

# Coast Salish GATHERING



MARCH 2009 – NUMBER 4

*Together for the Salish Sea*



## *Our Coast Salish family grows*

There were more than 1,100 scientists, technicians, politicians and other participants at the Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference in Seattle.

The theme was *The Future of the Salish Sea... A Call to Action*.

Among the hundreds of people were about two dozen Coast Salish leaders. Despite our small numbers, we were a guiding force at the conference.

We were there to share with everyone the impacts upon our indigenous life ways over the past 100 years through the deterioration of the environment and natural resources. Our message was clear. We need to come together, equally, as

governments and ordinary citizens to address the health of the Salish Sea ecosystem... this place we live and call home.

These two photographs (there are more inside) are from the closing witnessing ceremony at the three-day event.

There was standing room only to hear a young man read the powerful *Call To Action* statement; to hear strong words spoken by some of the leaders in the battle to save the Salish Sea; and to hear hundreds of voices shouting 'We are all Coast Salish'.

Those words, the sounds of our singing and the beat of our drum are still a powerful memory for everyone who attended and promised to take action.





# MESSAGES FROM AROUND THE SALISH SEA

*The most important thing is to Act! We are all human. Our hearts have to be open to an inclusive approach, to all of us working together to keep the Salish Sea alive.*

**Chief Lydia Hwitsum, Cowichan**



*This is our Armageddon. When the Plains People lost the buffalo, what happened to them? When we lose the salmon, we become the same as everybody else.*

*We have to fix what we can. Being isolated doesn't work and isn't necessary. Working collaboratively pays off for everyone.*

*In the past, our only indicators were observed and tracked when we harvested. We watched crows eating clams. If they ate it, then we did too. In our history, there were plenty of resources most times.*

**Chief Gibby Jacob, Squamish**

*We are a place-based society. We can't go to someone else's watershed and ruin it... Managing on the margins is a recipe for failure... For hundreds of years, men have thought they are doing the right thing, but they are doing it the wrong way... The Coast Salish have different values. 365 days a year we were fishing, watching the tides and currents, learning from our Elders when to set nets, checking traps and weirs... This Call to Action: I want to tell the scientists, When you speak up, we'll be standing beside you. Science is back!*

**Chairman Brian Cladoosby, Swinomish**



*Climate change doesn't look at lines on a map. Fish don't care about rules or borders... Governments forget about people, but this is supposed to be a government by the people. Tell the governments what you want, not what they want to hear.*

**Director Jon Waterhouse, Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council**

# ***We are miraculous... Paddle with us***

“That our people have survived is miraculous...”

That was Chief Leah George-Wilson of Tsleil-Waututh speaking at the conference’s opening panel discussion about the health of the Salish Sea.

Leah outlined Tsleil-Waututh’s marine stewardship program that has been in place since 2000 as well as the marine monitoring program that was launched in 2006.

She described the collaboration with partners, such as Environment Canada and VanCity credit union, that was essential to the ongoing success of the Tsleil-Waututh programs.

“Baseline data is important,” she said. “We are now producing good data by putting our people out on the land and the water.”

Her message to the packed room was a simple one: “Start small, think big and act. We come from rich, abundant territories. I can’t overstate the sacred trust that we have; the obligation to the land, air and water.



“We must act now so the richness of the Salish Sea is not just a memory... All of you need to get in our canoe and paddle with us.

## ***Good and Greed don't mix***

Darren Blaney of Homalco Nation sat on a panel discussion that explored the relationship of science, policy and traditional ecological knowledge.

He talked about how families were split up to fish in separate streams in order to lessen impacts. And he also spoke about the sacred trust and sacred alliance with the environment.

“We had a ceremony to share the first salmon,” Darren said. “Sharing is lost in capitalism. Resources don’t serve men; men serve the environment.

“The potlatch recognized the greed in all humans. We gave our wealth away... we shared. When greed comes up against the environment, it’s the environment that suffers. It’s de-evolution.

“We’re taking the biggest and healthiest. But long ago, our people used fish traps and let the biggest ones go in order to build up the stock.

Darren said the reason why fish farms started appearing along the Salish Sea coast “is because we didn’t take care of the environment.”



## ***What is the cost of not developing?***

Speaking on the same panel was Eric Beamer of the Skagit River Cooperative System.

He talked about the value of providing ecosystem services and the Bristol Bay Pebble Mine in Alaska, and area where he worked as a fisherman and a biologist.

He asked the question: “What happens if a mine is not allowed? The gold will always be there. What is the cost to not develop?

“There has to be less ‘me’ and more ‘we’. “There has to be less instant and more long term.

“The question is whether we want to grow or become sustainable.”



# Salish Sea CALL TO ACTION

*A Witness Ceremony ended the Salish Sea conference in Seattle. A young man named Adam stood at the center of the circle and read 'A Call to Action!' It identified critical work needed to protect the ecosystem. The Call to Action is a response to things heard in sessions of the event. Here are excerpts:*

If a new generation comes forward every 22 years, seven generations back would put us in the year 1855.

We learned at this conference that the 1850s was the era in which large-scale logging and resource harvesting began in the Salish Sea. The tribes of Puget Sound were signing treaties in 1855 to reserve their rights for hunting, fishing and gathering in perpetuity. Vancouver Island was leased to the Hudson Bay Company, and Aboriginal people were being decimated by smallpox and measles. The Salish Sea was on the threshold of unimaginable cultural and ecological change.

Seven generations later, in 2009, it feels once again as though we are on the brink of precipitous change. The climate is warming up, and so are the open waters of the Salish Sea. Many species that form the basis of traditional foods and important economic sectors are disappearing.

## How will we celebrate with no salmon?

Chief Leah George-Wilson asks "How will we celebrate the first salmon of the season if none return? How can we teach our children to harvest shellfish, when the beds have been poisoned?" People are part of ecosystems, and the health of the ecosystem will affect the health of the children.

All of us that have participated in this conference came here with one important question to answer: What are we going to do to restore and protect the Salish Sea?

First, we call on ourselves, our leaders, and all citizens of the Salish Sea to **take action**. Take actions that have been prioritized in plans, **monitor** to ensure that our actions are effective, and **learn** from our experience.

## New science panel

We call on our leaders to gather scientists together from both sides of the international border and from Coast Salish communities to coordinate learning and gathering of knowledge about our shared ecosystem through a new science panel. This panel should meet regularly. They should be tasked with creating a research agenda that will enable policy makers to make wise judgments.

We call for the creation of a working group tasked with developing, refining, expanding and using indicators of ecosystem health that are meaningful to the entire Salish

Sea. These indicators must include human well-being measures that reflect our close connection to the ecosystem and, particularly, the ability of Aboriginal people to harvest their traditional food supplies.

## What we do not know

In everything that we do, we should openly acknowledge what we do not know. We must tell the truth about the extent of our knowledge. However, we must not use a lack of perfect knowledge as an excuse to not take sensible actions.

We call for a commitment to pursue accountability and effectiveness in the governance of the Salish Sea... We must work as though there are no boundaries.

## 'Point the canoe in a different direction'

On Sunday night, Billy Frank stated that we should involve the people in saving the Salish Sea. We call for support for programs to educate a new generation of scientists and youth. And we recognize the need for close coordination among all groups working to inform, educate and involve the public in Salish Sea restoration.

What does the future hold for the Salish Sea—particularly for people of my generation and generations to come? If we think seven generations ahead, we're talking about the year 2163. As Billy Frank said at the beginning of this conference, we need to "point the canoe in a different direction" than we did seven generations ago. We need to paddle together in a way that is intelligent and efficient, and we need to paddle hard.

Download full text of Call to Action at:

[http://depts.washington.edu/uwconf/psgb/PSGB\\_CalltoAction.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/uwconf/psgb/PSGB_CalltoAction.pdf)

## THE NEXT GENERATION



The Call to Action was read by 18-year-old Adam Harding, a student at Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific near Victoria. "Why was I chosen? I think it had something to do with the fact that I was one of the youngest people attending the conference and I was perhaps seen as a representative of my generation...the generation which will continue the work that is started..."

*Witnessing the Call to Action were leaders in the protection and restoration of the Salish Sea. Their duty was to listen and respond to the Call to Action and then to carry the messages and share with others the importance of the words. This was, and will be, their responsibility for a life time.*

# Salish Sea WITNESS



WITNESSES (from left) were Chief Lydia Hwitsum, Cowichan Tribes; Bill Ruckelshaus, Puget Sound Partnership; Michelle Pirzadeh, EPA Region 10; Joe Gaydos, SeaDoc Society; and Ken Brock, Environment Canada. Below is Clinton Charlie of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group.



**Ken Brock** – “It was a powerful ceremony. I am filled with awe at the responsibility. We need help from each other. My thanks to the Coast Salish chiefs who attended. They are busy people and have a lot to do. There is an urgency to act. We should all choose one project to lead and make a difference. “If I do nothing else well, if my daughter grows up with a sense of place in the Salish Sea, then my project will have been a success.”

**Joe Gaydos** – “That the Call to Action was

delivered as a Coast Salish ceremony shows we are all interconnected... we are all in this together... The 17,000 square-kilometer inland sea – the Salish Sea – is a giant experiment in place-based conservation.”

**Michelle Pirzadeh** – “The US EPA Region 10 has a continued commitment to Environment Canada’s Call

to Action and to the Coast Salish Gathering... These coins you gave me today give me the strength to carry on.”

**Bill Ruckelshaus** – “This journey has no end. There is a 2020 deadline to clean up the Salish Sea, but it is never over... We humans are supposed to have the biggest brains of all species. If I was a salmon, I’d be very worried... The prosperity of humans and the health of our ecosystem is one and the same.”





## Salish Sea Conference 2009



The Coast Salish witness ceremony heard leaders share their responses of the Salish Sea conference.

Participants were: (front, from left) Bill Ruckelshaus, Puget Sound Partnership; Joe Gaydos, SeaDoc Society; Chief Lydia Hwitsum, Cowichan Tribes; Clinton Charlie, Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group; Michelle Pirzadeh, EPA Region 10; and Ken Brock, Environment Canada;

(Back) Chris Townsend, Puget Sound Partnership; Larry Campbell, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community; Adam Harding, Pearson College; Ray Harris, Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group; and Bronwen Geddes, Environment Canada.



1- Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, speaking at the Seattle Aquarium; 2- Renee Racette, Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group lawyer and Darren Blaney of Homalco; 3- Jon Waterhouse, Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council; 4- Larry Dunn, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe; 5- Debra Lekanoff and Sarah Akin of Swinomish and Eric Grossman of USGS talk to audience after panel discussion; 6- Clinton Charlie of Hul'qumi'num, Chief Dalton Silver of Sumas and Chief Jeff Point of Skowkale First Nation; 7- Chief Vern Jack of Tsyecum First Nation; 8- Randall Lewis of Squamish Nation; and 9- Charles O'Hara of Swinomish.





# It's all in the name

The naming of the Salish Sea is drawing closer.

During a Coast Salish session at the Seattle conference, people got to meet and hear from the man who came up with the name in the 1980s – Bert Webber, a retired university biologist from Bellingham. He talked about the 1970s, when oil tankers were first heading into the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound.



“There was a first attempt to look at the ecosystem. It became clear to me that the Fraser River dominated everything and that the Salish Sea was an integrated functioning ecosystem. It was very striking.

“If not for the border, it would have been recognized as such long ago.”

Bert said coming up with the name was “a small idea. Ideas are easy. But it’s wonderful how the Coast Salish have embraced it. The Salish Sea exists.”

Meanwhile, the finishing touches are being made to a new map of the Salish Sea.

The map was made by Stefan Freelan who is a GIS specialist at the Huxley College of Environmental Studies at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Bert Webber’s old stomping grounds.

## SALISH SEA FACTS

The surface area of the Salish Sea (saltwater) is approximately 18,000 sq. km. (or about 7,000 sq. miles).

Within the Salish Sea there are hundreds of islands (or even thousands, depending upon one’s definition).

The watershed draining into the Salish Sea (not counting the upper Fraser River) includes about 110,000 sq km (or about 42,000 sq miles).

In addition to the human population, the ecosystem is home to over 200 different species of fish, over 100 different species of bird, 20 different species of marine mammal and over 3,000 different species of invertebrates.

The above information is on the back of the map. Visit Stefan’s site at:

<http://myweb.facstaff.wvu.edu/~stefan/>



“It is unusual for a map of this area to not include the cities, roads and borders that have been created by humans. Instead, this map focuses on the Salish Sea and its surrounding watershed, defined not by political jurisdictions but by the geography of the water and land itself.”  
– Stefan Freelan



Our weirs are of ancient, but still relevant, design. They are put in fish bearing rivers, but we only harvest the smaller males. The biggest males and females would go right through so they could continue to flourish and breed. We only took the fish we needed, but ensured the return of the future parent fish. This was our law and teachings.



The oceans were our highways and our refrigerators. They provided us transportation and food. Our people traveled along the oceans to follow the food, cultural events, trade, barter and war.

(Photo courtesy Jimmy Sampson, Chemainus First Nation)



# Points taken!

The Coast Salish plenary (full) session was entitled: 'Using our knowledge to protect our future'. Speakers included Brian Cladoosby, Debra Lekanof and Sarah Akin, all from the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. Joining them was Eric Grossman, U.S. Geological Survey.

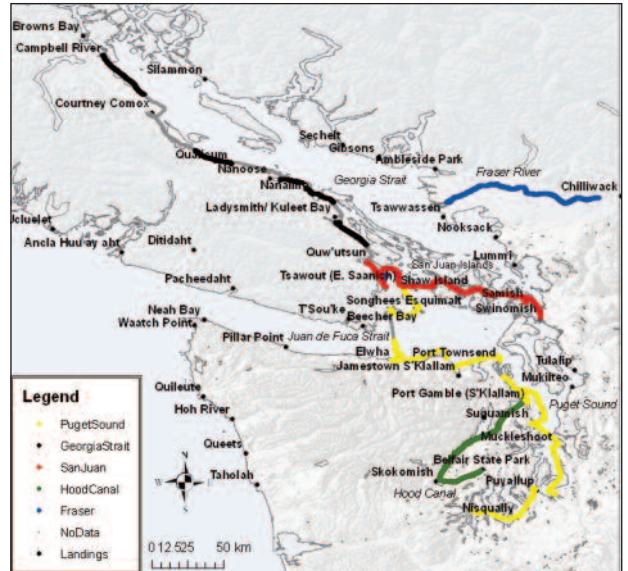
Sarah and Eric told the story of the great partnership between the canoe families and USGS in the transboundary Tribal Journey water quality gathering project with more than 40,000 data points recorded.

"The great thing was that people who were not scientists took part," Sarah said. "It was a wonderful blend of state-of-the-art science with traditional knowledge and cultural practices."

Eric said scientists learned a lot through their work with the canoe families. First year goals were accomplished including the bringing modern and traditional sciences.



The map shows the five routes from which data was collected. From July 15 to the final landing on July 28 over 43,000 data points were collected and 607 miles of the Salish Sea were mapped. The data points were taken at 10 second intervals during which time the canoes travelled about 75 feet.



**TRIBAL JOURNEY**  
*Paddle to Suquamish*  
Hosted by Suquamish Tribe  
Aug. 3-8, 2009  
<http://tribaljournays.com>

## Coast Salish Gathering 2009 at Whistler and Vancouver in June

The 2009 Coast Salish Gathering will be held at two separate venues. The first two days will be a leaders' conference at the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler. The third day will be for all communities and will be held at Stanley Park in Vancouver.

Our Coast Salish steering committee members from Squamish Nation, Tl'seil-Waututh Nation, Sto:lo Nation and Sto:lo Tribal Council will be co hosting the 2009 Gathering in their shared territories.

"It is very fitting that the Gathering will be at our Cultural Centre," said Chief Gibby Jacob of Squamish Nation. "This is a special place and, when the Coast Salish nations gather together, special things happen."

The Gathering represents the interests of nations from southern Puget Sound to the northern Strait of Georgia in transboundary agreements with four levels of governments on both sides of the border.

Tsleil-Waututh Chief Leah George-Wilson said the third and final day of

the Gathering would be held in Vancouver's Stanley Park. There would be recognition of the formal moves in BC and Washington to name the Salish Sea.

"There seems to be overwhelming support for an official name change," she said.



On a plaza, outside the conference center in Seattle, a plaque is displayed. On it is a message that seemed to have been specially written for all those meeting inside to save the Salish Sea.



"For anyone who may be able to chase these dreams, never doubt that your vision can happen. Bridges of community can be built all over the roadblocks and ditches. We are, after all, neighbors who care about each other and have learned how to love the same place."