

The Environmental Movement in

Prince Rupert

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I would like to thank all those who participated in the research process and fundamentally helped to shape the final report. Thanks and appreciation to the members of the Prince Rupert Environmental Society, Oona River Resource Association, the World Wildlife Fund, local biologists, members of the Special Committee for Sustainable Aquaculture, Pan Fish, and leaders in Gitxaala for taking time out of their busy schedules to talk with me.

Introducing the goal:

The principle objective of this research project is to outline the environmental movement in Prince Rupert and to determine how local and regional environmental organizations, such as the Prince Rupert Environmental Society, and international NGOs, like the World Wildlife Fund are approaching environmental problems specific to the North Coast.

The community members involved with environmental organizations ultimately led the research process and helped to sharpen my understanding of the environmental issues identified in this area of BC. A number of specific environmental concerns were raised in each interview ranging from off shore oil and gas, to problems with Prince Rupert's sewer system flowing directly into the harbour. However, the recurrent theme that developed through the interview process is the predominant social and political concern surrounding aquaculture in Prince Rupert, specifically salmon fish farms. Consistently, salmon fish farms on the North Coast emerge as the cultural, political, and environmental concern that remain on the agenda of environmental organizations and community leaders in both Prince Rupert and Gitxaala.

Discussion of methods:

Gathering the information needed to understand the environmental movement in Prince Rupert began by talking with the members of various environmental organizations. These discussions helped me to develop a list of individuals, which included members of PRES, community members, WWF representative, local political leaders, local biologists, elected and hereditary leaders in Gitxaala, and resource workers. I interviewed the licensing and development manager of Pan Fish and Gitxaala's economic development adviser. This interview was conducted to inform my understanding of the environmental movement in this area from the perspective of a corporation that is being challenged by the work of environmental organizations and the Gitxaala First Nations who have chosen to utilize their resources to improve upon the social and economic conditions of their village. This interview was a part of a natural progression that developed in the research process because the major concerns of community environmental groups, community members and leaders.

I interviewed approximately 15 people and the majority of these interviews were conducted in Prince Rupert, of the 15 interviews, 11 of them were formal interviews that were recorded and four were informal interviews.

In addition to the interviews that I conducted in Prince Rupert, I spent a weekend in Oona River where I attended a meeting of the local preservation group called Oona River Resources Association. This meeting focused fund raising, future research projects and group affiliations.

After having spent a number of weeks talking with local environmental organizations the consistent emphasis on the fish farm issue required revising my

research to focus on this question. I approached Gitxaala community leaders to include their perspective and position on fish farms, and their responses to the environmental movement's anti-fish farm stance. To illustrate the differences between the environmental organizations and Gitxaala's perspective on fish farms, I will outline the position of the various groups and make comparisons.

The Prince Rupert Environmental Society (PRES) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF):

Some of the major differences that I saw between environmental organizations have to do with the size of the organization, for example PRES versus WWF. These groups have different approaches to dealing with the issue of salmon fish farms ranging from being highly visible and active in the community to taking a neutral stance that requires collaborative work with the government, corporations and community members. Groups such as PRES operate as a “watch-dog” and serve to monitor the issue of fish farms and take action by protesting, letter writing campaigns, and public forums. In addition varying levels of funding contribute to how environmental organizations approach issues important to them and their ability to recruit supporters and media attention.

The Prince Rupert Environmental Society has developed an anti-fish farm campaign. This includes monitoring the issue in the media, following governmental committees such as the Special Committee for Sustainable Aquaculture, a letter writing campaign in the *Daily News* that began in the spring of 2003 and peaked in the summer of 2005, and the production of an educational video titled “Call from a Coast” directed by Twyla Roscovich. Most recently they raised funds to erect a billboard in Victoria on the

Pat Bay Highway that asks for a moratorium on fish farms in the North Coast. All of these tactics are methods for raising public awareness of the issue and can also be used as a recruitment tool. The PRES is strongly apposed to the implementation of fish farms in the North Coast and publicly defends their position. The overarching grievance that directs much of PRES's work on this issue are negative environmental impacts that fish farms have on the wild salmon stocks, the increase in sea lice and disease and the position that fish farms are not an economically viable option for communities like Gitxaala.

In contrast to the PRES's public position against fish farms, international NGOs like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have developed an 11-point position paper that outlines the ecological and social impacts of fish farms on the north coast. This position paper, written July 2003, titled the "Intensive Marine Fish Aquaculture" defines WWF's objectives and positions with regard to this issue. Specifically this paper states that the overriding mission of WWF is to, "recognize[s] the potential value to society arising from aquaculture in terms of providing food security, revenue, and an alternative food source to that derived from wild-caught fish," (WWF position paper, 2003: 1). In addition, the WWF also recognizes the negative environmental impacts of fish farms and provide an 11-point procedural expectation of corporations who wish to develop fish farms. However, representatives of WWF contend that aquaculture is only one of the many issues that the NGO focuses on with the goal of developing a general understanding of a changing ecosystem and ways in which the ecosystem can be protected and sustained. Ultimately, WWF strives to work with corporations,

governments and communities to bring to the forefront of the need of these institutions to include environmental/ “green practices” into the decision making process.

ORRA

ORRA is a small grassroots group that is made up of commercial fishers, concerned residents (Prince Rupert and Oona River), employees of the local salmon hatchery, and area biologists. This group focuses a lot of its work on the hatchery as a form of increasing the community knowledge base and enhancing wild salmon stocks. However, the differences that exist between ORRA and another grassroots group like PRES is their visibility and a specified stance for or against fish farms. ORRA’s focus is on hands on education that increases people knowledge of salmon, and hatcheries. They emphasize a commitment to wild salmon, and have avoided taking a political stance for or against fish farms. This position reflects many issues, including their proximity to and structural links with Gitxaala, and their desire for future collaborations with the community.

Gitxaala’s Position:

Gitxaala’s position on fish farms recognizes the possibility for environmental impacts and in this process has never ceased in placing great importance on environmental regulation measures and monitoring practices. Another important component of their agreement with Pan Fish is ensuring that Gitxaala First Nations have first access to training and jobs associated with regulating and monitoring environmental practices. Included in this agreement is Gitxaala’s right to stop all operations at any sign of environmental destruction.

It is also important to recognize the environmental assessments that have been conducted in Gitxaala to measure the possible impacts of fish farms in the area of the Skeena, and to create a baseline of scientific research that can be used to assess environmental change in the future. A \$2 million baseline study is being conducted in collaboration with traditional ecological knowledge and practices of Gitxaala First Nations and scientific practices. The key component of this development is the full participation of Gitxaala First Nations in defining the baseline, which can be used by the governing body of Gitxaala as a means of monitoring the developmental stages of fish farms in their waters. Gitxaala leaders discuss the fish farm agreement as part of their efforts as a sovereign nation to participate in and benefit from resource use in their traditional territories.

Emerging issues, preliminary conclusions and possible applications:

The environmental movement that has developed in Prince Rupert is a very complex movement that includes a number of diverging key players. These key players include local concerned citizens both native and non-native and local, national and international environmental organizations that produce and structure a lot of the information that people receive about the environment and in this case fish farms. Other important players include powerful corporations like Pan Fish, governmental agencies and committees, and government to government interaction that is formulated on Aboriginal rights and title, and issues of sovereignty and traditional practices.

An emerging issue that I did not anticipate are issues of governance, sovereignty, and participation in the decision making process. Largely these issues are focused on the right of a sovereign nation to harness the resources they have available to them. Another

important issue is the ability of Gitxaala leaders to be involved in the decision making process regarding resource development, an arena that has a long history of marginalizing First Nations perspectives and rights. Gitxaala's efforts to take control these issues are a reflection of the proactive approach taken by Gitxaala in regulating their natural resources.

Finally, a tool that has been used by all of these groups to support their arguments for or against fish farms is science. The science of fish farms has been used on both sides of the argument where each player contends that their science is the science that reveals the truth about the implementation of fish farms. Science is used to legitimate the claims that environmental groups, corporations and Gitxaala are making about fish farms, however the science has not lead to one specific truth about fish farms but multiple truths that are used in strategic ways by all parties involved.

The predominant arguments that are based on scientific research suggest that one of the biggest problems with fish farms is the use of open net cages.

The science that is associated with counting and monitoring sea lice is being used on both sides of the fish farm debate and have arrived at similar conclusions. These conclusion suggest that yes sea lice transfer does occur as a result of open net cages, but the differences are seen in the numbers and rate at which the wild smolts are impacted by sea lice. Many parties have quoted the scientific studies that are being conducted in the Broughton Archipelago, Scotland, and Ireland, but again the counter argument is that they are inconclusive, thus in need of further research and monitoring.

Another argument that is referred to often is the use of alternative farming practices such as closed containment cages on and off shore, that would reduce the impact of fish farms on wild salmon stocks, but that would increase costs.

Conclusions:

Conclusions that can be drawn from the research conducted at this stage are the importance of the different approaches of each of the environmental organizations and governmental bodies that have participated in the debate over salmon fish farms. Each group brings to light important environmental and social issues that can be used to inform the decision making process and create a process that his more inclusive and equitable. These grassroots organizations, coalitions, and international NGOs serve to create a public discourse about continuing and developing environmental problems that people of all walks of life face. These organizations help to provide information and resources that can be used to combat environmental destruction. However, another important component of this process is understanding the differing economic needs and the rights of a people to determine the best means possible of meeting those needs.

All of these organizations and groups play an important role of regulating social and environmental practices, and challenge the status quo, to not do so would be to accept the social and environmental practices as they are.

In sum, what remains a complex and difficult environmental and social issue presents opportunity for further examination and leads to an inconclusive debate about environmental protection, meeting social and economic needs, and political processes.