

SQ'EWQÉYL FIRST NATION

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Sq'ewqéyl First Nation Community Fish Hatchery

Update for City of Chilliwack January 2020

Sq'ewqéyl First Nation is building strength in numbers on the edge of the Little Chilliwack River.

Just over 40 years ago, Sq'ewqéyl's Little Chilliwack River Hatchery was established in a small building on the Little Chilliwack River. Since that time, the area has served as center of activity, with several Sq'ewqéyl members having completed training here in practices from hatchery management to stream cleaning and enhancement.

Our salmon enhancement project supported by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the hatchery use has become a fixture on the site and numbers indicate that 10,000 – 20,000 + Chum salmon can be reared here every year. When the hatchery began, there were little salmon left in the Little Chilliwack River. Thanks to the tireless efforts of volunteers over the decades there is now a regular return of Chum Salmon.

Sq'ewqéyl has recently received project funding from Ts'elxwéyeqw Tribe for the Hatchery to make necessary improvements to increase the capacity of the hatchery, planned stream enhancements, Education Programs, riparian work, it has also allowed us to hire a full-time Hatchery Hand/Caretaker & we are working towards adding a second species of salmon (*fall 2021*). This project was supported by Ts'elxwéyeqw Tribe in accordance with their mandate to responsibly steward the land, air, water, wildlife, and natural resources within its traditional territory.

In addition to building fish stocks, the hatchery has been building capacity within the community, relying upon many hours of volunteer labor, and providing both training and education for youth and adults. Youth training, employment and education are key and are part of the long-term community commitment to the hatchery.

Historically Skulkayn was a main village at the bend in Chilliwack River Road, and natural main natural resource was the Chilliwack River, and the bountiful valley that is still known as one of the most prime areas for farmland in BC. The village was built on both sides of the river on the sites now marked by IR #10 & IR #11, both listed as Skulkayn. Testimonies and oral history collected from Sq'ewqéyl Elders speak of the villages of Skulkayn, Squihala and Sumas being active from a much later date than other villages; when the whole valley was more or less covered with water from the Chilliwack River, the main branch of which still emptied full force into the Sumas Lake. After the little Chilliwack River was re-routed Sq'ewqéyl lost its place as a prime fishing location. Our elder generation here on Sq'ewqéyl remember the river being the hub of the community not only for subsistence fishing, a safe route for transportation to the lower valley and for recreation as well.

The remains of the Little Chilliwack River can and should continue to serve as a center for physical growth and environmental improvement. Our relationship to the land, air, water, wildlife/natural resources is important to our way of life and is deep rooted in our Communities values. The hatchery is the cornerstone Sq'ewqéyl's Comprehensive Community plan, on long term goal being to ultimately include a thriving Hatchery/Education Center & Interpretive Trail, Land-Based Healing/cultural programming, complete with Medicinal/native plants & herbal garden. The goal is to continue to make improvements and recreate to legacy of renewal.