

Nootka Sound Watershed Society

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 23 September, 2004 in the Western Forest Products Meeting Room

Present:

Craig Anderson- Village of Gold River; Paul Smith (D)- G.R. Stream Keepers; Stewart Adams (D) G.R. Streamkeepers; Dick Dennison (D)- Gold River Rod and Gun; Bruce Adkins- DFO; Wilf Luedke- DFO; Bill Shaw- DFO; Steve Emmonds- DFO/Conuma Hatchery; Tom Hopkins- Conuma Hatchery; Chris Erikson- Conuma Hatchery; Mike McCallum- Conuma Hatchery; Maureen Ritter- Marine Harvest Canada; Jim Murphy- Grieg Seafood; Jennifer Koch- WFP; Jim Davis- Moutcha Bay Resort; Cam Forbes- Critter Cove Marina; Ralph Osha- Chinootka Lodge; Frank Sinclair- Chinootka Lodge; Temple McPherson- Lodge at Gold River; Michel Rabu- Gold River Fish Camp; Andrew Rippingdale- C.R. Guides Association; Cam Guingnard- T-Hawk; D. Rodway- G.R. Resident

1.0 Paul Smith called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Paul asked everyone to sign the attendance sheet. Paul apologised on behalf of Dave Davies (DFO) and that Jim Murphy (Grieg Seafood) would be late.

2.0 Introductions around the table

3.0 Changes/additions/approval of agenda

Stewart Adams moved to accept agenda, seconded by Dick Dennison, called to question, all in favour, none opposed, so moved.

4.0 Changes or additions to minutes of the previous meeting

Paul asked everyone to read over the previous minutes. There were no additions or omissions.

5.0 Approval of Minutes

Dick Dennison moved to accept minutes, Stewart Adams seconded, called to question, all in favour, none opposed, so moved

6.0 Old business arising from the minutes

Paul Smith stated that the Big Bend Creek project is now complete with the exception of one lwd placement to be anchored in place. The rock weirs seem to be functioning fine in high water, but water is seeping through the filter cloth at low levels. Paul will be talking to Dave Clough and Sean Wong to determine if this is normal. The distance for salmon to jump into the culvert has been reduced to a couple of feet instead of meters. Paul went on to say that the Elk River riparian project initiated by Streamline Environmental Consulting and Mike Miles has started with a habitat assessment to compliment future funding just completed by Paul and John Ebell RPBio, also today and tomorrow he will be taking high school students to the site to volunteer their time helping to cut stakes in preparation for planting in October at which time the students will return to help plant them. BC Hydro is funding this project. Paul stated that the salmon enumeration project has been cancelled for this year due to the other issues and concerns with the Conuma Hatchery deemed to be more important. Paul commented that the new domain name for the Nootka Sound Watershed Society has been purchased and is now up and running. The new address is <http://www.nootkasound.org> and Paul has uploaded the web site files to the new directory. The old url will work for a

couple of weeks and at that time Paul will discontinue it. Paul also stated that when the time presents itself he would revamp the web site and add some new features. Paul said the Shore Keepers assessment of Tuta Beach was cancelled again this year because of a lack of volunteers due to everyone having jobs for a good change. We will pick this up again next year.

7.0 Correspondence

All correspondence has been tabled until next months meeting.

8.0 New Business

Paul Smith talked about the issues with the egg production cuts at the Conuma Hatchery and introduced Bill Shaw from DFO to start their presentation.

9.0 Presentations

Bill Shaw thanked everyone for attending the meeting and asked if everyone had a copy of the questions that the NSWS had sent to DFO in preparation for tonight's meeting. Bill went on to say that DFO is here to listen to our advice. And hopes that we can all work together to resolve the issues at hand. With that he introduced Bruce Adkins to the group. Bruce Adkins stated that DFO will attempt to address our questions tonight and also commented that DFO is here to initiate feedback on their options for the 2004 egg production numbers. Bruce gave a bit of background information on how they have been directed by Ottawa to distribute the budget. They have been told to cut Full Time Equivalent Positions (FTE) and this is the driving force behind cuts to hatcheries in BC. Bruce commented that in 2003 at Conuma Hatchery there were 7 full time positions and 3.9 casuals (part time). In 2004, this was reduced to 1.6 casual positions. 50 thousand per person per year was gained by reducing the FTE to 1.6. Michel Rabu asked if the operational budget has changed and Bruce replied no. Craig Anderson asked for confirmation on the operational budget remaining the same for 2003, 2004, and 2005. Bruce replied that he cannot give confirmation in fact there will be more cuts in the years to come. Bruce Adkins turned the presentation over to Steve Emmonds to provide insight into the 3 options provided by him to us. Option 1 is to leave everything as is except to completely cut the Chum program. Option 2 is reduce Conuma Chinook from 2.35 million release targets to 1.7 and reduce Deserted Chum release target to zero from 1.7 million. The Sucwoa Chum will be reduced to 1 million from 1.7 and the Coho program release target is zero. Option 3 is to reduce Conuma Chinook release target to 1.175 million from 2.35 and reduce Coho release target to zero. Steve added that all three options are based on 108 days of volunteer time at 2 volunteers per day. Paul Smith commented originally the plan called for only the Chum program being cut so why the change now. Answer was that it was considered to great a cut for the Chum fishery. Dick Dennison commented that the fishery only generates .13 per pound for Chum so why would the commercial sector not want more of the Chinook fishery where they make over 1.00 per pound. That is a question for the Commercial sector was the reply. Tom Hopkins asked if the area D Gillnetters were invited to the meeting. Paul Smith replied that they have been made aware of the meeting through Laurie Gordon (DFO) and Paul has left a few messages on Les Rombough's voice mail. Paul went on to say that there was a message on his machine today from Les and he will be contacting him shortly. Stewart Adams asked how DFO determined the Chinook cuts would maintain production numbers. Steve Emmonds replied that in the past they have not achieved egg targets for Chum for quite some

time so there would be some leeway. Steve went on to say that he is counting on this due to limited space i.e. well water. The hatchery has taken on the added responsibilities of rearing Burman, Gold, Tahsis and Zeballos eggs. Paul Smith responded that this was a question reflected in previous minutes of the NSWS where Steve was asked if there was enough water and he replied yes. Steve replied that he wasn't asked that question or he would have given the same answer as he is giving now. Paul Smith asked how much of a surplus existed in the Conuma River now compared to what is supposed to be there for a fishery and what will happen to this number once the Chinook egg release targets are reduced. Wilf Luedke replied that the lower limit for a commercial fishery is set at 18-20 thousand. This means that the numbers would have to be below these before any fisheries would be affected. He went to say that the recreational fishery has priority access to Chinook behind First Nations. Paul Smith asked how many cuts have been implemented in Ottawa. Answer was not as many as the Pacific region. Craig Anderson asked why not cut the Chum equal to the Coho amount to maintain our Coho program. Steve Emmonds replied that to equal the cost of rearing one Coho you would have to cut 23 Chum and it would be 8 Chum for one Chinook. Dick Dennison stated that this still leaves room, as there are 7 million Chum, which by his math still leaves 4.6 million after compensating for 23-1. This would be similar to option one was the reply. Michel Rabu asked if DFO has met with any users groups before these options and decisions were made. Bruce Adkins replied no. Wilf Luedke commented the impacts to our fishery with these cuts would be minimal and shouldn't impact our fishery in Nootka Sound to seriously. In fact with the abundance of Coho in the last few years we shouldn't see any impacts to our Coho fishery. Paul Smith asked if Wilf could guarantee that our fishing plans won't be altered with these cuts and Wilf stated he guarantees that we won't have to alter our fishing plans to reduce retention only catch per unit effort will change. Paul asked if this holds true for the fishery out front also. Wilf replied that most hatchery Coho out front are of US origin and they have a 100% marking program. Ralph Osha asked if DFO could drill another well on the hatchery site to increase capacity. Bruce Adkins stated that this wasn't going to happen because of the cost involved. Wilf Luedke commented that DFO has made it clear there will be no new big hatcheries created in the future and most big hatcheries in place now will be downsized to protect wild stocks and reduce costs. We are lucky to have our hatchery he went on. Dick Dennison responded that is why we are here to ensure it remains in the same shape as last year to protect our local economies and local stocks for the future. Wilf Luedke talked about Chinook escapements in 2003 as being a bumper year and every indication is that this will continue even with the cuts. Cam Forbes asked if the commercial fishery would be required to provide volunteers to aid in the collection of Chum. Answer was yes. Andrew Rippingdale asked why there were restrictions at the Lighthouse and Macquinna point if we are catching predominately US stocks. Wilf replied that there are still Thompson River Coho concerns and the restrictions are to mitigate these concerns. Paul Smith asked what the acceptable mortality rate on Thompson Coho was now. Wilf replied that it is 3%. These are based on cwt data from years past that shows Thompson River Coho being caught out front. Tom Hopkins asked if the Coho program is cut completely what does DFO expect the escapement to the Conuma River to be

in 3 years. Wilf answered about 200-300, but we will still have an abundance of local Coho stocks in Nootka Sound, which have rebounded nicely and should mitigate this. Cam Forbes commented that he is embarrassed that with such an important meeting for this area that there isn't more representation from some of the big players in Nootka Sound. He went on to say that we've been working over the messengers from DFO and wonders if we shouldn't be beating up on Steve Emmonds and Mike Austin instead as volunteers have been helping the hatchery for the last four years. If that hasn't helped our situation now, how can DFO expect it to change in the future? Paul Smith reiterated that Steve Emmonds has told us the real reason is a lack of water for the cuts and that the options include volunteer labour in the equation or they won't work either. Stewart Adams asked how many more FTE's will be cut. Answer was the remaining 1.6 would be cut the following year or the next. Jon Banas commented that he has to leave early, but for what it's worth he won't support options 2 or 3 when there is a directed gill net fishery on Chum. Dick Dennison asked what about the impacts of El Nino, does DFO have a back up plan in case we go through another cycle like in the nineties. Bill Shaw gave a website address http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/sci/usap/projects/sst/climate_e.htm as a good place to find out more. He went on to say that after talking to science they have informed him that every year El Nino flares up and then goes away so there is no indication yet that this will change. Steve Emmonds commented that the reasons for poor survivals during the last El Nino were due in large part to the Mackerel predation on juvenile smolts heading out to sea. There are ways to mitigate this by towing the sea pens further into the sound to release them away from the Mackerel. Michel Rabu asked how DFO justifies increasing the workload while at the same time eliminating labour positions. Most volunteers have jobs and careers also to maintain. Bruce Adkins replied that DFO has given Steve Emmonds a budget to follow and he will implement the operational plan to meet this budget. Michel Rabu responded that the cuts should be in management and not in the field where the most good is achieved. Maureen Ritter asked where is the money that DFO supplied to run the Burman/Gold hatchery and why can't it be transferred to the watershed society to mitigate the labour costs at Conuma. Wilf Luedke replied that DFO only provided \$5 thousand to the Gold River Chinook Project (GRCP) for fish food and the rest was generated by the GRCP through selling Atlantic/Chinook smolts. Craig Anderson asked where the rest of the operational budget details were. Bruce Adkins replied that some of it is confidential like wages etc. Michel Rabu stated that details such as those can be summarized, but this copy of the budget is pathetic and obviously meant to mislead us. Wilf Luedke stated that if we want a copy of the operational budget for the Conuma Hatchery we should put together a detailed proposal requesting such. Wilf Luedke gave a brief explanation on the impacts to the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) and stated that Alaska would have to reduce their catch to balance the cuts. Based on indicator systems in BC and on WCVI, DFO comes up with the numbers required for the PST. Because of past mistakes managing the fishery it is now based on abundance based management system. Cam Forbes asked if the options were related to capacity issues or money issues. Steve Emmonds replied that it is a water issue, specifically well water. For example, option two requires 20.4 l/min to work and he only has 20 l/min available. He hopes

to make up the difference by not achieving egg targets, as has been the case in the past. Chinook use more well water than Chum. Ralph Osha asked if DFO could clarify the actual dollar value cuts in the next three years. Answer was no, because the number isn't known yet. Michel Rabu asked if DFO has considered privatizing the hatchery to a non profit organization such as the Nootka Sound Watershed Society. Bruce Adkins stated that this is definitely not out of the question as DFO is looking at all kinds of different options. Stewart Adams commented assuming all is equal and we have more great years and we cut egg release targets by 50%, can DFO guarantee that they will maintain the 50% level and not fall below it based on your numbers? Wilf Luedke replied that in his opinion that he doesn't see the need to eliminate the hatchery and that these cuts won't change the fishing plans because DFO has focussed the fishing effort on Tlupana Inlet anyways. Dick Dennison asked why we couldn't sell the surplus fish to provide the shortfall in funding. Wilf Luedke replied that after First Nations we could sell the surplus if we so choose. Discussion followed on the viability of doing this and why First Nations quit doing it as they did in the past. Comments were that it was too expensive to transport fish and keep them in good shape compared to the price per pound. Jim Davis commented that as business investors in the community we need to have some assurances for the next 3-5 years so we can implement our business plans. Not knowing what the changes will be every year will drive business away from Nootka Sound. No astute businessman or investment group will take a chance on short term planning only long term security. Tom Hopkins stated that another option might be to find funding to complete the off channel project that was to tie into the raceways using the water that is being returned to the river. This would help to increase capacity and free up water and space. Paul Smith responded that the costs associated with this project are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and that is the reason it is stalled. There is also some disagreement within science as to whether side channels are a good thing or not. Wilf Luedke commented that Chinook live up to 4-6 months in Nootka Sound before heading out to the open ocean. This is usually in the estuaries and that is where we should be looking at maintaining our current levels of eelgrass beds etc. Andrew Rippingdale commented that very little money (1%) is put back into enhancement from the conservation stamp on the fishing license and the same goes for the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund on the freshwater license. DFO is looking at ways to increase this, but taking money away from general revenue is just not done. Jim Davis stated that charter operators and lodge owners should be asking clients to pay a small fee like 1% to a society to help mitigate these issues. Cam Forbes commented that our clients already pay a lot for fishing licenses, equipment, taxes, etc and if we keep passing the cost along to them eventually they will decide to go elsewhere or find another cheaper sport. He reiterated that there should be more support from the user groups in this area at the meeting, but that aside what can we do tonight to sustain our recreational fishery. DFO left at this time and the meeting continued on to decide our next steps.

10.0 Action Items

1. Paul Smith will coordinate a meeting with all the user groups in Nootka Sound, and outlying areas that depend on the fishery to map out our next steps.

2. Paul Smith will contact the media and the hotel association for their support.
3. Paul Smith will send an email to DFO explaining our position on the options presented to us.

11.0 Open Discussion

Michel Rabu moved that the Nootka Sound Watershed Society pursue contacting all user groups who stand to benefit from the sports fishery to meet and come to terms to develop an operational plan to sustain the recreational fishery in Nootka Sound. Seconded by Dick Dennison, called to question, Paul Smith commented that he would need help on this one as he already has way too much on his plate at the moment. We need to arrange a directors meeting to draft up a plan for the next meeting. All in favour, none opposed, so moved. There was some lengthy discussion on the by DFO and the options given to us by Steve Emmonds. We feel that we are not being told the truth based on past minutes where Steve was asked about capacity issues and the fact that water hasn't been a problem for the last few years when the Burman/Gold stocks have been reared with volunteer help at the hatchery. Why is there a problem now when only an extra 200,000 from the Tahsis hatchery will be added? Jim Murphy stated that this is exactly how it started on the east coast when they lost their recreational and commercial fisheries. He also commented that heath trays can be set up to allow different water sources to cover eggs without contaminating the heath tray below it. Dick Dennison moved that the Nootka Sound Watershed Society not support any of the options provided and ask for re-instatement of the previous years egg release targets. Jim Murphy seconded, called to question, all in favour, none opposed, so moved.

12.0 Adjournment

Michel Rabu moved to adjourn at 10:15 pm. Next meeting is on Wednesday, October 27, 2004 same time, same place.