

Large Escapements of Fraser River sockeye not all bad - Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA) says closure on the Fraser River Good for Region

Prince George, B.C. - Since it became clear that the Fraser sockeye commercial fishery was going to be shut down this year, following the same pattern as the Skeena River; many coastal communities and commercial fisherman have been getting more than their share of the media attention. The message is consistent – “DFO has mismanaged the sockeye run and the minister and the First Nations are to blame” For residence of the upper Fraser River the message isn’t the same at all.

For Native and non-Native alike, large escapements of sockeye destined for their natal streams here in the north, to nourish and provide for the next generation, is not a bad thing; in fact it is seen like a positive step forward and DFO should be given some credit for staying the course. For many interior people the signs are encouraging that a change is underway, a change in the way British Columbians view salmon management. The economy of many of the communities of the Upper Fraser River was once rich and vibrant because it was, in large part, based on fish. Since 1870 the economy began to slowly turn around and the fish became the domain of the coast exclusively, due in large part to the canneries. It has been a long and painful experience for many interior people to watch to economy die a slow death as the salmon resource eroded over time.

Paradoxically, it has been almost 100 years since the signing of the, Barricades Treaty, between Canada and BC, interior, First Nations, which effectively put an end to the interior, fisheries economy. A paradigm shift is unfolding and Upper Fraser citizens want to explore new and emerging trends in consumer behaviour and preferences. If handled appropriately the shift in salmon management to more terminal fisheries could right a 120 year old injustice, while providing ample new and innovative opportunities for all British Columbians from the headwaters to the estuaries. A

new era is taking shape, one that embraces suitability and bio diversity.

Since the Williams enquiry wound its way through the province last year in search of the elusive “missing sockeye” fingers have been wagging and pointing in every direction. Everyone will loose as long as the blame card keeps being played. Commercial fisherman, sport fishermen, and some First Nations, must embrace the paradigm shift and begin really setting up the structures that will enable everyone with an interest in salmon management, for future generations, to manage effectively.

The 2004, Judge Williams – Missing Sockeye” report stated explicitly in recommendation #41 that integrated management processes are needed and DFO has already set the process in motion.

In 2003, DFO began implementing a new multi-sector process to help deal with the management issue; they call it the “Integrated Harvest Planning Committee” (IHPC). This process is where DFO wants to go in the future; preseason negotiations between the different sectors, all in one nice neat little package. Allocations of all allowable catches will be decided at this table, at least in an ideal world.

The IHPC may yield results later, indeed it may bring stability, eventually. Unfortunately, there are those still yearning for the “good old days!” Doesn’t anyone wonder how we got to be in this situation in the first place? As long as the detractors continue to cry foul with the government and run rough shot over the Indians and the media for finding themselves in this predicament, British Columbians will continue to get fed the same old rhetoric and innovation will be hindered. New ideas and creative thinking based on core principles is one way forward. An economy once flourished up and down the Fraser and Upper Fraser First Nations are positioning themselves to take advantage of the new regime, but will the industry want to collaborate and make the transition easier or continue to shift and blame.