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Cooperation Leads to Groundfish Resurgence

by Lorraine Loomis
NWIFC Chair

Twenty years ago, West Coast groundfish stocks such as sole and rockfish were in serious trouble. Decades of overfishing had brought their populations to the brink of collapse. In 2000 federal managers declared a fishery disaster and closed huge sections of the ocean to further harvest.

But after two decades of unprecedented cooperation by treaty, state and federal fisheries co-managers, fishermen, conservation groups, industry and others, groundfish populations today are recovering decades faster than expected and closed waters are being reopened.

It’s been a long, hard decline for groundfish fisheries. Back in 1976 the federal government subsidized construction of a commercial fishing boat for West Coast waters, to harvest abundant stocks. By 1980 more than 500 vessels were catching about 200 million pounds of groundfish a year and were able to fish year-round.

By the late 1990s, however, the warning signs were clear. The once plentiful fish were being overharvested. By 2005 trawlers were harvesting only about one-fourth of 1980 catch levels. The treaty tribal and commercial groundfish fleet stands at about 75 boats today.

Distrust was high among the various parties, but they stuck to the effort and produced a strong recovery plan.

Harvest and bycatch of non-targeted species by treaty tribal, sport and commercial fishermen were cut sharply. Nets were modified to allow small fish to escape. Trawlers avoided rocky areas where their gear might damage important groundfish habitat. Strict quotas were developed and tightly monitored by onboard observers or cameras.

Changes made to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that regulates offshore fisheries now require that scientists set the maximum harvest level. Fisheries managers can reduce harvest from that level but can’t exceed it.

Like most win-win solutions, no one got everything they wanted, but each got something they needed. As a result, the fish are recovering, there’s greater accountability for fishermen and a more collaborative spirit among everyone who participated in the effort.

“Strong management, good science, accountability and a spirit of cooperation among all those involved are the keys to successful fisheries management, according to new research from the University of Washington (UW). A recently released study shows about half the fish harvested worldwide from populations that are scientifically monitored are at sustainable levels or are increasing.

“There is a narrative that fish stocks are declining around the world, that fisheries management is failing and we need new solutions and it’s totally wrong,” said UW professor and lead investigator Ray Hilborn. “Fish stocks are not all declining around the world. They are increasing in many places, and we already know how to solve problems through effective fisheries management.”

With salmon, it’s loss of habitat, not overharvest, that is driving the decline. Treaty tribal and non-Indian sport and commercial fisheries have been reduced by 80-90 percent over the past 40 years and many fisheries have been eliminated. Still, most salmon stocks continue to decline because their habitat is being lost and damaged faster than it can be restored.

The resurgence of the groundfish fishery shows us that fish populations can be successfully rebuilt. We need that same kind of commitment and accountability to recover salmon in western Washington.

Correction: In the Winter 2020 issue of Northwest Treaty Tribes Magazine, it was incorrectly stated on page 12 that the city of Tacoma took nearly two-thirds (3,300 acres) of land given to Nisqually at the time of the Medicine Creek Treaty, creating what is now Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Lands were not given to tribes through the treaties but were reserved by tribes along with the right to hunt, fish and gather in all of their usual and accustomed places. We apologize for the error.
Floods Force Loss of Coho in Hatcheries

Flooding in February caused the loss of at least 100,000 tribal hatchery coho from rearing ponds. High flows also damaged equipment and mud had to be cleaned repeatedly from trays with young salmon in them.

The Puyallup Tribe of Indians lost two fish-acclimatization ponds, each holding 50,000 coho. The Cowskull Pond filled with sediment from a slope failure before overflowing and flushing out fish. High flows blew out the dam at the Rushing-water Pond, sending another 50,000 coho into the raging flows, reducing the survival of young fish.

“It’s going to take hundreds of thousands of dollars and permits to repair the damage to those ponds before we can use them again,” said Russ Ladley, the tribe’s fisheries director. “We have now had four of these ‘50-year flood events’ in five years.”

The Nisqually Tribe also lost some coho to flooding of the Kalama Creek Hatchery when the Nisqually River came over the banks and into the rearing ponds. Eagles and herons were seen feasting on the young fish.

“We’ve been working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to submit our damages,” said Bill St. Jean, the Nisqually Tribe’s enhancement program manager.

Equally damaging was the slurry of garbage and pollution coming from a flooded nearby property, St. Jean said. The tribe continues to monitor the fish that remained in the hatchery, including some in trays that were showing signs of a gill disease.

“We have some equipment that isn’t working but we’re getting back to our routine,” St. Jean said. – D. Preston

“It’s going to take hundreds of thousands of dollars and permits to repair the damage to those ponds before we can use them again.”

Russ Ladley
Puyallup Tribe of Indians
Fisheries Director
Suquamish Opens Retail Seafood Shop

Suquamish tribal fishermen have come a long way from selling their catch individually to passersby on Highway 305.

Locally caught geoduck, salmon, crab and clams can now be purchased fresh or frozen at the tribe’s new seafood shop on Highway 305, operated by Suquamish Seafoods.

The 800-square-foot building includes a cold case, freezer and several live tanks from which to purchase seafood. A majority of the seafood sold is caught by Suquamish tribal fishermen, plus specialty products are available, including marinated clams canned by tribal member Lisa Rodriguez.

“The project was twofold: To expand and diversify our retail arm but also provide more opportunities for tribal fishermen, members and elders to have more access to their cultural resources,” said Tony Forsman, Suquamish Seafoods general manager.

“It started as a community effort and it’s going to grow from here,” he said. “And I’m proud to say it’s nearly 100 percent native employed.”

Suquamish Seafoods started selling retail products at its processing plant in 2016 before deciding to expand to the new location in November, where tribal members and the public could more easily access the products.

Suquamish Seafoods has primarily processed geoduck since it opened in 1996 but during the past few years, the business has brought in other seafood.

“We wanted to provide a market for the tribal fishermen who harvest this treaty resource, and support our fishermen,” said Leonard Forsman, Suquamish tribal chairman. “Plus we have wanted to expand beyond geoduck and have oysters and other seafood available. It’s gratifying to put these traditional foods in our community and make them more accessible for our tribal community, as well as the public, which we know also enjoys these resources.” – T. Royal
While forecasts for returning coho salmon are down again this year, the Muckleshoot and Suquamish tribes continue to make sure there are harvestable fish in Puget Sound for everyone, with plans to double the amount of hatchery releases next year.

Since 1993, the tribes have been co-managing a net pen in Elliott Bay, filling it with up to 500,000 juvenile coho salmon every February. The tribes will increase that number next year with the addition of a second net pen, with the capacity to hold 1 million fish.

Suquamish’s fisheries staff acquired funding and permits last summer to upgrade the existing net pen’s anchors, structure and nets, the third overhaul of the structure since the program started. Permits are pending for the addition of the second net pen.

The fish are spawned at Muckleshoot’s Keta Creek Hatchery, and reared there or at Palmer Ponds, a state rearing facility. Several state fish transfer trucks then haul the fish an hour’s drive to Port of Seattle’s Pier 91 in tanks of water with salt and supplemental oxygen. A Suquamish barge receives the fish, then motors over to the net pens to unload them. The fish are released from the pen in late May or early June.

“These fish are for everyone to harvest,” said Mike Huff, Suquamish Tribe’s hatchery manager.

Suquamish hatchery staff Bill Alexander and Corey Oster unload coho into the net pen in Elliott Bay.

T. Royal

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The Suquamish Tribe, in partnership with the state Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Navy, transferred nearly 300,000 juvenile coho salmon from the tribe’s Gorst Creek rearing facility to its Agate Pass net pens in February.

The Agate Pass program has been operating since the 1980s, providing coho salmon for both tribal and nontribal harvesting.

Flying Coho

T. Royal
The entire Duckabush elk herd is sitting about 100 yards away from Charin Godbolt, who is keeping her eye on a particular young bull.

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe wildlife biologist is hoping the 2.5-year-old branch-antlered bull gets a little closer so she can outfit it with a GPS/VHF collar.

For several weeks this winter, Godbolt and Dylan Bergman, Point No Point Treaty Council (PNPTC) wildlife biologist, tracked this herd to learn more about its population size, migration patterns and genetic diversity. The PNPTC is a natural resources consortium of the Port Gamble S’Klallam and Jamestown S’Klallam tribes.

A handful of elk have been collared with VHF trackers so the tribe can find the general location of the herd with a VHF antenna and receiver. Some of the collars have a GPS tracker, which shows migration patterns.

The biologists also take hair and blood samples for DNA testing, driven by the concern there could be inbreeding because the cows don’t leave their 8-square-mile home range of the Duckabush River valley, Bergman said.

“The only hope for genetic diversity is the bulls moving between the Duckabush, Dosewallip, Hamma Hamma, Lilliwaup and Olympic National Park herds,” he said. “We don’t know if bulls are moving between herds, so we are collaring a few of the 2.5-year-old bulls so we can follow them.”

Elk hoof disease and chronic wasting disease aren’t an immediate concern at the moment, “but we know they’re coming,” he said. Those diseases could increase the mortality rate and change how the tribe and the state manage the herd.

All this data helps with wildlife management discussions at a fine level with the co-managers, Bergman said.

“We use the data to help the tribes and the state set hunting seasons and inform land-use management decisions, such as state land sales, mitigation and potential development – pretty much anything that would impact that herd’s habitat,” Bergman said.

The herd recently has averaged 40-50 animals, and is rebounding from a low, Bergman said.

The animals generally stick to floodplains, state parks, alder bogs, logged areas and meadows because of the variety of grasses available, moving between public land and privately owned land. The tribe has established working relationships with land managers, park rangers and private property owners to access the elk when they come onto those properties. – T. Royal

Above: Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe wildlife biologist Charin Godbolt, left, and Point No Point Treaty Council wildlife biologist Dylan Bergman use antennas and receivers to find elk they have collared with VHF transmitters. Top right: Bergman, left, and state wildlife biologist Bryan Murphie work with a young bull before collaring it with a GPS/VHF collar. Bottom right: Members of the Duckabush elk herd hang out in the valley.
A Duck Life in the Refuge

At the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, a drake bufflehead swims past visitors seeking solace in nature during school and business closures in March to prevent spread of the coronavirus.
The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community is reviving ancient clam gardens to improve nearshore habitat and give tribal members more opportunities to harvest traditional foods.

Historically, Coast Salish tribal members built low-lying rock walls in the intertidal zone to create clam gardens. Broken shells and gravel filled in the space up to the wall, creating a terrace by reducing the slope of the beach and increasing the area where shellfish could grow.

Today, shellfish populations face ongoing threats from sea level rise and ocean acidification from climate change. Swinomish published a climate impact assessment in 2009 that noted that traditional shellfish harvest areas on the west shore of the tribe’s reservation were at risk of permanent inundation and potential loss.

“The impacts on shellfish from even modest changes in water temperature and absorption of (carbon dioxide), with consequent effects on pH acidity levels, are potentially enormous,” the plan stated. “Shellfish larvae are particularly at risk from acidity affecting their growth rates and ability to form shells.”

The plan recommended finding ways to restore and enhance habitat to re-establish diverse, harvestable shellfish populations.

“Clam gardens will promote robust native shellfish populations and encourage the integration of traditional ecological knowledge in contemporary resource management and climate change adaptation strategies,” said Swinomish marine ecologist Courtney Greiner. “It will also bolster local food security, support tribal treaty rights, and provide ecological and cultural benefits to the community.”

Swinomish tribal members and staff, led by Greiner, have spent the last couple of years narrowing down potential locations for a clam garden.

“Site selection is the most important aspect, so we are taking the time to make sure we find the right location,” she said.

Greiner ranked 15 potential sites on the west side of the reservation based on the abundance of juvenile clams, composition of substrate on and below the surface, whether the flow of the current will provide enough food and sediment, and the slope and distance from shoreline armoring.

Fisheries and Community Environment Health Program staff and Swinomish tribal members also have been building relationships with experts and knowledge-holders from the WSÁNEĆ and Hul’q’umi’num first nations, which have partnered with Parks Canada to restore clam gardens in the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. During field trips to British Columbia, Swinomish tribal members learned about clam garden construction, management and restoration.

In addition to increasing the abundance, growth rate and size of clams, clam gardens provide habitat that boosts other species such as sea cucumbers, sea urchins and kelp.

The Swinomish Community Environment Health Program will present potential sites for tribal members to rank. Factors to be considered include family connections to the tidelands and opportunities for community work and stewardship of the garden.

“Our goals are to improve ecological conditions within the greater nearshore environment, and increase and sustain the health and well-being of Swinomish tribal members,” Greiner said. “The information and tools produced by our project will be transferable to other resource-dependent communities within the Salish Sea and beyond to advance regional shellfish management.” – K. Neumeyer
Razor Clam Boom Welcomed

Razor clams were the hero that Quinault Indian Nation tribal members needed this winter after the blueback sockeye fishery was closed. Tribal and state co-managers surveyed razor clams and found a bumper crop, the best in two decades, allowing tribal members and nontribal members to fill their freezers this winter. Left: A tribal member sets up a lantern as dusk falls. While improvements in headlamps mean there are fewer lanterns, some tribal members still swear by the lantern to best illuminate the surf and remain aware of the waves. Above: Tribal member Jayal Billie looks for clams while his daughter Shaola waits to add to her collection in her wagon. Gulls and an eagle wait in hopes of getting in on the action.

In this 2009 photo, Jeremiah Johnny (left), then a Nooksack Tribe cultural habitat technician, and cultural resources director George Swanaset Jr. watch tribal member Jessica Williams try her hand at dip net fishing.

Swanaset, who is now also the Nooksack Tribe’s natural resources director, made the long-handled net with a cedar handle, vine maple hoop and bone rings, to demonstrate dip-netting to young adults in the tribe’s YouthBuild program.

It was the first time in 25 years he had made a traditional dip net. He and his grandfather used to fish with a dip net in the Nooksack River, but the method fell out of practice in favor of larger set nets.

“Basically what it is, is a net on a stick,” Swanaset said. “You drift your net down into a pool until you feel something bump. It’s really a long, slow process, but once you start feeling them in there, then you start catching them one by one.”

Dip nets also allow fishermen to safely release native fish that they do not wish to take from the river.
Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe

Tribe Purchases Former Timber Company Land

Port Gamble S’Klallam tribal members recently celebrated the return of nearly 1,000 acres to tribal ownership, 165 years after the tribe signed the Point No Point Treaty that ceded most of the tribe’s land to the U.S. government.

Since 2013, the tribe has been negotiating with property owner Pope Resources to purchase 937 acres of timberland north of the reservation, and a conservation easement for 18.4 acres and adjacent tidelands where Pope operated a mill for more than 150 years.

The purchase of development rights and restoration planning was funded by $4.5 million in grants from the state Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program, Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, and Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account programs for the purpose of protection, restoration and public access.

“The Port Gamble S’Klallam have a long history with Pope Resources,” said Jeromy Sullivan, tribal chairman. “The mill played a big role in our lives as a source of employment as we adapted to European settlement, but also hurt Port Gamble Bay and its shore-

The last several years have brought good things: the cleanup work on the bay and, of course, our conversations with Pope Resources that led to this deal.” Other outcomes include a commitment between the tribe and Pope Resources to work together on the redevelopment of the town of Port Gamble in ways that are more environmentally responsible and respectful of the tribe and its history on the land.

The tribe also has a 25-year lease on the tidelands south of the old mill site and north of the Port Gamble Heritage Park shoreline for possible shellfish harvest, and the option to purchase an acre of the mill site property outside of the conservation easement after the site is cleaned up.

The tribe plans to keep the 937 acres north of the reservation as open space for the immediate future and eventually put it into trust status, Sullivan said.

“We look forward to the future and watching this area – that we call nəxʷq.yt (noo-kayet) – continue to heal and come back to life,” he said. “Our culture and traditions depend on it.”

– T. Royal

National Park Service

Right: Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe chairman Jeromy Sullivan honors Pope Resources President and CEO Tom Ringo and Director of Administration and Corporate Affairs Adrian Miller. Below: The Pope Resources mill, left, operated for more than 150 years across from Point Julia on the Port Gamble S’Klallam Reservation.
The Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe and local conservation partners are preserving local farmland and restoring floodplain habitat at the same time along the Dungeness River. Called the River’s Edge Project, the tribe, North Olympic Land Trust (NOLT) and its subsidiary, Olympic Peninsula Conservation Resource (OPCR), recently purchased more than 100 acres of the McLane-Wallacker Trust property along the river. More than 40 acres purchased by the tribe will be restored for floodplain habitat for salmon, and 64 acres purchased by OPCR will be put into farmland conservation.

In addition, the tribe will acquire 25 acres along the river for a new setback levee with a conservation easement for restoration. The property currently is leased by Dungeness Valley Creamery but is too wet to be used as cow pasture, said LaTrisha Suggs, a Jamestown S’Klallam restoration planner.

“This is a huge opportunity to remove over a mile of a levee adjacent to the Dungeness River and open up floodplain for salmon habitat,” Suggs said.

The River’s Edge Project has been a priority project for the tribe’s salmon habitat restoration efforts since 1997. This project was possible because of willing landowners’ relationships with the tribe and NOLT, she said.

“Conservation at River’s Edge is an amazing opportunity for this community,” said Tom Sanford, NOLT’s executive director. “The Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe has been an incredible steward of the Dungeness for millennia and it is an incredible honor to partner in this effort for habitat restoration and farmland preservation.”

This project will protect the land through conservation easements, reconnect former floodplains with the river, create salmon habitat, reduce channelization and high water flows, allow opportunities for wood accumulation, re-establish riparian forests, and create public access to the river.

“This renewal of historical riparian habitat will support salmon recovery and boost overall ecosystem health,” Suggs said.

The next steps for the tribe are to find funding to complete the design for the levee setback, construct a new levee, deconstruct the old levee, and begin planting native vegetation and trees.

Funding for this project comes from a combination of tribal grants through the Washington State Recreation and Conservation office, the state Department of Ecology’s Floodplain by Designs program, a match from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, tribal brownfields funds, and NOLT’s fundraising efforts.

– T. Royal

Honoring the Legacy of Billy Frank Jr.

At the Billy Frank Jr. Day Community Celebration at Nisqually Middle School, Willie Frank III explains that he was never taught anything about his father or the Fish Wars when he was in school.

That has changed with the Since Time Immemorial curriculum taught to students in the North Thurston School District. At the March 11 event, students from grades K-12 displayed their projects.

Learn more about Billy’s life and work: nwtt.co/bfjd.
Skagit Salmon Pay for Hydropower

As Seattle City Light (SCL) begins its relicensing process with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe has asked the public utility and the city of Seattle to address 100 years of harm the hydroelectric project has caused.

The current license went into effect in 1995 and expires in 2025. SCL operates the Ross, Diablo and Gorge dams on the Skagit River, where salmon, steelhead and bull trout populations have continued to decline despite being listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

“We want Seattle City Light to fully assess the effects of hydropower on Skagit River salmon, and then develop plans to reverse or mitigate them, if that’s even possible,” said Scott Schuyler, the Upper Skagit Tribe’s natural resources director. “The tribe is grateful for the work that SCL has done to date, but the problems facing the Skagit must now be addressed through a holistic approach.”

Not only does the continual dewatering of the river undermine salmon recovery, but building dams and drilling tunnels also caused irreversible damage to Upper Skagit ancestral villages.

“The building of these dams disturbed the resting places of our ancestors, destroyed or damaged important cultural sites, desecrated an Upper Skagit sacred village and then renamed it Newhalem,” tribal member Janelle Schuyler, Scott’s daughter, wrote in a letter to Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan late last year. “The dams diminished our salmon runs by cutting off salmon passage, excluding miles and miles of former habitat, and literally have impacted the entire Skagit watershed.”

Since then, the utility has made a commitment to resource protection, environmental education, and environmental stewardship, according to its website.

“We manage the project to first manage floods, second to address fish, third to address recreation issues and fourth for power production,” Chris Townsend, SCL’s director of natural resources and hydro licensing, recently told the Skagit Valley Herald.

Scott Schuyler recognizes the positive role the dams play in flood management, but he wants SCL to own up to the negative impacts hydropower has on fish, and help assess the extent of the damage. Instead, SCL officials told him climate change and harvest management are to blame.

“They don’t have a clue what the tribes have sacrificed in terms of harvest,” he said. “Even if we quit fishing, it won’t reverse these trends. They never assessed the cumulative effects of the dams.”

Power production may be fourth on SCL’s list of priorities now, but that doesn’t rewrite the history of the city of Seattle, Janelle Schuyler reminded Mayor Durkan.

“The destruction of the Skagit sent cheap power through miles of transmission lines south to the city, spurring forth economic growth and the building of infrastructure which was the foundation of building Seattle into one of the greatest cities on the West Coast,” she wrote.

“Hydropower in the Upper Skagit has provided benefits to the city of Seattle for a century now and the disproportionate lack of reinvestment in the Skagit must be seriously looked at, because our precious river is in dire need of help,” Scott Schuyler said.

When the tribe signed the current license, none of the signatories could have predicted that Skagit salmon populations would continue their downward spiral, and the measures outlined in the license would not be sufficient to stem the decades-long decline.

“The Upper Skagit Tribe believes that the impacts of hydropower on the Upper Skagit extend into Puget Sound and may have a negative impact on marine species like the southern resident killer whale,” he said. “The Skagit tribes rely on a healthy, productive Skagit to sustain our fishing culture, and today we are faced with a complete fishery disaster.”

— K. Neumeyer
New Channel to Keep Landslide Deposits Out of River

The Stillaguamish Tribe hopes to reduce the amount of sediment flowing into the South Fork Stillaguamish River from the Gold Basin landslide.

The plan is to excavate a new channel to move the river away from the massive alluvial deposit created from the landslide. From then on, all the material coming down from the slide will be deposited into the dry former river channel.

The ongoing landslide is across the river from the Gold Basin Campground on U.S. Forest Service land, and is believed to be the largest source of fine sediment to the Stillaguamish River.

“If we can slow down or prevent most of that sediment from getting in the river, it should help the fish survive a little longer and make the habitat a little better,” said Pat Stevenson, the tribe’s environmental manager.

The project won’t treat the landslide, which should eventually stabilize itself. A geomorphologist conducted an inventory in the early 2000s that found 1,200 landslides in the North and South forks of the Stillaguamish. Another inventory 10 to 15 years later found between 400 and 500, Stevenson said.

“They do stabilize and fill in,” Stevenson said. “Once it stops, the vegetation starts to grow. After 10 to 15 years, you can’t even tell there was a landslide because it’s all vegetation. The Gold Basin landslide area has three lobes, and two of them have already greened up and are hard to see in aerial photos.”

This makes the Gold Basin slide very different from the deep-seated Oso landslide that took lives and destroyed homes along State Route 530 in 2014.

Work is expected to begin this spring and be completed during the summer.

Fine sediment is a major factor limiting recovery of chinook salmon, which are listed under the Endangered Species Act, in the South Fork Stillaguamish River. Sediment can smother incubating eggs and reduce survival of salmon from eggs to the fry stage.

Reducing the flow of sediment into the river also will improve flood control.

“Fine sediment fills in pools, and shallows and widens the river,” Stevenson said. “Massive sediment inputs exacerbate flood conditions downstream.”

By increasing available rearing and spawning habitat, the Gold Basin project also will benefit coho and pink salmon, steelhead and bull trout as well as numerous other aquatic invertebrates. – K. Neumeyer

Steelhead Scales Tell a Tale

Quinault Indian Nation fisheries technician Jordan Curley, right, and fisheries biologist Catrina Bean prepare to take a steelhead scale sample at the Lake Quinault Fish Hatchery.

Scale samples give fisheries managers information about the life history of returning fish. Unlike most species of salmon, steelhead can spawn repeatedly before they die. The timing of their migration to the ocean can vary, and they can stay at sea up to three years before returning to fresh water to spawn.

Quinault steelhead returns were good this year, but their size was smaller than average.
For tribes, the struggle between sharing culture and protecting it from being used by nontribal people for profit is a part of daily life.

The Nisqually Tribe is determining what information will be shared at public park sites on both Nisqually land and public spaces that traverse ancestral lands. For example, identifying important cultural plants is part of protecting them but the knowledge could lead to misuse and exploitation.

The Nisqually Tribe is responsible for a myriad of park lands, including properties on the reservation and at Lake St. Clair, Medicine Creek Springs, an exclusive use area at Mount Rainier, and lands surrounding Nisqually State Park. The tribe has a cooperative agreement to assist with state park development, including interpretive signage.

Recently, a community gathering was held to get input about park lands owned by the tribe as well as public parks that include Nisqually traditional areas.

Nisqually tribal member Chelsie Sharp coordinated gathering the input.

“This will give the tribe some idea of what the community wants to see in their parks,” Sharp said. “We don’t have a master plan yet that covers the various park lands, so this is a good start.”

Tribal members gathered at large round tables and filled out sticky notes to add to poster-sized question boards. Additionally, they filled out a survey ranking the top three improvements they would like to see at Nisqually parks or at Mount Rainier. Improvements might include more art, native plantings, signage, picnic shelters, more developed walking trails or additional covered basketball courts.

Community involvement in parks development is key, said Nisqually tribal member Jasmine McDonald, who participated in the event.

“I think that tribal and community member participation in the planning process is a vital piece to community engagement, which brings valuable ideas to the planning process,” McDonald said.

Building trust in the process and with those doing the planning helps provide better outcomes now and in the future, she said.

“Meetings with the community like this allow us to make plans and move forward,” said Tony Sanchez, vice chairman of the Nisqually Parks Commission.

Lisa Breckenridge, parks development specialist for the Nisqually Tribe, was pleased with the turnout and valuable input.

“We have used Nisqually AmeriCorps and our parks staff to do upkeep and some improvements, but community-based strategic planning allows us to think about things beyond basic maintenance and about future developments the community wants to see as well as the kind of information they want to share.”

– D. Preston

Nisqually tribal members are considering questions about public and tribal spaces located in the tribe’s traditional areas, including:

- Should parks include traditional plant areas?
- What information should be shared in Nisqually parks?
- What are some ways to bring culture into parks?

Joyce McCloud offers input at a community meeting about what the future of parks might look like for her grandchildren.

Ryan Ives, right, and Andy Lambert, geologists with Nisqually’s Archeology and Historical Services, survey a planned campground at Nisqually State Park.

Ives digs holes while Lambert sifts dirt. They are sampling 400 plots to make sure there are no tribal artifacts underground.

The tribe and state are working together to provide recreational opportunities for both the general public and tribal members, while educating visitors about the Nisqually Tribe. The 1,300-acre park is the newest in the state park system.
Seven generations after Northwest tribes signed treaties with the U.S. government, the Treaty of Point Elliott is on display at the Tulalip Tribes’ Hibulb Cultural Center through July.

The document was signed Jan. 22, 1855, and has been stored in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for most of the time since then.

Hibulb curator Tessa Campbell and assistant curator Emilie Smith arranged to borrow the treaty as part of an exhibit called “The Power of Words: A History of Tulalip Literacy.” While developing an exhibit about Tulalip authors, they traced the tribes’ first experience with the printed word back to the signing of the treaty.

Tribal leaders, including those representing the Lummi, Muckleshoot, Nooksack, Sauk-Suiattle, Stillaguamish, Suquamish, Swinomish, Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Skykomish and Upper Skagit tribes, marked X’s beside their names on the treaty. In doing so, they ceded almost all of their land in exchange for the continued right to fish, hunt and gather as they always had, as well as health care and education for tribal members.

Tribal members were relocated to reservations, and those from the Snohomish, Snoqualmie and Skykomish tribes, along with allied bands, became known as the Tulalip Tribes.

The museum exhibit describes how tribal children were sent to boarding schools where they were forced to assimilate into the settlers’ culture and forbidden to speak their traditional languages. They also were taught to read and write in English.

“Literacy has allowed us to keep a record of our history, culture and teachings,” Campbell said. “Literacy has not replaced our lifeways or teachings. Instead, it is a tool we learned to use to our advantage for healing, carrying on the teachings and traditions of our people, and, most importantly, upholding the inherent rights of our treaty.”

Tribal members were invited to preview the exhibit in January.

“Since treaty times, every tribal leader has fought to enact and protect the provisions in that document, and that’s why we are still here today,” said Glen Gobin, Tulalip Tribes vice chairman. “We are a sovereign nation with a treaty with the U.S. government because of our ancestors who never gave up the things they thought were most important.

“When you think of all the adversity the tribes have faced after 165 years, it’s amazing we are still here. It shows the resiliency we have, the strength of our own teachings, and the power of our understanding of what it means to protect that treaty.” – K. Neumeyer

Above, from left: Hibulb curator Tessa Campbell, Tulalip senior environmental policy analyst Libby Halpin Nelson and assistant curator Emilie Smith discuss museum signage. Top: Nelson and Tulalip Natural Resources GIS specialist Michelle Totman read the Treaty of Point Elliott.
Members of the Quinault Indian Nation relied on the blueback salmon for as long as they can remember—until they couldn’t. The Quinault Division of Natural Resources has been fighting for decades to recover the iconic fish from habitat degradation, but now finds itself at ground zero for the environmental impacts of climate change.

Can the Blueback Survive? tells the stories of Quinault tribal fisherman Butch Pope, policy representative Ed Johnstone and President Fawn Sharp, who all grew up eating blueback salmon.

Now playing at nwtt.co/blueback.