

Nuu-chah-nulth and DFO Explore Cultural History Together

More than 70 people came together at the Hupacasath House of Gathering before the holidays to learn about the trading relationships between Vancouver Island First Nations. Among the participants were 30 employees from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).

The workshop was the second time DFO and Nuuchah-nulth gathered to share cultural learning in 2013. The first workshop took place last spring and explored the impacts of colonization of communities and families.

“This time we tried to help people understand how the last one hundred years have impacted the resources our communities depend upon,” said Wii-tsuts-koom (Anne Mack), tyee ha’wilth of the Toquaht Nation. “We wanted to show the importance of those resources to all levels of our communities.”

Uu-a-thluk staff, the Nashuk Youth Council, and a committee made up of Wii-tsuts-koom, Derek Peters (Klii-shin), Kee-kee-kah-yah (Willard Gallic), Tuupuat (Julia Lucas), Pootlash (Harold Amos), and Thla-qua (Georgina Amos) designed the workshop after a request from DFO. Other contributors included Greg Charleson, Robert Watts and Simon Lucas. Facilitator John Rampanen also helped with workshop design and guided the day.

“The facilitation is what made this workshop so successful,” said Wii-tsuts-koom, noting that “the facilitator is fantastic. He has a way of sharing difficult information in a positive way. That makes understanding happen.”

To explore resource relationships before contact, workshop participants sat in different areas of the room. Each

area represented a fictional Vancouver Island First Nation with a wealth of one particular trade item. Oolichan grease, whales, moose, and camas bulbs were some examples.

While simulating activities like trading expeditions and tupaatii (a challenge leading up to marriage), participants also acted out historical roles. DFO Education Coordinator, Christy Wilson, became a traditional speaker for her ‘ha’wilth,’ DFO Aboriginal Affairs Advisor, Gerry Kelly.

“I really appreciated the role playing activities,” Wilson said after the experience. “This interactive experience powerfully illustrated the complexities of resource stewardship and use by Nuuchah-nulth people. It really hit home how families and communities are involved in making [resource] decisions, not just formal government.”

Gerry Kelly added, “I got a sense of how much was at stake in these negotiations...It brought home the message of how important the resources are.”

After exploring a timeline about the historical impacts of colonization to west coast resources, participants enjoyed

a performance by the haahuupayak dancers. The day ended with discussion groups focused on empowering change.

“I was very glad to see the participation from DFO,” said Kee-kee-kah-yah (Willard Gallic). “What we’re trying to do by having this workshop together is to create understanding that will move us ahead together...I’m pleased it hit home.”

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—Gerry Kelly, DFO Aboriginal Affairs Advisor



DFO Education Coordinator Christy Wilson speaks on behalf of her “tyee ha’wilth” during a cultural awareness workshop sponsored by Uu-a-thluk.



Haahuupayak dancers share their songs and dances with workshop participants.