

Northern Fraser Youth Capacity Building for Watershed Governance

Mentorship and Training Summary Report



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Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program



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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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Art created by Sage studios was awarded to each participant upon completion of the program

Introduction

From September 2011 to March 2011, the Fraser Basin Council hosted the Northern Fraser Youth Capacity Building for Watershed Governance Initiative. The initiative was designed to create opportunities for youth to become engaged in issues of watershed health, develop skills for working in the field of watershed health, establish supportive adult-youth relationships, and foster opportunities for ongoing learning and involvement with stewardship groups in the Northern Fraser region. As part of the larger initiative, the Youth Mentorship Program acted as a key component of the capacity building process, enabling youth to apply the knowledge and skills learnt during the dialogue¹ and training components of the initiative with support and guidance from adult mentors.

This summary report is meant to provide an overview of the background, format, and outcomes of the mentorship program. It will also provide recommendations, based on the feedback from the program participants, for designing future mentorship programs.

In addition to the mentorship program, the Northern Fraser Youth Capacity Building for Watershed Governance Initiative also hosted a one-day dialogue on that state of salmon and watershed health in the Fraser River. A report on the outcomes of that event and a report on effective strategies to youth engagement are also available at www.thinksalmon.com.



Shannon is supported by her team as she attempts the low-ropes challenge course at the weekend retreat

¹ In October 2010, the Fraser Basin Council hosted a youth dialogue on salmon and watershed sustainability in Prince George, BC to help develop strategies for effective youth engagement in watershed governance.

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 were 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 Youth Capacity Building for Watershed Governance 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.



Youth participants in the 2009 Lower Fraser Mentoring Program

Recruitment and Development

Youth Recruitment

In order to attract a wide variety of participants from various backgrounds, several different advertisements and recruitment strategies were used. The mentoring program was first announced at the Wild Salmon and You youth forum on salmon and watershed sustainability to an audience of 28 youth. Program information and brochures² were subsequently distributed to University and College networks through relevant programs such as Environmental Planning at UNBC and Natural Resource and Environmental Technology at CNC, as well as student groups such as the Prince George Public Interest Research Group and Students for a Green University at UNBC. Program information was distributed to high school audience via teachers in the various school districts and high school leadership programs.

In total, 18 applications were received. Originally, the mentoring program was designed to accommodate 10 participants, but due to the exceptional potential of many of the applicants, the program was expanded to accommodate 15 participants. The demographic makeup of the participants was as follows:

- 3 high school students, 2 high school graduates, 9 University/College students, 1 college graduate
- 3 males, 12 females
- 3 First Nations participants, 12 non-First Nations participants
- 4 Stuart-Nechako participants, 2 Cariboo-Chilcotin participants, 9 Prince George participants

Mentor Recruitment

As a long-term stewardship organization operating in the Upper Fraser and Cariboo-Chilcotin Regions, the Fraser Basin Council has many partnerships and contacts with various stewardship and non-profit organizations in the region. The Fraser Basin Council's existing networks were used to distribute program information and brochures³ to potential host organizations.

While many organizations expressed the need for more youth engagement and a revival of their volunteer base, several of the organizations did not have the capacity to host a youth mentor, due to over-capacity staff/volunteer workloads in a period of extreme fiscal restraint, or because the initiative ran through the winter season, while the primary activities of many organizations occur in the spring and summer seasons.

Host organizations that joined the mentoring program included the Murray Creek Restoration Project, the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative, the Exploration Place, the City of Prince George, the Northern Bear Awareness Society, Northern Health, the Potato House Sustainable Community Society, and the Fraser Basin Council.

² See Appendix E: Youth Recruitment Brochure

³ See Appendix F: Mentor Recruitment Brochure

Program Format

The Youth Watershed Mentoring Program was composed of two parts. The first part of the program consisted of a 3-day weekend retreat in a natural setting that would allow the program participants to meet each other and the program coordinators in a relaxed, supportive and distraction-free environment. Activities during the weekend were designed to build leadership and teamwork skills, encourage critical and reflective thinking, present and encourage discussion on issues of watershed health, and build enthusiasm and energy for upcoming mentorship placements.

As part of the 2009 program, adult mentors were invited to participate in the retreat and establish an initial relationship with their youth mentorees. Due to the large number of participants in the 2010 program, it was difficult to arrange for all adult mentors to attend the retreat. Thus, it was determined that the weekend retreat would be used to allow the youth participants to develop a strong relationship with each other, and allow the program coordinator to get a better sense of each of the youth participant's interests and skills before placing him/her in a mentoring relationship.

Following the weekend retreat, each youth participant was introduced to an adult mentor at a stewardship organization. After the initial introduction, the youth participant and their adult mentor were responsible for determining the potential mentoring opportunities available over the next three months, in which time the youth was required to complete 40 hours of mentoring time.

Few restrictions were placed on the type and scope of activities that could be performed to allow for the greatest flexibility. Because the program took place during the winter season, the opportunity for fieldwork was limited. Adult mentors were encouraged to engage the youth in organizational governance opportunities such as board and committee meetings, as well as outreach and development of extension materials. The theme of the mentoring placements was centered on salmon and watershed health, but introduction to activities related to broader sustainability issues was not discouraged. A wide range of mentoring opportunities would allow youth to experience the full scope of projects operated by the various stewardship organizations.

Once the mentoring relationships were initiated, the program coordinator would periodically check in with participants to offer support and guidance where needed. In March, upon completion of the mentoring program, youth participants and adult mentors were given the opportunity to evaluate their experience with the program and provide suggestions for improvement. Youth participants who had successfully completed their mentorship requirements were offered a two hundred dollar honorarium for the service, and host organizations were offered a one hundred dollar honorarium for their time. In addition, each youth participant was offered a fifty dollar honorarium in exchange for writing a blog post about their experiences for the online Fraser River Youth Network. These blog postings help to provide a first-person perspective of the program to the public, and allow other youth to become aware of the opportunities available to them.

The end of the program was marked with a wrap-up brunch where all mentors, mentorees, and program coordinators were invited to attend and reconnect.

Training & Skills Development Weekend Retreat

On November 12, 2010, fifteen youth aged 18-22 from across the Upper Fraser and Cariboo-Chilcotin Regions and three adult facilitators, gathered at Ness Lake, BC to meet and interact with each other and learn about the various watershed health issues from global to local.⁴ Food, accommodations and outdoor activities were provided by staff at the Ness Lake Bible Camp and Conference Centre, who were ecstatic to host a group of young leaders, and made several unique accommodations for the group, including a local foods dinner and winter bonfire. Mary Forbes of Dandelion Interpretations in Williams Lake and Laura Sapergia, a strong advocate for youth in Prince George, facilitated the weekend with assistance from Fraser Basin Council staff.

Day 1: Arrival and Introduction

Transportation for participants from as far as 300 km away was provided by chartered shuttle. All participants gathered in Prince George in the early evening to be shuttled out to the accommodations at Ness Lake. Upon arrival at the camp facilities, the group was introduced to the camp staff, the adult facilitators and to each other. The program coordinator, Jillian Merrick, provided an overview of the Youth Watershed Mentoring Program and expectations for weekend. To help encourage the youth to take ownership of the retreat, the weekend schedule allowed for a great deal of flexibility in which the participants were encouraged to develop and lead their own activity sessions.

Each participant had the opportunity to introduce themselves by sharing a story about their community and their motivations for joining the program by way of animal card draw; everyone drew a card from animal spirit guide card deck which provided some insight on key human characteristics to aid in understanding our interactions with the natural world, ourselves, and each other. Participants were then asked to relate their identity to the animal and the principle it represented. The animal card draw was a popular activity and was repeated several times over the weekend. The remainder of the evening was largely used for informal interaction.

Day 2: Discussions and Group Activities

The first morning began with a stretch routine led by one of the youth participants. After breakfast, the group assembled to share and discuss the issues of watershed sustainability that affected their communities. Before discussions, the group participated in self-guided icebreaking exercises to help everyone to get to know each other better, and in a 'sit-stay' exercise to encourage self-reflection. During sit-stay, participants were asked to wander the lake-side property to find a spot in nature that they felt comfortable. Once settled, each participant was to focus on the sights, sounds, smells and feel of their spot and take note of the peculiarities of what they experienced. After 10 minutes of reflective time, the participants returned and described both what they experienced externally, but also the types of personal thoughts and ideas that their selected site inspired.

Once the conversations on watershed sustainability began, there were many experiences to share. Many participants cited garbage and waste as major threats to the health of their local waterways. Others highlighted a lack of education and awareness of communities on the effects of human activities of the watershed. Participants from the rural areas expressed a sense of

⁴ See Appendix G: Weekend Training Retreat Program

frustration with being unable to connect with like-minded motivated citizens in their communities, and wished there were more visible efforts to protect and enhance natural areas happening on the ground locally.

The concepts of sustainability, watersheds, leadership and governance were also discussed, allowing the group to create their own definitions of the terms. For many, the discussion on leadership proved the most insightful. Participants were asked provide traits and qualities associated with their own respected leaders and role models. Many of the suggested qualities seemed to be conflicting: reflective vs. passionate, assertive vs. supportive, listener vs. talker. After a lengthy discussion, the group determined that leaders can have many different types of personalities, and strong leadership can often exist outside of the traditional 'lead' role. A good leader should focus on balancing their strengths with their weaknesses and balancing their skills and personality traits with others.

A discussion on communication also proved to be very insightful for several of the participants. The group discussed how many aspects of communication, including posture, dress, body language, grammar, and speech, can all greatly influence how others receive your message. Youth often struggle to have their voices heard in established adult communities; being aware of the many forms of communication can improve your ability to be heard.

After lunch, the group headed outdoors to attempt the low-ropes challenge: a series of 12 obstacle courses that were tackled both individually and as teams. The exercise proved to be a great compliment to the discussion portion of the day, as many of the individuals who remained relatively quiet during the discussion, were able to excel and take leadership roles in the ropes challenge course. All of the participants chose to forfeit their free time period in order to continue with the popular activity.

Following the low-ropes challenge, participants had an opportunity to shoot hoops or tackle the region's only rock climbing wall – an activity that was new to many in the group. During this time, participants also had the opportunity to meet some of the camp staff, who had traveled from Saskatchewan as part of a Christian youth volunteer exchange. The meeting inspired great conversation on recreation and youth volunteerism, and sparked some interesting questions on spirituality and community. Finally, after several hours of recreation and physical activity, the group was keen to sit down to enjoy the local foods dinner the camp staff had prepared.

After dinner, the group reassembled in the discussion room to participate in mock-debates, where participants were randomly assigned topics and positions to argue. The exercise was designed to teach participants how engage in respectful disagreement and how to understand, and even argue, perspectives they may not agree with. The day's activities were then wrapped up with a presentation by Mary Forbes on the importance of water resources and the influence of mass consumption using photographs from Chris Jordan's powerful 'Running the Numbers' exhibit.

In the evening, many participants enjoyed time outside at a winter bonfire where Laura Sapergia led a discussion on transforming ideas into action, and how to take an idea 'zygote' and initiate the steps to turn it into a real 'baby' project. During this time, many participants shared the ideas they would love to see happen in their community, and the group in turn provided advice and experience on moving forward. These discussions proved the most informative for determining the ideal mentorship placement for each participant.

Day 3: Goal Setting and Departure

On the final day of the retreat, the group assembled after breakfast for a presentation by Mary Forbes on her experience traveling the length of the Fraser River for four weeks during the 2010 Sustainable Living Leadership Program and how the experience had inspired her to initiate her own community-led sustainability initiative in Williams Lake. During this time, each participant stepped-out individually to meet with the program coordinator to discuss their potential mentoring placements and the steps that would follow the retreat. Each participant also had an opportunity to participate in a video interview that would later be assembled as part of a mentorship project.⁵

After the presentation, the group had a chance to provide feedback on the weekend and discuss what they were most looking forward to during their mentorship placement. Several participants wished the weekend retreat could have lasted longer, as they were only just beginning to get to know each other, and expressed an interest in reconnecting as a group after the placements were over.

Each participant and facilitator was awarded a small token of appreciation for attending the weekend retreat before shuttles returned everyone to their home community.



Sam and Sophia debate the merits of healthy salmon populations

⁵ View video online at: <http://fraserriveryouth.blogspot.com/2011/01/youth-uniting-in-sustainability.html>

Mentoring Placements

Following the weekend retreat, potential mentoring hosts were contacted to confirm their participation in the mentoring program. Finding mentoring opportunities for all fifteen participants that related directly to salmon and watershed health proved difficult. Thus, placements based on broader concepts of watershed sustainability or youth engagement were made available. In addition, efforts to find mentoring placements within First Nations organizations were unsuccessful, largely due to limited staff capacity of those organizations and geographical proximity; while several First Nations organizations in the Cariboo-Chilcotin were willing to mentor the youth participants, the First Nations youth involved in the program were located in the Stuart-Nechako and Prince George regions. Youth were selected for specific mentoring placements based on expressions of personal interest and the skills and interests survey they completed during the weekend retreat.⁶

In total, thirteen of the fifteen youth who attended the weekend retreat initiated mentorship placements. Of the remaining two youth, communication with one was lost, and the other opted to join a Fraser Basin Council program for First Nations youth leaders working with issues of air quality. Of the thirteen youth who began their mentoring placements, one was accepted into an international exchange program and was unable to continue with the mentoring program while overseas. Two participants found their heavy job and school workloads too difficult to coordinate with the mentoring program.

In total, ten youth completed their mentorship placements and one participant, unable to complete her placement during the program time frame, expressed an interest in re-establishing her mentorship in the spring and summer, outside of the program. The following is a summary of each of the completed mentorship placements based on an evaluation from both the youth participants and their adult mentors.

Selena Demenoff

Mentor: Bruce Gaunt, Drinking Water Planner and Public Health Protection, Northern Health

<http://www.northernhealth.ca/YourHealth/EnvironmentalHealth/DrinkingWaterSafety.aspx>

At the weekend training retreat, Selena expressed a keen interest in working with watershed sustainability as it related to human health. Northern Health, as an organization that works with several youth interns and volunteers, was keen to act as a host. During her placement, Selena worked with projects related to drinking water health, contamination and toxicology, where she learned that microbes can often be more harmful than toxic contaminants in the drinking water system. As a project wrap-up, she prepared promotional materials for community outreach. She was grateful for the opportunity to work with established professionals in the field.

Chayna Coghill

Mentor: Wayne Salewski, Vanderhoof Fish and Game Club

<http://vanderhooffishandgameclub.blogspot.com/>

Wayne Salewski is an advocate for youth engagement in the Vanderhoof region and was keen to mentor Chayna while working on the Murray Creek Restoration Project. Chayna worked on

⁶ See Appendix H: Youth Participant Skills & Interests Summary

gathering and organizing photos of the work done on Murray Creek over the past three years to add to the new project website. She also worked on graphing and mapping stream data. She attended the regular meetings of the project working group and was extremely grateful to be connected to such an open and energetic people. Before beginning her mentoring placement, Chayna had expressed frustration at her inability to connect with people working on sustainability issues in her community. Chayna continues to volunteer with the Murray Creek Restoration Project and was excited for the upcoming spring tree-planting and fence-building activities. The project volunteers were so pleased with Chayna's energy and potential that they donated a laptop computer to her to help her continue with her volunteer and academic pursuits.

Shannon McGinty

Mentor: Jocelyn White, Environmental Coordinator, City of Prince George

<http://city2.princegeorge.ca/Environment/RiversStreamsLakes/Pages/Default.aspx>

Shannon assisted Jocelyn with several of the projects in her environmental portfolio. She was able to visit several monitoring sites and worked closely with the McMillan Creek Fish Park – a riparian area that contains rainbow trout and Chinook salmon populations and offers a place within city limits that families can bring their children to fish. McMillan Creek is under pressure from various industrial, residential and rural activities, but Shannon joined the effort of many stakeholders to improve the health of the creek. She learned how human developments affect the watershed and ways to lower the impacts of these developments. Her work included developing activity sheets on invertebrates for park users and attending community group meetings.

Sophia Iliopoulos

Mentor: Jillian Merrick, Youth Program Coordinator, Fraser Basin Council

<http://fraserriveryouth.blogspot.com/2011/01/youth-uniting-in-sustainability.html>

Sophia began her mentoring placement by attending a two-day seminar entitled Fostering Sustainable Behaviour run by Dr. Doug McKenzie-Mohr, where she learned critical steps for motivating behavior change to achieve better outcomes from environmental sustainability projects. Sophia then worked with the Fraser Basin Council to assemble a video of footage shot during the weekend training retreat to demonstrate a youth perspective of watershed sustainability.⁷ The video was extremely well received when presented to the Fraser Basin Council Board of Directors and was posted to the online Fraser River Youth Network blog.

Kara Varley

Mentor: Ministry of Environment, Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative

<http://www.nechakowhitesturgeon.org/sturgeon/>

As a resident of Prince George originally from the Nechako Valley, Kara had the unique opportunity to work on a project that was closely linked to her hometown of Vanderhoof but

⁷ View video online at: <http://fraserriveryouth.blogspot.com/2011/01/youth-uniting-in-sustainability.html>

was based out of Prince George. Kara assisted with preparing sub-sample sturgeon fin clips for DNA analysis at an American University facility and worked with telemetry data of radio-tagged sturgeon in the river. She learned about the extensive efforts to revive white sturgeon populations in the Nechako and how to conduct assessments and sampling. Her mentoring placement greatly complimented her studies in the Natural Resources and Environmental Technology Program at the College of New Caledonia, and she looks forward to continuing her work with the Recovery Initiative in May when the group will capture and radio tag sturgeon in the river. Kara's mentor was inspired by the opportunities to expose a young person to a project she would not have otherwise been exposed to.

Lindsey Lemieux

Mentor: Rachel Caira, Education Coordinator, Northern Bear Awareness Society

<http://www.northernbearawareness.com/>

Lindsay received rave reviews from her mentor on her work designing two brochures and a door hanger that will be printed and distributed across Prince George to help raise awareness of human-bear conflicts in the City and inspire actions to reduce them. Lindsey was able to develop her design skills through working with Adobe Illustrator and her mapping skills by developing a map of human-bear conflicts across the City – skills that she says are important in her Environmental Planning field of study. Lindsey also attended several planning meetings, and her mentor was inspired by her willingness to step up to challenges and the efficiency of her work. Northern Bear Aware's activities will ramp up during bear season, and there are plenty of activities they hope to keep Lindsey involved in. As Rachel suggested, "in an organization like ours that is run but a pretty small group of people, it was fantastic to have a fresh opinion and perspective on things."

Samuel Lawrie

Mentor: Gina Layte-Liston, Environmental Coordinator, City of Prince George

Sam, as the youngest member of the program, was keen to tackle some hands on activities through his mentoring placement. While paired with Gina, Sam joined a tour of the City's sewage treatment plant and fishtrap, and accompanied Gina on several field visits. He learned where the City's drinking water comes from, the process it goes through before it reaches the tap, and also examined several point-source pollution sources. As part of his mentoring placement he helped research, prepare and give a presentation to a group of elementary school students, where he learned his own valuable lessons about youth engagement; in his own words, "6th graders would rather lick the diorama than listen to you".

Allison Bray

Mentors: Lauren Phillips and Kim Menounos, Urban Foresters, City of Prince George

<http://www.communityforest.princegeorge.ca/>

As a youth with valuable experience in outdoor recreation and education programs, Allison played a key role in mentoring with the Prince George Community Forest by providing resources and personal insight into the development of a future Outdoor Recreation and Education Facility

in the Community Forest. Moreover, she was very pleased to put some of her previous education into a valuable real-world context. She was able to attend Prince George Community Forest Steering Committee meetings and learn many aspect of the planning and management of large community-based projects and the unique aspects of ecosystem-based management in urban areas. She learned key public engagement and consultation skills, as well as insights into working with various stakeholders and the operation of professional boards. Because the Prince George Community Forest largely lacked any youth engagement prior to Allison's arrival, she played a critical role in demonstrating the value of youth input into the governance structure of the Community Forest, and her input into the planning of a project that is intended to serve future generations of youth was greatly appreciated by her mentors. Allison looks forward to continuing her relationship with the project beyond the life of the mentoring program.

Mark Nasu

Mentor: Lisa Conner, Education Coordinator, The Exploration Place

<http://www.theexplorationplace.com/>

Having expressed an interest in working with education and young children, Mark was placed with the Exploration Place's after school care program to help design their Explorers Urban Garden Project. The project used a garden plot on the museum grounds to educate young children plant biology and the sustainability of home gardens (i.e. carbon footprints, organic plant growth, and food security). In building lessons plans, Mark learned important differences between adult and childhood education. In working with a group, Mark refined his communication and time management that were required to create a cohesive project in a group environment. While Mark was grateful for the opportunity to work with childhood education, he was keen to gain more experience in a field directly related to watershed health. Some of the knowledge he gained on the value of fresh water resources at the weekend retreat and beyond has inspired him to initiate a self-guided study of sediment contaminant mapping in urban watersheds. Mark was also grateful for the opportunity to connect with like-minded peers from different communities and backgrounds.

Simran Lehal

Mentor: Chris Bone, Manager of Social Development, City of Prince George

During her mentorship placement, Simran took a lead role in developing a youth engagement strategy for the City of Prince George. Her placement was had a very direct impact on the ability of youth in the City of Prince George to engage in local governance. Her work involved constructing a framework for youth engagement, researching similar initiatives in other communities for best practices, making recommendations based on local youth perspective, and finally presenting her report to Mayor and Council at a future date (TBD).⁸ Simran was able to develop her speaking and engagement skills and acquired a deep understanding of municipal governance. She looks forward to presenting the youth engagement strategy Council and continuing to build her relationship with her mentor.

⁸ See Appendix I: Draft Prince George Youth Engagement Strategy

Program Evaluation and Outcomes

While the time commitments of the mentorship program proved to be a challenge for many, the experience gained by the youth participants and their hosts proved to be worthwhile. All of the youth reported enjoying their experience, and many were thrilled to be provided an opportunity to work directly with projects and established leaders and professionals in the community that they would have experienced if it were not for their participation in the program. The mentoring hosts were inspired by the creativity, energy and motivation of the youth mentors. While many hosts were grateful for the much-needed volunteer assistance, the opportunities for frank and casual conversations were reported to be the most valuable outcomes of all. This highlights the importance of relationship building in an intergenerational approach to watershed stewardship.

In order to accommodate the diverse interests, skills, needs and availability of all the project partners, not all mentoring placements were focused on issues directly related to watershed health. During the weekend skills training retreat, these broader relationships between ecosystems, economies, and societies to the watershed were explored at length. As per the recommendations for youth engagement developed at the dialogue event, a broadening of the discussion allowed for youth with various interests and knowledge bases to make a personal connection to their own role in watershed health. All of the host organizations play a direct role in watershed stewardship, but many of the activities working with watershed and fish population projects were seasonally oriented to spring, summer and fall months.

While the limited operations of host organizations during the winter months greatly restricted the different types of mentoring opportunities available, it increased the likelihood that youth would be engaged in governance, visioning, and outreach operations – the primary activities of the off season. Nonetheless, the most common suggestion for improvement to the program was a change in the time frame to include more field season opportunities. One host suggested a similar program that spanned a year would allow for the greatest flexibility and opportunities, as well as an extremely strong relationship at the end of the program.

A year-long program would also allow greater opportunity for working with First Nations organizations, who expressed a keen desire to participate in the program but struggled to find time in their already overburdened staff schedules in the wake of so many resource development projects region. This highlighted the need for greater support for staff resources needed in First Nations Band Councils to effectively handle the assessment of and engagement in the multitude of new resource extraction projects in the province that will have profound effects on traditional territories.

Feedback from the youth indicated that the opportunities to connect with their peers and the activities of the weekend retreat were just as important as the mentoring placements. The establishment of a strong peer network is critical. Moreover, the project was well received by the broader public and would have benefited from additional outreach and showcase of the project activities.

The mentorship program proved to be a valuable asset both to the youth, their host organizations, and to the broader communities. Youth possess a strong appetite for learning and action and are quick to make the best of the opportunities provided to them. It is strongly recommended that other communities engage in similar initiatives to strengthen the critical intergenerational relationships necessary for a more holistic approach to watershed governance.