

Yukon River Panel
Project CC-02-13

Yukon River Educational Exchange Program
Final Report

Jill Klein

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association
725 Christensen Drive, Suite 3-B
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

for:

Yukon River Panel

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Study History: Starting in 1985 the United States (U.S.) and Canada engaged in negotiations to create a long-term agreement for the management of Chinook salmon and fall chum salmon spawning within the Canadian portion of the Yukon River drainage in the Yukon Territory. After 16 years of negotiations both countries came to a final agreement on how to share the salmon resource in March 2001. The *Yukon River Salmon Agreement* represents an international commitment to the restoration and conservation of salmon upon which Yukon River communities depend. Due to the nature of the Agreement, it is important for fishers and residents of the Yukon River drainage to understand its terms and regional and cultural differences; hence the creation of an educational exchange program.

Abstract: The purpose of the educational exchange was to provide an opportunity for building cross border understanding between Alaskans and Canadians living along the Yukon River who share the salmon resource. In August of 2014, four Alaskans traveled from Alaska to Yukon Territory. Within Yukon, they traveled from Dawson to Mayo to Whitehorse with stops along the way. The Alaskan participants came from the villages of Alakanuk, Mountain Village, Galena and Allakaket. The group included an Elder in addition to active fishers, a Yukon River Panel member and an alternate Yukon River Panel member a two YRDFA board of director's members. The group was guided by Paige Drobny of Spearfish Research and met up with Dennis Zimmerman, executive director of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee. The group traveled by and lodged in a recreational vehicle from Dawson to Whitehorse with a significant stop in Mayo to participate in the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council where the group was presenting on the importance of working together on the salmon issues along the Yukon River and met with many people from the entire Yukon River drainage. The exchange wrapped up with a press conference in Whitehorse to discuss the current challenges associated with low Chinook salmon returns to the Yukon River and steps that can be taken to sustain the salmon stocks during these times. The group returned to Fairbanks and met with Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association executive director Jill Klein to debrief before heading back to their home communities.

Key Words: Alaska, Canada, Chinook, educational exchange, headwaters, salmon, United States, Yukon River, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA), Yukon River Panel, Yukon River Salmon Agreement, Yukon Territory

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Educational Exchange Program was initiated in 2002 after the signing of the Yukon River Salmon Agreement (YRSA) to enable members of communities along the Yukon River, both in Alaska and the Yukon Territory, to understand drainage-wide needs and concerns for use of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon and fall chum salmon. The program was conducted with the ultimate purpose of building relationships to sustain the salmon populations for future generations. This would be carried out through an exchange program that brought Alaskans and Yukoners to each others communities, homes, cultural centers and fish camps to learn first hand about fishing, processing fish, sharing fish and the significance of salmon along the Yukon River to many people for many reasons.

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Participants learned and shared information about different cultures, fishing practices, and the importance of salmon in different areas in the Yukon River drainage. The trip fostered personal relationships, by bringing together fishers and community leaders from different parts of the river to spend time learning about each other. All of these experiences emphasized the importance of communication between all salmon resource users along Yukon River.

INTRODUCTION

The Yukon River educational exchange program has been in operation since 2002. Based on other exchange models of creating people to people exchanges among professionals in similar disciplines from different regions, the Yukon River exchange is a multi-day trip alternating between Alaska and Canada with participants also alternating between Alaska and Canada. The trip participants are all from one country and usually represent various fisheries such as subsistence, commercial and/or sport, First Nations or Tribal Councils, state and federal agencies and non-governmental agencies. This group travels to different communities in the host country and interacts with the same type of various stakeholders to meet each other, share information, learn from one another, and see firsthand the way people live along the Yukon River.

Participants gain insight into understanding how people use the salmon resource, why it is important to them and how to sustain it for the future.

The trip is organized and hosted by the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) and funded by the Yukon River Panel in an effort to build relationships and understanding among the people who share the salmon resources. There was a long history of sixteen years of negotiations to reach a Yukon River Salmon Agreement (YRSA). The Yukon River is the longest river in Alaska with headwaters in Yukon Territory, Canada. With a mixed stock fishery and Canadian origin Chinook and fall chum salmon migrating up to the Yukon River and Porcupine River borders to their headwaters, the Yukon River is a complex river system with complex and varied management depending on what part of the river you live or fish on. Once the YRSA was signed, the Yukon River Panel, a bi-lateral panel of U.S. and Canadians decided that an exchange trip would help build understand and support for the agreement.

Over the years of this trip there have been modifications due to the scheduling of flights, the duration of time participants can be away from home and the ability of the host villages and organization to accommodate the trip. The eleventh year of this trip, reported on here, had evolved into a shortened trip with fewer participants and fewer logistics due to a staffing shortage at YRDFA and recommendations from the YSSC to make the trip more manageable.

STUDY AREA

Yukon Territory areas of Dawson, Mayo and Whitehorse

OBJECTIVES

1. Plan and execute a trip bringing five Alaskans with strong ties to Yukon River fisheries to representative fishing spots in Canada to gain and share knowledge, both during and after the trip.
2. Build cross-border understanding and cooperation among Yukon River drainage individuals and communities.

METHODS

Due to the departure of Jason Hale from YRDFA, Jill Klein of YRDFA planned the exchange trip in conjunction with Dennis Zimmerman of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee (YSSC). While this is a project awarded to YRDFA, in the spirit of cooperation with the Canadians, YRDFA collaborated with the YSSC to plan and implement the trip. Additionally the trip is reported on at the Yukon River Panel meetings as part of the communications committee agenda item and is jointly presented by the YSSC and YRDFA in addition to the communications committee member review ahead of time. Upon the recommendation of the YSSC, YRDFA contracted with Brooke Rudolph of MBS Yukon to assist in planning the Canadian portion of the exchange. She assisted with the following planning:

- Assisted with event concept development August 5th morning meeting and media
- Assisted with development of the agenda for the August 5th meeting

- Developed simple email invitations with phone follow-up – take RSVP
- Worked with CYFN to ensure all First Nation Directors are invited and other relevant stakeholders (I.e. DFO, YFGA, RRCs, YSSC)
- Assisted with Press Release and invited relevant media event
- Booked venue/catering/audio, video booking
- Assisted with trip logistics for RV parking and meals

Specific tasks from the proposal were addressed as follows:

Planning & Preparation

- a) YRDFA developed an itinerary based on past experience and on recommendations from the Yukon Salmon Sub Committee (YSSC). A main difference in the itinerary for this trip would be a trip of shorter duration going to fewer places. Due to other programs going on in the Yukon Territory, it was decided to coordinate the exchange around the main event of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council summit scheduled to take place in Mayo, YT.
- b) The YSSC identified and contacted individuals, First Nations, organizations, and individuals that could assist with program goals and outcomes. The main person that would assist with the planning of the trip was Brooke Rudolph of MBS Yukon, recommended by the YSSC due to her relevant experience in this area.
- c) YRDFA recruited participants through existing contacts and targeted U.S. Panel members, alternates and advisors as possible participants. The participants were the late Alexie Walters, Sr. of Mountain Village, John Lamont of Alakanuk, Fred Huntington of Galena and Stanley Ned of Allakaket. We decided on four participants as we knew all these participants and felt comfortable with their participation. Due to the restrictiveness of travel between the U.S. and Canada, we were not able to find a 5th participant that could travel from the U.S. to Canada or that was not already going over the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council summit.
- d) YRDFA coordinated all travel from the US to Yukon and included per diem and lodging. YRDFA worked in collaboration with the YSSC and Brooke Rudolph for the preparation of Canadian logistics.

Final Preparation & Trip Execution

- a) YRDFA contracted with and prepared trip guide Paige Drobny ahead of the trip and organized to get her supplies and petty cash.
- b) YRDFA spoke with all participants ahead of the trip to provide them with information prior to the exchange to prepare participants for their visit, to alleviate concerns, and to clarify expectations and requirements of the program.
- c) Paige Drobny traveled with the group to Yukon and guided the educational exchange trip. Alexie Walters traveled by bus with the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council due to not having a current passport. Jill Klein of YRDFA met with the group in Fairbanks upon their return.

Post-Trip Follow-Up & Reporting

- a) Due to two of the participants on the trip being affiliated with the Yukon River panel, they were using their information gained on the trip first hand at panel meetings. The

one YR DFA board member also participated in the YR DFA annual meeting and used his information during that meeting. Unfortunately, Alexie Walters, Sr. passed away this past year.

- b) YR DFA staff member Wayne Jenkins asked evaluation questions to three participants of the program.
- c) YR DFA wrote and submitted the final report.

RESULTS

Travel Details

Educational Exchange in Yukon

August 2 – 5, 2013

August 2nd

- Alaskans travel to and depart from Fairbanks to Dawson at 5:20 PM
- Guide for the trip is Paige Drobny who will meet the group in Fairbanks and travel together
- Alaskan visitors (5) arrive in Dawson City at 7:35, and meet up with Yukon Salmon Subcommittee (YSSC) members and stay in RV in, or just outside of Dawson
- Timing dependent, dinner meeting on the 2nd or breakfast meeting on the 3rd with YSSC Chair, Tara Christie.

August 3rd

- Drive in RV to Mayo for the Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council Summit (YRITWC)
- Participate during the day in workshops, presentations, meals, and social gathering
- Stay over in Mayo in the RV

August 4th

- Present on the agenda the summit on fisheries issues impacting the Yukon River
- Return to Whitehorse in the evening

August 5th

- Morning round table meeting between Alaskan visitors, YSSC members, and stakeholders
- Stakeholders could include Renewable Resource Council members, Fish and Wildlife representative, Yukon Fish and Game Association, Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) representative James McDonald and possibly media
- Agenda of dispelling myths, promoting positive relationships in salmon stewardship, talking about how the season went, personal perspectives with a map of the drainage so people can see where they are from. Personal pictures of the area brought would be a good way to communicate area specific issues.
- Possible facilitated question and answer session with media
- Possibly video recorded for sound bytes and records
- Alaskan visitors fly from Whitehorse at 3 PM and arrive Fairbanks at 4:55

- Jill Klein, executive director of YRDFA meets the group in Fairbanks for a debriefing dinner and assists with logistics for trips home to Alaskan villages

August 6th

- Final departures to home locations

The three primary risks discussed in the proposal were (1) participant dropout, (2) travel issues, and (3) participant health & safety. In our experience from this past season, a precursor to participant dropout was the challenge of finding “the right” participant. While there are many people along the Yukon River from which to invite, if we are trying to find someone that will be a participant that meets our criteria of participation then our selection pool becomes smaller. Out of that pool there are many people without passports and some that are not able to travel from Alaska to Canada. Then out of the people that can travel, we have to have people who can travel during the timeframe we have set up for the trip. This experience limited our ability to find participants this past summer and thus we ended up with four participants. One of which that did not have a passport but due to the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council summit taking place, there was a bus that could accommodate his travel.

The travel issues we encounter on the trip usually is related to when the flights and possibly buses, vans and personal cars can travel. Air North had a seasonal flight this past summer that made it so we had to choose between a shorter trip and a longer trip, and also take into consideration the travel abilities of our participants. Our trip this past summer was shorter to accommodate the Air North flights and the abilities of our participants and the staff shortage at YRDFA and the advice of the YSSC.

We did not have any issues with participant health and safety. Driving and lodging taking place in a recreational vehicle was different for our participants and they enjoyed it. When the trip has had boating and camping along the river there is a different level of health and safety that we prepare for.

Measure of Success

As noted in the detailed proposal for this project, there are three measures of success for this program:

1. Strong Participants.
2. Good interactions in host communities.
3. Sharing at home.

We feel that we did have good participants as can be noticed by the level of involvement they have in the fisheries. All longstanding fishermen and active in boards and panels, our participants also have worked together over the years and knew each other. The participants had good interactions with host communities, but they mainly were in the cities of Yukon. First going to Dawson and then Mayo where there was the council summit taking place and then Whitehorse, the largest city in the territory, the participants were in larger host communities. The group was still able to meet with strong participants from the Yukon side in each location and they were

exposed to a variety of events such as the watershed council summit and a press event scheduled for them. Following the exchange, the two participants from the panel (the panel member and the alternate) stayed involved through their participation at panel meetings and the YR DFA board member was able to use his experiences at the YR DFA annual meeting. As mentioned in this report, Alexie Walters, Sr. our Elder participant unfortunately passed away this past year. In one of the evaluations by a participant he noted that an Elder should be on all the trips. While we did have an Elder, it seems that because Alexie had to travel on the bus and not with the group, plus he stayed in special Elder housing at the watershed council summit, it seemed like he was not really with the group. This was a unique aspect of the trip this year and will be taken into consideration in the future when joining up with other events.

Financial Statement

Due to the shortened nature of the trip, and the fewer participants, the budget was not fully expended. Most line items were not spent out and this resulted in an overall grant expenditure that was less than anticipated. The only line item over spent was personnel as it still took the same amount of time to plan the trip and usually takes more than is actually budgeted for. Due to the under spending in other line items, we could accommodate this. A budget revision had taken place to accommodate trip changes prior to trip in the anticipation that a full budget would be spent out, but in the end not all actual costs added up to what they were budgeted for. Actual expenses were lower than anticipated and the YSSC covered some costs.

CONCLUSION

The educational exchange trip brought together a diverse group of individuals not only relying on the Yukon River salmon resource, but also working to share and conserve it. Not only was it an exchange between Yukoners and Alaskans, but also between Alaskans as participants from the same country, but different communities, got to know each other. While traveling to different parts of the Yukon River, participants interacted with people affected in various ways by salmon fisheries thereby giving both parties the ability to appreciate the needs, concerns, and interests of those involved. Throughout the exchange certain topics, such as the Yukon River Salmon Agreement, factors affecting salmon, management strategies, status of stocks, and the importance of the resource were stressed and discussed in an informal setting.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Yukon River Panel for providing funds to make the educational exchange program a reality. We thank the participants for joining us on this trip, taking time away from their families and duties at home to expand their worldview and advance their work to sustain salmon fisheries. We also thank the Yukon Salmon Sub Committee for collaborating on this project.

Appendices

1) Education Exchange survey from the 2013 education exchange trip

Respondent: Dennis Zimmerman

Questions for Dennis:

- 1) What is a memorable highlight for you from the trip? ***Stanley stealing the RV. The bonding and communications with some influential Alaskans.***
- 2) What were the challenges of the trip both with logistics and content? ***Content-managing expectations around the YRITWC conference.***
- 3) Did you feel the changes you had wanted to see were implemented? ***I like that we had a select group of influential Alaskans that we deal with at the Panel. Helped us rather than general users.***
- 4) What changes would you continue to like to see? ***Continue with the “right” people, those that work on YR salmon management. Bring along more communication; video, photo story focus, so we can share and use.***
- 5) Did helping to host the trip help you in your participation at panel meetings? ***Yes, absolutely, biggest value for our participants.***
- 6) Anything else to add? ***I like the YSSC (Canada) and YR DFA (US) working on this together.***

2) Education Exchange survey from the 2013 education exchange trip

Respondent: Stanley Ned

Questions for Alaskans:

- 1) Why did you want to go on the trip to Yukon, Canada? ***Always wanted to see other part of Yukon and see how people actually live. Their lifestyle.***
- 2) Was this your first trip over to Yukon? ***No, this was my first trip to the different communities, like Mayo and down the highway.***
- 3) What is a memorable highlight for you from the trip? ***Both the RV & boat ride.***
- 4) Were there any challenges in your experience on the trip, both with the logistics or the content of your exchanges with folks from different parts of the river? ***I couldn't get away with the RV.***

- 5) Now that some time has gone by, how do you feel the trip was? ***One of the most memorable trips. Got to see the country from the RV.***
- 6) Did going on this trip influence your work at the subsequent panel meetings? ***Of course, I got to see some fish camps with no fish.***
- 7) What recommendations do you have for future exchange trips? ***Why fix what not broken?***
- 8) Anything else you would like to add? ***Bon voyage.***

3) Education Exchange survey from the 2013 education exchange trip

Respondent: John Lamont

Questions for Alaskans:

- 1) Why did you want to go on the trip to Yukon, Canada? ***I wanted to find out more about how Chinook Salmon were utilized by Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and what effects Mining and Hydro Dams are having on the Chinook Salmon and their spawning habitat.***
- 2) Was this your first trip over to Yukon? ***Yes!***
- 3) What is a memorable highlight for you from the trip? ***Actually witnessing the First Chinook to the Whitehorse Ladder.***
- 4) Were there any challenges in your experience on the trip, both with the logistics or the content of your exchanges with folks from different parts of the river? ***Everything went as planned.***
- 5) Now that some time has gone by, how do you feel the trip was? ***I would have liked to spend time at Cultural Camps and talking with both the Mining and Hydro Dam entities along with the First Nations People.***
- 6) Did going on this trip influence your work at the subsequent panel meetings? ***Yes, it gave me a better insight into why we are experiencing the issues we are with the Chinook Salmon and their spawning habitat. Some of the closely related factors.***
- 7) What recommendations do you have for future exchange trips? ***Spending time in Old Crow and Moose Hide Camp, also spending time with the People of Teslin and visiting their Traditional Salmon Grounds.***

- 8) Anything else you would like to add? *It would be great to always have at least one Elder on the trip in both directions. And witness the actual fishing of the salmon.*

4) Education Exchange trip report submitted by Paige Drobny
Spearfish Research
paige@spearfishresearch.com
(907) 452-3828

Educational Exchange trip to Canada, August 2-5, 2013

John Lamont, Fred Huntington and Stanley Ned joined me at the Fairbanks Airport on August 2, 2013 for this educational exchange trip. They all knew each other and were very comfortable travelling in this group. Our plane to Dawson was rerouted to Old Crow to pick up some people from a meeting there. Our time in Old Crow was short but everyone enjoyed going there and wished we could have had time to tour around the village.

We arrived in Dawson City at 11pm. Dennis Zimmerman picked us up in the RV and we met up with several other people from the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee. We all met up again for breakfast the next morning and Dennis had arranged for a few other people to meet us there as well. We had a great round table discussion about salmon while we ate breakfast. We took a boat tour of Dawson's surrounding area with Tommy Taylor. This was a great tour of the Yukon River and the old gold rush places. We sat and had tea and fry bread with Tommy and shared stories about salmon and the places where the participants were from. They found they had some similar relatives! We then headed for the conference in Mayo. By the time we got to Mayo, the conference was nearly done for the day but the participants walked around and caught up with old friends, while Dennis and I made final arrangements for the YRDFA fish session the next day. We also met up with Alexie Walters, the fourth participant on this trip. We went to dinner with other conference attendees and headed to the campground for the night. We had a bonfire and chatted with Dennis and Frank Thomas about Chinook salmon issues and possible solutions.

On the morning of August 4, we got up early and went to breakfast at the conference and then listened to the first session. Our session started at 10:45 am and Dennis started it off by showing his video of the educational exchange from 2012. He then moderated a discussion with each of the current participants as well as adding three people from Canada that have been involved with fishing Chinook salmon for a long time. He asked the question, 'how has fishing for Chinook salmon changed in your lifetime and what can we do to fix it?' This brought out some great discussion from the panel members and also from the audience. We had lunch and were on our way to Whitehorse. We stopped a couple of times on the way to Whitehorse, first to check out the Five Fingers Rapids, a notorious spot on the Yukon River and second to hear about the Chinook salmon fishing issues with the Tatchun Creek Campground. We arrived in Whitehorse around 7pm and went to dinner and then retired to the campground for the evening. We had another bonfire at the campground with just myself and the participants and talked over what we had seen and learned the past couple of days.

The next morning, we had a meeting with the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee, several other stakeholders and some local media. This meeting was to highlight the educational exchange but also to focus solely on solutions to the problems. At this point, everyone knows what the problem is but the solution has been elusive. This was the most productive Chinook salmon meeting I have been too in a long time. The discussion was great and the message was united. The hope is to carry this meeting forward to the next YRDFA meeting in April. After the participants sat down to answer some questions for the media, we went to visit the fish ladder in Whitehorse. They had just had their first Chinook salmon pass that morning and another was holding at the bottom of the ladder so it was great to see on that last day. We had lunch and headed for the airport.

This trip went beyond my initial expectations and both the conference and the meeting in Whitehorse were a great time to talk with many user groups about Chinook salmon on the Yukon River. The participants were all really great to work and travel with and I think strides were made in the right direction for the Yukon River king salmon fishery.