



Conservation of Shuswap River Chinook through Education

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Executive Summary

The Kingfisher Interpretive Centre Society's 'Conservation of Shuswap River Chinook through education' (Priority Action SHU.ALL.SB.04.02 Implement high priority species-based actions-P1) project, partially funded through the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, was not able to proceed as originally planned in 2020 due to the global pandemic. The KICS had to think of new ways to offer salmon and watershed education with in-person, group activities not permitted under Provincial Health Orders. The education and public awareness created by the KICS includes the following: a self-guided hike was created for site visitors to use while walking through the forest, a series of educational videos were recorded and uploaded to our new YouTube channel, a Sponsor a Salmon educational program was launched and an educational virtual "Salmon Run" was created. The alternative learning options have been successful and provided the KICS with a broader audience. The KICS continued to provide the information and knowledge needed for the creation of salmon stewards, supplying them with the understanding, awareness and compassion needed to stimulate action towards the protection of the different species and the habitats essential for their survival

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Introduction

The Kingfisher Interpretive Centre Society was founded over thirty years ago in response to the near extinction of Shuswap River Chinook. Members from the Kingfisher Community were very concerned and through a partnership with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, helped re-establish the Chinook salmon populations to a healthy level. Over the years it was discovered that ignorance and indifference had played an integral role in the decline of the population. Once discovered, it became a mission to educate the people about salmon and the negative impacts of bad decisions that were simply made through lack of knowledge and understanding.

The need for the *Conservation of Shuswap River Chinook through Education* program is once again becoming a priority for our watershed as Chinook populations are once more in decline across the entire Pacific North West. Science suggests poor ocean conditions and habitat loss are to blame. Educating today's youth about the important role fish play in maintaining the health of the overall ecosystem needs to continue to ensure the long-term wellbeing of our entire watershed. As Baba Dioum, Senegalese Forester eloquently put it :

"In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught."

Our watershed has seen a huge spike in the amount of river traffic over the last decade. With the increase of visitors, we are also seeing an increase in garbage, negatively impacting our watershed. Many of these local schoolchildren also utilize the river for recreation with family and friends and can either be part of the problem or part of the solution. We strive to create salmon and water stewards by passing on knowledge and awareness and instilling passion in the participants through our experiential education programs. Conservation through education is critical if we would like to achieve the sustained abundance of our resident salmonid populations.

The Chinese Poet Kuan-Tzu (500 BC) explained it this way:

**"If you are thinking a year ahead, sow seed.
If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant a tree.
If you are thinking one hundred years ahead, educate the people."**

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of our project are outlined quite clearly in the introduction. The specific goals and benefits outlined in our application are as follows; Conservation of Habitat, Conservation of Ecosystem, Species Conservation and Community Engagement, Improve Science and Knowledge. I will outline each individual goal and what information was shared with the participants.

The **conservation of habitat** benefit was achieved by offering information to the participants about the importance of the river and entire watershed to the survival of our fish.

The **conservation of ecosystem** was explained through the explanation of how salmon are a keystone species that are relied upon by many animal and plant species.

The **species conservation** objective is met through instilling the wonder and awe of salmon to the participants. Again, explaining salmon as a keystone species clearly depicts how important salmon are and that their species needs to survive or the whole ecosystem will suffer, along with the lives of many different animal species. The bottom line was that we need our salmon and it is critical that they continue to exist. Also, the participants themselves contributed to salmon species conservation through salmonid enhancement activities which included raising salmon in their schools.

Community engagement was achieved by having over 230 individuals sign up for the virtual programs. We also provided local businesses with an opportunity to sponsor the virtual race at no cost, offering them free publicity. Our educational videos have received over 1,600 views and we have already had over 200 different family groups enjoy the self-guided walk.

We increased and **Improved the Science and Knowledge** of all participants. All of our programs are educational with that exact goal in mind. We also feel that the improved knowledge increases the amount of aquatic stewards created each year.

Study Area

The educational programming took place at the Kingfisher Interpretive Centre and on-line. The Centre is located 25 km's east of Enderby and situated along the banks of the Lower Shuswap River. Our 10 acre forested site offers visitors an opportunity to explore and learn about the Interior Cedar Hemlock rainforest.

The area in which we focussed our education was primarily the Shuswap watershed and entire Fraser Basin but also explaining to the participants that salmon are important in every watershed that they inhabit. The expanded reach of our on-line education programs has

expanded the geographic demographic of our audience. We even have someone from Scotland signed up as a participant in the Great Virtual Salmon Run!

Methods

I will be outlining the methodologies of each of our alternative educational programs that were provided instead of the initially planned objective.

You Tube Videos

The Videos that were created and uploaded to our new YouTube Channel were professionally recorded/edited and were initially intended for use by teachers. We recorded the different learning stations that the students who would have been involved in field trips would have experienced during their visit to our site. We felt awful about not being able to provide a place-based learning opportunity but as kids were not in school; this was simply not an option. We decided that the students could still participate virtually.

We hired James Alton to record, edit and produce the videos. Two days were spent recording and he was able to deliver the finished product in a very timely manner. The link to the videos was then sent to the teachers for use in their new virtual learning environment. Teachers were also offered an opportunity to meet with an interpreter virtually, with their class, and discuss with the students any questions that they may have. This was met with limited success with only two teachers choosing to have a live “meet”.

Sponsor a Salmon

The Sponsor a Salmon Program provides people with the opportunity to become salmon stewards through the “sponsoring” of a salmon egg. Participants paid a small fee (\$25) and were given a Salmon Steward Certificate, a birth Certificate for the fish and an opportunity to name their salmon. Four very informative Newsletters were sent electronically to the participants which included photos of their egg, alevin etc. and provided a wealth of knowledge about salmon and the hatchery operations that were taking place. The information was intended for a younger audience and also included puzzles, colouring pages and more.

The majority of the work for this program was carried out by our Office Administrative Consultant who is talented with modern technology. We increased our reach to include people that may not have been inclined or able to visit our site.

The Great Virtual Salmon Run

The idea for the Great Virtual Salmon Run was created through many brainstorming sessions on how we could continue providing salmon based education, virtually. As this idea was forming, we realized very quickly that we could offer so much more than just education. This three pronged program supports the local economy, provides encouragement and motivation for people to get active and of course provides watershed based education. With all of the boxes checked, we knew that we wanted to “run” with it! We have received funding to offset the costs of advertising and were also able to acquire funding through FWCP and the RDNO to assist with the cost associated with developing the platform, creating the educational milestone and the time taken to reach out to local business owners.

This race is a race like no other, where the participants become the salmon and will either run, cycle, swim or paddle the distance (640 km’s) that Shuswap River Chinook travel, up the Fraser River, to reach their spawning grounds. They can watch themselves progress along the river using the map provided. They can watch the other salmon in the “school” and compare their individual progress. Along the race route (the Fraser River) participants will unlock “milestones” that will provide information about salmon, watersheds, local First Nations and more. Many of the milestones will also unlock discounts to various businesses.

Results and Outcomes

The three different virtual learning opportunities reached an audience of around 2,300 and still growing. This is actually a larger audience than we had originally anticipated through our experiential programs. Having a larger audience is a really great result; however, we still believe that place-based learning would have had a much greater impact on the participants.

Recommendations

We have no recommendations this year. I think that with the current global situation, there have been some silver linings but I also think that we all need time to decompress and take a moment to truly appreciate the natural world and the other things that are important to us individually.

Acknowledgements

The Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program was added to our media campaign as a sponsor of the Great Virtual Salmon Run. The FWCP logo is on the posters and on the race platform itself.