

FIRST PEOPLES

NATURAL RESOURCES

Join us Mondays through Nov. 28, 2005, as we take a look at the contributions — past and present — of Washington's First Peoples.

Salmon is revered by many of Washington State's First People. For centuries, salmon was a staple of traditional indigenous diets. Today, many tribal people still eat salmon several times a week. To them, salmon means many different things. Salmon is food. Salmon is life. Salmon may be central to their religious practices. Catching or protecting salmon may be their work.

Salmon has become an important part of Northwest culture for many reasons. Most people in the Pacific Northwest have eaten salmon at one time or another. But have you ever thought about where that salmon came from and how it got on your plate? The salmon could have been raised in a hatchery or, if you're lucky, grown wild in the Pacific Ocean. It probably took many people to get that salmon to your dinner table.

Salmon are an important indicator of how clean and healthy our waters and ecosystems are. These days, there are many entities — businesses, nonprofit and tribal organizations, federal, state and local governments and tribal programs — all dedicated to working cooperatively to ensure that salmon continue to flourish. So that both hatchery-raised and wild salmon in Puget Sound waterways and the Columbia River continue to migrate and return home to spawn.

These cooperative relationships have not always existed. Conflicts over regulation of Indian fishing began in the early 1900s. In the late 1960s, these conflicts escalated.

Indian and non-Indian citizens, and government officials of Washington state were engaged in a full-blown "salmon war." Non-Indian and Indian fishers were literally fighting in the streams about who got to fish where and how many fish each could take. This resulted in a very protracted lawsuit in the early 1970s called *United States v. Washington*, which is now a famous treaty rights case. Sometimes the decision is referred to as the "Boldt" decision. Judge Boldt interpreted treaty language, such as the language used in the treaty with the Yakama, that said that Indians had "... the right of taking fish at all usual and accustomed places in common with citizens of the territory ..." to mean that Indians were to share in half of the fish that were caught during any fishing season.

The decision was controversial at the time but it paved the way for better relations between Indians and non-Indians. Later, there would be more lawsuits over clams, geoducks, crabs and other shellfish, concluding that the same treaties also reserved half the shellfish harvest for the native people of Washington State.

Due to their property interest in the fish and shellfish resource, Indian people have a huge stake in co-managing the habitats, waterways and beaches ensuring that they are clean and healthy for fish and shellfish. For many years, the four treaty tribes along the Columbia and Snake rivers have been attempting to get dams removed that block fish passage. Opposition has come from people concerned about the possible loss of jobs and electricity provided by the dams.

Treaty rights also ensure the gathering of roots and medicines at all "... usual and accustomed places ..." Hunting is also a protected treaty right that allows Indian people to hunt for deer and elk off their reservations. Some tribal people still rely on game for subsistence in addition to fish and shellfish. Tribes have learned to co-manage this

resource with the state as well. Many tribal people still celebrate with a ceremony and feast when the first elk is taken or the first salmon is caught.

Clean water is paramount for healthy ecosystems for fish, animals and people. Managing watersheds has become an important goal for tribes, local communities and state officials. Looming on the horizon are battles over conflicting needs of growing cities consuming water versus the need to have the water stay in the streams and waterways for fish, tribal rights and the overall health of the environment. Only by working together can we succeed in using water wisely and not wasting this precious resource.

ACTIVITIES

- 1: What are the main ideas and issues presented in this week's issue of CELEBRATING WASHINGTON'S FIRST PEOPLES? Look for articles in today's *Seattle Times* that further explores or provide insight into this issue. How did the newspaper help inform you about the world around you?
- 2: As a class, discuss or conduct a formal debate regarding the Boldt decision (you may need to do additional research and read the supplemental information in the teacher guide provided with this program). In your opinion, how should decisions regarding land rights and the environment be made when the issue is between Native Americans and the U.S. government? Write an opinion essay presenting your position on this issue. You may want to consult the editorial section of *The Seattle Times* with the essay format.



TONY FORSMAN

SUQUAMISH INDIAN TRIBE
SHELLFISH COORDINATOR FOR
NORTHWEST INDIAN FISHERIES
COMMISSION

"Protection of our natural resources is important to not only the tribal way of life, but also for the quality of life for our entire state. My father always told me to 'take care of the beach and everything that grows on it; you may need it someday.' Indeed, during many hard economic times over the years, the resources the beaches and bays of Puget Sound provided were a lifesaver to tribal families throughout the region. It was always a way of life that continues to this day and a main reason tribes are so dedicated to protecting and enhancing their fisheries resources."



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CHAPTER 5:

NATIVE SPIRITUALITY