

WITNESS SUMMARY

Chief Fred Sampson

Witness Background

Fred Sampson is the elected Chief of the Siska Indian band and a member of the Nlha7apmx Nation.

Territory

Siska is situated 9 km south of Lytton, BC, and is renowned throughout the Nlha7kapmx Nation as an important fishing site – the river at Siska is so narrow that one could throw a rock across it. The Siska reserve is comprised of approximately 12,000 acres, with about 250 people living in the Siska village. Their reserve land was allotted because of the historic fishing sites.

Traditional participation in the fishery

Traditionally, the fishery at Siska was a communal fishery conducted with dip nets. Gillnets did not come until a later date. Owing to the narrowness of the canyon, huge numbers of fish used to be caught in that area. The Siska community traditionally had approximately 17 drying racks, and there are black and white photos of thousands of salmon being dried along the shore. Chief Sampson is aware of historical records of wind dried salmon numbering 25,000 brought up from Siska to Fort Kamloops to trade.

Historically, the government divided up the fishing into areas, which created many problems. For example, the Siska were allotted 6 km of the river for fishing, whereas the Lytton Band was given 28 km of river. Chief Sampson believes this type of disparity, which is sometimes described as the “divide and conquer” mentality of the Crown, has caused divisions and difficulties within the Nation.

Modern participation in the fishery

Siska continue to operate a communal and commercial fishery. Chief Sampson’s view is that the fishery should be kept communal. Siska has also been working to develop a processing facility to flash freeze, smoke and vacuum pack fish. The project received funding from the PICFI program. The facility has the capacity to process around 30,000 fish per year, and is located by the river. Chief Sampson envisions a future where these types of facilities are found all along the river, producing brand-name, river-fresh fish, and providing opportunities to those who are often the poorest of the poor in this province. However, a viable commercial fishery can only happen when the stocks are able to sustain themselves again.

Observations of historic abundance levels and of decline

Prior to 2010, Chief Sampson has witnessed a gradual yet drastic decline in harvest levels over the years. In the past, one could easily have seen 5000 salmon hanging on a rack owned by one extended family, whereas in 2009 Chief Sampson hung only four salmon. He recalls hanging hundreds of fish in previous years, and remembers catching 250 salmon in one hour using dip nets as a 12 year old.

Harvest levels have dropped even more drastically in the last few years, making it difficult to satisfy the community's needs. Chief Sampson's responsibilities include providing salmon for the elders. It was heart-breaking for him when elders would call asking for fish, and he could not give them any fish or dried salmon as he had done for years and years. He is not even getting close to supplying the community's demand for salmon. Coho is a very treasured fish which is no longer available to Siska. Steelhead is the same way, and early timed Chinook is also in danger.

Chief Sampson has many observations on the declining health of salmon populations. At Siska they have noticed more lesions on the fish which they believe are caused by sea lice, higher numbers of beat-up fish coming up from the gauntlet fishery, as well as higher numbers of net burnt fish, likely due to warmer water temperatures.

In regards to abundance levels, Chief Sampson has heard traditional stories which describe times when salmon were so abundant that one could run across the river on their backs. Chief Sampson refers to the book entitled "Our Tellings", which contains the Interior Salish stories of the Nlha7kapmx people, and in which a version of the story about how Coyote brought the salmon back to his people and taught them how to prepare the fish, how to cook it, and how to dry it again can be found.

Cultural significance of the Fraser sockeye and fishing

Chief Sampson explains that food is only part of the story; the community's social needs are also critical. For Chief Sampson, his inability in recent years to share fish, and to go fishing, entails a huge cultural loss. For example, his son is 18 years old and has still not learned how to build a dip net, because the opportunities to go dip netting are so limited now. With his son attending school, Chief Sampson has no real opportunity to take his son fishing, given that the dip net fishery is open for only a few days. Chief Sampson fears Siska will suffer a cultural loss if those fishing techniques are not passed on to the next generation. In his view, if the salmon continue to decline, so will Siska's cultural, physical and spiritual well being.

For Chief Sampson, his relationship with the salmon resource is almost indescribable. When he is out at his fishing site, he feels a bond with the fish that is difficult to describe. The rock at his site is worn at the three levels: when he stands at the top level and dips for early spring Chinook, he is literally standing in the footprints of his elders, and their footprints are worn into the bedrock. Later on when he fishes down at the next level of rock, at the mid-summer fishing site, he is again standing in spots that are worn into the bedrock. The next level is the Adams river run level, and that third tier for the late summer is directly related to the migrating stocks. The way his grandmother explained it is that the Creator put the rock here for that reason – for use as a fishing spot.

Traditional Knowledge

Historically, the people of Siska used natural indicators to guide timing of their fishing. In this regard, Chief Sampson recalls that when the mock orange blossoms came out on the bushes, his grandmother would say "now it's time to go spring salmon fishing." When he asked why he could not go out earlier, she would say "those fish don't belong to us; they belong to people up the river." Chief Sampson

explains that elders would not harvest those fish until they saw blossoms on the mock orange because they knew those fish belonged to somebody else.

Chief Sampson is aware of other indicators in relation to sockeye. For example, it is said that once the Saskatoons turn purple, that is an indication of the start of the mid-summer sockeye runs. The best time for drying fish happens when big grasshoppers can hold themselves up in the air and make the “click, click, click” noise, which indicates the right breeze and temperature. If the fish were hung on the drying racks before then, they would break down and go rancid.

In working with elders, Chief Sampson has found that the language holds an incredible amount of traditional knowledge. For example, there are 14 words in his language that describe fish and many, many words that describe different parts of fish and how they were eaten, prepared, etc. The Siska had a very intense resource management regime, which has become entrenched in the language. Chief Sampson regrets that he cannot speak his language fluently; that ability was taken away by the residential schools.

Chief Sampson explains that certain knowledge that relates to ceremony is held dearly and not shared beyond the community. However, Siska has broadly shared indicators related to escapement and conservation, with the intention of encouraging other groups not to overfish the stocks.

Importance of traditional knowledge in management of the Fraser sockeye

Chief Sampson advises that certain indicators are now less reliable, which he attributes to shifts in local biodiversity, and the fact that the knowledge developed at the time of “small bite” fisheries prior to things like ocean fishing. For example, the fish never arrived in 2009 even though the indicators suggested the fish should have been there. Chief Sampson regards this as a sign of something being out of sync. In his view, if the biodiversity is kept intact, the indicators could still have a role in management as far as the timing of openings and closings.

Chief Sampson believes the reliability of the indicators is only one aspect of a larger issue: DFO’s failure to adequately consider traditional knowledge in making management decisions. His view is that traditional knowledge should be respected as being on the same level as contemporary science. When scientists come together, traditional knowledge holders should be right there at the table. When Chief Sampson hears contemporary scientists saying to him, “You just don’t understand the science,” he replies: “No, it’s you who does not understanding of traditional knowledge and how it has worked for our people for thousands of years.” Chief Sampson expects that, as more traditional knowledge is gathered over time, we are going to see that there are ways it can be integrated into fisheries management.

Collaborative processes with other First Nations

Chief Sampson hopes that the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC) will be an organization that will represent First Nations at the co-management table. The FNFC is the group he sees being most active right now. He would like to see FNFC obtain a representational mandate from First Nations. He thinks

the Intertribal Treaty Organization (ITO) could have a role in a purely political sense, but wonders whether it will be ready to step into a representative role. Chief Sampson advises that the First Nations' representational mandate is still work in progress and is probably a few years away.

Chief Sampson believes First Nations should move away from community level consultations, which take up too much time without addressing important issues. Too many things can go wrong when DFO consults individually with each community. Therefore, his view is that First Nations need to work towards a collective approach, whether through the ITO or the FNFC, which is supported by all Nations in BC.

Chief Sampson represents seven bands in his role as the political and fisheries representative of the Nicola Tribal Association (NTA). If given sufficient technical support and capacity, he believes he could act as the mandated representative of those communities in Nation-level consultations. At this point, however, he cannot make decisions without first obtaining authorization from political authorities in the seven tribes.

Chief Sampson advises that good work is happening in the ROADMAP exercise, in terms of collaborative processes among First Nations. The ROADMAP meetings were influential in regards to early timed Chinook in 2010, and brought about some changes.

Interactions and consultations with DFO

In regards to fishing on the main-stem Fraser, Chief Sampson advises that certain fishing methods should be used more frequently, such as fish wheels or dip nets, but DFO has not provided dedicated or consistent funding to support their use. DFO favoured the use of 8" mesh nets to minimize by-catch, but would not let them use a fish wheel or dip nets, even though fish wheels allow for highly selective fishery as well as collection of data. Chief Sampson cannot not understand the rationale for that type of thinking.

Chief Sampson also has concerns regarding the management of the recreational fishery. In particular, the inland Nations have begged the recreational fishery to stay off the river to protect early timed Chinook based on numbers coming out of Louis Creek (which had only 6 fish last year).

Chief Sampson thinks that the better return in 2010 was directly related to First Nations working with recreational fishers and with DFO to close off certain areas to the recreational fishery. Chief Sampson believes this type of engagement - between First Nations, recreational fishers and DFO - needs to happen again. In his opinion, there is a place for a sockeye recreational fishery on the Fraser River, as long as the numbers are there to support it. However, in terms of priority, conservation always comes first, followed by the Aboriginal fishery, and the recreational and commercial fisheries come last.

Visions for involvement in the management of the Fraser sockeye fishery

Chief Sampson advises that many of DFO's consultative and advisory processes are considered "weak" to the point where many First Nations do not even consider them to be consultation. In his opinion, First Nations are looking for a seat at the decision-making table, with an opportunity to voice their

support for or concerns about particular fisheries management decisions, and to have their position recognized; First Nations want more than just lip service.

Chief Sampson is concerned that collaborative processes and initiatives are being undermined by a lack of capacity. The funding from DFO is insufficient to really make them work. In particular, there is a lack of funding for technical support within First Nations (e.g. biologists, riparian management, biodiversity, traditional knowledge).

The NTA has attempted to engage in AAROM agreements with DFO, but has found them to be very intrusive and restrictive. For example, the NTA started a fish wheel program which collected data that was vital to the timing of up-river fisheries. Chief Sampson found it frustrating when DFO put the wheel in the river for one year, took it out for two years, and then put it back in again the next year. DFO would not allow them to collect data and to do commercial fishing at the same time, and it was extremely frustrating.

Chief Sampson favours the development of “small-bite” fisheries, as opposed to massive commercial fisheries on the coast, which have processing facilities that need one million salmon just to break even. He explains that the in-land tribes bear the brunt of conservation concerns, and have to pay for the overfishing that happens out in the ocean.

If the fishery is going to be sustainable for future generations, Chief Sampson believes there needs to be very dramatic shift towards in-land fisheries to allow for guaranteed escapement goals, and to protect stocks of concern. Small in-land fisheries have an advantage of being able to shut down quickly as conditions change, whereas large fish plants on the mouth of the river continue to operate to get the numbers required to break even or make a profit. For example, despite having a permit to take 10,000 sockeye, Siska shut down their commercial fishery based on their assessment of the strength of the run, and lost \$3000. In 2010, their commercial quota was increased to 500,000 salmon, which is a significant allotment for a small community fishery. Chief Sampson wonders whether that high number was chosen to justify the fisheries that had already occurred in the ocean.

Chief Sampson believes that, by moving fisheries in-river, the stocks can be rebuilt to a point where the ocean fishery can be viable again. In this regard, Chief Sampson believes DFO’s license buy-back scheme is a step in the right direction, as it will help build up the in-river demonstration fisheries and establish them as permanent fisheries. The benefits of an in-river commercial fishery would be significant for First Nations, as most of the inland reserves are located near traditional fishing stations.

While terminal fisheries are clearly efficient and support conservation objectives, Chief Sampson has concerns regarding how the consumers will view the quality of the fish in a near-terminal fishery. Even among in-river First Nations, there are diverging views on when a fish is suitable for the market. He remembers fish processors saying to him, “anything past Yale is not a fish but a carcass,” so he brought their marketing managers to Siska and showed them that the fish is still high quality.

