



Àghâ T'á Huch'gíxh wusitíyi gàw
A time when salmon are no more

Teslin, Yukon



Gadzûsda, Virginia Smarch, at her fish camp on the Teslin River (VS 1980)

“That is who we are, part of the land, part of the water.”

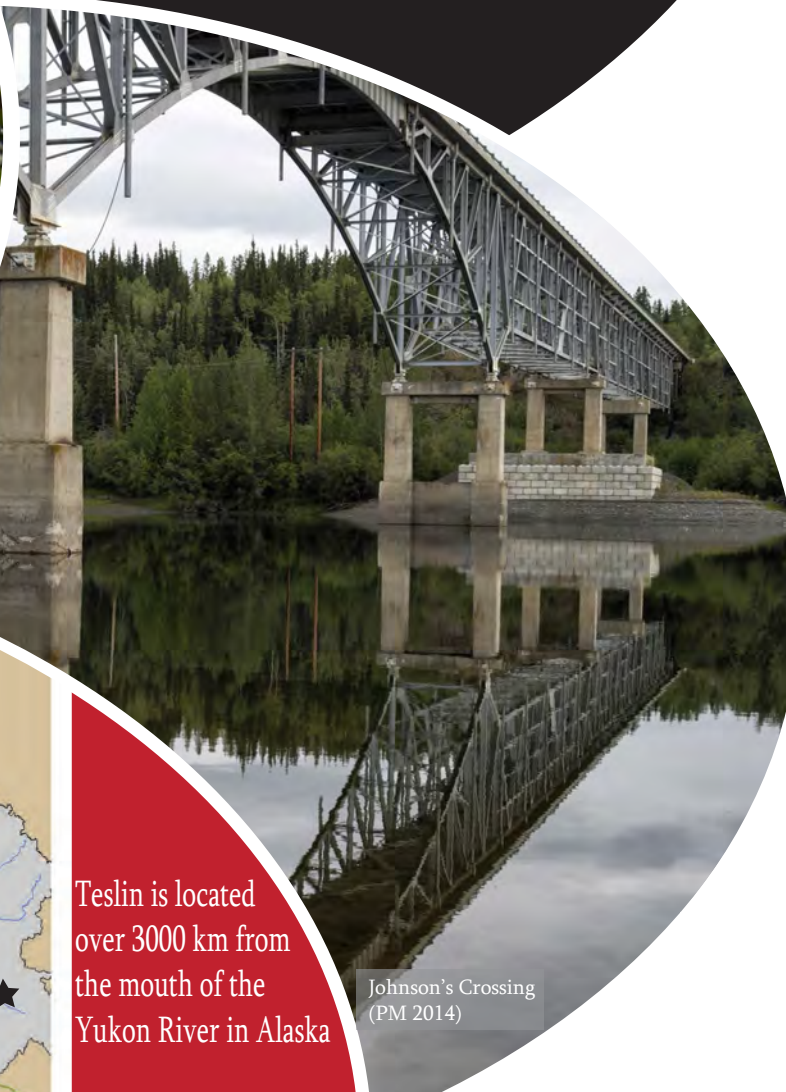
Teslin Elder, the late Virginia Smarch - early days of Land Claims negotiations

The Teslin Story

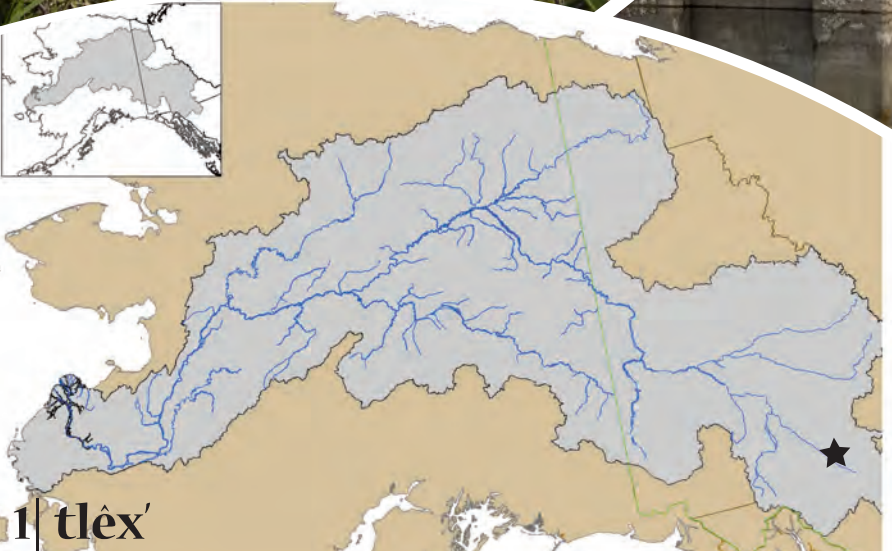
*That is who we are;
part of the land,
part of the water*



Smith family fish camp at Johnson's Crossing (PM 2014)



Johnson's Crossing (PM 2014)



Teslin is located over 3000 km from the mouth of the Yukon River in Alaska

Teslin is located in southern-central Yukon on Teslin Lake, a major headwater of the Yukon River Drainage. These headwaters are in the heart of the traditional territory of the Teslin Tlingit people. The Teslin Tlingit have shared ancestry with the coastal Tlingit of Southeast Alaska and the Inland Tlingit of Taku River First Nation and Carcross-Tagish First Nation. There are five Teslin Tlingit Clans which play a central role in Teslin Tlingit Council's (TTC) government structure and cultural practices. They are the Raven Child Clan (*Kùkhittàn*), Frog Clan (*Ishkitàn*), Wolf Clan (*Yanyèdi*), Beaver Clan (*Dèshitàn*), and Eagle Clan (*Dakhl'awèdi*).

Chinook salmon (*T'à*), also known as King salmon, and a part of the *Ishkitàn* Clan, is an important resource for Teslin Tlingit Citizens, being both culturally significant and important for subsistence. Once, Chinook salmon returned to the Teslin area in numbers that made the rivers run red. Over the last 30 years, pressures such as ocean bycatch, in-river commercial fisheries, and climate change have cumulatively taken a significant toll on the Chinook salmon returns. TTC has taken a proactive approach to salmon management and has implemented conservation measures for over 15 years in response to the alarming decrease in the salmon run size and quality. TTC Citizens have committed to a full closure of Chinook salmon fishing for many years.

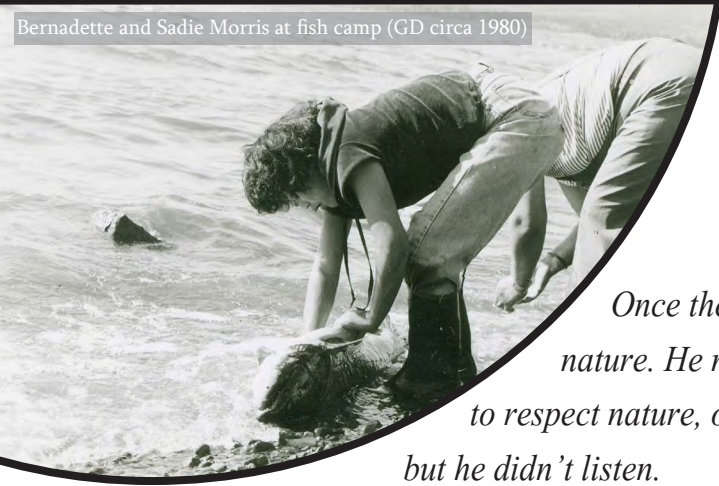
With over 25% of Canadian origin Chinook salmon returning on average to the Teslin headwaters, these stocks are an excellent indicator of the strength and health of the entire run. With a journey of over 3000 kilometres from the mouth of the river, the salmon returning to this area face the greatest number of challenges on their return trip, many of which are out of the control of TTC. Combating the ongoing decline with strict conservation measures is the last tool left to the community of Teslin before artificial means of boosting the population will become necessary.

It is a great responsibility to care for spawning grounds of this amazing species – a responsibility that the Teslin Tlingit take very seriously. Ensuring that future generations will have the opportunity to continue to experience the relationship that Teslin Tlingit people have shared with the salmon since time immemorial is of the utmost priority. Salmon remains culturally and nutritionally important. Each summer, out of necessity, Taku River Salmon is flown into Teslin via floatplane so that our people can at least continue to eat salmon. The story of the declines of Chinook salmon, and its effects on the Teslin Tlingit is now spreading quickly along the Yukon River drainage – a foreshadow of the widespread decline in Chinook salmon numbers now being felt along the entire drainage.

The Teslin Tlingit remain strong in our protection of Chinook salmon. We are determined to see the rivers run red with large, spawning Chinook once again. It is with this determination and strength, drawn from the heart of community and culture, that we hope to inspire others to learn about this crisis, and join us in our commitment to conserving the Yukon River Chinook Salmon.



Cutting Taku Coho salmon at Tlingit Celebration (WM 2011)



Bernadette and Sadie Morris at fish camp (GD circa 1980)

The Salmon Boy

Once there was a young boy who was very disrespectful to nature. He made fun of many things. His mother tried to tell him to respect nature, or else the consequences would come back on him, but he didn't listen.

One day, he saw salmon eggs, and he started laughing at them, exclaiming, "Those look like maggots!", and the Salmon People heard. When the Salmon People returned, as they do every year, and heard him making fun of them, making fun of their eggs, they decided to teach him a lesson. They turned the boy into a salmon so that he was forced to live his life as a salmon to see what he was making fun of. He returned to the ocean with the Salmon People and lived with them.

When it was his turn to return to spawn, he returned to the stream where his village was, and was caught - by his mother. His mother was preparing to fillet him when he called out, "Mom! Mom! It's me! Don't eat me!" His mother recognized that he was wearing a necklace that she had given him as a gift, and knew it was her son. He cried, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Mom, for making fun of the salmon, and I have learned my lesson!"

When he learned his lesson on how to respect the Salmon People and all of nature, he was finally allowed to return to his people.

As told by Yanyèdi elder, Madeleine Jackson, and Duane Gastant' Aucoin.

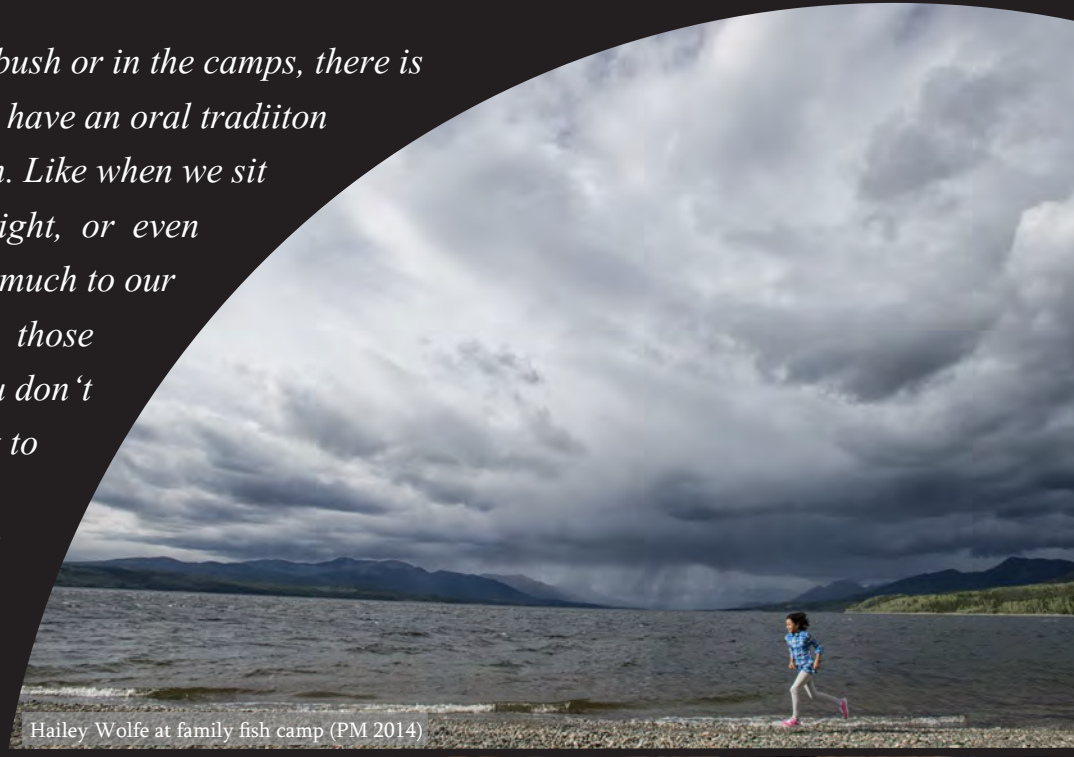
This is a well-known traditional story that has been passed from one generation to the next. Stories such as this are an important part of gathering at fish camp.

Salmon People

As Teslin Tlingit, we believe that salmon are a people. Not just a food, not just a fish. We believe that the Salmon People live under the ocean, and come every year to bless us with their presence and to share their life with us.

When people gather in the bush or in the camps, there is a lot of history, because we have an oral tradiiton where we pass stories down. Like when we sit around the campfire at night, or even during the day. There is so much to our culture that you learn at those camps. They'll tell you. You don't play with anything. You got to respect everything, and everything has a spirit, and you have to treat it a certain way.

-- Georgina Sidney



Hailey Wolfe at family fish camp (PM 2014)



Cordell Jules and Jim Smarch inspecting old nets (PM 2014)

*Ha Kus Teyea means
our culture
or, literally,
our way.
It guides our way of life.*

Remembering Fish Camp

Fish camp is important to us. It wasn't just about fishing, it was a place where family and friends gathered. We did not just fish at fish camp, it was a good time to pick berries - some people went on the mountains from the camp, too. It was the main gathering place in the summer months. I miss that a lot.

-- Richard Dewhurst, TTC Citizen

I can remember fishing salmon with my grandma, my dad, my mom, my aunties, my cousins, always excited to go to fish camp.

-- Roland Gergel, TTC Citizen

All I wanna do is to be able to gut a salmon, cut out the backbone, cut off the head, take the guts out, and dry it on a rack. Nothing too hard about that. I'm not asking for anything out of the ordinary than what I used to get.

-- Wilburt Smarch, TTC Elder

I remember when I used to check the net when I was younger, with my mother, and we used to catch King salmon, and all kinds. Lots of salmon.

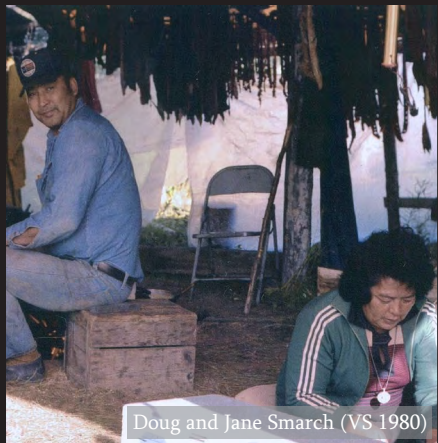
-- Georgina Sidney, TTC Elder

That's our source of food in the summertime. Wintertime we get our moose, our caribou, and in the summertime, all of us rely on fish.

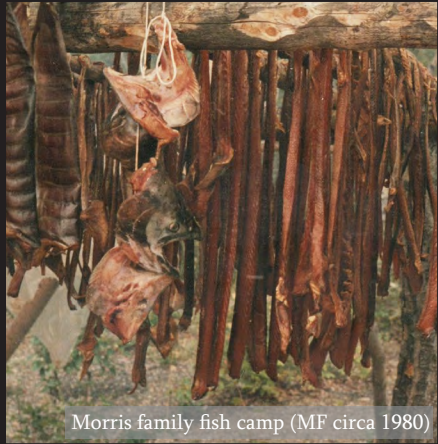
-- Clara Jules, TTC Citizen



Virginia Smarch and local children (VS 1980)



Doug and Jane Smarch (VS 1980)



Morris family fish camp (MF circa 1980)



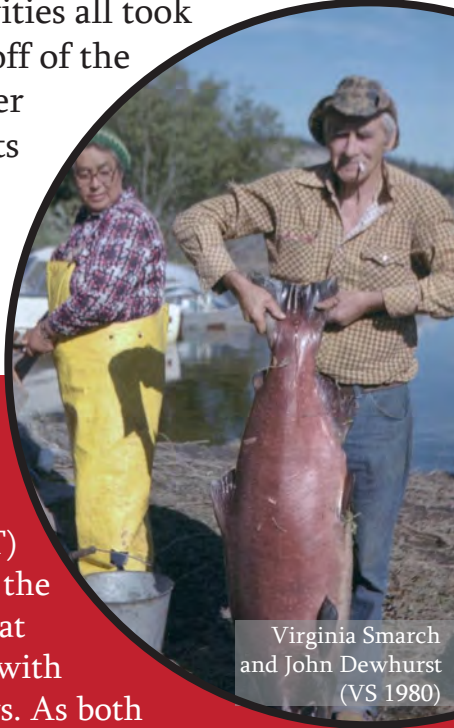
Cliff Geddes and Doug Smarch (VS 1980)

My Grandma's Salmon

Photos from 30 years ago are reminders of what the salmon runs in the Teslin area once looked like. Experiences and knowledge once passed on to our children through summers spent at fish camp are now conveyed through photos and stories of a disappearing way of life. In only one generation, we have experienced a transition from abundant Chinook salmon that returned life and nutrients to the forests, animals and people of the Teslin area, to empty fish camps and silent spawning grounds.

Our Elders, and many of their children, speak of days when salmon were so abundant here that they were able to catch enough salmon in one week of drift netting to provide for their entire family – extended family often share a fish camp – with dried salmon until the next fishing season. Signs of the return of the salmon, such as changes in the color of the water, were deeply felt, as anticipation of the salmon run rippled throughout the community. The salmon returned in such numbers that it seemed possible to walk across the rivers on the backs of the salmon. The children of these times remember standing in awe, slightly frightened by the sheer size of an adult Chinook salmon, sometimes longer than they were tall! Even in these times of abundance, it was clearly understood that a person did not fish for more than they needed, and all parts of the fish were used.

Berry picking, hunting, and many other land-based cultural activities all took place during the months at fish camp. Families were able to live off of the land for much of this time, and to also gather the berries and other food that would be stored for the winter. The nutrients in all parts of the salmon are an essential part of the Tlingit diet, and Chinook salmon was, and continues to be, an important part of the Teslin Tlingit culture, traditions, and diet.

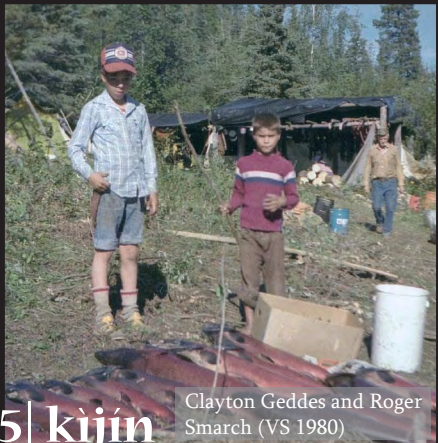


Virginia Smarch and John Dewhurst (VS 1980)

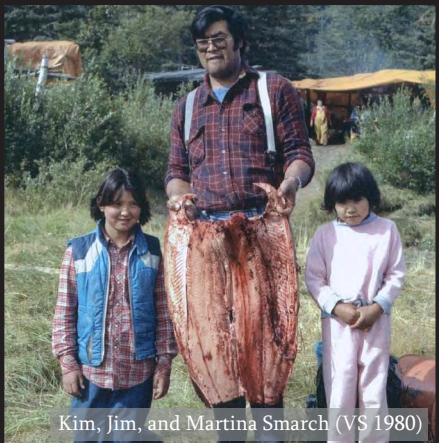
Pacific Salmon Treaty

“The United States (U.S.) and Canada signed the *Pacific Salmon Treaty* (PST) in 1985 to address interception of salmon originating in one nation, by the fisheries of the other nation....The first principle of the PST directed that overfishing should be prevented and each country should be provided with benefits equivalent to the production of salmon originating in its waters. As both countries derive benefits from shared salmon resources, the welfare of salmon stocks was a matter of concern for both countries and each country desired to cooperate in the conservation, rebuilding, management, research and enhancement of shared salmon stocks.”

-- Yukon River Salmon Agreement Handbook



Clayton Geddes and Roger Smarch (VS 1980)



Kim, Jim, and Martina Smarch (VS 1980)

The Endangered Fish Camp

Chinook salmon begin to arrive in the Teslin area in mid to late August, and by then, the run at the mouth of the river has been distributed amongst the many tributaries along the Yukon River drainage. Increasing pressures along the river has resulted in fewer Chinook salmon returning to the Teslin area. The loss of Chinook salmon has had a tremendous impact on the Teslin Tlingit's culture, community, and way of life.

In the past, children of the Teslin area spent their entire summers at fish camp, reconnecting with family, learning our cultural practices, and experiencing the fun and wonder of the local environment, and how to care for and respect it. Memories of fish camp are a shared linkage throughout the community. Fish camp is vitally important for other traditional practices, such as berry picking, but without the salmon to sustain families at fish camp, it has become too costly to manage long stays with extended family. Some of our children have never had an opportunity to experience a fully operational fish camp. Our Elders and parents worry about never having the chance to pass on vital skills and teachings that are learned through experiences at fish camp.

Chinook salmon are an essential part of the Tlingit diet, providing rich oils and nutrients during winter months when this extra energy is required. Although salmon is still an important part of the Teslin Tlingit diet, the salmon that is flown into the community from the Taku River is mainly Sockeye and Coho. These are not species traditionally processed and eaten in this area. Traditional ways of cutting, drying, canning, or other forms of processing, do not work in the same way with different species of salmon. Traditional salmon fishing locations, net-making skills, and fishing techniques are being lost altogether.

2011 saw one of the last operations of a fish camp in the area, which was limited to processing and drying salmon flown into the camp from the Taku River.

Our fish camps that we used to have, are now only stories and legends that 10 to 15 year old children are only hearing about. They have never experienced fish camp. Hopefully one day they will.

-- Chief Carl Sidney

A great-grandmother gathers with four generations at the family fish camp and reflects on a photo of her full fish rack, sadly devoid of Chinook salmon for many years.

Melanie Douville with Grace McLoed, Richard Dewhurst, Grace Dewhurst, Philip McLoed, and Leigha Douville (PM 2014)

Auntie and niece stand on the banks of the family fish camp where plentiful, large Chinook used to be laid out for cleaning. The last salmon processed at this camp were flown in from the Taku River so that younger generations could experience their cultural and family traditions.

Grace Dewhurst and Robin Smarch (PM 2014)

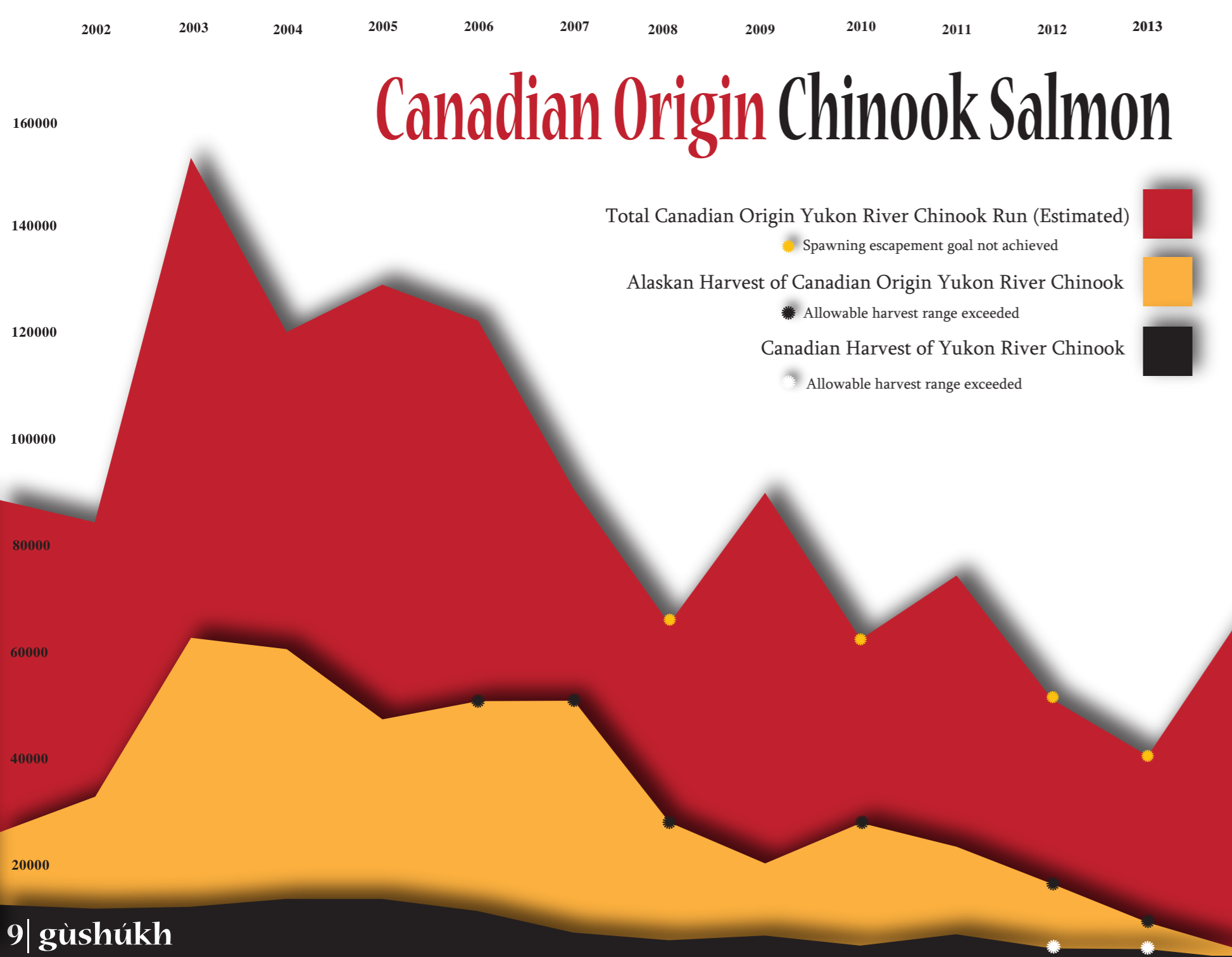
An empty, collapsed fish rack represents the sacrifices this family made for the conservation of Chinook salmon. A photo from the family collection is evidence of the healthy salmon runs that once reached the Teslin area.

Bernadette Morris (PM 2014)

A mother and father describe to their daughter how the fish rack at their family fish camp, now fallen at their feet, used to hold their winter's supply of Chinook salmon before the declines in the run.

Darin and Hailey Wolfe, and Roberta Jackson (PM 2014)

Cordell and Julian Jules, Kim Smarch and Jim Smarch at family fish camp (PM 2014)



Canadian Origin Chinook Salmon

Yukon River

Salmon Management

The majority of Chinook salmon migrate to the ocean to feed and grow for several years. This puts them in international fishing waters, where they are at risk of the multiple effects of large-scale, international fishing operations.

Bycatch
The pollock industry in the Bering Sea - Aleutian Islands Management Area is currently maintaining a bycatch that is much lower than their performance standards (set at a hard cap of 47,591), reporting a bycatch of around 16,000 Chinook salmon in 2013. This is a smaller bycatch than some previous years, but still amounts to more salmon than have been available to the Yukon First Nation fishery for the last 3 years! Implementation of a new program since 2011 provides incentives for minimizing bycatch, but has not yet produced notable results.

Food depletion
Pacific Herring stocks make up a large proportion of the in-ocean diet of Chinook salmon, but are also targeted by commercial fisheries for Herring roe, considered a delicacy in Japan.

Competition
Japanese Chum hatcheries release over a billion Chum salmon into the Pacific Ocean every year, creating additional in-ocean competition for wild salmon stocks.

Predicting salmon run sizes is complex!

The state of the Yukon River Chinook salmon, and their management, is constantly changing. Management and conservation has come a long way in recent years, but it is difficult to predict where we will be in even a short time. Strategies and issues will likely evolve over coming years.

Chinook salmon return to their spawning grounds at various ages, generally ranging from 5-8 years. This means that predicting the number of salmon that will come back is dependent on past run sizes and productivity. Different proportions of each age class may return from year to year. Predicting run size is made more difficult by the uncertainty in productivity, effects of climate change, and changing population dynamics, such as male-female ratios.

Enough salmon need to be able to return to their spawning grounds every year for the species to survive. Management in both Canada and Alaska is driven by the goal of meeting spawning requirements, called escapement, across the Canada - U.S. border. Meeting this goal depends, in part, on the estimate of the total run size, which is hard to predict. This uncertainty and pressure on management bodies to meet the needs of Alaskan in-river fisheries has, in recent years, resulted in the escapement threshold not being met many times. In the last eight years, escapement has only been met three times.

Years with stronger runs than predicted may see a higher number of Canadian-origin salmon crossing the border as a result of precautionary approaches to the season. Sadly, in-river conservation efforts often wane in the following year. Weaker runs threaten the salmon population and eliminate fishing opportunities in Canada. Effective conservation requires a long-term commitment from everyone.

Canada manages allowable Chinook salmon fisheries using an in-season management matrix that is informed by the run size and quality. Alaska manages harvest using a system of districts that may be given openings, and can be restricted using closures, gear restrictions and species restrictions depending on pre-season predictions and in-season run information.

Current management systems must become more adaptable and responsive for efficient and effective in-season conservation actions to take place. Changes in habitat, ocean conditions, and other pressures that are not well understood, also call for long-term planning. Collaborative management is necessary for promoting consistent, precautionary approaches to the management of all Yukon River salmon species, and proactive protection, rebuilding, and maintenance of their habitats.

Salmon Conservation

The salmon have gotten into a bowl of resource politics, and I don't know if that's a good place for it.
 -- Wilburt Smarch

The power to conserve lies with the user. Fishers along the river do not need to wait for federal governments to implement conservation measures when the lack of long-term sustainability threatens our way of life.

For many years, TTC has shared the message that there needs to be drastic conservation measures taken. In order to see the returns of salmon that once spawned along the Yukon River drainage, fishers along the river need to commit to a closure of at least two cycles to allow stocks to rebuild, and provide some time for scientific research to catch up. That is 12 years! Having committed to escalating voluntary closures for almost 15 years, Teslin Tlingit Citizens will be the first to admit that it is not an easy task. Nor is it an easy decision for a community to make.

Restoration projects may, over many years, succeed in artificially sustaining Chinook salmon numbers, but long-term commitment to conservation from all users along the entire Yukon River drainage is needed if the large, 7- and 8-year-old Chinook salmon are to be restored to this population.

Loss of the large Chinooks also has effects on the population that intensifies declines. Smaller females produce fewer and smaller eggs, reducing productivity. Recent years have seen productivity levels of Chinook salmon rapidly declining to a level below a 1:1 ratio, indicating that spawning salmon are not currently replacing themselves in the population, let alone providing for potential growth in the population.

Although Chinook stocks and their productivity continue to decline, salmon management has experienced a lot of progress in recent years. We have to keep these up if we hope to achieve a sustainable, shared harvest in the future!

I'm not going to tell my kids, my grandkids, that I didn't do anything to try to fight for these salmon for them. I could not look them in the eye and tell them, "Well, my cache was full, but sorry that you don't have anything."
 --Duane Gastant' Aucoin



Teslin school kids watch salmon filleting (PM 2014)



TTC Game Guardian filleting salmon at the school (PM 2014)

Salmon Education and Media

TTC has undertaken, and continues to develop, several community-based projects, aimed at increasing local, territorial, national and international awareness. A video created for the International Salmon Summit in Fairbanks in 2014, is an example of this. TTC staff and Citizens attend all salmon-related meetings to share and receive important information.



Research and Restoration

TTC maintains a temperature monitoring network in a number of salmon-bearing streams, in an effort to develop a baseline and better assess future effects of climate change on salmon survival. TTC is currently carrying out research within the traditional territory to inform future habitat and stock restoration projects.

Political Action

TTC actively governs and manages local salmon conservation through strong political commitments, such as passing resolutions, that reaffirm the significant dedication of TTC to conservation of Chinook salmon. Concerns around Chinook salmon management have been raised with federal, state, and territorial governments, and the United Nations.

"Flying Salmon"

Since 2010, TTC Citizens and their government have paid to fly Taku River Salmon in from the community of Atlin, B.C. to support local conservation efforts during the many consecutive years of low returning Chinook numbers. TTC Heritage Centre also runs an educational fish camp at the Heritage Centre every year using Taku salmon.



Salmon Management

In 2010, TTC developed and implemented the Teslin Tlingit Salmon Management Plan to actively respond to Chinook salmon declines. The plan is currently being reviewed and updated. TTC actively participates in salmon management discussions and decisions.

SPAWNING SUCCESS

Saving the future of the salmon run for everybody requires us all to work together.

TTC is incredibly encouraged by the efforts of other First Nations, individuals, communities, and organizations that are part of this salmon conservation movement. IT IS STILL NOT ENOUGH.



salmon cover/sticker art by: William Callaghan, 2012

Many thanks to:

The TTC Citizens and others who contributed to the book: Duane Gastant' Aucoin, Madeleine Jackson, Roland Gergel, Georgina Sidney, Jane Smarch, Doug Smarch Sr., Jim Smarch Sr., Kim Smarch, Cordell Jules, Julian Jules, Robin Smarch, James Smarch, Grace Dewhurst, Richard Dewhurst, Melanie Douville, Philip McLoed, Darin Wolfe, Sarah Wolfe, Roberta Jackson, Linda Sidney, Bodean Wolfe, Hailey Wolfe, Wilma Magill, Bessie Cooley, Wilbur Smarch, Clara Jules, Chief Carl Sidney, and Bernadette Morris.

Historic photo contributors: Wilbur Smarch (Virginia Smarch Collection), Richard Dewhurst (Grace Dewhurst Collection) and the Morris Family.

Yukon First Nations and Alaskan Tribes who have made efforts to contribute to the conservation and protection of the Yukon River Chinook Salmon.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada Managers and the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee for all of their hard work and continuing support and collaboration in all things salmon.

The Departments of Lands and Resources and Heritage for compiling and designing the book.

All TTC Citizens for their many years of dedicated sacrifice and support.

Photo collection abbreviations: GD = Grace Dewhurst; WM = Wilma Magill; VS = Virginia Smarch; MF = Morris Family

Photos by Peter Mather indicated by: PM 2014.

As always, to all those who dedicate themselves to the conservation of the incredible Yukon River Chinook salmon, we thank you.

Our Commitment...



TESLIN TLINGIT COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

TESLIN TLINGIT COUNCIL
ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
BROOKS BROOK, YUKON
July 7-9, 2015

RESOLUTION # 2015-009

CHINOOK SALMON CONSERVATION

WHEREAS the General Council supports the sustainability of the Yukon River Chinook Salmon ("Chinook") to ensure there is salmon for future generations to harvest;

WHEREAS the Teslin Tlingit Council's conservation measures exercised in the 2014 season improved the run, albeit at a minimal level;

WHEREAS the 2015 projected run size is scheduled to be the lowest on record, with an estimated 59,000-70,000 of Canadian origin; and

WHEREAS the State of Alaska and many Yukon First Nations have exercised significant conservation efforts in 2014 and intend to continue these stringent conservation measures in the 2015 season.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

1. The TTC Executive Council and Lands and Resource Department implement a full mandatory closure of Chinook harvest for the 2015 season throughout the Teslin Tlingit Traditional Territory, inclusive of Yukon and British Columbia;
2. The Executive Council work with other Yukon River First Nations (Yukon and Alaska) and the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Alaska Management Agencies to achieve a complete closure of the Chinook harvest throughout the Yukon River for the 2015 season; and
3. The Executive Council to take any further action necessary to conserve and protect the Chinook.

...Needs Your Support

The beautiful salmon artwork below is available as a sticker. Please place these in a visible place to show your support for Yukon River Chinook salmon conservation and help to bring **Chinook salmon**, a part of **our culture**, back to the Yukon!





TESLIN TLINGIT COUNCIL