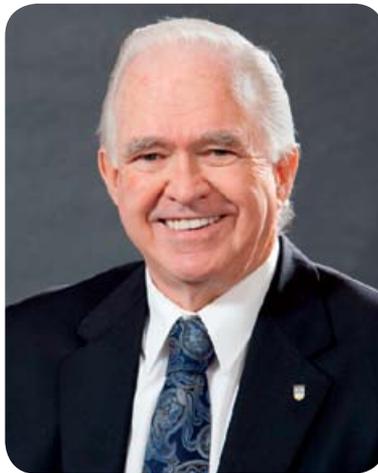


Reflecting on 25 Years

Personal perspectives on the silver anniversary of the Pacific Salmon Foundation

BY GARTH EICHEL

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Pacific Salmon Foundation. A great deal has been accomplished during the past quarter-century, but perhaps the greatest achievement of all was creating the Foundation in the first place. To mark this milestone, the Foundation reconnected with two key B.C. political figures who helped get the Foundation off the ground: the Hon. Tom Siddon, federal fisheries minister in 1987, and the Hon. John Fraser, former Speaker of the House of Commons. Here are their perspectives on how an idea became a reality 25 years ago.



The Honourable Thomas Siddon, Ph.D., L.L.D.



The Honourable John Fraser P.C., O.C., O.B.C., Q.C.

Foundation: What was the original vision for the Pacific Salmon Foundation 25 years ago?

Siddon: I was the federal minister of fisheries at the time and we felt government should be putting more money into a self-perpetuating organization that could stand on its own feet, go out into the community and raise money for projects.

Working with different stakeholder groups at the time, we envisioned a common organization that could preserve salmon and generate public awareness. We all knew we had to work together to stop the decline of the species... and so we agreed to establish a Pacific Salmon Foundation towards the

betterment and enhancement of the species. I fondly remember standing alongside the Adams River in October of 1986, during the famous Adams River Sockeye run, to publicly announce our decision to establish the [Pacific Salmon] Foundation. I was pleased to be joined on the platform that day by several representatives of Pacific fisheries stakeholder groups including First Nations, commercial and sportfishing sectors, conservationists and the fishermen's union.

Fraser: The idea of a Pacific Salmon Foundation was talked about for a long time before it took place. I didn't think you could protect salmon and habitat by waiting for the federal government to do it.

There was a notion within the Department [of Fisheries and Oceans] that the only way to measure the value of salmon was related to the economic value of the commercial catch. There was not an adequate value placed on the salmon resource outside the immediate catch value of the fishery. It was impossible to manage and conserve salmon stocks if the priority was only its commercial value.

I also strongly believed that in an enormous province like B.C. it was never going to be possible to conserve and maintain salmon stocks if it was only done by government. The idea at the time was to establish an institution in the private sector with a mandate to raise funds

and manage habitat protection and restoration — something at arms length from government with some seed money, then tasked with raising funds in areas where it was necessary to do work and involve communities and incorporate businesses.

Foundation: *What were the biggest challenges associated with getting the Foundation off the ground?*

Siddon: Like any new idea, we had to deal with skeptics. We also knew we had to get the right person to lead it. That person was George Hungerford. He was a great B.C. citizen – former Olympian, established lawyer and a major donor on behalf of many charitable causes in partnership with his wife, Jane.

The other challenge was getting regular people to donate and come out to fundraisers, and creating mechanisms, like the Salmon Conservation Stamp, that would become major bases of funding that could be relied on by the Foundation each year and give some level of certainty to the communities who needed the funds to undertake salmon projects.

Fraser: The biggest challenge was getting the right person to head it. I knew George Hungerford could do it and he had a proven ability to raise funds. He was the only person in the private sector I knew of who could do it.

Foundation: *Has the Foundation fulfilled the vision as originally intended?*

Siddon: From the original concept in 1987, the Foundation has certainly realized and gone beyond what I might have imagined. There

is a long list of donors, lots of fundraisers, and it supports groups of dedicated people pitching in and cleaning up streams for salmon habitat.

If anything really matters, it is that future generations have to recognize how important and precious salmon stocks are on the west coast of North America. We need to support the Foundation if we're going to preserve salmon stocks from all the pressures on fish habitat.

Fraser: The Foundation is one institution that has turned out to be remarkably successful. It's still here after 25 years, and while it gets some government money, it gets most things done by raising community money and community input. The Foundation has been very good at convincing the public they are something of value to communities.

Foundation: *Overall, what has been the Foundation's most significant accomplishment?*

Siddon: The legacy is the most important result. The Foundation is not just about raising money for salmon. It's about the legacy we can leave to younger people to preserve salmon stocks.

The ability of the Foundation to attract enthusiastic support has allowed small scale community projects to 'walk the talk' and do the work that makes a lasting legacy of difference. That's a great compliment to the many volunteers who have worked on these projects.

Fraser: The Foundation is now self-sustaining, operating on funds it raises and through the community involvement it has been able to establish.

It has also managed to be remarkably neutral when it comes to partisan politics. It has been able to interact with anyone who gets elected — federal, provincial or municipal — because they have avoided public protests. They have respected that people who get elected deserve some respect. Over the years its relationship with governments has been civil and that has been helpful for salmon.

Foundation: *Why does the Foundation matter 25 years later?*

Siddon: We'd lose it all if it wasn't for organizations like the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and the stewardship of individuals in government and local communities. Their combined commitment to salmon habitat conservation has created a high level of public awareness and made a lasting difference in communities.

Fraser: There is as much, or more, to do now as there was 25 years ago. Nowadays, we have a lot of new problems — climate change, industry growth, water usage, and expansion of municipal housing boundaries.

We need a respected private institution to look out for these issues . . . and maintain the rivers, oceans and wetlands, without which, we haven't got fish.

The great challenge the Foundation has going into the future is to broaden the public understanding of what its mandate is — to continue to ensure that children are growing up understanding all these issues, and to keep a close non-partisan relationship with those we elect.

If we're going to continue the original idea, we're going to have to keep doing the work. We can't afford to relax. ➡