

Ditidaht Fisheries: Passing on the Passion of Sustainable Fisheries

Many years ago, elders of the Ditidaht First Nation on Vancouver Island's west coast told Philip Edgar, "The salmon, bottom fish, and shellfish are really important to our people. Look after them for our kids and grandkids." Since then, these words have guided Edgar's work with the Nation's fisheries department where he has spent the last 22 years carrying out their request.

To ensure this work continues, Edgar has focused his energy on building the skills, knowledge, and passion of the upcoming generation, including his son and students from the Ditidaht school.

"When I was learning [these skills], our life depended on them...we had to have fish for the winter," said Edgar, noting that today, "learning to fish and operate a boat is still vital, especially since Nitinat Lake and Nitinat Bar can be treacherous".

It took Edgar four years to teach his son how to navigate local waters. At the same time, he taught his son how to crab fish, about the fishing banks, where the rocks are, and all the other important skills required to be out on the water.

In March of 2014, his son applied his knowledge when Nuu-chah-nulth fisheries managers came to Nitinat Lake for training. Edgar let his son operate the boat that transported the group. According

to Edgar, this trip and the associated responsibility inspired his son, who now wants to do more work of this kind.

Outside his family, students at the local school have been recipients of Edgar's desire to pass on his knowledge and his undeniable passion for fisheries management. So far Edgar and the school have created a reward program for students with good grades and high attendance. In recognition of their achievements, these students enjoy a day on the water with Edgar, crabbing and long lining.

Edgar also participates in Oceans Day at the school, sharing information about the work he does and teaching the students about aquatic resources. This year he will focus on

low tide seafood. This will also be his fourth year of having summer students work along side him in the Ditidaht fisheries department. For their work, the students receive school credit and skills they can use into the future.

Through the summer student program, Edgar teaches the students how the department operates and how things are done. He emphasizes conservation measures to ensure there will be fish into the future; he also wants the

Philip Edgar (right) has 22 years experience working on fisheries issues for Ditidaht First Nation.



students to learn the importance of working with other fishers out on the water. In their time with the department, the students work on salmon fry salvage, fish and shellfish identification, and bottom fish surveys. They learn about the timing of different species, long lining, and the important value of taking care of their community members.

Students also take part in food fish distribution, helping to deliver seafood to Ditidaht elders. In the future, Edgar would like to train older students to do more assessment work. When asked when he would feel comfortable with the next generation taking over, Edgar said, "I would like to see three or four youth take the skills they have learned and use them to make sure the species are here into the future."

Edgar is excited for the opportunity for training and knowledge sharing around fisheries in his community, especially with youth. He would also like to work with youth who are not engaged in school and get them out on the water learning about fishing. Philip has recently partnered with the school and the health clinic to access funding for youth mentorship activities. This will ensure youth capacity building around fisheries and fisheries management will happen every year and that Edgar will continue to have the opportunity to pass on his knowledge and passion for sustainable fisheries.

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—Philip Edgar, Ditidaht First Nations Fisheries Manager



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- Ditidaht First Nation Elders