



Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission

Protecting Tribal Lands and Waterways for Future Generations

Tribes and First Nations Declare Salmon Emergency

Lummi Nation (Ferndale, Washington) October 10, 2019.

In a historic exercise of self-determination, Indigenous governments from southeast Alaska, Washington and First Nations from British Columbia met to declare an emergency. The meeting was prompted by the rapid rate of destructive resource extraction in the waters and lands these nations have called home for thousands of years. “We will not surrender our responsibilities as stewards of the land and resources entrusted to us by our creator,” stated John Ward of the Taku River Tlingit.

Human activities have decimated the salmon populations that sustain our communities. These watersheds cross the U.S. and Canadian international border; a border not acknowledged by the First Peoples of the land. Neither the U.S. or Canada has addressed these issues, so the Indigenous Nations committed to come together and act on their shared concerns and use their collective ancestral knowledge.

“We as human beings have to stand together to ensure we have clean waters and sustainability,” stated John Ridsdale Chief Na’Moks of the Wet’suwet’en Nation. “We as Indigenous peoples have a duty to protect what sustains all people as we have done for thousands of years.”

The event, organized by the Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission (SEITC), focused on the right for Indigenous communities to be fully represented in all decisions impacting their territories. The Indigenous communities that define this land are left out of the decision-making processes, but often suffer the immediate and lasting impacts.

SEITC Chairman Rob Sanderson Jr. summed up the objectives; “We have lived in balance with this land through many changes and have learned many lessons on how to protect the fish and water, lessons to which the world should pay attention.”

“We have a right to self-determination to use our ancestral teachings and relationships which are continuously validated through our languages, stories, songs, maps, traditional laws and spiritual beliefs. The U.S. and Canada must follow our lead. We expect that any mining or other activities occurring in our territories must first obtain our consent,” said Kirby Muldoe who is of Gitksan and Tsimsian descent.

All participants committed to work together to protect, defend, and assert their human rights by protecting clean water and the health and habitat of the wild salmon stocks. Accomplishing this

will assure that the health of the ecosystems and cultures that understand and depend on them will also be sustained.

“We as Indigenous people know how to do this, local decision-making is the key. Both countries must recognize and implement our rights under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and honor free, prior and informed consent,” said Loretta Williams Chair of First Nations Women Advocating for Responsible Mining.

The unified group will work diligently through the coming year so that at the next annual meeting “we can say we honored all our people, those who were and those yet to come when it is their time,” said Ray Sensmeier of the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe

This respectful dialogue will lead to healthier, more predictable outcomes. “If we do not care for the land and water, the land and water will not care for us,” stated Shawaan Jackson-Gamble Emerging Leader of the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska.

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