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Yukon River Panel 100 – 419 Range Road Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 3V1

Yukon River Panel Meeting

December 1-5, 2013

Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre, Whitehorse, Yukon

Public Testimony:

Tuesday, December 03, 2013

9:00 a.m.

Ryan Peterson: *I am a fish and wildlife steward for Tr'ondëk Gwitchin. In the past, fishing for me was a great privilege. It is very disappointing that our people were not able to fish.*

Andy: *How do you keep people engaged in fishing? How might the R&E process keep people engaged, even if they can't go out and fish?*

Ryan: *A lot of people have it instilled that it is a part of their heritage.*

Erik: *You and your family are struggling. What I am trying to do is to show an appreciation of the struggles. Both sides need to recognize that people are making sacrifices.*

Nathan: *Thanks for your message.*

Doug Smarch: *I have fished on the Teslin River for many years. The salmon used to come off the river – 60, 70 pounds. Today it is not like that. We caught 7 salmon and they were all around 6 pounds. Big salmon will spawn. One drift, 40 or 50 salmon. Two drifts and you were done.*

In Teslin we have quit fishing completely. We only took what we could use and no more. This we did for years. There has to be some kind of control done so we can have our fish back. Those who commercial fish are over harvesting. There should be more fish up here to spawn. The size of the fish at the spawning grounds is down.

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1:30 p.m.

William Josie: *I am here on behalf of the Vuntut Gwichin government. I heard the talk today on the Chinook and the need to do more. I was impressed with the management work Alaska is doing. Mary Ellen mentioned there were 30,000 Chinook into Canada on the Yukon. We don't know how many Chinook are going up the Porcupine River. The chum is doing okay on the Yukon, but on the Porcupine they are not doing so well. It is the Chinook that people want to know.*

Wilber Smarch, Teslin Tlingit Council: *I would like to thank the technical people for their work with a species they don't know. In the last 10 or 15 years I have noticed a significant decrease in our salmon. I recognize the situation we are in. It is hard to put it in to perspective for people to understand the situation we are in. There is no more salmon for us. We have been buying salmon for the last two years. We are a First Nation. We have Treaty rights with a traditional territory of about 13,000 square miles. If we were at the mouth, we would be in court. At the same time I wonder about subsistence in Alaska. One subsistence license takes more fish than my whole community. Every year we count salmon and every year we count less salmon. I want to talk also about the basic needs level.*

Thomas Maillele: Grayling, Alaska: *I wonder if there is any way to check the fish out for the impact of the nuclear incident in Japan. I hear also about Chinook salmon going north of the Yukon.*

Steve: *You had a question around the radiation. There is monitoring going by both US and Canadian agencies. This information is available online.*

Don Toews, Carcross Tagish Renewable Resource Council: *A couple of points. We have made improvements with the management information we have. I want to caution that we need to take a step back. The technical information needs to include experience along with our data. We need to make sure that we don't overlook other information, besides our data. The models are there for the benefit of harvesting, not for the benefit of the fish. We have been managing for year to year. We need to manage for the longer term. If you presented the harvest data you have for the past 50 years, any experienced biologist could tell you what the problem is. It is obvious that something there is not sustainable. We have to correct the change in the quality of the fish stocks we are putting on the spawning grounds. I saw some encouraging things in the data: larger medium fish, more females, and older fish. This is not enough. What do we have to do for the next 10 years? We need to protect the first two pulses. We need to maintain the fisheries, as you need to maintain the culture of fishing to maintain the interest. Then we need to look at the run size, what is the minimum level of harvest we need to maintain the interest. Approach it from the other end. What further restrictions are necessary and how much can we allow.*

Andy: *I want to recognize Don as a former Panel member. He was one of the first to push for quality of escapement.*

Roberta Joseph, Tr'ondëk Gwichin First Nation: *In regards to the First Fish, it is very important that we maintain the First Fish program to teach our community about the value of Chinook salmon and to maintain and protect our tradition and culture. So many of our people have*

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stopped fishing throughout the past several years. The decline of the Chinook salmon is very serious and this has to be told to our people. It is important that people begin to submit new proposals. Continuing the same proposals all the time isn't good. When will you stop working on escapement goals and start looking for ways to enhance the Chinook salmon?

Erik: I appreciate you coming to speak to us. We have spent years and years counting fish. We have to start producing fish.

Wednesday, December 04, 2013

9:10 a.m.

Betsy Jackson, Ta'an Kwach'an Council: Welcome everyone and welcome to Ta'an Kwach'an territory. The Yukon River is very significant in our life. It is very important that we know how we got to this point. I can remember when I went to my first fish camp. The traditional values and culture were passed on. We are almost at the end of the salmon run here at Lake Laberge. I know that for the Ta'an people we bought our salmon from the Stikine this year. We still need to pass on how to care for the fish to our young people. Because we are an urban first nation, it is hard to get the kids out on the land. I want consideration on both sides of the border when you talk about the numbers and the management. All have the right to travel the Yukon River.

Francis Thompson, subsistence/commercial fisherman: I just spoke to you in my native language. It is the same way when we hear technical people talk to us. Maybe next year you will be speaking Yupik. I am from the village of St. Mary's. Currently I am an alternate Panel member to the Yukon Panel. I was a Panel member and advisor prior to that. It was hard for me to come to this meeting, as we just lost 3 from Mt. Village and 1 from St. Mary's in a plane crash. It is important to be a part of this meeting and to speak on behalf of our people. The Yupik people and the people of my community live between where the salmon come in and where the salmon spawn.

I started in 1960 as a crew member. I started commercial fishing on my own in 1970 and have fished ever since. We have seen many changes in the salmon fishery. We have fought for the Chinook to protect them in the Bering Sea (from the Japanese trawl fleet). With all of the issues we started restricting the people. There have been positive actions taken on the Alaska side to protect the salmon to the spawning grounds. Reducing bycatch in the trawl fleet is also positive. We hope all of these increase salmon production. We hope that in the Yukon they watch the mining industry to make sure they protect the streams. My hope is that the Panel will support good projects in the R&E. It is going to be awhile before we see returns of the Chinook, but if we work together it will happen. If we keep fighting this won't happen.

Questions:

Steve: Thanks for coming. It is very important for you sharing your story here.

Nathan: Very wise words and thoughts from you. Thanks for your reminding us of some of your victories.

Stan: Thank you for giving the brief history of why we are here. I want to comment that the Salmon Summit could undermine what we are doing.

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Chief Carl Sydney, Teslin Tlingit Council: *Along with my friend, Francis, we have worked for almost 20 years for the salmon. I want to thank you for coming in light of your loss. I was quite hesitant to provide testimony. It doesn't seem like we are heard. I was disappointed to hear about the concern of the JTC about having elders, since they are a technical committee. But they could learn the historical from the elders. Let's put the money into the restoration projects to begin bringing back the salmon. Restoring the habitat is one way to bring the salmon back. Let's stop studying the salmon and let them do their own thing. There are still a lot of salmon that are missing. We are concerned.*

Questions:

Erik: *My hope is that the Panel does take a bold path. I don't just want to see us counting fish. The Panel does have to make some bold decisions. I don't want to see us document the demise of the king salmon. You cannot put a price tag on the culture.*

Andy: *Thanks again for all of your years of service. We can't question what Carl said. We are making positive changes and that is often lost. The salmon life cycle is long and it takes years for them to reflect changes. We are listening and we are trying to do the right thing. Alaska positive conservation measures: reduced mesh depth from 50 to 30 mesh depth; fish friendly fish wheels; using dip net and beach seines; reducing mesh size to 7 1/2" and then to 6"; first pulse protection; volunteer harvest reduction in all of the villages; shifting to other species; reduction of Chinook bycatch in the Bering Sea.*

Carl: *The Board of Fish is the one we should be meeting with. These measures in place are not enough. We haven't fished at all.*

3:00 p.m.

Don Toews, Carcross Tagish Renewable Resource Council: *I was involved with the early negotiations. In the last couple of meetings I am seeing challenges creeping back into the process. There are more questions because the shoe is starting to pinch. As things get worse, the process is going to get more difficult. I understand there was much discussion around the numbers from Pilot Station: In terms that we have an internal audit of the data. The third question centers on the R&E fund. My recommendation is to really give priority to restoration projects that will give more fish in the near term: To actually restore stocks and the habitat. How do we actually manage the funds to improve the numbers?*

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