



Commercial salmon beach seine fishing at the mouth of Harrison River shares space with sport anglers

Conflict In The Fishery Provides Energy And Opportunity To Solve Problems

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In the summer of 2009 a serious incident occurred which proved to be the catalyst for the creation of the "Peacemakers". A respected Sts'ailes chief while drift netting on the Fraser River experienced a confrontation with two recreational anglers who discharged a pellet gun in his face. The resulting uproar within the native community threatened to escalate into wide spread violence toward the recreational fishing community. Fortunately cooler heads prevailed, resulting in a coffee shop meeting between respected First Nations leaders and leaders within the local angling community. This meeting and follow up dialogue played a significant role in establishing a committee which has evolved into the current day Peacemakers organization.

Although conflict was a catalyst to conflict resolution, ongoing efforts to improve relations between the area First Nations and sport fishing groups resulted in the "Chehalis River Angler Trail" project. It was a great example of competing interests in the fishery working together in developing access to fishing for recreational anglers while preserving the integrity of sensitive First Nations land. Other participants in the process included Natures Trust of BC and representatives from both federal and provincial governments. This cooperation defused potential trespassing issues between the groups and protected sensitive cultural properties. The positive relationships fostered in this project was an important foundation for the success of Peacemaking when conflict arose on the river.

The intent of the newly created "Peacemakers" was to provide a venue for timely review of ongoing conflict and developing a procedure for reporting and diffusing these conflicts. The sub committee created was the "Conflict Resolution Committee" with co chairs from the Recreational and First Nation interests. The primary objective of the committee and the Peacemakers at large is to address

conflict pre-emptively and as it occurs – a lesson from the Chehalis Trail project. Today the work of Peacemakers is well known and the group has produced a video called "River Manners". Although the Peacemakers organization is clear that it is not responsible for solving everyone's conflicts on the river, a new standard of behaviour befitting both fisheries has emerged. If it appears the conflict is serious enough to be considered criminal behaviour it is referred to the proper authorities.

Other priorities include exploring options for joint monitoring objectives to improve trust in each other's catches as the basis for improved in-season decision-making. Since the arrival of salmon in the river fisheries is also the time when improved stock assessment drives harvest management in-river, competing fisheries need to build decision-making capacity together in the interest of orderly and conservation-based plans. Distrust of recorded catch numbers from each other's fisheries is a key driver of distrust, conflict and presents the risk of over fishing by both sectors. Working together to improve monitoring and in-season catch reporting will help to confirm the accuracy of reported numbers and help to develop respect and understanding of each other's fisheries.

The summer of 2012 featured a "Fraser River Safety & Culture Festival". This was coordinated by the Peacemakers in cooperation with the City of Chilliwack and the Fraser Valley Regional District. Fishing demonstrations by local First Nations and life saving demonstrations by Coast Guard staff were highlights of the day. As safety on the river for all user groups is one of the priorities of the Peacemakers, the intent was to make this Festival an annual event. Unfortunately despite the tremendous support within the community groups we were unable to stage the event in 2013 due to staff changes and cut backs within one of the major sponsors. We are hopeful we can resurrect in 2014.

Discussions have taken place with several Fraser River First Nations toward developing more angler access including boat launching facilities and camping areas. These discussions are ongoing and could represent substantial economic opportunity for many First Nations. Lack of access has created overcrowding in limited access points and forced illegal parking along dangerous highway corridors. The lack of washroom facilities and infrastructure has also presented health and security concerns around many popular fishing sites.

Participants in the Peacemakers includes the B.C. Wildlife Federation, B.C. Federation of Drift Fishers, Fraser Valley Angling Guides Association, Fraser River Salmon Table, Christopher Vang Memorial Fund and support from DFO, Pacific Salmon Foundation and the RCMP. The Peacemakers has been officially endorsed by the Sport Fishing Advisory Board (SFAB) as an important tool in improving relationships between the sport fishing sector and First Nations.

In an attempt to promote the Peacemakers concept monthly meetings are now roving among various First Nations offices in the lower mainland and is proving to be a successful strategy at engaging more of the local First Nations. Meetings have been held at Sumas, Sts'ailes, Cheam and Kwantlen. A recent presentation was made at the B.C. Federation of Drift Fishers banquet where another 200 people were introduced to the objectives and similar presentations were well received by the BC Wildlife Federation. Further plans include presentations to various local Fish and Game clubs where possible.

Recent progress includes the speedy resolution of an incident between a native fishery buyers boat and recreational anglers during the pink fishery in September 2013 at the confluence of the Harrison and Fraser Rivers. Consultation between the Recreational and First Nations "Conflict Resolution" chairs resulted in verifying information and a speedy resolution which will assist in developing a "Code of Conduct" for fish buyers on the River. This cooperative resolution of a conflict has been publicized and forwarded to the various user groups to demonstrate that the system is working.

We believe the Peacemakers organization plays a vital role in reducing tensions during Fraser River fisheries and through education can significantly break down past barriers which impeded respect and understanding of each other's fisheries. Greater understanding will assist in ensuring safe conflict free fisheries now and for our respective future generations.

We encourage other **Peacemakers** province-wide to use the model for their areas. We most certainly offer assistance and our experiences to date in helping other's find peaceful solutions to potential conflicts in their area.