose territory the Stuart sockeye spawn. The people of this region have had a long relationship based on spiritual values of connectedness and respect; the fish have provided food for social and ceremonial (spiritual) purposes for centuries, and as the run continues to decline, so to does the spirit of the people.

After many lean years and many frustrating meetings, and after hearing the elders of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council express their fears about the dwindling sockeye runs in the Stuart River, the UFFCA decided to tackle the job of preparing a Stuart sockeye stock status report. The purpose of this report is to document the current state of the Stuart sockeye runs and to draw a parallel between the current precarious state of the run to the growing sense of despair. As the run continues to decline so too does the spirit of the people who have relied for millennia on this bounty.

Possible explanations for the declines that were evaluated by the study include pollution, logging impacts, overharvesting, reduced spawning habitat quality, adverse in-river migration conditions, competition with kokanee, and reduced suitability of nursery lake habitat. While several of these factors are considered to be important, the

study concluded that reduced in-river migration conditions are largely responsible for causing the declines of the Early Stuart stock group.

Until the Stuart sockeye population recovers to higher levels of abundance, restrictions on fishing should be maintained. In the event that an inter-tribal treaty is eventually signed committing all the "Nations" of the Fraser River to the principles in the document, arrangements could be made to seek alternate remediation solutions, which recognize the deep spiritual interconnectedness between the First Nations and the Stuart sockeye.

The report goes into more technical details, but essentially recommends DFO maintain current minimal fisheries exploitation on Early Stuart sockeye, and consider further reductions on Late Stuart as well, such as fertilizing Takla Lake on an experimental basis to aid the recovery of some Early Stuart sockeye. In the longer term, more study is needed of juvenile biology and population sizes in Stuart area lakes, and both Early Stuart and Late Stuart sockeye should be listed as endangered under the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), and possibly and only as a last resort, the Species at Risk Act (SARA).

**For more information contact Dr. David Levy
(report author): davidlevy@shaw.ca.**

WANTED: MEETING VENUES

FRAFS is looking for bands, tribal councils and First Nations organizations that can serve as meeting venues for the 2008-2009 fiscal year. If your organization has rentable meeting space and catering services that could be made available to FRAFS, we would love to host a future meeting in your territory!

**Interested parties please contact
Aimee Arsenault,
FRAFS Communications Coordinator**

UPCOMING MEETINGS

SUB-REGIONAL FISHERIES MGMT WORKSHOPS

Kamloops: Tuesday March 11, 2008
Langley: Wednesday March 12, 2008
Nanaimo: Thursday March 13, 2008

FRASER WATERSHED JOINT TECH COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday March 31, 2008 - Location TBA

INTERTRIBAL FISHERIES TREATY MEETING

Thursday March 27 & Friday March 28, 2008
Prince George - Venue TBA

SEE WWW.FRAFS.CA FOR DETAILED MEETING NOTICES