



Gitksan Watershed Authorities

Project Updates

May 2017

In a series of open community meetings held in Old Hazelton (Gitanmaax), Gitwangak, Kispiox, and Gitseguekla, the GWA spoke with the Gitksan about planning for the upcoming fishing season. With a preseason forecast of approximately 595,000 sockeye returning in total and only 505,000 – 535,000 sockeye returning to Canada after Alaskan harvest, all sectors are making changes to conserve this vulnerable run. **Commercial** and **Recreational** fisheries will be **closed to sockeye** for the 2017 season, and First Nations along the Skeena are opting to do the same in the name of conservation and switching focus to other salmon species for food fish.

In 2013 when the sockeye run reflected similarly low numbers, the Gitksan led the conservation action by implementing a closure by a consensus decision.

Acknowledging drastic gaps in monitoring and compliance amongst the recreational fishery sector, the GWA has begun pressuring DFO to increase enforcement or completely close the recreational fishery within our territories to stop the impacts of the sport fishery from directly infringing upon our Section 35(1) Aboriginal rights to food fish.

Through collaboration with other Nations along the Skeena, within the Skeena First Nations Technical Committee (SFNTC), the following proposal points have been put forth to each respective community:

- 1) **Raise trigger level** for First Nations Section 35(1) fisheries closure from **400,000** to **600,000** returning sockeye (consider opening at returns greater than 625,000 sockeye)
- 2) **Start** the 2017 fishing season **CLOSED** for all fisheries targeting **Skeena sockeye** – and take measures to **minimize the bycatch** of Skeena sockeye in all other fisheries (ie. First Nations will use a minimum **7” mesh web** to replace sockeye nets)

Community meetings began with presentation of the above information, introduction to the proposal points to change current policy of the Integrated Fish Management Plan (IFMP - <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/peches-fisheries/ifmp-gmp/index-eng.htm>), and then led to an open discussion to gain input from the Gitksan communities.

Key Feedback from the community meetings are summarized by the following:

→ On the Recreational Fishery:

- Recognition that the recreational fishery isn't sufficiently monitored and that it should be closed prior to the First Nations Food Fishery
 - o All sectors need to make concessions, not just the First Nations
 - o They (DFO) do not have consent to fish or make decisions within our territories.
- All Gitksan need to do their share in monitoring (i.e. their own fishing holes)

- Following direction from our chiefs and our laws, many would be open to forcing a closure of the recreational fishery within our territory
- Most communities suggest a full closure of the recreational fishery within our territory, while some may like to make financial gains by issuing sport licenses.
- Want to see more inclusion within DFO meetings

→ On multi-sectoral compliance:

- Until the First Nations have met their needs, other sectors shouldn't be able to fish
- Because poaching is a major concern, we need to collaborate with other First Nations – i.e. if the Gitksan shut down the river in our territories to sporties, we need others to conform
- Concern that other First Nations along the Skeena will not abide by closures and 'water down' the effects of our own

→ On Chinook / other species harvest:

- Communities are open to using chinook webbing (7" mesh preferred) to reduce sockeye bycatch

→ On alternate options:

- Wish to discuss with Wilps in Gitanyow to harvest sockeye from the Nass River
- Few people wanted to have 1-2 days open to sockeye fishing per week

→ On Gitksan compliance:

- How will we notify Gitksan of the updates to openings/closures?
- How will we monitor the Gitksan fishery (using 7" mesh webbing)?
 - o Wish to have DFO removed from Gitksan fishery monitoring and enforcement
 - o The people need to decide on our plan and hold each other accountable
- At the end of the day we are talking about conservation, and we (Gitksan) need to conserve the sockeye in good faith
 - o We can survive without sockeye for one season, other species will provide sustenance
- Need to identify the areas where Gitksan choose to rod/reel fish so we can ensure these areas are open only to Gitksan

Before we make any more demands to DFO about what we want to see for the upcoming season, it is important that we are all on the same page. A **Gitksan decision** needs to be made on accepting/rejecting the proposal points, and resolving any points noted above from community meetings. As the GWA our priorities lie firstly with conserving these sockeye salmon that are integral to our identity as Gitksan, followed by advocating for our food fishery and capitalizing on economic opportunities when possible.

A Larger follow-up meeting for all **Gitksan community** members will be held **Tuesday, May 16, 2017** at the "Gitanmaax Hall. Please visit our website www.gitksanwatershed.com and read all the information documents on the Public Access Page prior to the meeting to facilitate a well-informed and productive discussion.

This is a very important meeting in finalizing the Gitksan Fishing Plan for 2017.

We look forward to seeing the Simgiigyet, Fishers, and Community members attend.