

BCFDF QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

May, 2021

Fraser River Collaborative Table

Following 2 years of collaboration between First Nations, Public Fishery and the commercial sector, a Terms of Reference (TOR) has been accepted as a guideline for on-going efforts toward reviewing issues of common concern between Fraser River harvesters. Identified areas of concern include protection of sensitive fish habitat, reduction in predator numbers including pinipeds, and sharing of salmon stocks on Fraser tributaries.

The FRCT includes 23 F/N's under the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance, 7 Public Fishery organization both regional and provincial as well as commercial reps. The BCFDF has played an instrumental role in developing this important initiative toward preserving salmon and non salmon stocks and retaining and expanding fishing opportunities.

The significance of these sectors coming together is recognized and supported by both DFO and the province. The next official full forum meeting will be May 25th. All participants recognize the challenges going forward, including how issues such as "Reconciliation" will impact our fisheries and our shared concerns to preserve these threatened stocks and retention of future fishing opportunities for the next generations.

Outdoor Recreation Council (ORC)

The BCFDF has been an active participant with ORC for a number of years with a Director's position on the Executive. We recognize the correlation between many recreational activities including angling which suggests that cooperative efforts between all forms of recreational groups in B.C. is necessary to ensure continued access and enjoyment of the tremendous recreational resources available in the province.

A good example of an ORC initiative was their intervener status in the recent court cases, challenging the Douglas Lake Cattle Company denying access to Stoney and Minney lakes. While this challenge was not successful, the decision has been appealed and the issue has been widely profiled, which will be beneficial in this case and other potential restrictions to public access to crown land.

ORC has also recognized the potential ramifications of Reconciliation on all forms of

recreation in B.C. and is actively reviewing scenarios toward developing an official position. The BCFDF supports initiatives at the regional levels toward respectful conversations with First Nations leading to solutions to access and other issues currently under review.

We firmly believe that often solutions to perceived complex issues can be best handled at the grass roots level without govt in the room. Round Tables appear to be a viable method of dealing with issues through respectful dialogue.

Sport Fish Advisory Board (SFAB)

The BCFDF has been an active participant in the SFAB process for many years and views the process as the best example of an advisory method of dealing with DFO on all issues impacting salmon and non tidal salmon stocks in B.C. The current endangered state of many stocks including steelhead, demands immediate actions in conjunction with the province and First Nations. With the tidal Public Fishery worth in excess of 1.2 billion a year, many jobs directly and indirectly related have been lost due to severe restrictions placed on fisheries.

While supportive of required conservation measures the BCFDF and other SFAB participants are demanding that a balance between conservation and preserving livelihoods must be the primary goal. Increased enhancement where possible and “Marked Selective” fisheries must be initiated to provide opportunity where wild stocks are at risk. Responsible release methods for non targeted species & incidental catch of wild fish must be promoted extensively and enforced rigorously . We expect the same demands on all sectors.

The Public Fishery must be recognized as a tremendous social and economic benefit and be accorded the respect warranted. We recognize the constitutional priorities of First Nations, but demand that all Canadians be granted equitable treatment. Salmon and non salmon stocks are common property.

The BCFDF has representatives on the SFAB province wide and we appreciate the additional attention to non tidal stocks and look forward to the proposed revisions to make the SFAB truly representatives of all angler concerns and increasing their advocacy role.

Fraser River Sport Fishing Alliance (FRSA)

The BCFDF played a pivotal role in creating and chairing the FRSA. The primary role of this alliance is to now play a reactionary role in protecting and enhancing the angling opportunities for Fraser River salmon and non salmon stocks. We cannot continue to

condone total summer salmon closures when other sectors are permitted to fish for and retain these same fish. The FRSA on behalf of their member groups must initiate all actions, including legal to ensure that lower Fraser River anglers are treated equally when stocks in adjacent areas are deemed sufficient to allow opportunity and retention. We have submitted proposals for short term Chinook fisheries in late summer when late Chinook stocks may warrant openings. These proposals would be approx 3 to 4 weeks duration using selective gear designed to avoid stocks such as threatened sockeye. There is significant documented evidence that “Bar fishing” with a short leader is probably the most selective of all methods and all sectors on the river. Considering that past years has seen the Fraser River fishery generate revenues in excess of 100 million dollars to the local economies we demand serious consideration of our demands. The tremendous social family values of Fraser Bar fishery further justifies openings, particularly in our current pandemic challenges.

Provincial Angling Advisory Team (PAAT)

The only bright spot in inland fresh water fisheries is the lake fishing under the management of the Fresh Water Fisheries Society. B.C was formerly a world class destination for steelhead fishing both north and south coast. Unfortunately most stocks, particularly in the south are at extreme conservation concern with many at point of virtual extinction. This trend has been evident for some time and we as anglers and conservationists have allowed this management to extinction to continue.

Divisiveness within angling groups on recovery options and lack of adequate cooperation between DFO and the province has exacerbated the problem. Interior Fraser Steelhead continue on life support and rivers such as the once prolific Gold River are now devoid of winter run fish. Numerous past studies and provincial steelhead summits have identified the issues and suggested recovery options. Unfortunately the political will has been lacking to make the tough choices required to save these B.C. icons.

A new provincial recovery initiative has been announced although we are still awaiting any real details. The BCFDF and we know other groups remain committed to seeking solutions to this crisis. Our only demand is that ALL options must be considered and recovery decisions must be based on best science.

Failure to save these tremendous creatures will hold us accountable to future generations.

Region 1 Report

Vancouver Island steelhead fishing continues the downward spiral with virtually all stocks at point of extreme concern. In 3 counts on the Gold River only 3 fish were reported on what was once the most prolific river on Vcr Island. The Englishman counts indicated only 7 fish. These numbers represent extinction and loss of a tremendous resource. There is little optimism that other systems are doing much better particularly for winter fish. These numbers are the lowest in 30 years and despite stakeholder alarms for decades our government has allowed this slide to oblivion. The only somewhat bright spot is the Cowichan with estimated winter returns of 4 to 5 hundred fish which is still well below historical returns.

It should be noted that despite declines Island wide any remaining enhancement programs have been terminated.

Predation by seals and sea lions in-river & estuaries has been determined to be a major contributing factor. Predation by these creatures has been determined to result in a 60% reduction of steelhead smolts for Interior Fraser steelhead. One would assume this same scenario applies to other B.C. steelhead.

A radio tagging program was initiated on the Cowichan on 20 adults to determine migration patterns & returns. The info obtained could be useful to determine potential impacts.

Winter Chinook fishing was decent, with lots of hatchery clipped fish. This is an indication that marked selective fisheries with proper release techniques of wild fish can provide both social and economic opportunities for the Public fishery.

Halibut fishing to date has been decent and we are awaiting further announcements on retention of hatchery Chinook in south coast waters.

Shane Bradley BCFDF Island chair

Northern Report

The message for the 2021 season is clear. Conservation of salmon populations is the primary objective. Conservation measures or low returns for many salmon populations, particularly those returning to the North Coast and Skeena River may constrain some of the Public fishing opportunities while these stocks of concern migrate.

This Spring the North Coast BCFDF members participated extensively in the recent Sport Fishing Advisory Board (SFAB) meetings, the Integrated Fisheries Mgt Plan (IFMP) process as well as the Integrated Harvest Planning Committee (IHPC) All of these meetings and processes provide an opportunity for the Public Fishery and the various member organizations to provide recommendations, guidelines and support

toward management decisions for commercial, recreational and F/N Food & Ceremonial fisheries. Our input to the process is to try to ensure fairness in the salmon allocations between sectors.

The overall message from DFO during all of these meetings was that the post season evaluation of salmon returns in 2020 were weaker than expected; subsequently a continued precautionary approach is warranted for 2021. In-season management measures may be put in place to support conservation and promote rebuilding of North Coast salmon stocks, including no targeted, spatial and temporal closures and retention limit reductions in marine recreational fisheries.

Provided below are some species highlights for the 2021 season:

North Coast Sockeye-2021

When sockeye are below conservation thresholds, the Skeena watershed will start the season closed to any retention for the Public Fishery. In addition, when FSC fisheries for Skeena sockeye are closed for conservation purposes, the Public Fishery for all salmon in the Skeena River will be closed. Public marine salmon fisheries in area 3, 4 and 5 fisheries will have retention limits reduced by half for 2021 and the Area 4 commercial fishing opportunities will be suspended.

The 2021 outlook is that the Skeena River Sockeye returns will exceed the conservation threshold and an in-river Public sockeye fishery will take place. All will be closely monitoring the Test fishery for an exceeding of the conservation threshold and the resulting opening of the Public fishery, which provides not only access to sockeye but also other species such as steelhead.

North Coast Coho-2021

After experiencing near record low returns of Coho on the North Coast in 2018, DFO implemented additional measures to reduce the overall exploitation rate of commercial fisheries in 2019. Additional measures were introduced in 2020, with a goal of a 50% overall reduction in commercial fisheries in the North. While both commercial and the Public fishery catch was reduced in 2020, and some Coho stocks showed modest improvement, preliminary escapement data suggests that many Coho stocks remain weak.

Ocean survival continues to be a concern for Coho returning in 2021; and subsequently, a continued precautionary approach to Coho fishery management is warranted for 2021. Although no significant changes (closures) to the retention and non-retention Public fisheries are proposed, the in-season numbers may result in changes to proposed fisheries.

Skeena Chinook-2021

In 2020, in response to a continued trend in poor productivity of Skeena Chinook, DFO implemented a suite of management measures to reduce the overall exploitation rates on Skeena Chinook. For 2020, restrictions also included an extended closure of the commercial troll fishery in Northern B.C. until Aug 15th to allow passage of Fraser River Summer Chinook. 2020 was also a unique year due to Covid-19 and restrictions on travel which reduced Public fishing effort in the North and Haida Gwaii. Considering the reduction in both commercial and Public fishery exploitation, Chinook returns still fell short of expectations.

For 2021, preliminary Chinook data suggests that we remain in a period of low Chinook productivity and continued precautionary measures will be required.

The Public fishing opportunities for Chinook salmon in the North Coast are dependent on a number of potential options which include spatial and temporal closures in the marine and fresh water environment and temporal retention limits throughout the fishery-including starting the season with the non retention of Chinook salmon in all rivers draining into the Pacific Fishery (management areas 3 to 6 , not including the Kitimat River.

The Department has been clear that the recreational limits for these fisheries will be determined by relative abundance and all are hoping to see improved returns for the 2021/2022 seasons.

The North Coast members would like to thank our South Coast members for all of their hard work and effort in supporting us on the various SFAB, IFMP and IHPC processors and the drafting of letters and motions that help provide angling opportunities for all our members and the Public fishery.

Jason Harris, BCFDF, Northern Director

Region 3 Report

Recently reported that the Okanagon First Nations is working with Washington State bands to introduce Chinook into the Okanagon River. This is a positive move toward reintroducing a species decimated by the many dams on the Columbia River. This initiative along with the potential removal of the Enloe dam on the Similkameen River will benefit all fishers in this area.

The Nicomen F/N supports opening the Thompson River Recreational Chinook (jack) fishery on the Thompson River. The Band chief has requested that all Covid protocols

be followed and that as a sign of respect that anglers keep the area clean and take out all garbage. To help ensure continued Nicomen F/N support for this fishery.

This cooperative gesture demonstrates the ability of the Public fishery and First Nations to work together to provide fishing opportunities for all communities. A great example which hopefully can be emulated province wide.

The Nicola Valley Fish & Game Club is in the process of applying for leave for the Supreme Court of Canada appeal of the decision which prevented the public access to Stoney & Minnie lakes. Lawyers for the Nicola club indicate a favourable response could be forthcoming. This is a precedent setting case which will have very significant implications province wide in preserving public access to resources belonging to all B.C. residents.

Don Tretheway/ Sandy McDonald Region 3 directors

BCFDF Fundraiser

Due to Covid concerns we have not had a fundraiser since 2019. It has been a challenge to pay our bills and continue our many initiatives to protect fish and preserve angler opportunities. Thanks to past fundraising successes and the generosity of donors we have stayed afloat.

Please mark your calendars for Sept 30th 2021, at the Langley Golf Centre for our next event which will include our traditional raffles and auctions. We sincerely hope you will make an effort to attend and bring a friend. Considering the tremendous current and future challenges facing our angling opportunities it's imperative that you support our efforts. We are a purely volunteer organization and count on your financial support for our existence.

In closing, I want to thank all our dedicated directors and supporters. Without you there would not be a BCFDF. It's been a tough few years and unfortunately we have had some of our long term directors and supporters pass away. Our very sincere condolences to the families of those who have left us.

They may be gone but they will not be forgotten.

Please check out our website and facebook for updates on the BCFDF and our many initiatives

Rod Clapton, President

