



**Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
First Fish Final Report
2016**



Submitted to:

**Yukon River Panel – Restoration and Enhancement Fund
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Fish and Wildlife Department
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department**

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A huge **Mähsi Cho** to our sponsors:



Acknowledgements

To everyone who made the First Fish Culture Camp 2016 possible and to all those who contribute to the success of this beloved annual camp - **Mähsi Cho!** First Fish requires many hours of planning, organizing of activities and mentors, drafting work schedules, and creating a diverse list of activities that take advantage of the expertise we have on hand. Thank you to all those who support this camp by working and volunteering the many hours it takes ensure this special camp continues to run year after year. A special thank you to the youth who attend and participate in the many activities offered and who make this camp the special experience that it is. Of course without the generous support from our funders, the learning opportunities and experiences that we are able to offer the youth would not be as extensive. As it stands now, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is extremely proud of the numerous opportunities that we offer at this camp and we are happy that First Fish is able to provide the youth with meaningful learning experiences that contribute to their

understanding of TH culture, tradition and knowledge about the land and natural resources.

The following are some of the people, organizations, and departments that took part in First Fish 2016. We would like to thank them for their contributions and efforts on behalf of this event.

- Traditional Knowledge Specialists
 - Elder, Angie Joseph-Rear
 - Elder, Julia Morberg
 - Jody Beaumont
 - Allison Anderson
- Fish processing mentors
 - Elder, Angie Joseph-Rear
 - Fish and Wildlife Steward, Ryan Peterson
- Camp Cooks
 - Leanne Dickson
 - Clara Van Bibber
- Moosehide Village caretakers
 - Ronald Johnson
 - RJ Nagano
 - Michael Joseph
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Fish and Wildlife Department
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 - Gwyn Williams

- Tori Holmes
- Allison Kormendy
- Julia Milnes
- TH Elders
 - Clara Van Bibber (opening and closing ceremonies)
 - Ronald Johnson (boat driver, Moosehide Village maintenance, fish smoking)
 - Julia Morberg (Story-telling, medicinal plant walk/ talk, fish smoking)
 - Peggy Kormendy (Traditional Knowledge re: fishing on the Yukon River, Story-telling)
 - Victor Henry (Traditional Knowledge sharing)
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in boat operators
 - Kevin Blanchard
 - Ralph Blanchard
- First Fish 2016 photographer
 - Bonnie Rear
- Kirby Meister – Yukon Government, Conservation Field Operations Dawson Area
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation Government

If we have missed mentioning anyone in our thanks, we apologize and assure you that your contributions were welcome and helped us to deliver a fantastic culture camp. A special mähsi cho to all the participants who came out and made this year's First Fish so successful!

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First Fish 2016

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Fish Culture Camp 2016 was held at Moosehide Village from July 11th – 15th, 2016. This culture camp, hosted by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in for Dawson City youth and their families, is a fish camp aimed at teaching youth all about harvesting, processing, conservation and stewardship of Yukon River salmon. During the camp, the youth are taught about the many aspects associated with subsistence salmon fishing on the Yukon River including where to set nets and fish wheels, how to pull a net or check a fish wheel, how to mend the nets, how to prepare the fish for processing, cutting the fish into strips and how to smoke and dry the fish. The youth are also taught important lessons consistent with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture and values; these include stories about respecting the salmon, only harvesting what you need as well as the importance of distributing the harvest to community members. First Fish also includes teachings on the biology of salmon, salmon conservation and salmon habitat. Other important teachings include receiving instructions and directions in boat safety, bear safety, fry life cycles, spawning and rearing habitats and current global issues that are affecting salmon stocks.

This camp was created to teach safe, ethical and respectful fishing practices to our young community members. First Fish also helps youth gain the self esteem and skills that they need to make healthy, positive lifestyle choices, and provide an opportunity to learn about Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture, language, heritage and traditional areas used along the Yukon River.

First Fish Teachings

The historical significance of Moosehide Village adds value to the experiences gained while at the fish camp by passing on traditional knowledge and skills to the younger generation by supervisors, volunteers, and Elders. During this year's camp there was an Elder on hand, Angie Joseph-Rear, to help with processing salmon and assist with the youth programming. Angie was very generous in sharing her childhood stories of fish camp at Dawson Shipyards. Her teachings focus on the respect that is expected when anyone from the community is out on the land harvesting traditional foods. It is from, and within, these teachings that youth learn respect for the land, respect for the animals and respect and understanding of the preparation needed when out on the land to guarantee

personal safety and to ensure that the fish and wildlife can be harvested by following Da' Ole, *traditional law*. Present day conservation concerns associated with this stock are discussed at every opportunity during the camp, including during fish processing. The conservation efforts that TH has committed to, including the passing of the GA Resolution to “voluntarily withdraw from subsistence harvest of Chinook salmon for an entire life cycle” is also explained to the youth participating in the camp. Discussion about the importance of conservation is encouraged.

Planning

This year, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Fish and Wildlife Department organized the First Fish Culture Camp. As with previous years, a departmental planning committee was established and included employees from the Heritage Department, Fish and Wildlife Branch, Education Department and Health and Social - Youth Enhancement. The planning committee's role was to provide direction, guidance, assistance and advice to the organizers. Every committee member was given tasks to complete prior to the next meeting, as well as provide updates to ensure that tasks were completed as necessary. A meeting was held 2 weeks prior to the camp and addressed planning needs that included bookings, advertisement, staffing requirements, special guests, curriculum, logistics, and budget. E-mail communications followed the planning meetings to ensure that all logistics and planning components of the camp were being addressed.

Camp Set up

Camp set up was coordinated by the Fish and Wildlife Department and they ensured that all necessary equipment and supplies that were needed to run the camp were brought to Moosehide. The Fish and Wildlife Department also ensured that the required infrastructure was in place and everything was in good working order prior to the start of the camp.

The Fish and Wildlife Department provided boat transportation for youth participants, Elders, supervisors, volunteers, and visitors who would be attending the camp for the week. Transportation was provided, when required, to those groups visiting throughout the duration of the camp, however First Fish organizers made a concerted effort to reduce the boat transportation requirements this year. The planning committee discussed this prior to the camp and it was agreed upon that reducing the number of visitors would

benefit the camp because more time could be devoted to the activities for the youth, rather than be spending time on back and forth transportation logistics. There is a nuance that needs to be respected with this approach which is that this is family-oriented camp and we do not want to limit family participation or involvement in the camp. Transportation options need to be available to accommodate community members, citizens and Elders who are willing to assist and share their knowledge with the camp.

During First Fish culture camp, the youth stayed in the school house and in cabins with chaperones. All other participants either stayed in other cabins or tents. Each participant arranged their sleeping area and were then provided with a safety and orientation briefing conducted by the event Coordinator for the group. The youth were then divided into 2 groups (Chinook and Chum); division of the group was done so that delivery of the programming and the scheduled activities could accommodate a group of this size. The two groups were responsible for completing daily chores that are necessary at any fish camp (collecting firewood, maintain the fish-smoker fire, cleaning equipment used, garbage disposal, cleaning and maintenance of facilities being used, etc.). Once everyone was settled in, First Fish culture camp began with an Opening Prayer led by Elder Clara Van Bibber, and a Da'ole Traditional Knowledge talk was given by TH Traditional Knowledge Specialist, Jody Beaumont.

Participants

This year, the planning committee set the limit of 15 youth participants for the camp in order to retain an enriching experience for the youth. We had 12 youth register for the entire week of First Fish (6 boys and 6 girls), and a number of unregistered youth came down to Moosehide to participate during certain days they were available. There were eight (adult) supervisors scheduled over the course of the week, as well as four Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in summer students who were scheduled as '*Junior Supervisors*'. The junior supervisor schedules coincided with senior staff members' supervisory schedule so they could "shadow" senior supervisors; this provided them with a great learning opportunity and the training necessary to oversee youth participants in a busy, "on the land" camp. Elders and other community members also volunteered to chaperone and teach the youth, as well as share their knowledge of fishing and other land-based activities. Families and other visitors were welcome to camp at Moosehide during First Fish, along

with families who visited for the day.

Activities

The planning committee completed a schedule of activities for the camp (please see attached), however it was made clear to the participants that the salmon processing at the smoke shack would take precedence over any activity. If the required processing was not complete, or took longer than anticipated/ scheduled, the participants and supervisors were to prioritize this aspect of the culture camp as learning about salmon and salmon processing is always the priority.

Over the course of the week, the youth were split up into two groups (Chinook and Chum) and each group was chaperoned by supervisors (senior and junior supervisor(s)). The groups would alternate between the smoke shack working on the salmon processing and taking part in whichever activity was scheduled for that time slot; each group would periodically switch off to allow all participants equal opportunity to take part and enjoy the activities provided for them. The group participating at the smoke shack cleans the fish, cuts the fish into strips, soaks them in a brine and hangs them up for smoking. Elder, Angie Joseph-Rear and Fish and Wildlife Steward, Ryan Peterson provided instruction on how to clean the salmon and prepare it for smoking. Each youth participant had a chance to take part in all phases of the salmon processing. At times, the youth would be at the smoke house until lunch and would then be back processing for at least 2 more hours to complete the work. This is an excellent opportunity for the youth to get a sense of all that is involved with running a fish camp and properly processing fish.

Every year, the youth receive instruction about boat safety, wilderness survival (medical or environmental emergencies), and bear safety. These activities are reminders that there are inherent risks when living in any camp setting. The youth should be aware and be prepared in knowing what to do if any potential incidents happen while at the camp.

The schedule of activities keeps the youth busy and engaged. Bed times and the morning schedule was enforced; the supervisors rallied the youth daily and reminded them to stay

on task. The supervisors ensured that each group followed the activities schedule and the chore schedule.

The schedule was created to allow time for both educational opportunities and learning-based entertainment. (*For example, the Hän language treasure hunt!*). The youth went on a medicinal plant walk and talk with Elder, Julia Morberg, and received information about which plants in Yukon forests are great to harvest, as well as the medicinal properties of certain plants. Julia taught them what berries to look for when making “Indian Ice Cream” and how to identify medicinal plants in the woods that have traditionally been used to make teas and salves. Julia also explained medicinal properties of some well-known Yukon plants and which plants to stay away from due to toxins or seasonal changes.

As the Yukon River had high water levels during the camp, the supervisors decided to not let the youth swim in the slough in front of Moosehide Creek. We did, however, set up a slip and slide on a sunny afternoon and many of the participants (junior and senior) had a chance to brave the slippery hill in front of Moosehide Village. The slip-and-slide was a huge hit!

As part of a new activity, the youth boated downstream to a traditional fish camp approximately 15km downriver. Elder, Victor Henry accompanied the group to this traditional fish camp and spoke of past days when fish camps used to line the river. He told the youth stories of the commercial harvest on the Yukon River and talked about the old Hän Fisheries processing plant. Victor also talked about how many people used to be out on the river and how the fishing community was “a large community” that embraced fishing culture. . Conservation concerns are raised again and again at First Fish, but without speaking to someone who has seen declining stocks and have been directly impacted by those declines, it may be difficult for them to understand and appreciate the bigger picture. It is from visits like this, that the youth can begin tying together the loss in traditional knowledge, loss of culture, reduced food availability and an “industry” that can no longer provide work for families and become able to understand this conservation concern within a more intricate context. After our talk on the beach, we hiked up Quebec Creek about 4 kilometers looking for (and finding!) a TH family camp – the MacLeod camp. This cabin was known about but is difficult to get to and locate. The hike up the

creek gave the youth a sense of adventure and many of them enjoyed learning about the many families that were raised in this part of the Traditional Territory.

Other activities at the camp included information sessions on salmon life-cycles, juvenile habitat requirements, juvenile fry trapping, traditional medicines found in local plants, Hän language classes and treasure hunt, bear-aware behaviour and safety course, crafts, carving, and traditional stories told around the campfire. The youth also played games such as capture the flag, tire pull, Inuit Blanket game, Frisbee, dodgeball, slip-and-slide, and Indian Bingo.

An addition to this year's camp was the inclusion of a nutrition talk and cooking class focusing on Chum salmon. TH's Health & Social department facilitated a workshop that reviewed nutritional value of wild and cultivated foods found within the TH TT. This included all the benefits and vitamins found in Chum salmon. We then went on to teach the youth how to use this fish in a tasty recipe. The youth made Chum salmon pâté and paired it with cheese, crackers and local veggies that were grown at the TH Teaching and Learning Farm.

Fishing

First Fish camp is organized during a time that will coincide with the Yukon River Chinook salmon run. It has been structured this way so the youth participants have an opportunity to learn all about traditional harvesting practices in a hands-on scenario. However, due to declining run sizes and conservation concerns, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in General Assembly and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Chief and Council have passed resolutions that support TH citizens in a voluntary withdrawal from subsistence harvest. It was explained to the youth in attendance that TH is trying to rebuild the Chinook salmon population by adopting strict conservation measures and by choosing to allow more fish to reach their spawning grounds. Teaching younger generations the importance of conservation has now become a primary focus of this culture camp. It is explained to the youth participants why TH is not harvesting Chinook salmon and why Chum salmon is being taken out of the freezer so that they may continue to learn salmon processing skills. From this, the youth gather information about conservation measures, run timings and the different species that are in the Yukon River. All fish processed this year were Chum salmon harvested in 2015 by Fish and Wildlife department and kept aside (frozen) for First Fish 2016.

Accreditation

A recent addition to the First Fish Youth Culture Camp is the opportunity for Grade 9 and 10 students to apply for a credit (1 of 2 credits necessary) to be put towards their Grade 10 school year 'culture camp accreditation' course. The youth are required to participate in all activities organized for the camp, as well as complete a project representative of all they have learned from the teachings at the camp. The curriculum followed by First Fish includes (but is not limited to) Da'ole (traditional knowledge talk by TH Elders), Hän language classes, medicinal plant collection, cutting, smoking and fish processing, smokehouse chores and tending to the fire, salmonid biology and life cycle teachings, bear safety, boat safety and many other traditional knowledge teachings that happen organically throughout the week.

Food and Cooking

Two camp cooks were hired to provide meals and snacks in order to keep the participants well-fed and to ensure all meals met Canada Food Safe guidelines and standards. Cooks for a camp with ~40 people are much needed to ensure cleanliness of the kitchen, safe preparation of foods and they also provide the youth with more time to concentrate on the camp activities provided for them, as maintaining a camp with this many people is a difficult task that requires much time in the kitchen preparing, cooking and cleaning.

First Fish Feast

The First Fish feast was held on August 24, 2016. The feast is an event that is held after the fish camp in order to honour the youth for all their hard work and skills gained by attending the camp. The feast is open to the youth and their families, adult supporters from the community, as well as any Elder who would like to attend. All participants and youth are acknowledged and receive a '*Certificate of Participation*', along with a commemorative token (i.e. t-shirt). In addition, a slide show is presented from photographs taken at the First Fish culture camp. The youth then present Elders, volunteers and supervisors with a gift which is usually small bags of the smoked salmon strips that they made during the camp. These are distributed to the people in attendance at the feast as part of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture of sharing.

Camp Environment

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is committed to providing a safe learning environment for the youth. The sleeping areas are comfortable and supervised at all times and there was sufficient food and snacks to ensure the youth were well fed. Furthermore, the supervisors and chaperones are good role models for the youth and encouragement and praise were expressed freely. In the evenings after the daily chores had been completed, there were free times built into the schedule to give the adults and youth a chance to enjoy time together and get to know one another.

Most of the activities took place at the camp, and the schedule was followed quite closely. Although the fish processing took precedence (as it always does), it was built into the schedule this year. This is different than most other years, because normally the youth groups would go out to the fish nets or wheels and not know how many fish they would catch and therefore, the time needed to gut, clean and prepare the catch for smoking will vary. In future years, if First Fish culture camp is able to harvest Chinook salmon, adaptations will have to be made to allow for a more flexible schedule.

Feedback and Recommendations

An important aspect of the program was having knowledgeable people on hand at all times to teach the youth proper techniques of processing the salmon. The individuals who were teaching the processing, showed patience when the youth were learning how to cut the salmon and they allowed for error to provide a perfect teaching opportunity about the proper way to care for the salmon. The individuals praised the youth whenever they did an exceptional job of processing the salmon or cleaning their work stations. Strong relationships were created between the youth and the mentors, as well as amongst the youth themselves. Connection with others and connection to the land has always been an important aspect of spending time out on the land where team work and unity are essential. In addition to salmon processing mentors, First Fish culture camp was fortunate to have experienced teachers provide instruction on the many activities included in the schedule of activities.

Future Goals

The biggest challenge is to keep a balance between fun and work for the youth. Once again, this year's camp proved to be a lot of fun whether the youth were doing the salmon processing or participating in any of the other scheduled activities. The youth were great fun and showed enthusiasm during the entire camp.

A challenge noted in the past was not having a large enough workstation to clean and cut the salmon, as well as a limited number of knowledgeable supervisors to help the youth learn. This year, Fish and Wildlife department constructed an additional fish processing table before the start of the camp. This extra work station worked great and there was sufficient space for the processing and plenty of opportunities for the youth to gain a hands-on learning experience. There was also a good amount of community participation by TH Elders who came down to the camp and taught the youth about Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in heritage and culture. The camp would benefit by more citizens getting involved with the camp to share stories and knowledge about life in fish camp and living on the land. Stories were shared during the salmon processing, while walking around Moosehide and while sitting around the fire; these stories spoke of past relations that lived off the land as well as connections that some of the youth might have with past family members from Moosehide. Information was also continuously shared about the present decline in the Chinook salmon run and the importance of conservation of this valued species. Fish and Wildlife staff and other mentors shared knowledge of the life cycles of salmon and our responsibility of taking care of salmon habitats.

Financial Report

A financial report and spreadsheet of expenditures has been attached to this report.

Measures of Success

With each year, the camp improves due to the planning committee being an integral part in the organization and the provided feedback and recommendations to improve the camp for community youth. The success of the camp can be measured a number of ways; Elder's being available to share Traditional Knowledge and important teachings, fish being available to allow the youth to learn important processing skills, a well-rounded and full schedule of activities providing the youth with a variety of aspects to learn about, school curriculum and accreditation being met, and, of course, the best way to gauge the

success of the camp is seeing the youth wandering around saying they wish the camp was longer and that they are not in a rush to go home Wishing for more fish to take care of.

Recommendations from the youth participants this year were to ensure that we continue to coordinate the First Fish program every year.

Thank you to all who participated or helped ensure the success of this youth camp through your generous commitments of funding and support.... Mähsi Cho!

