



A River Rare

The Nass River is the lifeblood of an uncommonly rich watershed. It ties Nisga'a villages to each other and Nisga'a Lands to the sea. It connects the past to the future.

For thousands of years, the abundant salmon and oolichan runs of the Nass River were harvested in a manner that allowed the Nisga'a people to build and sustain their villages, and to develop trading relationships that extended into the interior and ranged up and down the coast. Under the Nisga'a Final Agreement, the Nisga'a have the right to fish throughout 26,838 square kilometres of territory known as the Nass Area.

Nisga'a Fisheries

For the Nisga'a Nation, participation in the management of the fishery is vital for both cultural and economic reasons. Recognising this, Canada and the Nisga'a Nation established Nisga'a Fisheries in 1992 to co-operatively manage the resource. The treaty allows for the commercial sale of salmon and this new revenue has enabled the communities to benefit significantly.

In the 2001 fishing season, 800 Individual Sale permits were sold to Nisga'a citizens for a chance to participate in eight Individual Sale Fishery openings. During the Individual Sale Fishery, 103,860 kilograms of salmon was caught, which represents \$386,126 in revenue to Nisga'a fishers and \$162,908 to Nisga'a Lisims Government. The domestic harvest, for internal consumption,

reached the target of 13,454 salmon. Due to the effective interaction, co-ordination, and information exchange between Nisga'a Fisheries and the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the harvesting amounts were based on abundant levels of fish that were accurately predicted. The quality of the information collected also allowed a targeted coho troll fishery, which was open to all commercial fishers in the area.

Nisga'a Fisheries continues to invest in the future. During the reporting period, NLG purchased a new aluminium patrol boat named *Liblksim Lisims* or *Protector of the Nass*. Sixteen Nisga'a employees were trained for swift water rescue and 12 were trained in first aid. A new fishing landing site was constructed at Gitwinksihlkw for offloading, counting, and weighing salmon under the direction of Nisga'a Fisheries. In its first year of operation, it was used for 221 government-inspected landings. In addition, the Nisga'a Fisheries fresh fish plant at New Aiyansh was improved with a loading dock and control depot for shipping Individual Sale fish. Over 100 people worked for Nisga'a Fisheries during the 2001 season.

Co-operative Fisheries Management

The Joint Fisheries Management Committee (JFMC), a tripartite fisheries body established by the Final Agreement, recommended the Nisga'a annual fishing plan to DFO. With six members — two each appointed by the Nisga'a Nation,

Canada, and British Columbia — the JFMC facilitates the co-operative planning and conduct for Nisga'a fisheries and enhancement in the Nass Area.

In a post-season review of the 2000 fishing season, through the Technical Fisheries Working Group, DFO and the Nisga'a Nation identified necessary changes to the fish allocation criteria. The JFMC agreed with the recommendations and adjusted the Fisheries Operational Guidelines. These changes resulted in greater accuracy in estimating fish allocations. Details of these changes were discussed with interested groups throughout the region prior to their finalisation and inclusion in the 2001 Nisga'a Fishing Plan.

In 2001, Nisga'a Fisheries undertook pink/chum escapement studies at Ksi X-anmas River using hydro-acoustic technology, and underwater video cameras were used to improve methodology for estimating Chinook/pink escapement. An assessment of crab stocks also continued.

During the reporting period, a joint steelhead stock assessment project was funded and undertaken by Nisga'a Lisims Government and B.C. An aggregate population estimate was produced for the Nass River summer steelhead run as part of the fish wheel assessment project. British Columbia amended its Angling Guide Licences to reflect Nisga'a Final Agreement provisions and provided \$13,000 to the Nisga'a "Herring Spawn on Kelp Feasibility in the Nass Area" study.

Co-operative management of the resource has extended beyond the three parties. Under a Canada/U.S. initiative, the Nisga'a Nation was included in technical discussions on the assessment of Northern Boundary Sockeye. The results of the joint analysis produced a common international approach for sockeye assessment and accounting.

Product Development

Building strategic partnerships outside the Nisga'a Nation is a priority for Nisga'a Fisheries. In 2000, NLG entered into an alliance with Canadian Fishing Company (Canfisco) to process Nisga'a commercial fish. Canfisco supplied Nisga'a Fisheries with personnel, fish totes, and expertise in processing fish. Beginning in 2001, five percent of the annual catch is now utilised for value-added products, including premium quality, specially labelled Nisga'a wild sockeye salmon.

Lisims Fisheries Conservation Trust

Nisga'a Lisims Government is committed to ensuring a healthy, productive aquatic ecosystem for the benefit of present and future generations of all peoples. In pursuit of this goal, NLG applies the highest possible standards in the areas of conservation and environmental protection. That commitment is ensured, in part, by the Lisims Fisheries Conservation Trust.



Managed by trustees appointed by the NLG and Canada, the Lisims Trust promotes conservation and protection of Nass Area fish species; facilitates sustainable management, watershed restoration, and wildlife habitat restoration; and supports Nisga'a participation in fisheries stewardship for the benefit of all Canadians.

Developmental Lending

Nisga'a Lisims Government has entered into a Loan Fund Management Agreement with Tricorp, a lending institution focused on First Nations, to provide developmental loans to Nisga'a commercial fishers that are licensed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. This new initiative provides Nisga'a fishers with an additional source of financing in the form of low-interest loans and partial loan forgiveness for start-up and operating costs. This Loan Fund Management Agreement opens up new opportunities for Nisga'a commercial fishers. During the reporting period, 63 Nisga'a fishers took advantage of the program.

Hydroelectric Power Generation

Under the terms of the Nisga'a Final Agreement, the Nisga'a Nation is able to investigate the hydroelectric power potential of unrecorded waters in streams (other than the Nass River) that flow wholly or partially within Nisga'a Lands. Now that the question of land ownership is settled, exploration of this opportunity can begin.

Like much of the rest of British Columbia, the rivers and streams within Nisga'a Lands are rich in energy potential. During the reporting period, Nisga'a Lisims Government and a Vancouver-based energy company began reviewing hydrology data with the goal of developing small-scale "run of river" class hydroelectric generating facilities in the Nass Valley, both on and off Nisga'a Lands.

Hydroelectric power generation would be useful in promoting economic development on Nisga'a Lands. With greater energy generating capacity, Nisga'a communities would have an important asset to attract business to the Nass Valley. Should it be successful, this project has the potential to not only provide power for the Nisga'a Nation, but also to provide NLG with the opportunity to negotiate the sale of surplus "green" electricity back to the provincial power grid.



Melvin Stevens, 47
Wolf clan

Manager, Laxgalt'sap
Forest Corporation.
Interviewed at Laxgalt'sap
log sorting site.

Change is happening, but it's happening slowly. Slowly but surely. One of the things that we've known all along is that the treaty is not a book of guarantees — it's a book of opportunities. It means that opportunities are there, but nothing will be handed to us on a silver platter. We have to work for what we get. This is the real world. If anyone thinks that it's one big handout, they need a reality check. They're dead wrong.

Laxgalt'sap Forest Corporation is a community-owned company. The board of directors is completely separate from the village government. The company was in existence before the treaty, but now with the treaty in place we have this opportunity. Before the treaty, we weren't able to have our own contractors. Now the majority of the work is with Nisga'a contractors. That's a nice change. Nisga'a have control over their resources on their own lands. It wasn't like that before.

We're not tied to the domestic markets, but the rules of general application still apply as far as the resource goes. We're able to put some of our timber on the export markets in Asia — to the Japanese, Koreans and Chinese. All this is through the treaty. We also have some local sales to guitar and violinmakers, like Timbertone. They like our white spruce.

Our company still doesn't have a long-term tenure. That's one of our goals — as is the possibility of a value-added secondary manufacturing facility. All these were not possible before the treaty, now they are possible. Opportunities exist, but you will not get them if you just sit back and wait for them to come to you.

It will all fare well providing the government listens to the people. The people know what's best. But this is just the second year. We're barely into the first phase of our treaty; not even the first full term of our government. It needs time — we'll get everything squared away and on track. In the meantime we will

continue to work, have our company grow, and have most of our people working.

I envision our company being one of the major companies within the northern district. Not just the Nass Valley. We have nearly 30 guys working here; Nisga'a and non-Nisga'a. I don't care who they are as long as they can do the job. Without the treaty, there would be no jobs here for any of them.

We can sit around and still be in a treaty, but unless we get up and start going after the opportunities, we will be just as dormant as we were before. Opportunities are just that: opportunities. They will stay opportunities unless we capitalise on them and turn them into success stories.

“...the treaty is not a book of guarantees
— it's a book of opportunities.”

