

2009

Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference

WASHINGTON STATE
CONVENTION & TRADE CENTER
FEBRUARY 8-11, 2009

THE FUTURE OF THE SALISH SEA... A CALL TO ACTION!

A Call to Action for the Salish Sea

Developed by the Call to Action Team at the 2009 Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference. Read aloud in closing plenary by Adam Harding, Pearson College, on Wednesday, February 11th, 2009.

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. 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?

Many important actions have been identified in all of the sessions over the past three days. Those actions have been assembled and sorted. They will be provided in the proceedings of the conference and will be used in the development of the agenda for the next Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference in 2011. The spirit of the work done over the past three days has been captured in this Call to Action.

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.

We call for broad commitment to implement the Puget Sound Action Agenda. The Action Agenda calls for protecting the parts of the eco-region that still function well, restoring the parts that don't, preventing polluted stormwater runoff from flowing into the waters of the Salish Sea, and working together in new partnerships. We call for the Puget Sound Partnership to regularly re-evaluate the Action Agenda, based on input such as that provided during this conference, so that it remains a living document responsive to new knowledge and a changing environment.

We call on the leaders and citizens of British Columbia to rededicate themselves to COLLABORATIVE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT. And we call on the scientists and leaders from Puget Sound and Georgia Basin to collaborate with each other in all useful ways—transferring knowledge and lessons gained during the Puget Sound Action Agenda planning process so that it can be leveraged in efforts to advance ecosystem management in the Georgia Basin AND transferring

PugetSoundPartnership
our sound, our community, our chance



Environment
Canada

Environnement
Canada



www.pgsabcconference.org

experiences and learning from fifteen years of ecosystem-based management efforts in the Georgia Basin to leaders and citizens south of the border.

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 new science panel should meet regularly with each other and with policy makers so that recommendations can be adjusted as knowledge and understanding grows. 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.

We call for existing trans-boundary governance bodies to establish, within the next two years, portals that will allow the exchange of information and identification of collaborative projects on how to restore an ecosystem. Scientists, policy makers, volunteers, and resource managers need the capacity to collaborate on joint priorities, tools, data that has been collected, and lessons learned.

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. Ecosystem based management means looking at the big picture and the long term, and that means more transparency in what we do. It also means fostering stewardship on a wider scale. We must work as though there are no boundaries – to set priorities for protection at the level of the ecological region, and encourage collaboration among scientists, planners, and decision makers at all levels of government.

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. We heard examples of how people are hungry to get past the fighting, and they need to have meaningful ways to get involved through watershed councils and volunteer organizations that build local capacity. Citizen scientists collect important information and we need to use their energy and expertise to learn and adapt.

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.