

**RIVERS SMITH SALMON ECOSYSTEMS PLANNING SOCIETY**  
**SUMMARY OF AGM MEETING**

**June 10, 2008**

**9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

**Airport Inn**

**Port Hardy**

Present:

Doug McCorquodale, David Stevenson, Misty MacDuffee, Wayne Jacob, Teresa Horbach, Colleen Hemphill, Ted Walkus, Stan McLennan, Dennis McGill, Lance McGill, Cindy Hanuse, Rod Visser, Sandie McLaurin, Jeffrey Young.

**1. Coordinator's Report:**

David gave a brief overview of the Wild salmon Policy. The Conservation Units for Smith and Rivers Inlets have been decided. The establishment of benchmarks for each species remains to be done. The WSP also calls for the development of strategic plans to manage the CUs. This will involve determining criteria to assess the CUs. In addition the WSP calls for the identification of the habitat features, the selection of habitat benchmarks, criteria to assess the habitat and a strategic monitoring plan. Planning for CUs and habitat units needs to be further integrated with ecosystem values. He concluded that there is a need to develop a strategic plan to implement the WSP in the Rivers and Smith watersheds.

**2. Jeffrey Young – David Suzuki Foundation's report on the Wild Salmon Policy.**

Jeff presented an overview of the DSF's report Returning Salmon: Integrated Planning and the Wild Salmon Policy in BC. According to the report:

The federal Wild Salmon Policy (WSP) is one of the main regulatory frameworks through which wild salmon populations can be protected and restored. The WSP identifies conservation as the first priority for salmon management and provides a science-based framework for protecting salmon diversity, habitat, and ecosystems. The WSP provides an excellent opportunity to build effective models of sustainable, ecosystem-based management (EBM) in Canada. Wild Salmon Policy success will be to the benefit of salmon, as well as the people and ecosystems that depend on them.

This report considers the progress made in implementing the Wild Salmon Policy, released in June 2005, and identifies opportunities for real short-term benefits to wild salmon while a robust management system is built for the long-term. The aim of the report is to explore linkages with existing land- and water-use management processes and to offer practical Wild Salmon Policy implementation advice at a regional scale.

The report takes an in-depth look at the Central Coast region of B.C. This area is covered by the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement, a conservation and sustainable-development plan negotiated between First Nations, the Province of British Columbia, and conservation groups.

The Central Coast region was chosen because it has a wide range of freshwater, temperate rainforest, coastal, and marine ecosystems of incredible productivity and diversity. Salmon are integral components of all of these ecosystems. These features both lend themselves to, and call out for,

strong efforts to integrate ecosystem values into salmon management. Success will require increased efforts to understand, monitor, and conserve salmon. The report explores the degree to which the Wild Salmon Policy is being integrated into these processes and applied as part of the B.C. government's commitment to an ecosystem-based approach in this region.

Jeff said that there was lots of good science and knowledge on CUs, Habitat indicators etc, but the application of the strategies was constrained by lack of resources to actually implement the development of management plans and establish monitoring regimes. So far step #3 to integrate Ecosystem values into habitat plans and CU management plans has been poorly developed. There is no clear idea of exactly what that means, like how ocean and fresh water ecosystems integrate.

Strategy 4 – integrated planning is the key step to implementation. The WSP is not affecting fishing decision making yet. The DFO must uphold their responsibility to implement the WSP provide sufficient to make it happen. DFO need to decide exactly what WDP will mean to them. Clear leadership from DFO is necessary to direct research and management to ensure we make good decisions that are integrated and produce goals and an understanding of tradeoffs.

The report recommends an increase in funding of \$5 million from the Federal Government to facilitate WSP implementation. As well it recommends that:

- Shift of existing salmon and salmon-ecosystem related expenditures to priority WSP activities
- Strengthen and support champions within Fisheries and Oceans Canada who will ensure effective WSP implementation.
- Hire at least 12 additional habitat-conservation enforcement officers in the Pacific region within the next year, and a further 16 within the next three years.
- Provide at least \$10 million per year for five years to develop a marine-use plan for PNCIMA that incorporates wild salmon conservation objectives and WSP principles.

In the discussion that followed Ted pointed out the importance of including Local ecological Knowledge in the planning process. Sandie pointed out that integrated planning should include people from the Province as well. Colleen pointed out the treaty negotiations were being stalled because of fisheries issues and the lack of true integrated co-management structures.

Other groups can do parts of management but DFO needs to facilitate integration, identify opportunities for integration, and develop tools for integrated planning.

3. Rod Vissor -spoke to the Wuikinuxv Economic Development Initiative to purchase Fresh Water licenses and rod days. There was some discussion about who holds what licenses. They have engaged Province at senior level to implement a comprehensive strategy for management of FW fisheries (Chuckwalla / Kilbella) and to get the other local streams in Owikeno Lake classified. The WN see this as an opportunity to take control of fresh water fishing and get some economic benefit from leasing out the rod/days. Some rivers like Orford River have very high pressure from sport fishers BC classified rivers in late 80s to manage adventure fishing lodges of the day. The rivers were granted rod days to regulate fishers on the river. The Chuckwalla/Kilbella Rivers have 625 rod days for example. The province classifies a river for fish like Coho, which is not a provincial fish. The lodge owners lock up a river for their clients. A lot of the rod days in the central coast are owned

by one guy (Phil Dawson 425 days on Kilbella/Chickwalla). This secures access to many stocks of salmon for their sport fishery. They want to get a lot of rod days for Wuikinuxv by classifying many of the local streams in Wuikinuxv's name.

The Wuikinuxv Nation has rights to logging in the lake, Chukwalla-Killbella watersheds and in Johnston Creek. Sandy and Misty expressed concern for the Johnston as an important coho producer with very sensitive lowland habitat, also a rare remaining intact watershed. Rod said no decision have been made on the Johnson, but all band logging in Wuikinuxv territory would be "EBM+".

#### **4. WSP Conservation Units**

Jeff led a discussion of the WSP Conservation Units : There seems to be agreement that there is sound science and reasoning behind the CUs identified by DFO. Chum and Pinks both have large CUs that cover big tracts of the Central coast. Rivers and Smith Inlets are the combined CU for both Coho and Chinook. Owikeeno and Long Lake are separate CU's for Sockeye. It was noted that Wannock Chum weren't listed as a separate CU in DFO's last draft but that this has probably since changed. Jeff said there is a need to identify of how these CU determinations line up with COESWIC and other processes. CUs are supposed to assist us in avoiding a SARA listing for example so we should see how it fits with these other processes. TEK was incorporated a bit lining up CUs with traditional use areas. The definition of CUs is only as good as the information at hand at the time of establishment. Designations are open if new information comes to light. The underlying premise in a CU is the evolutionary significant unit. The issue was raised that we need to develop management plans for each conservation unit but in the case of Pinks the CU extends beyond the Rivers Smith Watersheds so the management plan would have to fit in with the larger CU planning.

#### **5. Benchmarks**

Benchmarks discussion: Jeffery lead with some highlights from Carrie Holts paper on benchmarks. There are many approaches and considerations that can go into determining benchmarks. Benchmarks don't need to be just about numbers, they can consider trends, and other indicators. This moved into a larger discussion about DFOs general approach to determining target escapements. DFO uses MSY and PR models (maximum sustainable yield, photosynthetic rate) to determine the minimum number of spawners needed to sustain the fishery, but it does not examine broader considerations such as ecosystem needs for nutrients, wildlife and predator needs and dynamics, climate change, uncertainty, precautionary approaches, effects of spawners on habitat, etc. which should be considered in the WSP. There were also questions on the relationship between SARA and WSP ie. Can a CU meeting its benchmark become a SARA candidate? Because SARA listings are based on trends over time, this could be possible if chosen benchmarks are just numbers.

Clarification is needed on this issue.

A CU can be assessed on overall abundance, but can also consider individual stock status within a CU. You have to ensure you meet your recovery / escapement goal in a CU benchmark.

Misty – A copy of Misty’s Salmon escapement survey for Rivers and Smith was distributed for discussion. DFO has revised target escapements over time, so how do we choose benchmarks? She used the old DFO targets in the original benchmark presentation. All the new benchmarks are based on some MSY consideration. She looked at all systems in Rivers and Smiths and identified the indicator streams, non-indicator streams and streams where there is nothing but presence / absence for the species.

Focusing on indicator streams classified by CU, then looking at BC16 reports looked at target escapements, last time that escapement was met and status over the last 10 years. If met the target escapement 80% of the time or more was green. There was some discussion of target escapements – the old target for Wuikinuxv lake was 900K fish, now reduced to 500K at a watershed level instead of individual streams. Misty suggested that benchmarks be set higher instead of the 200K no fish limit that DFO wants.

## **6. Peter Johnson (LGL) proposal Didson on Wannock**

The Wild Salmon Policy requires a management plan for each CU and this management plan requires accurate monitoring of the stocks. Previous RSSEPS discussion has identified an interest in using hydro acoustics technology on the Wannock to enumerate returning salmon. Peter Johnson of LGL was asked to develop a proposal to test the effectiveness of a Didson on the Wannock. We have had previous discussions on doing a 3 year study with Didson on the Wannock and compare its use to the traditional Clear Stream Index information. This is good but premature to propose now as uncertainty exists on use of Didson in the Wannock. Peter Johnson participated by phone. He proposed a 2 week study to investigate the use of 2 Didsons on the Wannock. We need to see if we can use Didsons to survey the entire water column in the Wannock. The 2006 study using a standard unit Didson we found a site that worked to about 20m in front of Frank and Alvina’s. This was done for the North shore, not the south shore. The deepest part of the river is 30m from the south shore which would be beyond the limits of the standard unit in this river. It was proposed using two units one on each shore to cover the river in entirety. The issues to be studied are:

1) Can we sample effectively throughout the water column to get accurate counts?

2) Tidal influence effects? The 2006 study was short and could not determine effect of tide on fish behavior. We can with a 2 week study investigate milling or holding. If fish are holding in the beam it’s hard to determine if fish are moving up or down. During high tide for example the location in front of Frank’s house may not be the best place.

3) The Didson technology does not provide species ID. Sometimes you can use size or swimming distribution to separate fish, but its hard. We need to independently capture fish to ground truth Didson counts (sockeye vs non-SK counts). The annual food fishery may be a way of determining species composition. After this feasibility study it may make better sense to propose a long term project. The proposed budget of \$60K USD includes a 2 week lease for 2 Didson’s. LGL has a standard unit, but there are lots available for use. There may be one long range unit for lease. The proposal will be distributed to all the members. Dave will look for funding for a 2009 project.

There was some discussion about previous hydro acoustic studies. Sandy made the point that the CSI index is not an in-season management tool, and the Didson may also not be any better in that context, the hydro acoustic study in the inlet is an effective in-season management tool. We are however looking for a better way to monitor escapement, not an in-season management tool especially since there is little likelihood of a commercial fishery in the near future.

It was recommended that a sub-committee be set up to examine the data available to determine benchmarks. It was suggested that the benchmark committee include Wayne Jacobs (Wuikinuxv fisheries biologist), Misty McDuffee (Raincoast Conservation Society) Doug McCorquodale (GNN fisheries biologist), Karl Wilson (DFO biologist) Julian Sturhahn (DFO Stock Assessment) Lance McGill (former commercial fisherman). The committee will try to meet once over the summer to set up a working schedule. Campbell River was suggested as a good central meeting place.

## **7. Habitat Indicators, Benchmarks and Metrics**

Dave presented a spread sheet which summarize the tasks to be accomplished under the WSP. Discussion proceeded on task #2 the need to assess habitat status. The habitat indicators presented at the previous WSP workshop was reviewed. The indicators that apply to Rivers and Smiths were discussed.

Water extraction – there are 9 water license in Rivers Inlet and 2 or 3 in Smiths. The ones in Smith are being monitored by Nanwakolas Council in Campbell River. Sediment is an issue in some streams in Rivers and Smith watersheds. Water quality is currently monitored by temperature data loggers. There is no coordinated collection of this data. Stream discharge – the Wannock is currently being monitored. Benthic invertebrates have never been collected or assessed. Key spawning areas have been identified on our sensitive habitat atlas but perhaps we need to do a review of all streams to assess the actual spawning available. Lake productive capacity is determined by Nitrogen and Phosphorous levels relative to lake surface. Some limnology studies have been done. These need to be reviewed. The work of identifying benchmarks and developing monitoring plans for fish habitat needs to continue. It was suggested that we should work with indicators first add others as we develop the benchmark.

## **8. Ecosystem values**

There was a brief discussion of ecosystem values and the importance of including:

- the needs of other species such as bears, eagles etc.
- the effect of predators such as stickleback and seals
- marine conditions, nutrient levels

Sandie and Misty agreed to do some research on what is available on habitat and ecosystem studies.

## **9. Strategic Plan for WSP**

David presented a quick overview of the components of a strategic plan for the WSP. The WSP calls for a response through the development of Strategic Plans (SP). A SP should be issue based/goal based planning model moving from the general to the specific. The first step is to set strategic direction by determining a Vision, Mission, and set of principles. This is already developed by WSP. Step two is to evaluate the current situation, by examining the available data and identifying gaps and internal/external factors. Step three is to identify tactics objectives and strategies. Step four is to develop an action plan with clear tasks, time lines, person(s\_) responsible and a budget. SPs need to be built from the bottom up. An SP for each CU is not practical so we need to define planning units which may include a number of CUs. SPs should integrate information on CUs, Habitat and Ecosystem Status. The focus should be on long term biological targets within a given time frame.

The meeting was adjourned at 3: 00 p.m.