



Metlakatla Communications photo

This image, recorded by a drone high above the Skeena River, shows a group of sealions gathered together during the eulachon run.

Tracking eulachon, planning for food fish

The work of Metlakatla Fisheries staff often takes place directly on the waters around the traditional territory, but late last month the attention of the department turned to the air.

Working in conjunction with Richard Sullivan of Hummingbird Drones, staff hit the waters of the Skeena River in mid-March to track the eulachon run by documenting the movement of predators, all from a safe distance high above the river. The result was dramatic video of sealions huddled together on the Skeena, dozens of eagles gathering together to fish and seagulls taking flight along the river.

The following week fisheries biologist Dillon Buerk and fisheries technician Kim Ryan spent three days learning how to operate the drones safely, and legally, in order to continue to use the technology for future research and monitoring.

The goal is to use the drones to confirm the migration path of the eulachon and use that information to advocate for increased protections along the route, either through new policy or elimination of bycatch by the commercial fishery in the area. Other applications for drone use could include herring spawn surveys, foreshore assessment, environmental monitoring and stream surveys.

The drone project was highlighted during the community fisheries meeting held on March 29, during which staff also outlined plans for the 2016 food fish distribution program.

This year the program has been slightly modified to make it easier to distribute food fish to members. All households are asked to provide information on which members are in the home and appoint one person as the primary contact and an alternate. Fisheries staff will then contact each household throughout the season pick up the food fish for the home, rather than trying to track down individual members by phone.

All households are encouraged to provide updated household and contact information to the Metlakatla Fisheries Department by contacting Dillon or Kim by emailing dbuerk@metlakatla.ca or kimryan@metlakatla.ca, or by calling 250-628-3315.



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