



## Counting on Salmon The Heydon Bay Salmon Enumeration Project

“Campbell River Band wants to ensure that our future generations have fish for food and ceremonial purposes,” says Campbell River Indian Band Councillor Tony Roberts Jr. “Our salmon enumeration activity on Heydon Creek is a vital part of that.” Until 2009, however, that was easier said than done.

Since 1998, Campbell River Band had been working with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) at Heydon Creek, 65 kilometres north of Campbell River. Using a salmon counting fence, the goal was for Heydon Creek to be a representative salmon indicator stream for the Johnstone Strait area, counting not only Sockeye, but Chum, Coho and pinks as well.

It is important to have that information in order to make planning decisions based on trends in fish production; but the enumeration crew were challenged by inconsistent funding, making it difficult to gather sufficient information year after year. “We needed to make sure we could collect data continually,” says Roberts. “But without consistent funding, which was our situation until 2009, that just wasn’t possible.”

In 2009 Campbell River Band decided to use its Coast Funds conservation fund allocation, a secure committed source of annual funding, to support the creation of a complete and consistent record of all salmon runs on Heydon Creek right through to the 2013 season. Its other partners have been DFO and the Living Rivers Trust Fund. The Band was already contributing its own funds to the project (and continues to do so).

The First Nation intends to utilize the data collected to develop a long term plan to enhance habitat and spawning channels in the area. Modification of the fence to allow for counting and tagging of juveniles heading out to sea, as well as adults, is a work in progress. “Our overall goal,” says Roberts, “Is the restoration of balance to the ecosystem in the watershed. That’s a very important priority.”

Fisheries biologist Kelsey Campbell, who is a Band member, adds: “Our First Nation has been the steward of the Heydon Creek watershed for generations. With so much uncertainty around access to fisheries stocks, the Heydon Bay project represents an opportunity for a diverse group

of organizations to work together towards realizing a worthwhile goal that will result in real benefits to the environment and our community.”

Part of the balancing act is ensuring there are enough young people like Kelsey involved in carrying on the work into the future. Tony Roberts says: “One of our key goals has also been to build capacity within the First Nation in fisheries management. We would like to see our youth take an interest in fish management and production. Ultimately, we hope we will see more of our youth work towards becoming fisheries biologists as well. After all, this is all about our future generations.”

