



2010 FRASER FALLS COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

YUKON RESTORATION AND ENHANCEMENT
PROJECT NUMBER

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PREPARED FOR:

YUKON RIVER PANEL

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ABSTRACT

The First Nation of the Na-Cho Nyak Dun (NND) with assistance from EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc. (EDI) conducted a community consultation to determine the extent of community support for investigating enhancement options at Fraser Falls, on the Stewart River. This consultation included two community meetings. A meeting was conducted with the NNDFN Chief and Council on October 13, 2010 and with the community of Mayo on October 14, 2010. Participants at the Chief and Council meeting were receptive to the idea of investigating enhancement activities at Fraser Falls. Those participants present at the community meeting were strongly opposed to any modifications to Fraser Falls. It is recommended that no further investigation into enhancement opportunities at Fraser Falls be conducted at this time. Community support does not exist for such a project at this time. However, as evidenced by the strong attendance of both the Chief and Council and public meetings, there appears to be a large amount of interest in and support for the Chinook salmon resource in the community of Mayo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Fraser Falls (45 Km upstream of Mayo, Yukon) is an important traditional fishing location on the Stewart River. Recently, this area has received attention regarding its impact on migrating Chinook salmon. These falls are the most notable obstacle for Chinook salmon migrating up the Stewart River (for fish that spawn upstream of the falls). The high water velocities in this area likely restrict fish passage during some flow conditions. Even when fish can get by, it is likely that the amount of energy required to ascend the falls has an impact on mortality and ultimately the number of fish that spawn upstream of the falls. Although Fraser Falls has always presented a challenge to migrating Chinook salmon, recent concerns over low returns of Chinook (coupled with increased harvesting pressures) provide a rationale for novel solutions to enhance Chinook spawning success.

In 1992, the Fraser Falls site was visited by an engineer. Some initial measurement on the height and water velocities at the falls were collected (Nielsen 1992). An additional brief investigation was conducted in 1997, including an aerial overflight of the site (Chilibeck pers. comm. 2010). The site has been visited periodically by DFO since this time; however, no additional investigations have been conducted.

In order to help determine future planning options for Fraser Falls, the NND Lands and Resources Department sought input from the local community (Mayo, Yukon) and all potential stakeholders to determine whether public support existed for potential enhancement projects at Fraser Falls.

2 METHODS

2.1 CONSULTATION PACKAGE

To determine whether community support exists for enhancement work at the Fraser Falls site, NND Lands and Resources Department and EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc. developed a consultation package to be delivered to community groups and the general public in Mayo. This consultation package included an introductory presentation, followed by an open forum discussion period. This presentation is included in Appendix A. All meeting participants were given the opportunity to share their knowledge, ideas and opinions in relation to possible modifications of the Fraser Falls site for the purpose of salmon enhancement. In addition, anonymous questionnaires were prepared to encourage participants who may not have spoken during the discussions to submit their input. This also allowed for participants to submit their input confidentially, if they desired.

As a component of the introductory presentation, meeting facilitators gave a brief explanation of the recent history and physical characteristics of the site. The presentation discussed (as the rationale for the enhancement investigations) the concept of high water velocities at the Fraser Falls restricting Chinook



salmon passage and reducing overall spawning success for some salmon. It was stressed that many Chinook were able to make it past the obstacle presented by Fraser Falls and that fish passage was likely dependent on variations in flow regimes. Also included in the background presentation were several supporting points related to enhancement opportunities at the falls. These supporting points included:

- The recent low Chinook salmon returns, providing the impetus for any enhancement project that could enhance existing runs;
- The issue of size selective fishing, leading to smaller average fish sizes and a consequent reduced ability to overcome migration impediments, such as Fraser Falls;
- The availability of high quality habitat, suggesting that notable high quality habitat areas upstream of Fraser Falls could support more Chinook salmon than they currently do; and
- The energy Budget Concept, implying that those fish that are forced to expend limited energy reserves migrating through obstacles such as Fraser Falls will be left with less energy for spawning activity, as compared to those fish that are not faced with such obstacles.

To provide context, the presentation also offered examples of enhancement projects conducted at similar sites (i.e. fast flowing rapids and falls) in B.C. and Alaska. However, the presentation made clear the fact that no specific enhancement ideas were being proposed for the Fraser Falls site at this time and that no enhancement activities would be discussed if community opinion was against such a concept.

2.2 COMMUNITY MEETINGS

A series of meetings were set up with the Chief and Council of the NND, the Mayo elder's council and the general public in Mayo. The Chief and Council and the Mayo elders council meetings were scheduled for October 13, 2010; the meeting with the general public was scheduled for October 14, 2010. Unfortunately, due to a death in the community shortly before the date of the consultation, the meeting with the elders' council had to be cancelled. As a result, a number of elders were not consulted.

A series of posters were created to advertise the meetings and were put up in various locations in the community of Mayo. A complimentary dinner was also provided with the public meeting to encourage participation and to allow community members to attend during the evening hours after work.

3 MEETING RESULTS

Both meetings were well attended, a complete list of attendees and their affiliation (as applicable) is provided in Appendix B. A detailed list of all comments provided during the public meeting is included in Appendix C. Meeting questionnaires filled out during and subsequent to the public meeting are included in Appendix D.

A summary of the meetings and most common comments and opinions is provided in the sections below.



3.1 CHIEF AND COUNCIL MEETING

The meeting with the NND Chief and Council took place on October 13, 2010 and was attended by the chief, deputy chief, two councilors and NND's executive assistant. Overall, participants were receptive to the idea of investigating enhancement activities at Fraser Falls. The Chief in particular, was keen on salmon restoration/enhancement activities within the NND's Traditional Territory, including possibly Fraser Falls (provided community support existed). Specific comments provided at the meeting included:

- Returns of Chinook salmon are low and the size of returning fish are smaller than in the past. Improvements in local and larger scale management of the fishery are needed.
- It is important to have the community involved in salmon enhancement projects.
- It is important to have the young people in the community, in particular, involved in salmon enhancement projects.
- The traditional value of the site is important to community members.

3.2 PUBLIC MEETING

The public meeting took place on October 14, 2010 and was well attended. A total of 35 people attended the meeting and many provided feedback during the open discussion period. Overall, participants were strongly opposed to any modifications to Fraser Falls. Much emphasis was placed on leaving the site as it is. There was a general feeling that the problem with salmon returns is not at Fraser Falls, rather, it is related to downstream issues (e.g. overfishing). The most common comments during the public meeting included:

- Leave Fraser Falls as it currently is.
- There is nothing we can do to change fish migration patterns, we need to leave it as it is. Mother nature will sort things out over time.
- Fish used to be much larger, up to 50 or 60 pounds. There are no big fish now.
- How many fish get by the falls? We need to know this.
- Not as many fish are holding below the falls as there was in the past; fish go right through and don't pool below the falls.
- All fish go through the falls, since 5 years ago when (natural) changes to the falls occurred.
- Modifications to Fraser Falls are a band-aid solution; we need to look at the bigger problem.
- We need to deal with the low numbers of fish through investigations in Alaska, not just at Fraser Falls.
- Any things we do up here to benefit salmon will benefit downstream fishers and not result in more fish returning to Yukon.



4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As evidenced by the strong attendance of both the Chief and Council and public meetings, there appears to be a large amount of interest in and support for the Chinook salmon resource in the community of Mayo.

The Chief and Council were receptive to restoration and enhancement ideas in general and did not discount possible investigations at Fraser Falls. However, the opinions shared by many community members during the public meeting were strongly voiced and were against any enhancement project that would modify Fraser Falls. As a consequence, it is recommended that no further investigation into enhancement opportunities at Fraser Falls be conducted at this time. Community support does not exist for such a project at this time.

As mentioned previously, one community member indicated that the falls changed about 5 years ago (some large rocks fell into the river). The community also has the impression that fishing below the fall site has not been good in recent years. As mentioned by another community member, Chinook are moving through this site faster as a result of recent changes, and thus are less susceptible to harvest. If this is indeed the case, there may be a future improvement of run strength upstream of the falls. Additional study into this occurrence may be valuable.

Despite the lack of support for enhancement activities at Fraser Falls, it should be noted that a number of participants from both meetings expressed interested in investigating salmon enhancement activities in other locations within NND's Traditional Territory. Many meetings participants demonstrated considerable knowledge regarding the Chinook salmon resources in the area. Several participants also suggested that traditional knowledge is not currently fully considered. A number of elders indicated that they are interested in sharing their knowledge of salmon resources. This could be pursued when researching any other future restoration/enhancement projects in the area.



5 REFERENCES CITED

Nielsen, G.O. 1992. Stewart River – Fraser Falls. Technical Memo to Department of Fisheries and Ocean, Whitehorse, Yukon.

Personal Communications

Chilibeck, B. Hydrological Engineering Consultant, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants, North Vancouver, B.C. Via email to Ben Snow. September 14, 2010.



Appendix A. Introductory Presentation



Appendix B. Consultation Meetings' Participants



Chief and Council Meeting Participants

Simon Mervyn – Chief
Beverly Blanchard – Deputy Chief
Bryan Moses – Councilor
Mary McMahon – Councilor, Elders’ Representative
Mabel Kottnitz – Elders Council
Elenise Profeit – NND Executive Assistant

Public Meeting Participants

Helen Buyck	Willy Patterson
Martha Buyck	Sandy Washburn
Betty Lucas	Rose Lemieux
Kathy Moses	Anne Leckie
Bella Peter	Mark Johnston
Johnson Peter	Bernice Catcheside
Josee Tremblay – NND Lands and Resources Department	Sharon Peter
Crystal Stevens – NND Lands and Resources Department	Roy Buyck
Frank Patterson – Member, NND Renewable Resources Council	Jimmy Johnny
Pat VanBibber	Ed Champion
Julia Olsen	Gary Umbrich
Robert Hager	Ray Kokiw
Christine Hager	Matthew Hager
Art Hoogland	Teresa Samson
Persis Hager	Rosemary Mervyn
Stewart Moses	Mabel Kottnitz
Archie Lucas	Elaine Moses
Catherine Germaine	



Appendix C. Summary of Comments Provided during Consultation Meetings



Appendix D. Completed Meeting Questionnaire Forms