

Youth Dialogue on Salmon and Watershed Sustainability

Project Learnings and Summary Report

Report drafted by
Fraser Basin Council
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Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program



Fraser Basin Council



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada



Event poster designed by Sage Studios

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Fraser Basin Council

The Fraser Basin Council (FBC) is a charitable non-profit organization that advances sustainability in Fraser River Basin and across BC. The long-term vision of the FBC is to ensure that the Fraser Basin is a place where social well-being is supported by a vibrant economy and sustained by a healthy environment – a true reflection of sustainability.

Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program

Created to strategically deliver funds from the provincial Living Rivers Trust Fund and a federal initiative of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program (www.ThinkSalmon.com) is jointly managed by Pacific Salmon Foundation and Fraser Basin Council. The FSWP mission is to inspire changes in human behaviour for the benefit of salmon and the watersheds on which we all depend. FSWP has funded over 270 projects with \$12.1 million since its inception in 2006.

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MC Salmon Finn opens the show

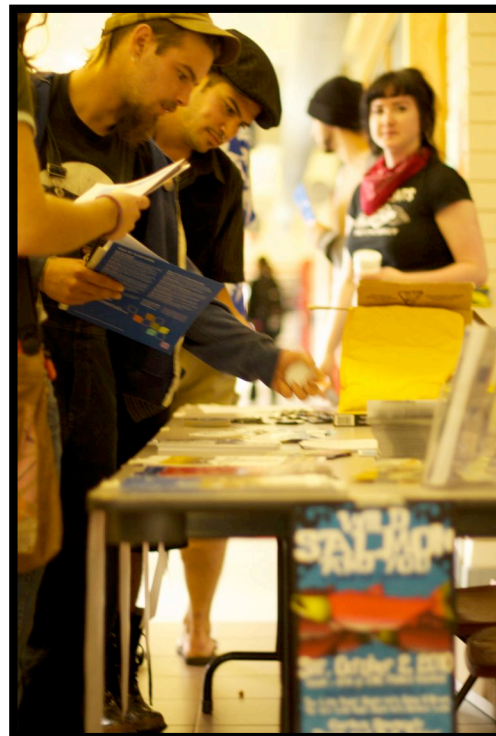
Introduction

On October 2nd 2010, the Fraser Basin Council hosted a uniquely formatted dialogue on salmon and watershed sustainability issues for youth from the Northern Fraser region. The dialogue was just one piece of a larger project to develop the capacity of youth to participate in watershed governance. The event, *Wild Salmon and You: a forum for youth voice*, included the participation of 28 youth and 7 elders in a mix of information presentations, interviews, small group dialogue sessions, musical and theatrical performances, and plenary discussions.

The daylong event was designed to establish baseline knowledge of salmon and watershed issues and to inspire leadership and engagement in local watershed health. The event slogan, “Join our workshops to learn and lead. Discover how you can have a voice in the future of wild salmon, wild rivers, and wild people” was realized through the unique skill set and experience that each participant possessed. More than half of the participants lead a discussion, presentation or performance of their own.

While the number of participants was lower than anticipated, the quality of participation exceeded all expectations. The opportunity for youth to interact with peers and community leaders face-to-face in an informal and intimate setting proved vital in inspiring leadership and engagement amongst participants. Many of the discussions that took place around strategies to youth engagement supported this notion.

This summary report is meant to provide an overview of the background, format, outcomes and learnings of the forum. It will also provide some initial recommendations, based on the forum discussions, to watershed initiatives or organizations wishing to engage youth in a meaningful way. A more comprehensive report on effective approaches to youth engagement that will incorporate learning from all aspects of the capacity building project will be available in March 2011.



Participants browse the info table at the forum

Background

Youth Leadership and Capacity Building

The Fraser Basin Council received funding for its Northern Fraser Youth Capacity Building for Watershed Governance Initiative as part of the 2010/2011 Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program. The initiative was designed to build the capacity of youth aged 16-24 to be watershed champions and create opportunities for mentorship and engagement within existing watershed stewardship groups in the Northern Fraser region. The key objectives of the initiative are to:

- Build the capacity of youth to be watershed champions through dialogue, mentorship, and hands-on learning
- Provide an opportunity for stewardship groups and other organizations to engage and support youth in a meaningful and long-lasting way
- Develop a framework for effective and meaningful youth engagement with input from project partners and youth participants
- Establish a network of youth watershed champions to address watershed sustainability issues in their community

The need for this initiative became apparent during the BC Youth Congress, which was hosted by the Fraser Basin Council in February of 2009 and brought together 85 youth from across British Columbia. One of the key recommendations to come out of the Congress was to create opportunities for meaningful engagement to build youth capacity to participate through mentorship, intergenerational dialogue and action.

The initiative first ran in the Lower Fraser in 2009. In 2010, the initiative moved northward, to reach youth in the communities in the Northern Fraser. In addition to the objectives achieved in the Lower Fraser, a new objective was incorporated into the Northern Fraser initiative. A regional youth dialogue for up to 50 youth to discuss salmon and watershed sustainability and identify actions youth can take to address these issues was planned. The expected outcome of this objective was to enable youth to participate and take a leadership role in raising the profile salmon and watersheds in their communities.



Participants in the 2009 Lower Fraser Initiative. Pictured kneeling is Daniel Van der Kroon, who joined Wild and Salmon and You to lead a discussion on his experiences

Project Planning and Development

In July 2010, the Fraser Basin Council engaged several members of its Youth Advisory Committee to participate in designing the forum. Members were asked to provide suggestions for potential themes, structures, and recruitment strategies. While all members of the Youth Advisory Committee are established leaders in their communities and are actively engaged in many environmental sustainability issues in the Fraser River Basin, their knowledge of the state of wild salmon was minimal. Many were aware that salmon stocks were declining, but had no concept of the magnitude or impacts of this decline. It was assumed that if the collective knowledge of salmon sustainability amongst a group of engaged youth is minimal, the general knowledge of youth on the subject of salmon would be almost non-existent. It became clear that a dialogue on salmon would have to establish baseline knowledge amongst participants before any meaningful discussion could take place.

The committee suggested a theme emphasizing a personal relationship with salmon – focusing on stewardship and the economic and cultural implications of declining stocks, in addition to the ecological. They encouraged incorporating a sense of place, establishing how where we live affects our relationship with salmon. Dramatization and visual representation were strongly encouraged, and experts, mainly peers and respected elders, would be needed to bring information to the dialogue. The committee emphasized the need to engage existing organizations as partners in the project in order to capitalize on their established networks and avoid a duplication of efforts. They also suggested making the event as barrier-free as possible, by offering free transportation options from outside of Prince George and providing food and beverage as incentive.

The valuable input offered by the youth on the steering committee proved critical developing the dialogue. The title of the event, *Wild Salmon and You*, was a direct result of the emphasis placed on establishing a personal relationship with salmon; the need for dramatization and visualization led to incorporation of music and performance art into the event program, and the call for peer and elder knowledge strongly influenced the type of presenters that were recruited for the event. Barriers to participation were reduced by holding the event outside of regular school hours and providing shuttle transportation from surrounding communities. Substantial amounts of food and prizes at the event were offered as incentives.

Publicity

The event was publicized in a variety of different ways. Paid advertising was done through postering and radio advertisements. While the posters¹, designed by Sage Studios in East Vancouver, were well received and garnered much attention, the radio advertisements², which ran in several local communities two days before the event, did not lead to any additional registrations. Articles in local newspapers³ and interviews with radio CFNR on the Nationview Magazine program provided free publicity. Email broadcasts and Facebook proved somewhat successful, but the most effective publicity method of all was word of mouth. Of the 52 youth who registered for the event, only 28 actually attended, almost all of which were known to the event coordinator. It is clear that personal connection played a critical role in attendance.

¹ See Appendix A

² See Appendix B

³ See Appendix C

Event Overview

Wild Salmon and You was a daylong youth forum held on Saturday, October 2, 2010 at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, BC. It was designed to establish baseline knowledge of salmon and watershed health amongst participants and to inspire youth to become leaders in their communities in raising the profile of salmon and watershed issues. The forum consisted of two theatre-style performances modeled after popular late night TV talk shows, and two breakout sessions where each celebrity guest led a small discussion or activity group. The event was concluded by a final plenary session in which all participants discussed strategies for and barriers to youth engagement. For a detailed overview of the event schedule and presenter and performer biographies, please refer to the event program.⁴

Morning Plenary

To begin the forum, participants gathered in theatre and were welcomed by City of Prince George Councilor and acting Mayor, Debora Munoz, and by longstanding member of the Fraser Basin Council's Youth Advisory Committee, Alana Kulchar. The event MC, dressed in a full salmon costume, provided an overview of the day's activities and reminded participants of the two central questions to keep in mind throughout the day:

1. How can youth have stronger voice in the future of salmon, rivers, and communities?
2. What are the barriers to youth engagement

The Late Night Show with Coho O'Brien

A young stand up comedian from the UNBC hosted the first performance, the Late Night Show with Coho O'Brien, and was accompanied by house band, the Sassy Spawners. Following a humorous opening monologue, he interviewed four celebrity guests:

- Roy Argue, Community Advisor from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans
- Mary Forbes, a young interpreter from Williams Lake and graduate from the Sustainable Living Leadership Program
- Barry Booth from the Land Conservancy of BC
- Jasmine Thomas, a youth leader and activist from Saik'uz First Nation.

Each guest participated in a candid 15-minute interview with the host in front of the audience and shared their relationship to salmon and watersheds, as well as their experience working as stewards in their communities. The performance was then wrapped up with a two-song set by local singer-songwriter Corbin Spensley.

Breakout Discussions: Establishing Baseline Knowledge

Following the performance and a snack break, each celebrity guest hosted a 45-minute breakout discussion group where participants could learn more about some the topics touched on in each interview. Roy Argue and Barry Booth teamed up to lead a discussion on salmon ecology and habitat values. Mary Forbes led an interactive session on the value of interpretation, a communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships of cultural and natural heritage to the public, through first-hand involvement with an object, artifact, landscape or site. Jasmine Thomas led a discussion on her experiences learning and practicing traditional

⁴ See Appendix D

medicines from the late Sophie Thomas and her travels around the world to advocate on behalf of the protection of her traditional territories.

The Very Late Night Show with Sockeye Leno

After a lunch break, the forum reconvened in the theatre for a second performance, the Very Late Night Show with Sockeye Leno and the Sassy Spawners. After his monologue, the host interviewed:

- David Loewen, author of the Salmon Guy blog and the Wild Salmon Cycle
- Andrew Kurjata, a young media specialist and radio producer
- Michelle Nickerson and Daniel Van der Kroon, young advocates who cycled the entire Fraser River Watershed in the summer of 2010
- Barbara Coupé, a professional forester and creative writer

The Very Late Night Show wrapped up with a performance by Drum & Bell, aka Brent Morton, a talented performer and high school teacher from Williams Lake who sings about the social, environmental, and economic sustainability issues that face his community.

Breakout Discussions: Inspiring Leadership

Following the performance and another snack break, each celebrity guest hosted their 45-minute discussion group. David Loewen teamed up with Michelle Nickerson and Daniel Van der Kroon to talk about their experiences leading traveling advocacy campaigns to raise the profile of salmon and the experience of salmon on their long journey through the watershed. Andrew Kurjata led a presentation on new media and the power of the web in connecting people from across the world on common interests. Barbara Coupé hosted a creative writing workshop, using images of the salmon life cycle to evoke creative use of language.



Sockeye Leno interviews Daniel Van der Kroon and Michelle Nickerson

Final Plenary Discussion

After the second set of breakout sessions concluded, participants reconvened in the theatre to participate in a final whole-group discussion. The questions used to guide the discussion were:

How can youth have a stronger voice in the future of salmon, rivers, and communities?

What are the barriers to youth engagement?

The lively discussion produced a lot of advice for individuals and organizations trying to promote youth engagement. Buried within the advice are clear opportunities for youth to have a voice in salmon and watershed governance and clear barriers that prevent them from doing so. The following is a summary of the feedback provide during the final discussion session.

Start young: Instilling stewardship values at a young age is critical. Teenagers and young adults are flooded by new responsibilities and demands of their time. If a core stewardship ethic does not exist prior to early adulthood, it is likely to be lost in the overwhelming array of choices and responsibilities facing youth today. Bring salmon to the classroom and classrooms to the salmon.

Target specific age classes within the youth demographic: The methods used to engage a 16 year old are very different from the methods used to engage a 24 year old as each will possess a vastly different knowledge base and capacity to act. Many participants strongly supported using the format of *Wild Salmon and You* to target the older youth, adding that a cabaret-style evening event, run as a series held over time, would be well-received. Holding an event at a licensed venue such as a performance space or student pub would attract a large and participatory audience. Many question why learning events such at *Wild Salmon and You* are held in classroom settings rather than more social and informal environments⁺

Establish a personal connection: Not everyone has had the opportunity to view live salmon their natural habitat. Youth should be made more aware of hatchery tours and fish viewing opportunities in their region so that they can see, smell, feel, and hear salmon in addition to tasting them.

Establish a sense of place: Be sure to make the issue relevant to the local area. Provide a geographic context youth can work with.

Network and cross-promote: Include existing groups and organization with similar mandates in your work (ie. Local naturalist groups and university wildlife clubs). Team up with instructors and facilitators who can teach new and interesting skills.

Use art and visual mediums: Art workshops promote creative and engaged thinking and are always hands-on. Best of all, the art can be shared with others to broaden the audience. Powerful discussions can emerge over the message a piece of art might convey. The longer the

⁺ The vast majority of the participants in the final group discussion were above the age of 19

art is displayed, the longer the learning will be retained for both the artist and the viewing public.

Get physical: Incorporate physical activity into your programming (ie salmon belly dancing, salmon yoga, nature walks). Youth need to be physically and mentally active before they can engage in sustainability issues. The drive to show up regularly to scheduled events won't come from someone who spend most their time at a desk or on a couch. People need to feel physically and mentally healthy before they can extend themselves to support the health of their communities and ecosystems.

Start small: Don't let the discussion get lost in the long-term. Provide easy and short-term solutions for youth to begin with. Develop 10 simple steps for salmon stewardship.

Simplify the science: Don't let the discussion get lost in the details. Especially when it comes to salmon science, the 'ifs', 'buts' and other uncertainties in the research hinder motivation.

Broaden the discussion: The concept of salmon may be too narrow. A broader discussion of whole ecosystem health would draw a larger audience and allow for more input from youth who are not particularly knowledgeable on salmon issues.

Celebrate: Include learning opportunities at festivals and community fairs – associate salmon with community empowerment and celebration. Share information about successful programs. Avoid always associating the issue with doom and gloom.

Address disenfranchisement: Many youth are resistant to being responsible for the mistakes made by previous generations

Show me the money: Incentives are important, and cash is most effective. Provide honorariums, scholarships and prizes for participation. One individual suggested that if we had offered every participant \$25 to attend the forum instead of spending money on advertising, the room would have been full.

What's in it for me?: Self-interest is a great motivator, but be sure not to lose the message. Develop a skill that youth can take away from an event that they will find useful later on.

Work one on one: Engaging youth directly, working one-on-one and face-to-face, is far more effective than creating grandiose plans. Large-scale events are most effective when there is already an established network of youth to work with.

Follow through: Keep participants connected and updated on the work of the project and provide ongoing opportunities to participate.

Conclusion

Youth today are part of a fast-paced and time crunched world. Communication is based on extremely brief and highly interactive and visual messaging that comes from a wide variety of sources. In many ways, opportunities abound, and youth are exposed to more options than ever before on how they would like to spend their time.

On the same token, demands of their time are growing. Young people attend school, work part-time, and participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities. A stewardship ethic must be instilled at an early age in order for youth to prioritize environmental stewardship activities as they age.

Those seeking to engage youth in their programs face competition from an infinite number of other activities. While time-consuming, interacting with youth on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis is a much more effective way of building youth engagement than large-scale information dissemination. Face-to-face conversation also allows for a two-way exchange of information; youth must have ample opportunity to voice their opinions and influence the process. Youth programs developed without the input of youth advisors will appear disingenuous.

By effectively engaging respected youth leaders in the development of your programming, you are also harnessing the power of peer influence. Marketing messages need to come in a variety of formats, but the most effective, by far, is word-of-mouth.

Finally, youth, as well as adults, seek fun. Avoid fear-based messaging and instead celebrate achievements and successes in an environment that is free of guilt or shame. Effective youth engagement relies on methods that inspire, entertain, and energize participants.



Forum attendees participate in a creative writing workshop

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Appendix B: Dialogue Radio Advertisement

Appendix C: Program Media Coverage

Appendix D: Dialogue Program