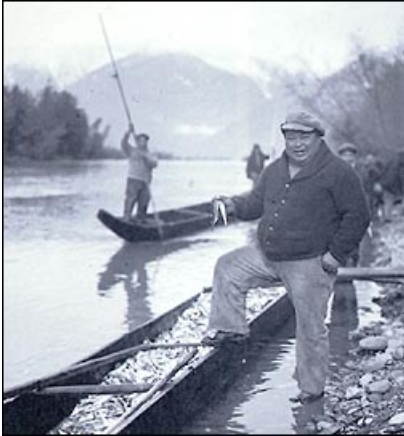


Eulachon Conference Acknowledges New Era

By Jacinda Mack, June 2007



Springtime in the Nuxalk village of Qomqots (Bella Coola) has always been marked by the arrival of the Sputc, or eulachon, to our river. That is, until about 10 years ago, when they suddenly and sadly disappeared.

Patrick Schooner Sr with a spoon canoe full of eulachons, 1935

Local residents, including eagles, gulls and people, still wait on the banks of the river, hoping to catch a glimpse of the silver and black fish that once filled spoon canoes to within an inch of the water. Cooking boxes and shacks are overgrown and decayed from lack of use, and personal stores of Grease are guarded like gold. What once marked the end of a cold winter has turned from celebration to condemnation. But there is still hope.

People from neighbouring villages and beyond joined local Nuxalk residents at the recent Eulachon Conference in Bella Coola, June 11 and 12, 2007 to discuss the devastating causes and effects of the disappearance of our beloved Sputc.

Elected chief Spencer Siwallace spoke on his childhood memories of catching the prized fish, as did many others, including our neighbours of the Haisla, Kitsoo, and Wuikinuxv nations.

"It is very painful when you lose something that is the backbone of your people," said Percy Starr, hereditary chief of Kitsoo, "the loss of the eulachon is spiritual...this is the foundation of a people."

Nuxalk scholar Megan Moody presented on her Master's thesis research on the decline of the eulachon, citing several potential causes including the huge by-catch of eulachons in the commercial shrimp trawl fishery. Add to this the landslides such as those in South Bentinck, Thorsen Creek and numerous other valleys in Nuxalk territory that were caused by over logging- effectively choking out streambeds for both eulachons and salmon. The two day conference wrapped up with a "roll up the sleeves" working session to develop a collaborative and multi-lateral action plan to protect and increase eulachon populations. Strategies for research, documentation, publicizing the crisis, legal avenues and enhancement opportunities were discussed and committees were formed. This spring conference marked a new era, one that may not include eulachons in our future. For the eulachon's sake, and ours, we must work together to stop the destruction of our savior fish.