

What We Heard

“Fishery guardians are mechanisms of control. We’re fishery officers in transition.”

Getting to Know Community Fishery Guardian Programs

- Fishery guardian programs differ among communities: in some programs, guardians are focused on data collection and stock assessments, while in others, guardians are focused on enforcement patrols. One community no longer has a fishery guardian program as they have ‘catch monitors’ and ‘by-catch monitors.’ Another has ‘stewardship technicians’ to do the technical work of fishery guardians.
- Activities undertaken by fishery guardians may or may not be funded through the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy program. For example, participants said the program did not fund technical work related to invasive species or species at risk – or most fisheries enhancement and habitat restoration initiatives.
 - One participant thought activities discussed during the workshop were far beyond what the program funded, but another recalled that the program included these activities when it first started.
- Participants report that the lack of program funding has reduced the number of fishery guardians in communities, the length of time a guardian may work, and the amount of technical work in which a guardian may be involved. *“We used to work seven months, now we work only four.”* They also said that funding gaps are covered through other sources. *“[The program] only covers wages and fuel.”*

Technical Activities

- Fishery guardians collect data on the number of fish being caught in their community’s fisheries. They are also engaged in a number of fish counting activities, such as stream or creek walks, counting fences, snorkel survey programs, dives and Didson counters. Some use traditional methods to collect this data, including spears and nets.
 - Collected data is shared with the Department in both raw form and summary reports, including stream inventory logs. *“Data is also presented back to the Chief and Council; especially, if the community starts to question it.”*
- Some guardians do stock assessments on select species, including salmon species, crab, and other species. Many are also monitoring the health of one or more rivers and creeks, and doing creel surveys.
- Many participants are involved in fisheries enhancement and habitat restoration activities; in some cases, in partnership with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Province or industry. This includes running fish hatcheries. However, these activities are not funded through the program.

- Participants want fishery guardians to be able to do more work to enhance fish and restore fish habitat, and address invasive species and species at risk issues. *“We need fishery guardians to take control over these things.”* A few support continued funding for habitat restoration after the Fish Habitat Restoration Initiative ends. Others view funding for habitat work as a way to retain fishery guardian staff beyond the fishery and prevent seasonal lay-offs. *“I wish we could do more on the habitat side, but when chum is done, we’re done.”*

Monitoring and Enforcement Activities

“It’s a poacher’s dream – you know it’s a place that needs to be monitored, but there’s not enough money for it.”

- Fishery guardians monitor food, social and ceremonial fisheries and other fisheries and activities taking place in rivers, creeks and streams in their territories. Patrols take place both by foot and by boat, and may be during the day or at night, depending on the fishery.
 - One participant has a group of monitors (not fishery guardians) to oversee their food and ceremonial fishery. They also issue designation cards to community harvesters. *“Eventually, we want to use it as an enforcement tool – to yank a card if someone breaks the rules.”* Two others have staff to monitor offloads as well as community distribution of fish.
- A few participants have designated fishery guardians in their communities. Others are interested in having designated guardians – and being more involved in enforcement duties. *“That’s part of the reason for coming here. This program is important for my community and no one has the designation.”*
 - Participants point out that enforcement is different than compliance – and that a duty belt with a firearm is worn by a fishery or police officer. *“There are liabilities to train fishery guardians to have that power and that’s why they backed away from it a long time ago.”* They also think support for having enforcement duties varies by Nation.
- One participant said that their fishery guardians have observe, record and report duties, and the information is passed directly to local fishery officers. Another said they monitor recreational fisheries quite a bit: *“especially those not local.”* Still another said their fishery guardians enforce Tribal regulations, closely monitoring certain days that members fish and even closing the fishery to protect chinook. *“We also did this to make a point to the Department and commercial and recreational fisheries that we need more cutbacks of chinook takes.”*
- A few participants do joint patrols and work closely with fishery officers. They may also work closely with RCMP or conservation officers.
 - Some want to participate in joint patrols and other collaborations to ‘legitimize’ fishery guardians or to restart joint patrols that were done in the past. Others think that the presence of fishery guardians is enough to deter any illegal activity. Still others question how such collaborations would work as *“it would be a challenge with the way Conservation and Protection is viewed by the community.”*
 - Some participants want collaborative monitoring and enforcement activities to be put in place through a protocol or other agreement with the Department, but others may not support these protocols. For example, one participant said the Department has

pressured their community to establish a protocol so they could get access into the territory, but the community does not want the protocol to come out of their allocations. Another found protocols established among nations in certain fishery areas were “not respected” by the Department.

- Some participants are concerned by the lack of fisheries monitoring by the Department. For example, one said there were very few fishery officers in their region and they tended to work in one community.

Community Education and Awareness Activities

“The public comes to us with a lot of questions.”

- Some participants are actively engaged in education and awareness raising activities, including activities directly related to the food, social and ceremonial fishery. *“We have two to three community meetings a year to notify members where we’re at.”* Others are not involved in these types of activities.
 - Participants also said that community education and awareness activities are often funded through other programs, including the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk.
- One participant noted the importance of community information and education about the fishery guardians, so that it was clear that they worked for the community (and not the Department) and data relayed to the Department did not disclose personal information.

Co-management

- A few participants spoke about closing a fishery in the past (or being involved in the decision to close a fishery) due to conservation concerns. *“We’ve been successful in getting closures in the past or restrictions in the river, but we’re currently not impacting as much.”* One viewed co-management as linked to the importance of the relationship between First Nations and the Department, while several saw co-management as a measure of success of the program.

Understanding Relationships

“Trust needs to be nurtured to be able to establish these relationships.”

- The majority of participants report having good relationships with local fishery officers; however, feelings are mixed regarding the presence and/or response of officers, with a few reporting timely response time and others noting that they seldom have the officers in their communities. *“We maybe hear from fishery officers once or twice a year.”*
- A few participants also interact with science and resource management at the Department. *“Our relationship with science is good, but it was stronger in the past.”*

Reporting Structures

- Participants report enforcement and technical data first to community supervisors, managers or biologists and, secondly, to the Department. A few said that catch data goes directly to the Department every few days during the fishery.

- One participant thought enforcement activities should be reported to a community contact so *“it doesn’t go straight to court and the community can decide how to deal with it.”*

Understanding Training and Future Training Needs

“We have to look at adding more fishery guardians – and they need to be more well-rounded in habitat management and other activities to be able to work year-round.”

- Participants report that training and designations have not been done in a long time. A few recall that during their initial, three-month training phases, they had five days to learn the manual before a test. They also had refresher training in the past.
 - Some guardians have not received formal training or they have been trained as stewards or guardian watchmen by other programs, such as the Coastal First Nations / Great Bear Initiative, fisheries technical training at a local college, ranger training or Parks Canada training.
 - A few guardian teams have a designated guardian, a guardian with some training and ‘guardians’ without training. One participant said they did not have access to guardian training because they were not part of an aggregate.
- Participants want their fishery guardians to be designated. *“We need designations so fishery guardians can protect themselves as peace officers.”* They also want more frequent training; especially, in swift water rescue and first aid, as well as ‘in the field.’ However, they do not want training to come at the cost of something else in their Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy agreement.
 - One participant thought the fishery guardian program and training should be linked to environmental assessments and the monitoring of mining, forestry, pipelines and other industries. *“This would bring in proponents and the Province – and would really complement guardian activities.”* Another thought training should include conservation and police officer training. *“As we go to self-government, we need to do these jobs. That’s where we’re headed.”*
- Participants note the dedication of their part-time (seasonal) guardians despite long working hours, no wage increases, and seasonal work. *“They’re truly dedicated to the season. Some guys have been there for 30 years.”* They also want to address retention issues and succession planning, including by hiring students interested in guardian-related career tracks, but several fear that young people would not be interested in this kind of job: *“We’re not showing students and youth everything for these reasons.”*

Improving the Aboriginal Fishery Guardian Program

“We need to go from seasonal to meaningful.”

- Conservation of fish species and habitat is the most important priority of participants – and they want the fishery guardian program to cover more conservation activities related to the fish they eat and that are integral to their culture, traditions and social values. *“We are salmon – they represent our linear mortality and the strength of our people.”*
 - Conservation activities include: habitat protection and restoration *“...to do true riparian protection”*, catch reductions and more enforcement of the recreational sportfishery, and more fish counting and stock assessments. *“The Department says they are there*

to conserve, enhance and protect salmon, but they're doing nothing to protect some runs or to financially support Nations that want to do this work."

- Participants want the program to be adequately funded. *"I was sent to complain about the funding."* They also want more working hours for patrols, including over the weekends, and training available online and through seminars.
- Participant think the program should be accessible to all Nations and that a measure of the program's success would be more communities with fishery guardian programs.
 - One participant thought the Department needed to first define the program. *"Are we still basing it on designated guardians that don't exist?"*
 - Others thought the fishery guardian network needed to be integrated across the Province and into more resource areas. *"We need to broaden our guardians – into marine areas and in the forests – and work together in overlapping territories."*

Measuring Success

"Success is when First Nations are managing resources within their territory through guardians informed to do so."

- Participants measure program success as managing the resources in their territories, having trained fishery guardians, and an adequately funded program. They also want the program to be accessible to all Nations.
 - One participant measured success as rebuilding fish stocks to historical levels, while another by the number of surveys and the data collected. *"It's a great success for me – the knowledge generated and the transfer and use of that knowledge."* Still another viewed success as *"when guardians are recognized for their role in successful incidents."*

Ideal Fishery Guardian Team

- Participants want a mix of technical and enforcement personnel in a fishery guardian team, including scientists or biologists, retired guardians, natural resource managers and fisheries/stewardship leaders. One participant also viewed the ideal fishery guardian team as guardians enforcing First Nations laws.