



## **Gitksan Watershed Authorities**

### **Project Updates**

**June 2017**

Gitksan interests collected throughout community fishing meetings, and subsequent demands forwarded to DFO, have officially received a response in the form of formal fishery closures for the Recreational and Commercial sectors until July 14 on the Skeena River. The recent decisions made by the Gitksan to shut down our food fishery on sockeye were generated through difficult but necessary conversations, giving the Gitksan Watershed Authorities (GWA) a stronger podium to stand on when confronting DFO with our demands.

The strongest voices we heard throughout the meetings expressed concerns over our First Nations **priority** food fishery bearing the brunt of the conservation, while the sectors (recreational and commercial) remained open and unregulated for other species. This conflict has finally been recognized by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), as they have acknowledged our Constitutional rights to our fishery and the recommendations we have made thus far. The Gitksan, along with all other Skeena First Nations have demanded that the sectoral fisheries must curtail their harvests to make room for First Nations' increased demand for alternate species (chinook, coho, steelhead) in the face of a sockeye closure.

Notices have been released by DFO, notifying the general public that recreational salmon fishing in the Skeena watershed has been postponed due to low returns in the Skeena River. The notice reads as follows:

*“Effective immediately recreational salmon fishing in the entire Skeena River Watershed will be closed to July 14, 2017.*

*This closure is being implemented to facilitate First Nations harvesting of Skeena salmon due to predicted low returns of Skeena River sockeye salmon in 2017. Recreational, commercial, and First Nations food, social and ceremonial (FSC) harvesting of sockeye salmon will be closed for the 2017 season, unless there is an in-season indication of increased Skeena sockeye abundance.*

*Recreational harvesting opportunities for Skeena coho, pink and chinook salmon will re-open on July 15. Please refer to the on-line BC Sport Fishing Guide and future Fishery Notices for details on confirmed opening dates, times and other restrictions.”*



Tim Wilson, GWA, counting sockeye in Club Creek.

**For the Gitksan**, this still means that all sockeye fisheries within our territory will remain closed for all sectors; **recreational fishing on all salmon species will cease within our territory**. Now with the legal support of DFO, the expected lack of sockeye for food fish needs can be offset through directed harvest on Chinook, Coho, Steelhead, and a potential proportion of Nass sockeye. **THERE IS NO REPLACING OUR NEED OF SOCKEYE.**

In the event that sockeye returns surpass the forecasted returns of 595,000 and reach 625,000 returning to Canada, our First Nations food fishery for sockeye will open based on in-season forecasts from both the Tye Test Fishery and the Babine River Counting Facility. All Gitksan may continue to set nets using a minimum 7" web until we know for certain that sockeye abundance to the Skeena exceed predictions. The Gitksan can also utilize rod and reel to harvest chinook and species other than sockeye. If sockeye are caught, still alive and vigorous they must be returned to the river.

For more information contact the GWA by phone (250-842-2213) or by email (twale@gitksanwatershed.com)