

Harvest Monitoring for Future Generations



Errol Sam pictured here with Ahousaht's food and ceremonial catch, 2010.

As a commercial fisherman, Errol Sam is passionate about fish. As Uu-a-thluk's Harvest Management Coordinator, he's also passionate about resource stewardship. For Sam, safeguarding the resources means ensuring there are enough fish for current and future generations.

Hired in early 2010 to help improve harvest monitoring for WCVI fisheries, Sam is currently working with First Nations and fishermen to evaluate Nuu-chah-nulth harvest monitoring programs. Beginning with food and ceremonial fisheries, Sam has been meeting with First Nations fisheries staff and others to find out how they record and report their Nation's food and ceremonial catches. He takes his work seriously.

"As Nuu-chah-nulth people, we have guiding principles, which are iisaak (Respect with caring) and hishukish tsa'walk (the understanding that everything is connected)," he said.

For Sam, these principles hold the rationale for accurate catch reporting by Nuu-chah-nulth Nations. In its most basic form, catch reporting means providing information about what is caught, along with the location and gear type, to the First Nation and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Catch reporting is the cornerstone of successful harvest monitoring programs (HMPs).

But Sam also understands some Nations' hesitation with getting involved in this kind of reporting. "Previously some Nations provided this information to DFO, only to have it used against them," he said.

Still, Sam believes the benefits still outweigh the risks. "First, we as Nuu-chah-nulth have a responsibility to steward the resources based on the principles I mentioned. Without accurate reporting from all groups, including commercial and recreational harvesters, things are likely to be overfished. Second, we want to ensure that the priority food and ceremonial needs of our First Nations are not reallocated to either the commercial or recreational sectors."

Recording and reporting food and ceremonial catches will help First Nations and DFO accurately assess fish stocks, improve fisheries planning, and ensure the conservation and long-term sustainability of the fisheries. Solid catch reporting at the food and ceremonial level also means numbers that accurately reflect what Nuu-chah-nulth communities need to thrive. Since First Nations food and ceremonial use is a priority after con-

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—Errol Sam, Uu-a-thluk Harvest Management Coordinator

The first commercial catch reporting began in the 1950s with daily records of transaction between fishermen and buyers. Recreational catch monitoring began in the early 1980's in the salmon fisheries. Today expanded and detailed harvest monitoring is the norm in most commercial fisheries and new harvest monitoring initiatives have been implemented in the recreational fisheries, most notably in halibut and crab and prawn fisheries. Food and ceremonial reporting provided by Nuu-chah-nulth Nations will work together with information from the commercial and recreational sectors to improve overall fisheries management.

servation, knowing these numbers will help with planning for future years.

To date, Sam has met with 13 Nations to find out how they monitor and report their food and ceremonial catches. He hopes to meet with all Nuu-chah-nulth Nations and fishermen to listen to their methods and suggestions for improvements.

"Harvest management is about managing the fishery cooperatively with all those involved, to conserve and sustain the resource and to uphold our priority access," Sam said. "That's why we need everyone at the table."



Larry Swan of Ahousaht Fisheries samples salmon to help with accurate catch reporting.

Harvest monitoring programs are an important part of ensuring First Nations retain priority access to fish.

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