Building for the Future:

A Participatory Evaluation of the First Five Years of the Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program

Executive Summary

▶ Acknowledgements

As with any project, many more people are responsible from making the project happen than just the authors. This evaluation, like the Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program itself, relied on the advice and partnership of many different groups and individuals.

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Questions concerning this evaluation can be directed to the Pacific Salmon Foundation. To download the full version of the report go to www.thinksalmon.com

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▶ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

The Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program (FSWP) was developed by Pacific Salmon Foundation and Fraser Basin Council to inspire changes in human behaviour for the benefit of salmon and the watersheds we all depend on. Launched in 2006 with funding from the Living Rivers Trust Fund, the program is managed and administered by Pacific Salmon Foundation and co-delivered by Fraser Basin Council. The Living Rivers funding was matched by cash and in-kind services from Fisheries and Oceans Canada. In its four years of operation, plus the year currently underway, FSWP has funded 275 projects with a total value of more than $12 million. Projects span four Program Areas: Habitat, Governance, Fisheries and Engagement, and seek to address issues throughout the Fraser Basin. In early 2010, the Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program initiated a call for proposals to carry out a program-wide evaluation to assess its first five years of operation. Staniforth and Associates were awarded the contract to conduct a mixed methodology evaluation, using developmental and participatory evaluation methodologies, and qualitative and quantitative assessments of program objectives, outcomes and outputs.

Evaluation Methodology: Participatory and Developmental

The FSWP evaluation is grounded in participatory, developmental evaluation, and involved primary users - FSWP staff and stakeholders - in its initial design and implementation to enable a deeper understanding of the process, encourage more ownership, and improve the usability of the data. The process is very collaborative, and builds evaluation capacity in all participants and stakeholders. This provides a more holistic picture of the social and political context, the prior history and the nature of the culture within which a program operates.

This type of evaluation shifts from one of "objective judgments" to one of enhanced learning with a focus on improvement – making things better rather than rendering summative judgment. This type of evaluation process involves participation from all stakeholders, and substantiates the learning community that FSWP strives to support.

Evaluation Framework and Workplan Development

The initial stage of the evaluation included a detailed review of relevant FSWP and related documentation to enable the evaluators to build some context for the program, and determine existing assessment criteria.

To help ensure a relevant and thorough evaluation, two evaluation advisory committees were convened: an internal committee made up of FSWP staff, and an external committee consisting of fish and habitat experts and past grant recipients. Committees served to inform the design of the evaluation framework, vet research tools, and provide on-going expertise.

Early staff engagement was supported through convening a staff workshop session to position staff as key players in defining the most important characteristics of the programs being evaluated. Key evaluation questions were generated, compiled and used to shape the evaluation process, workplan and evaluation tools.

The Evaluation Research Process

The evaluation plan consisted of both primary and secondary research methods. Primary research included an online survey sent to all program proponents, and telephone interviews with program stakeholders. The proponent online survey was sent out to 103 proponent groups and stakeholders, and posted online from April 30 to May 16, 2010. Fifty-four completed surveys were received; an excellent response rate of 52.4%. Extensive interviews with stakeholders selected for their program area expertise were conducted during August and September 2010. The twelve interviews were transcribed immediately upon completion, to ensure accurate data capture.

Secondary research methods included the initial scoping and review of FSWP documentation, a systematic review of proponent and FSWP project report files using a template developed for this purpose, and Fraser Assembly activities, including assessing barriers to evaluation and emerging issues. These main data sets were then compiled, summarized, and triangulated to synthesize conclusions and recommendations.

FSWP Evaluation Themes

Evaluation themes were formed through input from FSWP staff, Advisory Committees and the documentation review, and then refined through proponent and stakeholder input during the online proponent survey, stakeholder interviews and the project file review processes. Nine major themes emerged as organizers for the evaluation data and were employed to focus the evaluation and structure the report.

1| Role and Positioning Within the Sector

2| Goals and purpose

3| Capturing Program Area Impacts

4| Organizational Structure & Grant-making Processes

5| A Capacity-Building Approach

6| Engaging First Nations

7| Fostering Partnerships and Relationships

8| FSWP Outreach and Communications

9| Building a Program Legacy

Methodological triangulation was used as the main data analysis tool: data from between and among each study group and methodology was triangulated to assess its reliability and enable theory confirmation.

On-Line Proponent Survey

The survey data is both quantitative and qualitative, in that response percentages and correlations were generated for the questions, and respondents also provided comments, producing a richer data set that is of value in identifying trends, issues and challenges, and correlations between proponent groups.

The organizational profile of the FSWP proponent population was compared to that of the survey respondents. Although the survey responses are generally reflective of the different opinions, capacity and status of groups within the population of FSWP proponents, a higher proportion of non-profit proponents answered the survey than First Nation and government proponents.. Equal representation was present from each of the four program areas.

Significant findings from the online proponent survey included:

○ FSWP supports initiatives not covered by other funders (indicated by 74% of 49 respondents).

○ Respondents agreed that "FSWP is easy to work with" (82% or 36 out of 44 responders), progressive in what they will fund (68%) and have straightforward reporting templates and requirements (66%).

○ Biggest recognized strengths of FSWP were its collaborative and networking role, and supportive staff.

○ Three main benefits of FSWP: Out of 49 respondents, almost 50% highlighted the ability to use FSWP funds to cover staff and labour costs. Information gathering and sharing was the second benefit selected (43%), while the ability to leverage other funding (37%) and improvements in collaboration and partnerships (37%) were also noted.

○ Most valuable type of funding to receive: Respondents selected multi-year funding (76%) and core funding (69%) as the top two types of funding that they felt were most valuable to receive.

Program Area Impacts
Program area impacts sample sizes are small, however the trends that have surfaced are consistent with the other evaluation data and feedback received.

○ Collaboration and relationship-building between First Nations and non-First Nations proponents was noted to have occurred across all program areas.

○ Significant partners on FSWP projects included a wide rage of groups from all levels of governments including First Nations, to other non-profits, consulting groups and universities.

○ Relationships have been created as a result of FSWP processes and projects: the majority of respondents across the four program areas responded positively.

Stakeholder Interview Data
Interview data was summarized under the main evaluation themes to assist in accessing this rich and detailed data source. Interviewees were selected for their expertise that broadly encompasses the FSWP initiative, as well as their ability to speak explicitly to specific issues and overall impacts of individual program areas.

Significant findings from the stakeholder interviews included:
Role in the Sector: FSWP plays a key role as a funding agency, facilitator and convener that is viewed at arms' length from government: this supports their ability to facilitate networks and build bridges with diverse audiences. There is a current lack of funding sources for community based stewardship projects, leading to an increasingly important funder role for FSWP.

Program Area Impacts

Education: Respondents highlighted specific examples from proponent programs and improved First Nations outreach capabilities, while the challenge of documenting and attributing behaviour changes and actions to FSWP-sponsored projects was noted.

Habitat: Respondents stated that FSWP had made some positive gains through their funding of high level strategic projects and their important networking role. Integration issues were seen to be in the early development stages, with more work needed around enabling relationships among regional proponents and encouraging partnerships at both management and community levels.

Governance: Improved governance and planning processes are main objectives of FSWP: respondents spoke positively of their experiences with the governance initiatives, and felt they were worthwhile in building networks and developing relationships.

Fisheries: Respondents spoke to specific examples of how FSWP projects have had positive impacts on stakeholder relationships, broad community participation in the reduction of water use, policy implementation and community planning. Specific examples highlighted included the reduction of on-river conflicts, the facilitation of a cohesive community response to a water shortage, and a successfully integrated community planning process.

FSWP Management: Interviewees felt that FSWP was well managed and administrated, and staff accessibility and support around projects was highlighted. The temporary nature of the Program Director position was seen to be problematic for FSWP's organizational capacity, and the management challenges of two organizations jointly delivering the program were noted.

Engaging First Nations: FSWP received positive feedback for their emphasis on connecting with, highlighting and supporting First Nations projects and bands. The prioritizing of First Nations engagement and partnerships through the FSWP program goals, and First Nations involvement in the Fraser Assembly were seen to be important approaches that enabled all proponents to build relationships and share perspectives on key issues.

Partnerships and Relationships: Interviewees felt that FSWP had supported partnership building through their funding and networking processes. All interviewees were positive when asked about FSWP's role as a convener of proponents, and networking and partnership-building were also specific attributes that stakeholders identified when asked about FSWP's key role, emphasizing some synergy in how the program is perceived and valued.

Outreach and Communications: Overall, interviewees felt that FSWP has played a positive role in distributing and sharing information and resources to proponents across the Basin. The annual Fraser Assembly was identified as a unique and very important tool for amassing priority issues, communicating them throughout the region and networking with key players, and suggestions were made to increase its leveraging capacity. Responses were mixed around FSWP's success in sharing project information: stakeholders felt that some information was getting out to proponent groups, but that much of the project resources and best practices were not easily accessible or distributed. Improvements to the program's website and outreach to proponents was suggested to increase information-sharing.

Program Legacy: The networking that has occurred across the Fraser Basin and within specific regions and watersheds was identified by all stakeholders as a main legacy or lasting impact of FSWP. The Fraser Assembly was highlighted by the majority of groups as being a key factor in this networking, and the specific partnerships that have resulted were noted as tangible examples. The support by FSWP of strategic projects that were seen as innovative but risky for other organizations to fund was also noted.

Project File Review

Twenty Project files were randomly selected for forensic review from a combined pool of the 2008-2009 FSWP projects within each of the four program areas. Using a collaboratively-developed template, project files were examined for evidence of accountability, fund leveraging, partnerships, First Nations engagement, information sharing, and leadership in salmon conservation. A search was conducted on ThinkSalmon for project information, final reports and project deliverables/products.

Accountability was assessed by evaluating the completeness of the project files; ninety-five percent of the project files reviewed were either 'complete' or 'somewhat complete'. However, it was noted that the FSWP-led files were handled differently than proponent-led files.

Leverage: Financial data from final reports was used to calculate both the leverage of additional cash resources as well total leverage that included in-kind and volunteer contributions. Calculating the leverage proved a challenge as inconsistencies were noted in the financial details provided by proponents. For the twenty files reviewed, on average each FSWP dollar invested returned 1.6 times as much in project support, including cash and in-kind contributions.

Partnerships: Project files were examined to ascertain whether the project had fostered meaningful partnerships in the community of practice. In ninety percent of the project files reviewed, some evidence that the project engaged partners or fostered partnerships was present.

First Nations: Over 50% of the projects engaged First Nations at some level. In 30% of the files the First Nations engagement was enigmatic - it might have been mentioned in the proposal stage but then not reported on later as the question of First Nations Engagement was not asked in the final report template.

Communications and Outreach: Project files were reviewed for evidence that information sharing was occurring by proponents as part of the FSWP-funded project. Eighty percent of files demonstrated evidence in the final report documentation of information sharing between partners or with a target audience. In 20% of the files the evidence was unclear. For each of the project files reviewed, ThinkSalmon was searched for the presence of accurate project information and project outputs. All but three of the project files reviewed had a profile on ThinkSalmon. Forty percent or eight of the twenty were considered well represented as their online presence included profiles, final reports and outputs.

Data Interpretation and Discussion

The research findings were interpreted through the use of methodological triangulation, and results summarized under the main research themes, with supporting quotes and comments to illustrate key findings.

Theme: FSWP's Role and Positioning Within the Sector

A Unique and Flexible Funder FSWP is seen to be a unique funding agency in that it is positioned arms-length from government but has the benefit of government partnership. This perceived neutrality also enables FSWP to extend government agencies' support to projects that might otherwise be deemed too risky for them to take on alone. Its flexible funding strategy includes funding labour – an area that few other funders will support.

"No other funders looking at connecting issues such as ecosystems management, cross-organization collaboration, etc." Survey Q13_3

A main strength of FSWP is its role as a collaborative networker that is able to build bridges between governments and non-profits, and connect stakeholders throughout the watershed around shared issues and priorities. FSWP's perceived neutrality also assists their role as an important convener and facilitator, able to bring a diverse representation of groups, perspectives and agencies to the table to address complex and often divisive issues.

"Pure bureaucracies are limited by their policies, and their ability to communicate to the public… it is important to disassociate the bureaucracy from the decision-making, FSWP is the 3rd party that is allowed to do that." Interviewee 10

"I think they act as a bridge between government agencies and non-profit stewardship groups. They can feed in a lot of information and support and tie groups in to one another that do similar work…" Interviewee 1

Coordinating Strategy at Multiple Scales The concept of FSWP is to act as a "big picture" strategic player that works to leverage and increase efficiencies of community-based stewardship by also supporting higher level, high impact initiatives. There is a recognition from stakeholders that these higher level strategic projects - supported, initiated and often led by FSWP - are essential in meeting the program's goals. Without more focused outcomes and indicators (see below), however, attempts to strategically define higher level projects and how they relate to community level ones are somewhat ad hoc. Plus, the rationale and results of high level projects that are undertaken are not always clearly communicated.

Adding to this issue, non-FSWP funds for community based stewardship work are becoming increasingly scarce. This adds pressure to FSWP to broaden its scope to help maintain all good stewardship work, rather than narrow its scope to a more focused, multilevel strategy. Strategic decisions about the Program's role in community based stewardship need to be made with input from its key stakeholders.

"They need to be a road map… that highlights the really broad stuff, things like First Nations recognition and reconciliation…Right now… people don't see how they are plugged in to the bigger picture, FSWP can play that role, take a broader look at the Basin….Everyone needs to see where they are contributing to these bigger outcomes. People must see the connections, this is the holy grail of collaboration, and this is where FSWP can play a role." Interviewee 8

Theme: Goals and Purpose

Staff and stakeholder perspectives of FSWP's over-arching goals are clear. Given the challenges inherent in amalgamating two very different organizations to deliver one Program, this clarity of purpose is an important finding.

"FSWP deals with critical issues around salmon habitat, the sustainability of the habitat through the social, ecological and economic lenses. They have done a pretty good job of supporting this three-legged stool of sustainability." Interviewee 7

However, an exploration of FSWP documentation revealed multiple iterations and layers of strategy, indicators and approaches to realizing the program's goals. Connecting program goals with its actual activities on the ground necessitates clear program outcomes and indicators – elements that are not well-defined throughout FSWP's documentation. This lack of actual outcomes statements that describe the short and long term effects of program implementation is a process gap that needs to be addressed, and recommendations are provided for how to approach this task.

Theme: Capturing Program Area Impacts

Benchmarking the empirical program area impacts in order to describe FSWP's progress towards achieving the desired Program outcomes is both essential and challenging. The absence of defined, consistent program outcomes and indicators for each program area, combined with a lack of baseline data were main barriers to determining program impacts. Also, the complex, systems-based nature of the work that FSWP supports does not lend itself to linear, tidy indicators.

However, the three evaluation data sets provide: confirmation that projects are meeting their proposed deliverables in the file review; descriptive information on the many perceived positive program impacts in the on-line proponent survey; and powerful and detailed insights from the in-depth interviews of stakeholder experts from across the Fraser Basin. Specific examples of key program impacts are described, and suggestions for identifying, tracking and monitoring FSWP program priorities across all four program areas are provided.

Program Area: Education & Engagement
"FSWP has helped us to deliver and focus our pitch and messages, and be able to improve branding and messaging – really helped us to inform and engage people in this area." Interviewee 1

Program Area: Habitat and Water Restoration & Stewardship
"Projects have moved us closer to co-management on some issues. They have been strategic in dealing with water issues… they have had an impact here… I was also part of the Fraser Salmon Table, we were looking at river etiquette conflicts on the river, this is a very good project." Interviewee 7

Program Area: Planning & Governance
"If there is anything good that's come out of these meetings, we are tentacling in with each other much more… Even though we have different agendas, there is a common goal and vision that is shared – and these meetings bring this out… That is what building community is all about." Interviewee 2

Program Area: Sustainable Integrated Fisheries Management
"The stock assessment stuff they have funded is ground breaking. The watershed management in Nicola and other places, they have helped to put in place regulations on rivers like the Capilano, the Alouette, these were all influenced by FSWP investments."
Interviewee 5

Theme: Organizational Structure and Grant-Making Processes

In discussion around the FSWP management structure, program staff were highlighted as a main strength.

"It has excellent liaison persons, we always felt FSWP staff were an email or phone call away. So, it supports and networks like few others." Survey Q14_21

The challenges and opportunities of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) supporting the FSWP Program Director position were discussed. Different directors come with different sets of skills and interests that impact the program and contribute to potentially positive change. However, given the Director's short tenure, there is little time for new directions and systems to be fully developed and implemented. The temporary tenure of the position was seen to have hindered the program's ability to focus on its goals and objectives and led to a lack of program direction, reduction in organizational memory and negative impacts on organizational capacity building.

"An assignment is just an assignment, it is not a permanent position. FSWP is doing themselves a big disservice by not building capacity there… the program needs a long term approach and guidance. The ideal situation would be if they had a staff director who was permanent, and then had two people brought in on assignment, one for the province and one from DFO." Interviewee 6

The co-delivery of FSWP was seen as advantageous, in providing a wider base of expertise, an increased ability to convene a variety of perspectives, and a perception of neutrality and impartiality. However, the additional work of coordinating two different organizational cultures was also noted.

Consistency Required Across Project Documentation Proponents and stakeholders generally support FSWP's funding processes and documentation: the two-stage application process instituted in 2008 – 09 for proposal submission was highlighted as a time-saving and capacity-building process. However, a number of issues were noted with the grant documentation: the conceptual proposal, detailed proposal and final report templates do not contain sections that can be easily tracked and compiled for project outputs and accountability. Fortunately there are some simple things FSWP can implement immediately- such as stating program priorities and gathering metrics on these priorities (partnerships, information sharing, First Nations engagement etc) consistently across all its program documentation, to be able to compile, compare and assess findings.

Theme: A Capacity-Building Approach

Capacity can be described as the ability of an organization to do its work sustainably and effectively over the long term. It is a defining characteristic of FSWP's work, although no clear definition of the term is provided. It would serve the program well to clearly define capacity-building in terms of program and project activities as well as develop indicators to track its occurrence and progress.

Although FSWP contributes to the capacity of the sector in a number of ways, its primary role is as a funder. This role is increasingly important for two reasons: groups are finding it more challenging to find money to support their work, and the model for funding non-profits in Canada has changed, shifting away from core funding to short-term project-based grants. Thus how FSWP allocates grant dollars has a direct impact on proponents' success in achieving their mission. Proponents highlighted the benefit of being able to apply FSWP grant dollars to labour and other core costs.

"FSWP is exceptional in providing for staff salaries, travel expenses and overhead allowing us to provide programs throughout the Basin and mentor others." Survey Q13_22

Surveyed proponents overwhelmingly requested multi-year funding and core funding as the funding types that would best support their capacity. The time saved due to the reduction of proposal and report writing that results from multi-year funding is also a capacity contribution. FSWP may want to consider additional funding approaches that promote organizational stability, such as core funding and multi-year grants, to enable groups to better plan for outcomes with a long time horizon.

Fostering Leadership Developing and recognizing leaders is a specific area of capacity building that FSWP has identified as an important objective in their program documentation. Leadership can be approached at different scales: at the individual, organizational or community level. Enabling leaders to come forward in communities, building leadership capacity in organizations, recognizing leadership, and supporting initiatives that take the lead on emerging issues are all tangible leadership activities for FSWP to support. However, defining what leadership means for FSWP and developing strategies to support leadership capacity will be important for the program and proponents.

"They have been able to be really effective at finding and supporting champions in the watershed and supporting them, and the First Nations engagement is a real strength." Interviewee 12

Theme: Engaging First Nations

The project data around engaging First Nations in meaningful and collaborative relationships is encouraging, with over half of the reviewed files demonstrating engagement, and the interview and survey data including positive examples from a wide range of stakeholders. Both the prioritizing of First Nations engagement and partnerships through the FSWP program goals, and First Nations involvement in the Fraser Assembly were seen to be important approaches that enabled all proponents to build relationships and share perspectives on key issues.

"Fantastic, they have done a great job in providing accessible programs, relevant to First Nations, making sure that the lack of capacity to partner doesn't hinder us applying, also helping us to get the technical help that we need, and to network or work more broadly, they do these things well." Interviewee 4

However, FSWP has not defined First Nations Engagement or developed specified objectives as to how it might occur, making investigation and tracking of this program goal difficult. Stakeholder suggestions that would support this important goal include: the sourcing and/or development of examples of best practices around First Nations engagement, the strategic funding of larger Nations in order to expand and sustain the capacity of the smaller bands within them, and providing additional funding to allow multiple band members to attend the Fraser Assembly.

Theme: Fostering Partnerships and Relationships

Building and maintaining relationships and partnerships across the Fraser Basin are key program priorities for FSWP. Stakeholders frequently cite the important relationship-building role that FSWP has taken on, particularly through their funding and networking processes and their effectiveness as a convener of key players across the Fraser Basin. The creation of meaningful partnerships is an aspect of the Program that has high value to stakeholders, and a factor that was present in 90% of the project files that were reviewed.

"Absolutely, without FSWP the situation would be tragic, the silos are so entrenched and the governments so threatened and time-strapped, they are a rare organization that can bridge some of these divides." Interviewee 4

Relationship and partnership-building can mean many things to many people. As a fundamental program objective, it is important that FSWP develop some clear definitions of both these elements, as well as requesting partnership information from proponents on the project reporting templates. One approach that FSWP could adopt is to develop a continuum for partnerships, based on the types of relationships found between proponents and their degree of integration. An example is provided for discussion.

Theme: FSWP Outreach and Communications

Communications is foundational to FSWP's work. Stakeholders highlighted FSWP as an important communications conduit for issues and projects occurring across the Fraser Basin, and specified the Fraser Assembly as one key to this success.

"The Fraser Assembly is a very important tool to bring out issues throughout the whole watershed, and give us all the larger picture of the whole basin, understand the issues from a broader perspective. They are… a place to catch up with people you don't see often, meet new people, learn about other programs and broader issues." Interviewee 1

The Fraser Assembly provides an exclusive opportunity for stakeholders to meet and network with other proponent groups around issues specific to Fraser Basin sustainability, to distill and communicate key issues across this large geographic region. However, there is a perception that past stakeholder input into program priorities has not been reported on or implemented. Timely communications around the issues and decisions that emerge would re-engage participants.

"We need something that says…'We heard from you in Merrit and this is what those folks are saying, this is what we will change as a result of this considerable effort from many people.' We really need to hear back." Interviewee 2

The Assembly is also an excellent tool for building on regional and Program area expertise, through hosting working groups or panels at the Assembly to bring participants together by region and/or Program area.

Communications activities occur at multiple levels. Broadly, FSWP is a communications hub for the sector, while specific communications activities are directed to proponents by FSWP as a grant-maker, and carried out by proponents at the project level.

Communications Tools

Thinksalmon is the main tool for stakeholders to access information about the FSWP, grant processes and project information. However, stakeholders reported it as cumbersome and confusing to use, noting its weak search engine, difficult navigation elements, and the presence of an imposter FSWP site. Improving the website would enable FSWP to better fulfill its important role of sharing of information, resources and best practices.

The programs' e-newsletter is a useful communications tool that stakeholders felt could be improved through the addition of program categories, project links, and by focusing more on celebrating projects and proponent groups.

Communications Role within Projects

Communications is an integral component of many FSWP-funded projects. The online proponent survey and file review data support the notion that sharing of information was occurring. Incorporating specific tracking mechanisms to record the nature of communications and information-sharing being carried out by proponents would be an important addition to the project templates.

Theme: Building a Program Legacy

FSWP is building a legacy as a critical funder for groups working to realize healthy salmon populations in functioning watersheds against a backdrop of government funding cuts, lack of core-funding, and increased specificity of foundations' grants.

FSWP is building a collaboration and networking legacy, providing opportunities for a wide range of stakeholders with varying perspectives to come together and build relationships, networks and joint initiatives. This networking role has activated some substantial coordinated efforts among governments, communities, non-profits and First Nations: this is seen as a unique and important program priority that few other funders or agencies are undertaking.

"The… project is gaining many successes but the biggest one will be moving this knowledge base to several other streams under one management strategy and program. This original project and its funding is also giving the ranching community confidence in the objectives and its gentle push towards water stewardship within the region." Survey Q32_2

FSWP is building a legacy as an innovator and risk-taker, supporting strategic projects that may not have found funding or support other places.

Finally, FSWP is building a legacy as a capacity builder: the legacy of its project work - distributing over $12 million dollars to 275 projects in its five years of operation has enabled groups to better contribute to healthy salmon and watersheds in the Basin and for the long-haul.

Recommendations and Conclusions

FSWP is a Critical Funder
The current meager funding environment for stewardship and sustainability projects underscores the importance of both sustaining FSWP for the long-haul and leveraging existing grantmaking networks.

Recommendation: FSWP continue to build its internal capacity as a grant maker to ensure its own sustainability.

FSWP Models Complexity
When examining the organizational makeup of FSWP, its four program areas and the broad diversity of proponent groups, it quickly becomes evident that this is not a simple, straight-forward funding program, but a socially complex multi-layered organizational model requiring collaboration among stakeholders from different organizations, systems and sectors to succeed.

Recommendation: Recognize that complexity is inherent in the work FSWP supports, and celebrate the program's successes in supporting innovation and risk-taking while working within these complex systems.

Maintain the Networking Role
The convening and facilitation of critical gatherings of watershed stakeholders using the collaborative approach championed by FSWP creates the environment where shared solutions and the effective social change needed to address issues of watershed health can emerge.

Recommendation: Support ongoing development of FSWP's role as a networker and convener.

Fraser Assembly Kudos
The Fraser Assembly is seen as a critical element of the program's success in facilitating communications, supporting networking, identifying and targeting issues across the Fraser Basin, and building partnerships.

Recommendation: Re-envision and leverage the Fraser Assembly to re-engage stakeholders and proponents, and look at new ways to gather information and make connections across the sector.

Program Area Wins
FSWP funding has contributed to projects that: contribute to the body of fisheries and watershed knowledge, actively restore and enhance habitat, and explore new governance processes, as well as projects that engage First Nations and build partnerships and organization capacity for proponents. However, assessing these project accomplishments is challenging as clear indicators, consistently applied across program documentation are not present.

Recommendation: Develop consistent indicators for tracking success within key program and harmonize project documentation to enable better assessment.

A Pro-Active Communications Hub
Communications is foundational to FSWP's work, and occurs at multiple levels.

Recommendation: Continue and increase the pro-active brokering and match-making role in linking project proponents working on similar issues, regions and/or program areas.

Recommendation: Improve distribution and access to project and program resources through improving website format and search engines, and through pro-active dissemination of salient program information, products and research.

Program Strategy Coordinated at Multiple Levels
The goal of FSWP is to act as a high level, strategic player in leveraging a range of participation and funding. Funding for community based stewardship is one part of the strategy. However, coordinating high level initiatives and community-based initiatives is challenging in the face of overly broad target outcomes and shrinking availability of other stewardship funding across the Basin.

Recommendation: Define and deliver high level projects in a transparent manner as part of the strategy to achieve focused outcomes.

Program Process Gap: Indicators
The programs' founding objectives that include developing partnerships, engaging First Nations, providing outreach and communications and building capacity are not specifically articulated or tracked through the program documentation.

Recommendation: FSWP staff and stakeholders develop indicators of success that reflect the program's mission and priorities and are both internally and externally focussed.

Build FSWP Leadership and Human Resources Capacity
FSWP is generally well managed and administrated, and program staff expertise and project support is a recognized strength. However, the program would greatly benefit from the continuous leadership of a permanent director, and internal human resources capacity-building.

Recommendation: Establish the FSWP director as a permanent staff position, external to DFO; develop internal human resources capacity.

A Sustained Funding Base Going Forward
Project impacts, collaborative efforts and partnerships within and across the many systems through which FSWP operates require extended time to be substantiated. Although FSWP was initiated with government dollars, it will be important to secure additional and varied funding sources for the Program, to ensure its sustainability and success over the long term. An enduring and secure funding base would allow FSWP to more easily support multi-year funding models, which provide stability to organizations, enable planning and partnership development, and support the implementation of difficult, complex and long term projects. A longer time frame would also serve to authenticate FSWP's long term goals.

Recommendation: FSWP access additional funding sources in order to ensure long term Program sustainability and enable extended funding models, longer project time frames, and long term Program goal and objective targets.

A Reflective Pause: Looking Back to Move Forward

This evaluation has demonstrated that there is a great deal of support for FSWP throughout the Fraser Basin, and the program has achieved much. This five-year juncture is an opportune time to step back and look at the bigger picture: reflecting on what has worked well; what needs some attention; and to forge a new pathway forward.

Recommendation: FSWP and its key stakeholders engage in a strategic planning process reexamining the initial Business Plan through the lenses of additional knowledge and experience gleaned from the first five years of operation.

It is our hope that this evaluation inspires dialogue, critical reflection and actions that will contribute to the ongoing success of the FSWP.

▶ About the Authors

Sue Staniforth (B.Sc., M.Sc.)

Sue brings to her work over 25 years of experience as an evaluation consultant, biologist, educator and capacity-building specialist for non-profit groups at national and international levels. Her passion for the environment led to work as a marine mammal biologist, international conservation educator and curriculum developer. Sue excels in working as part of a team in facilitating collective learning and success.

As a passionate educator, she strongly believes that evaluation must occur as part of an organizational learning process. Sue can be reached at sstan@shaw.ca.

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Kristine's connection to nature grew from a childhood exploring the west coast rainforest, steps from her back door, on rural Vancouver Island. Since completing her Master of Science Degree from UBC she has worked in and with environmental nonprofit organizations specializing in environmental education, facilitation, communications, development and leadership.

Her passions are people and the planet- and how to enable both to shine. Kristine can be reached at webber.kristine@gmail.com.

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