

COHEN INQUIRY

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Submission: Kim North - Sat'atqwz7 Restoration Advisory & Outreach Crew
Citizen Engagement, Citizen Science and Stewardship

Citizen participation in the recovery of the Fraser Sockeye.

Use and enjoyment of the natural environment directly involves all of us. People of all ages, from all cultural backgrounds, and walks of life use the environment in a variety of ways. None of us can help but impact the natural ecosystems in some way each day.

Decisions we make in our daily lives have impacts locally, provincially and world-wide. Decisions we make in how we interact with the salmon, the river and our watersheds have impacts locally, provincially and world-wide.

However:

- there is a disconnect between our decisions and actions, and what they really mean to the entire ecosystem (from the headwaters to the ocean).
- there is also a disconnect between all levels of government, agencies, non-profits and the people.

Citizen participation in decision-making processes is vital to the health of the Fraser River, the sockeye that use the system, and all the other species (fauna and flora) that depend on salmon for their survival... over 137 documented species.

However, currently, citizens are typically on the fringe of governmental decision-making, frequently having neither the power and resources of business and industry, nor the political and strategic skills to be a critical force in influencing decisions.

Citizens are increasingly distrustful of bureaucracies and governments. With the collapse of the sockeye fishery last year many individuals and community groups throughout the Fraser

watershed mobilized to react to this situation. That groundswell of concern resulted in this Commission.

There is a strong interest and appetite among citizens for involvement in policy processes that lead to real tangible actions and results.

On behalf of the Sat'atqwz7 Restoration advisory committee and outreach crew, I would like to suggest that reacting to crisis, and "fixing" things after the damage has been done, is a lot of work - in time, in resources and in money. We know this. This commission is an example of that, and our local restoration efforts are an example of that.

Therefore, we wish to share our recommendation that would see citizens and agencies become involved in sharing their skills and expertise together for the benefit of our salmon and our watersheds:

Long-term and on-going processes need to be developed that honour our citizens and acknowledge their cultural understanding, insights, skills and passions. Through creative engagement of our citizens a greater knowledge of the interconnectedness of our watersheds will lead to creative solutions and increased stewardship.

The citizens of BC should be included in adaptive approaches to watershed management. Real citizen engagement, that is creative and inclusive, in partnership with aboriginal peoples, DFO and MOE, should be mandatory. By this we mean that the government should mandate that all agencies involve citizens in all aspects of their work.

How can we achieve this?

1. Citizen Science and Mapping

Having citizens of all ages and backgrounds involved in community mapping of the full length of the Fraser River, in partnership with DFO, could engage the communities along the river to participate in protecting the river for salmon. At the same time governmental agencies would develop a greater connection with the local area and its people.

The interconnectedness of the river from the headwaters to the ocean needs to be more fully appreciated and could be promoted through the final production of a salmon 'watershed' map of the entire river systems and ocean one community at a time.

This process should involve local communities in cultural, scientific and artistic avenues to create a rich and artistic community map for their area, which would then connect to the next communities map, until the entire river system is completed.

2. Identify Assets and Liabilities

Through the community mapping process, salmon ecosystem assets and liabilities would be identified. Local people in all the communities on the coast and along the Fraser River watershed could share their local knowledge with DFO and identify critical spawning grounds, temperature sensitive streams, groundwater sources, travel corridors, and other wildlife, cultural and resource extraction hotspots within their own communities.

By including traditional ecological knowledge and citizen based science, alongside DFO research and existing studies, we would develop a greater understanding of the interaction of our communities with the river, and our impacts on the salmon.

3. Develop and Prioritize Action Plan

Citizen based science and mapping, using local knowledge, would engage people in looking at the issues in our watersheds and lead to a list of actions that need to be taken to ensure the health of our watersheds for salmon. Once these actions are identified, an action plan can be developed. Through citizen involvement, decisions that are adapted to the individual communities would have a greater chance of success than a top-down approach. Stewardship would include conservation, restoration and human interaction details.

4. Implement and Evaluate Plan

The plan should then be implemented by the local community. Our experience is that involving citizens in stewardship work creates a sense of pride in place and builds capacity within the community that will benefit our local watershed.

The plan should be evaluated on an on-going basis and be adapted based on results.

What is needed to see this is done?

1. Hire an outreach team that would travel to each community along the river to set up citizen science and mapping protocols.
2. Engage local facilitators to work with DFO and the local community, to assist in coordinating these efforts.
3. Fund conservation and restoration work appropriately, based on Action Plan. Non-profit groups and individuals should not have to beg and borrow to carry out work that benefits the health of our rivers, the salmon and the economy of our province.