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## Coast Salish leaders commit to environmental action

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TULALIP, Wash. - "Enough talk, it's time for action." Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, summed up the consensus at the second day of the Coast Salish Gathering at the Tulalip Tribes Feb. 27 - 29.

"We are the Indian people, the Coast Salish Indian people, who live on all the watersheds, on the headwaters and on the bays throughout the Salish Sea region. We've got a message for all the nontribal governments and communities and we're delivering it."

In the second full day of planning, Coast Salish leaders from British Columbian First Nations and western Washington tribes committed to a goal of environmental action, including a Salish Sea-wide information sharing database, a water quality information gathering project, and a Coast Salish environmental indicators project. (Visit [www.coastsalishgathering.com](http://www.coastsalishgathering.com))

Brian Cladoosby, co-chair of the Coast Salish Gathering and chairman of the Swinomish Tribe, said: "We are true leaders here. True leaders have the confidence to stand alone if they must, and make tough decisions. We want to work with the other governments and other communities if we can, but we will continue to look to our traditional strengths and tie our culture to our objectives."

"Our objective here is to turn the tide on all the environmental destruction that the white society has heaped upon us over the past 150 years. Our objective is to speak with one voice as Coast Salish people, and to adopt action plans that will make a difference," said Tom Sampson of the Tsartlip First Nation in British Columbia.

Cladoosby also pointed out that over the past 150 years of environmental deterioration, there has been a philosophy that people must make as much money as they can without regard for the environment. Thus, he said, we have seen a destruction of the air, water and plants. "Mother Earth is not a commodity to be dominated and exploited, but rather a gift to be loved and respected."

"We're on a journey here that has no end," Frank said. "We're the only ones who are willing to do it. The other governments haven't done it. We are the Indian people, people of the land. We know what the problems are and we're trying to address them in an honorable way. If we have to take things into our own hands, that's what we will do," he said. "Action is needed right now if we are to have any hope to have a healthy environment for the future."

"We tell the truth. The U.S. government does not tell the truth. The Canadian government does not tell the truth. The states don't tell the truth. They lie to their people. They say, 'It'll scare the people and hurt the economy, so let's just lie to them.' Well, we won't lie to our people, and the other governments cannot fool us. We know where our trail is, and we've got to stay on that trail - together."

One component of the Coast Salish Gathering Environmental Action Plan calls for greater controls and tribal consultation on fish farming - a form of aquaculture that has become commonplace in Canada and is being explored in the northwest United States. The tribes voiced deep concern about the sea lice problem that is hand-in-hand with fish farming, a major challenge to fish survival. The consensus at the gathering was to oppose continued destructive fish farms and to continue working toward the replenishment of natural runs.

The delegates to the gathering determined to collectively urge the United States and Canada to adopt the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a statement of principles that took 25 years to develop. The declaration represented fundamental changes in international policies toward indigenous peoples. It calls for the human rights of the 370 million indigenous people in the world to be respected.

The United States and Canada joined Australia and New Zealand as the only four nations to oppose the declaration. One hundred and forty-three countries adopted it. Since then, Australia has issued an apology for its position and has indicated it will support the declaration. There is a strong movement in Canada moving in the same direction.

However, the United States has not altered its position.

In the climate change arena, state and federal guests at the gathering acknowledged that the tribes' long-term memory of the region offers the only opportunity to gain comprehensive historic data. "Non-tribal environmental data only goes back to the 1930s," said Terry Williams of the Tulalip Tribes. "Ours goes back thousands of years. Without our traditional knowledge, nobody truly has the ability to compare the status of fish and wildlife habitat today with its condition before the white man came."

Williams said such traditional knowledge is just one example of the values tribes bring to natural resource management. The representatives at the gathering concurred that tribes must receive more equitable management funding to deal with climate change conditions. "These are tribal resources being destroyed," Williams said. "We have got to have the ability to build the capacity and staffing necessary to help clean up the mess, even though the tribes didn't create it."