

Idrove home from the Kitsumkalum, past the gravel pit, the rotting mill, and the large sign declaring that hunting moose in the valley is prohibited by its rightful owners, the Kitsumkalum First Nation. I thought about the butchered cow moose we'd stumbled onto. This led me to thoughts of the butchered valley.

The Kitsumkalum was one of the world's greatest salmon rivers, particularly famous for the chinook salmon, some of which were the largest on the globe.

The river sustained indigenous peoples for thousands of years. Even after the creation of the wasteful, environmentally unconscionable, and ultimately, economically unsustainable commercial fishery at the Skeena's mouth, the number of returning Kitsumkalum salmon were still impressive. I have corroboration of this from the late Gene Llewellyn.

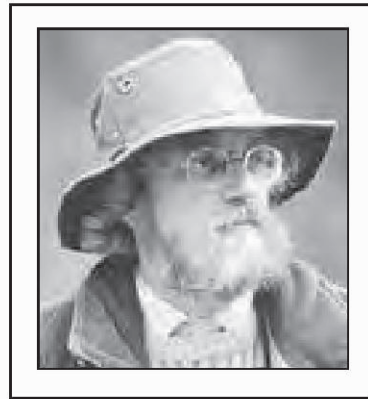
Gene was a steelheading pioneer who divided his fishing time between the Zymoetz and the Kalum River. I'd visit him in his tiny trailer perched on the edge of Jim Snodgrass's property on Dobbie Road. Thanks to Jim's kindness, Gene lived rent free, which allowed him to get by on his meagre old age pension.

On those visits, Gene and I would talk about fishing over cups of instant coffee whitened with powdered milk and sweetened with white sugar. When the conversation turned to the Kalum, as it invariably did, Gene would reminisce about the fine winter steelhead he'd caught in the runs below Alice Creek and in the pools up-

stream of the Firepot. He didn't fish for the river's big springs by then, but he spoke of them with a reverence approaching awe. When he did, he'd look at me intently. His voice rose and he became more animated as he described waves of the great creatures surging upriver under the railway bridge. There were so many, he said, they filled the river, making it seem black.

Gene was convinced the preparations for the disastrous log drive, like the blocking of side channels, and the drive itself, which plugged the canyons and wreaked havoc upon the spawning grounds of the great fish, was an act of violence from which the chinook never fully recovered.

I'd go farther than Gene and argue that primitive logging, interception fisheries, including the sport fishery over main stem spawners below the Kalum/Skeena confluence as well as the 200-year-old debacle at the mouth of the Skeena, and the ill-considered log drive combined to form the unholy trinity of forces that have left the once mighty chinook — and, for that matter, all the Kalum's salmon — greatly reduced and unable to achieve anything approach-



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Poachers 3

ing their historic populations.

Over the years I have walked all but a short section of the Kitsumkalum River below the lake, and much of the Cedar River below Anweiler Creek as well. From its decaying remnants, stumps, cables, skid trails, bridges, and roads, the destructive and insensitive logging inflicted upon the valley is still evident.

This was logging conducted by companies acting as if the only values that existed in the river valleys were timber

values. These were entrepreneurs who had no appreciation for the complexity of forest ecosystems, and, therefore, not an inkling of how they work.

This is understandable given that the science of logging the ancient forests of North America is still relatively new, and much of it has been skewed by the fact that the teachers of a couple of generations of foresters had come from places where old growth forests no longer existed. When they settled in places like Vancouver then nestled into the University of British Columbia where they began teaching forestry, they taught the forestry they knew, the plantation forestry of the Old World.

Another reason for chaotic forestry practises of that time is that the provincial Ministry of Forests, like the federal Department of Fisheries, became a victim of corporate capture, that is, those running both institutions realized that their prominence within the hierarchy of government, their security, and ultimately, the standards of living of their staff, were all in the best of shape as long as the forest giants were fed a rich diet of trees.

This is how what was then the largest ministry in the provincial government lost sight of its mandate and became a servant of private industry rather than the steward and servant of the forests on behalf of the people. It's also the reason why B.C. has the largest clear cuts on earth, why selective logging is all but non-existent in this province, and why fish and wildlife are everywhere much diminished. Ironically, it's also the reason why the once monolithic Ministry of Forests is now a puny ministry. Too many trees, and in many cases the wrong trees, were cut too quickly.

The Kitsumkalum was logged to its banks in so many places. Equipment was dragged through large creeks. Vitaly important runnels were treated as if they didn't exist. The valley is starting to heal. To reach its historic magnificence, every wound will have to heal. That may be impossible, but the environment will heal much of itself over time.

Who will protect it as it does?

...to be continued with some suggestions next week ...