

Moyeha River Benefits from Sentinel Stocks



Salmon eggs (**nixtin**) from spawning Moyeha salmon.

Nuu-chah-nulth Nations forged another important partnership last year with Uu-a-thluk and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) when the Canada/U.S. Sentinel Stocks Committee confirmed funding for three chinook estimation projects. The projects kicked off in August, and according to project super-

visors, so far, so good, even with challenging conditions and weather.

Two of the projects continue mark-and-recapture work on the Burman and Kaouk rivers using tags to estimate salmon escapement. A third allows Uu-a-thluk biologists and Ahousaht members to conduct similar studies on the Moyeha River.

The Moyeha River project received nearly \$200,000 for the first of a potential four-year project that started earlier this year. Project supervisor Katie Beach believes it will grow big legs in 2010.

Similar to the Burman and Kaouk projects, the Moyeha project is trying to improve escapement estimates for chinook, along with collecting information on the fish's sex, age, and origin. Says Beach, "This includes tagging and recapturing live fish, as well as checking carcasses for tags. If we are successful, we look forward to further funding until 2014."

Concern about the Moyeha River's remoteness, along with its very low numbers of returning chinook, had some worried the third project would be too difficult to conduct. The main goal for this year was to see if the pro-

ject crew could catch, tag and recapture adult chinook. So far the Moyeha crew has met and exceeded those goals.

Ahousaht Fisheries Guardian, Larry Swan, is optimistic about what the project team has accomplished. "It has been a few years since we [Ahousaht] have had the chance to swim the river and see for ourselves how many fish are there," Swan says.

Beach adds that the Pacific Salmon Treaty between Canada and the USA was recently renewed, providing a framework to conserve and manage Pacific salmon. "During negotiations of the Chinook Annex in 2008, Canada and the US agreed to implement a Sentinel Stocks Program to support a 2014 review of the catch reductions for chinook fisheries on the west coast Vancouver of Island and southeast Alaska."

These reductions were put into place to help protect weak stocks, such as those in Clayoquot Sound. The goal of the Sentinel Stocks Program is to get accurate chinook estimates to evaluate the need for continuing the reductions agreed to in the Pacific Salmon Treaty. "The number of fish returning to a river to spawn is important data to have," Beach says. "It allows us to better manage far north migrating local chinook stocks."

"Although short-term," she adds, "This project is also positive for Nuu-chah-nulth Nations because it creates employment for people interested in being involved in salmon assessments from a grass-roots level."

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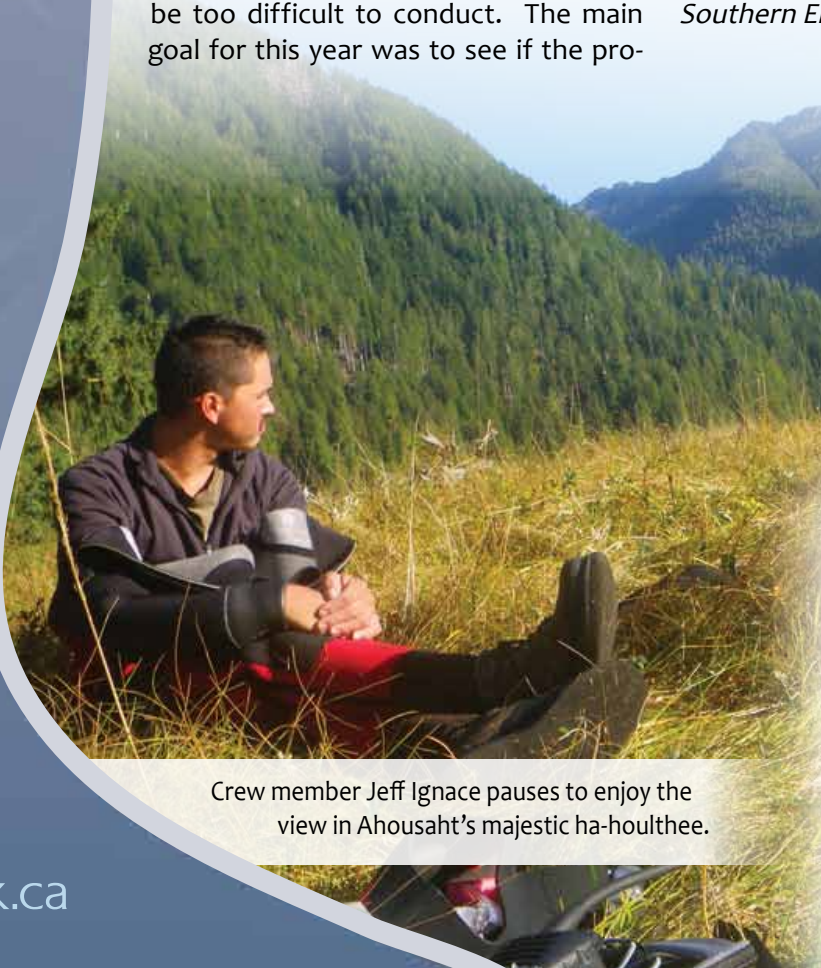
—Larry Swan, Ahousaht Fisheries Guardian

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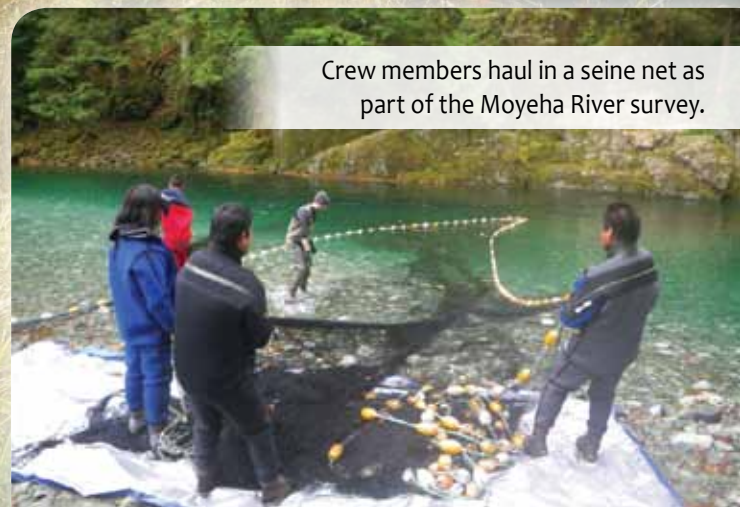
The Moyeha River project has seen a five-person tagging crew and two carcass surveyors work three days per week in the river since the start of September. Those employed on the project are from Ahousaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, and Hesquiaht First Nations and the town of Tofino. Overall, the crew expects to be working until mid-November.

Originally intended for the west coast of Vancouver Island alone, Canada broadened the Sentinel Stocks Program during Pacific Salmon Treaty negotiations to include stocks harvested in all fisheries. The program will provide critical information for the international and domestic management of chinook fisheries and stocks in the southern U.S. and Canada.

The SSP is supported with \$2 million per year and is administered by the Pacific Salmon Commission's Northern and Southern Endowment Fund.



Crew member Jeff Ignace pauses to enjoy the view in Ahousaht's majestic ha-houlthee.



Crew members haul in a seine net as part of the Moyeha River survey.

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