

First Fish 2003

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Prepared by:

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Yukon River Commercial Fishing Association

Yukon River Panel

ABSTRACT

In the management of our salmon resources, rarely do we manage fish. Rather, we manage effects to fish. The biggest most manageable effect is people. By teaching youth about the importance of salmon and the habitats in which they depend, we instil them with conservation and stewardship ethics. By instilling this ethic in the next generation of people, we are working to assure the future health of our salmon resources.

In the summer of 2000 and again in 2002, a very successful 7-day conservation and stewardship camp was hosted for Dawson Area youths. In 2003, the camp was conducted over two weeks and there were 28 participants. During this time, children were exposed to many things, such as: First Nation and commercial fishing values; First Nation and commercial fishing methods, and, cleaning, smoking and drying methods; educational talks and field trips on life histories, fry habitat, habitat management, stock assessment, conservation and protection techniques; and, boat/river safety techniques. The children then participated in a very large public gathering where they, customarily and respectfully, gave their first fish away to elders. Children left the camp as young adults. These young adults now look at the river with greatly increased respect for the salmon resources it provides.

First Fish Activities

- Setting nets on the river: to be able to set a net effectively, youth must learn about how water flows in the river, how and why the salmon use these currents, as well as the effect that changing river levels have on the eddies and the effectiveness of the nets. They youth helped to make the nets they set and learned about how they work to catch only salmon and not every kind of fish!
- Gutting and Cutting fish: the youth learned much more than just how to cut a nice salmon fillet. They learned about the difference between the males and females, (i.e. why the females have thinner sides, why they are different colours, the effect carrying the eggs has); they learned about the anatomy of the fish, and had lots of questions about the guts and other parts; They learned about the traditional way to cut and dry the salmon to keep it preserved.
- Life cycles of the salmon workshop: During this workshop youth were presented with maps of the watershed of the Yukon River, and the King Salmon spawning areas; discussions of the different fish in the River, with bottled examples of each species; an explanation of how the tagging system works, including getting to test out the radio tags; bottled examples of the different life stages of a salmon; importance of conservation and how human interference during any stage of the lifecycle can cause salmon numbers to drop.
- Salmon Fry Study: This workshop involved discussing what features salmon fry required in their habitat to ensure survival. Then an explanation of how the traps worked was given, as well as why they are set. They kids then looked for an appropriate area to collect salmon. 24 hours later the group

would go back and check their traps, collecting any salmon for sampling with the local Habitat Steward. They helped to collect data and re-release the fry.

- Ecology walks: these were lead by community elders and youth learned tradition uses for different local plants. Everything from making soap berry ice cream to the healing qualities of spruce gum.
- Stream Study: Here the kids got magnifying glasses, strainers, scoops, trays and more. They were then given the challenge of discovering what kind of creatures lived in the stream, and how did they affect the salmon fry? They discovered other fish, bugs (in all their life stages) plant matter and other 'stuff'. We had ID books present to try and identify all that they found.

Organizations Involved

There were several different groups that helped make First Fish such a success:

- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in organized the camp and provided staff and facilities.
- Jake Duncan and RJ Nagano, volunteered their time as representatives of the Yukon River Commercial Fishing Association and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in partnership to do the fry and lifecycle studies.
- Fisheries Biologist, Yukon River Partner Association of Village Council Presidents, Inc (Alaska) joined us for the second week to learn about setting up their own Fish Camp. They provided lots of information for the youth.
- Yukon River Commercial Fisheries Association assisted with the preparation to get the camp running.
- Selkirk First Nation brought 10 youth and 2 chaperones to attend the program.

Practical Skills and Information

- Youth learned about the variety of jobs that surround the Salmon harvest – that there are more than just fishermen.
- They learned why the jobs had been created and got to work directly with people in those different careers, asking questions and finding out about what each job entails.
- They learned skills which will benefit them immediately, including boat and bear safety.
- The youth have learned the techniques to catch, cut and dry fish in the traditional way.
- The youth experienced how biologists gather their information.

Comments from Participant

Leon Sidney, Summer Student:

BENEFITS: “It was really good to learn all of that different kind of stuff from people who have been doing it for their whole lives.”

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION: “Around an 8/10. The best part was going out on the boats and bringing in the fish. My least favorite part was the lifecycles of the salmon and the net tying because it was a lot of work to keep the kids settled down and paying attention.”

AWARNESS OF BENEFITS OF SCHOOL: “This is not something that the kids ever talked about, but maybe something that they pick up through role models.”

INCREASED AWARNESS OF CAREER OPTION? “I think that they didn’t realize how many jobs there are because of the fishing industry, so yes.”

INFLUENCED YOUTHS VIEWS ON CAREER IN THIS FIELD? “No, not personally, because I already knew that Fish and Wildlife management is something that I want to do as a career, and that I have applied to go to school for.”

Other General Project Information:

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| 1. Total number of youth | 28 |
| 2. Total number of female youth | 10 |
| 3. Total number of male youth | 18 |
| 4. Total number of youth with disabilities | 1 |
| 5. Total number of participating communities/organizations | 3 |
| 6. Total number of activities | many |

Financial information:

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| 7. Total amount spent on initiative | \$11,293.00 |
| 8. Total contribution from DIAND | \$ 6,000.00 |
| 9. Total contribution from Yukon River Panel | \$ 1,000.00 |
| 10. Total contributions from other sources | \$ 4,293.00 |

Photos



Photo 1. As the Tradition goes: Participant kissing his first fish.



Photo 2. First Nation assistant and participant kissing his first fish.



Photo 3. Participant kissing his first fish.



Photo 4. First Fish, first kiss.



Photo 5. First Fish Cultural Facilitator.



Photo 6. Getting nets ready and teaching kids net building.



Photo 7. Learning to cut and clean fish.



Photo 8. Getting help from Cultural Facilitator.



Photo 9. First Fish participant learning to cleaning fish.



Photo 10. Getting ready to clean-up after cutting fish.



Photo 11. Going on a net check from Moosehide village.



Photo 12. First Fish participants learning to smoke salmon.



Photo 13. First Fish participants in front of a smokehouse.



Photo 14. Going on a net check.



Photo 15. Checking minnow traps from salmon fry in Moosehide Creek.



Photo 16. Getting ready to sample salmon fry from Moosehide Creek.



Photo 17. Sampling salmon fry from Moosehide Creek.



Photo 18. Monitoring the recovery of sampled fry.



Photo 19. The first group of 2003 First Fish participants.