

YUKON RIVER PANEL

PROJECT: CC-02-18

Salmon Know No Borders – 2018 Yukon River Exchange – Year 2
Salmon Culture – Recognizing Unity and Sacrifice

Educational Exchange

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The Educational Exchange was designed for people on both sides of the US/Canada border to increase their understanding of their neighbor's experiences and challenges as they relate to Yukon River salmon fisheries. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for building cross border understanding between Alaskans and Canadians living along the Yukon River who share the salmon resource. This project is funded by the Restoration and Enhancement Fund under the Yukon River Panel. The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA/US-Alaska) works with the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee (YSSC/Canada-Yukon) to organize, host, and report on each trip. There are usually 5-6 participants chosen and they embark on a week-long exchange; alternating traveling to each country from year to year. Five Alaskans traveled to communities along the Yukon River in Canada in 2017 and six Canadians traveled to the mouth of the Yukon River in Alaska this year.

The six participants in the 2018 Educational Exchange were:

- Karrie Brown – First Nation Representative
- Steve Gotch - Canadian Yukon River Panel Co-Chair
- Janelle Hager – First Nation Representative
- Steve Hossack - Media representative and sports fishermen
- Jesse Terice - Yukon Salmon Subcommittee Director
- Geoff Wooding - Director on the Board of the Yukon Fish and Game Association

The delegation started out in Whitehorse with a half day orientation that covered the Yukon River Salmon Agreement, history of project, and much more, with YSSC and Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Canada staff. The team of five participants drove from Whitehorse to Anchorage, and the 6th participant flew. Once the group arrived in Anchorage, they were greeted by YRDFA staff for a dinner and a short Alaskan orientation. The following day, the Canadian team, along with the YRDFA Communications and Outreach Director, Danielle Stickman, flew to Bethel – St. Mary's - Emmonak.

The group was met by a gracious host, John Lamont, and had accommodations at the Kwikpak processing plant. Their accommodations and meals during their time in Emmonak was donated by Kwikpak. This service and opportunity to stay where many of the Kwikpak workers live was a wonderful opportunity to gain insight to the operations as well as have one-on-one conversations with various locals that live in Emmonak seasonally. The group was impressed

with the high percentage of locally hired workers as well as the high number of Yukon River youth employed at Kwikpak. It was eye-opening to the Canadians, and to Danielle, to see the high reliance people of the lower Yukon have on money for the winter earned from the summer fisheries work. The group met with the summer season management team which consists of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) area management, research biologists, research assistants, subsistence resource specialists, and the manager & assistant manager from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). A thorough presentation of the summer season operation was given along with research projects and in-season assessment. The educational exchange entourage visited the Lower Yukon Test Fishery site, observed monitoring/data collection, and saw the distribution of Chinook from the test fishery to Elders and people who are unable to fish. Informal gatherings were coordinated with the Chuloonawick Tribal Council, several Elders, and other locals, as well as a visit to a fish camp, trip to the coast, and tours of smokehouses. These visits with locals at their fish camps and viewing their drying racks were vital pieces of this exchange that are invaluable and eye opening for all parties. The Canadians were able to observe the differences and similarities of processing and catching salmon. The visit to the coast was a first for all on the trip and also important to observe where the salmon spend a huge chunk of their life and feeling the grandeur of place and the ocean was a gift to many.

The three days in Emmonak also included a detailed tour of the Kwikpak processing facility (which included the head and gutting process and packing plant) and the skiff manufacturing plant; where the group learned that the skiffs have been bought and distributed to various parts of the state. The group had an informal meeting with Ragnar Alstrom, Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association Executive Director and Yukon River Panel member, and Jennifer Williams, YDFDA Government Affairs. A lot of great information about the Kwikpak operations and history was exchanged in that meeting. The group also participated in the Canadian Teleconference and the YRDFDA Tuesday Teleconference and gave updates on the trip and all the experiences and knowledge gained in those first few days. It was a first for all on the trip to witness a 12-hour opening allowed for commercial fishing, which was restricted to dip nets—which was eye-opening for all on the trip to see how much work and time it takes to catch the salmon with this gear type. The group also paid a visit to John Lamont's fish camp and boated to different tributaries at the mouth of the river. Steve Hossack interviewed a few Elders and locals for a possible short film.

On the fourth day on the river, the group left Emmonak and traveled, in two boats, to Saint Mary's where they were greeted by the Alstrom's and YRDFDA anthropologist, Catherine Moncrieff. Steve Hossack interviewed John Lamont in the boat before John ventured back down river to Emmonak. The group stayed at the Eagle's Nest BnB and rented vehicles to get around the community. They toured St. Marys and Pitka's Point and met the new crew at the fish processor Borealis and also visited with a family cutting salmon at a camp on the beach in Pitka's Point. One of the women was sampling her fish for ADF&G for \$10/fish, if done correctly. The group also stopped at the community center in Pitka's Point where the youth were in Campfire and playing hide and seek and cards.

The last full day on the river, Danielle flew back to Anchorage, and the rest of the group continued their boat journey up river to Pilot Station with Bill Alstrom, where they observed the counting station and test fishery at the sonar project site, which is managed by ADF&G. The

ADFG staff lead on site was Lindsey Dreese. The group watched the test fishery where the kings were caught in nets, quickly sampled, and released. Two sizes of nets are used in this project, and like the Lower Test Fishery in Emmonak the salmon that die in the process are given to Pilot Station residents with priority for Elders and those that can't fish. The sonar equipment and operation was explained thoroughly. The group visited with people in Pilot Station, met with USGS staff on beach, and community members explain that they were out of gas and missing a commercial opening taking place. Once the group arrived back to St. Mary's they visited with Elders', Peter and Ester Tyson. Peter was one of the participants on the 2017 Educational Exchange. The group observed 2-3 boats unload and sell fish to *Fish People and Borealis*. at *Fish People* the group watched them check temperatures of fish and gill rip for bleeding, unload and weigh the fish. At *Borealis* the group visits with staff and watched one group from Marshall sell fish.

On the final day, the group flew back to Bethel and then to Anchorage; they ran into Sven Paukan (YRP Member and 2017 EE participant) and Holly Carroll (ADF&G Summer Season Manager) at the airport. They had one final dinner in Anchorage as a group, and did a debrief with Danielle and said good-byes.

Each year there have been modifications to the program due to scheduling of flights, boat driver availability, availability of hosts, and timing of fishing periods. This is a dynamic program that will continue to grow and evolve; the participants did a post-exchange evaluation survey and below are some of the recommendations provided by YRDFA staff:

- Arrive early to community if possible, even by a few hours.
- Recruit more key people/local guides/boat drivers to relieve burden on few during important fishing periods. Be sure to understand that fishing season is a busy time in communities and people have other priorities.
- Build clear expectations of guests that we need to “Go with the flow” and be accommodating and understanding to the needs of people in communities during fishing time.
- Update Booklet with accurate information. This booklet was built off of the Young Fisher Booklet—it needs some fact checks and summarization for participants. Some participants stated that there was a lot of information and not enough time to review; another suggestion was to send it prior to the actual trip.

The importance of the exchange goes farther than those who participate; it's about the Yukon River people coming together to learn and connect with each other in other venues and ways than at formal meetings. We all know and understand that it is the personal connections we build that help maintain a healthy working salmon/people system. These connections can grow to improve the greater understanding of all parts of the Yukon River fishery in both the U.S. and Canada.

This project would not be possible without all of the people on the river that hosted, guided, and aided the group in many ways-along the process of planning and implementing this Educational Exchange.

Testimonials:

Geoff Wooding- “It was a pleasure to be selected as a member of the Canadian contingent for the 2018 international exchange. I learned a great deal and especially enjoyed meeting the many people of the lower Yukon that depend so much on the river. Being on the river with the Chum salmon dipnetters was a real treat! I look forward to future years where we Canadians can once again harvest Chinook Salmon in the upper Yukon River due to the sacrifices being made on the entire river during these years of poor returns.”

Steve Hossack- “I’ve been fishing across Canada for over 20 years. I learned more about salmon on this ten-day trip than the rest of those years put together. Not only did I learn an incredible amount on fish but I also gained a whole new understanding and appreciation for our neighbors in Alaska; their relationship to salmon, and the sacrifices being made on both sides of the border. This is a world class opportunity to learn about a species that brings different cultures together under the same cause, to witness firsthand the transboundary conservation efforts in place. And most importantly — to educate the public about the historical significance, cultural relevance and ongoing legacy of pacific salmon.”

What was the most valuable part or experience of your Exchange trip?

Karrie Brown- “Knowing that we have an amazing team of people on both sides, Yukon & Alaska, working to sustain salmon stocks.”

Steve Gotch-“The opportunity to meet people who live in the lower river and discuss the importance and role of salmon, as well as their understanding of how salmon fisheries are managed and why.”

Janelle Hager- “Learning about how much salmon influence the economy of the local people and how they only take what they need and no more. It was all very valuable and I really enjoyed myself.”

PHOTOS:



Photo 1: *Left to Right:* Catherine Moncrieff, Karrie Brown, Steve Hossack, (unknown fisherwoman) Steve Gotch, Janelle Hager (Back row) Geoff Wooding, Jesse Trerice. Pitka's Point, Alaska.