

Whidbey Native Connections Initiative Newsletter

January 2026

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 6:30 PM-8:00 PM: Native Connections Zoom Gathering

(Watch for the Zoom link in your inbox a few days before the event.)

FIRST DESCENT: KAYAKING THE KLAMATH

Join us on the first Wednesday of this new year to view a documentary following Indigenous youth kayakers as they paddle the Klamath River from its source to the sea. Twenty-eight young people undertook this 310-mile journey to celebrate the removal of four major dams from the Klamath, and to honor their ancestors who had tried for more than a century to free the river and bring the salmon back. To prepare for the epic journey, some of the youth traveled to places like Chile to learn how to kayak, and to study river health and the effect of dams worldwide.

The journey down the river was a life-changing event for many and helped set them on courses for their lives. “This trip was also a promise,” said Danielle Rey Frank, of the Hupa and Yurok tribes. “We promise that we will do whatever we have to, to protect our river.” Many of the youth have been speaking at conferences and events since returning in July, bringing attention to the negative effects of dams.

When the dams were built on the Klamath River, they wiped out all of the salmon in the homelands of the Klamath and Modoc people. Since then, the resident Chinook and Coho have been listed as threatened and endangered species.

The film was recently released in November by Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB). If you miss seeing it with us on Wednesday, you can view it on OPB or via YouTube.

BACKGROUND: HOW THE KLAMATH DAMS CAME DOWN

“The removal of the four dams on the Klamath, which were owned by the power utility PacifiCorp, represents the first real attempt at the kind of river restoration that Indigenous nations and environmentalists have long demanded. It is the result of an improbable campaign that spanned close to half a century, roped in thousands of people, and came within an inch of collapse several times. Interviews with dozens of people on all sides of the dam removal fight, some of whom have never spoken publicly about their roles, reveal a collaborative achievement with few clear parallels in contemporary activism.” [Read the story in Grist](#)

THE ONGOING SAGA OF THE DAMS ON THE LOWER SNAKE RIVER

A similar improbable collaboration of governmental agencies, environmental activists, and tribal representatives (come to be known as “The Six Sovereigns”) have worked tirelessly on a plan to restore the Snake River by removing the four dams on the lower Snake. Much work was accomplished to bring tribes and governmental entities together to study how the dams on the Lower Snake River could be taken down while preserving the benefits the dams provided. The two states and four tribes created the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative (CBRI), which Biden signed onto in 2023, and Trump promptly revoked in June of 2025. [Read the story in Grist](#).

Indigenous Nations say ending the Columbia Basin agreement undermines treaty rights.

To support Tribes, the environment, clean water, salmon and the Orca who depend on them, it is of utmost importance that we keep the pressure up on our congressional reps, and that we keep these issues in the public view-scape. Write letters to the editors. Call your reps. Save our Wild Salmon has excellent action suggestions. Or join their monthly virtual action hour for salmon.

[Act NOW on behalf of Salmon. Fund the CBRI.](#)

HEAR HEAL
THE THE
PEOPLE RIVER

JANUARY 27: HEAR THE PEOPLE, HEAL THE RIVER ACTION HOUR

When: Tuesday, January 27th at 5:30-6:30pm PT

Where: Zoom

What: Join the *Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition* in taking collective action to protect salmon and defend the historic progress made towards salmon recovery by attending their **MONTHLY VIRTUAL SALMON ADVOCACY ACTION HOURS!**



MONTHLY VIRTUAL ACTION
HOURS FOR SALMON

Artist: Sue Coccia
earthartinternational.com

THE SNAKE AND THE WHALE

This award-winning documentary tells the story of an investigative journalist attempting to expose the effects of dams on the Lower Snake River. The existence of the remaining four dams have driven Idaho Salmon and Southern Resident Orcas almost to extinction. The documentary has won many awards, including the Chief Dan George Award from the Red Nation International Film Festival. Howard Garrett of Orca Network is interviewed in the film, as are Tribal elders, Rosie Cayou and Raynell Morris.



Artist: Sue Coccia

The film is currently available only at film festivals. But we found one such festival has an online ticket (\$10) that gives you access to the film for 2 weeks, from January 17th through February 2. [Register for the Snake and Whale here.](#)

Treaty Reflections from the Snohomish Homelands

**An open letter to the NCI community from Carly Mathews, Vice-Chairperson,
The Snohomish Tribe of Indians
January 2026**

As we move through Treaty season, marking the 171st anniversary of the Treaty of Point Elliott, signed January 22, 1855, remembering the Treaty of Point No Point, signed January 26, 1855, and reflecting just beyond the anniversary of the Medicine Creek Treaty, signed December 26, 1854, we find ourselves thinking less about dates and more about the people who stood inside those moments on these shores, beside these rivers, under these same skies.

These treaties are not relics of the past. They remain legally binding commitments today.



We think about how those treaties were made.

Not in comfort.

Not with full information.

Not with shared language or equal power.

They were signed under duress.

They were signed amid pressure and threat.

And in some cases, they were not signed at all.

Our ancestors did not come to those gatherings thinking about modern governments, corporations, or future recognition systems. They were thinking about survival. About salmon and rivers. About villages and burial grounds. About how to preserve lifeways, land, language, and kinship for children not yet born.

Some signed because they believed it was the only way to protect their people.

Some refused because they believed the cost was too great.

Some fought in the treaty wars that followed, believing resistance itself was an act of care.

None of them did this for only some of their children.

None of them did this so that only some of their grandchildren would be remembered.

None of them made these decisions so that entire bands, families, or peoples, including those who descend from multiple treaty signers and multiple nations, would later be forgotten.

What followed was not accidental. It was intentional.

It was enforced through removals, boarding schools, confinement, and laws that criminalized Indigenous languages, ceremonies, and ways of life, and later through federal policies such as the General Allotment Act, Indian Reorganization Act, enrollment systems, and recognition frameworks that deliberately redefined identity, fractured families, and excluded entire peoples from the protections treaties were meant to secure.

Many treaty-descended Snohomish families, along with many of our Duwamish, Steilacoom, Chinook, Chemakum, and other relatives, remain outside federal recognition today, not because we ceased to exist, but because federal systems were designed to narrow who would be seen.

That is not what our ancestors agreed to.

That is not what they fought for.

That is not what they prayed into the future.

When we speak of treaties, we speak with our ancestors beside us. Their footsteps are still on these beaches. Their prayers are still in this wind. They remind us that responsibility does not end. **It is handed down.**

This reflection is both a call out and a call in.

It is a call out to systems and narratives that continue to benefit from selective memory, selective recognition, and selective responsibility.

And it is a call in to relatives, neighboring tribes, and communities to remember that treaties were made by human beings under impossible conditions, acting with care for the future as best they could.

Honoring the treaties means more than marking anniversaries.

It means telling the truth about how they were made.

It means recognizing all the descendants they were meant to protect.

It means refusing stories that narrow Indigenous existence to what fits on paper.

Treaty rights are not special privileges. They are reserved rights, retained when vast homelands were taken.

This is not about undoing treaties.

It is about completing them.

About remembering that treaties were promises rooted in relationship, not mechanisms of erasure.

To Our Allies and Those Learning with Us

To our allies, we say this gently: When you walk these lands, you walk inside our ancestors' promises. Treaty responsibility is not a moment. It is a relationship; one that grows like cedar, slowly, through seasons of listening.

We acknowledge that we have been quieter since our November 12th panel. As winter comes, and continues, so has the need for internal work. This quiet is not absence. It is tending. It is strengthening roots beneath the surface.

We ask you to continue learning with us and growing with us, not as observers of history, but as people who now live inside its consequences. Treaty responsibility is relational. It deepens over time through listening, humility, and care.

We have not left.

We have not gone away.

We are still here. Still thinking, still listening, still carrying what needs to be carried forward.

We thank those who have continued to hold space and who understand that growth, like the seasons, includes rest.

We offer this with love and with strength.

Because our ancestors carried responsibility for us under impossible conditions, we too must carry it forward with honesty, care, and courage.

Stay Connected

If you would like to stay in touch and receive updates as we begin to share more of our history, our vision, and ways to learn, support, and walk alongside this work, we invite you to sign up: [Stay connected with Snohomish Allies](#)

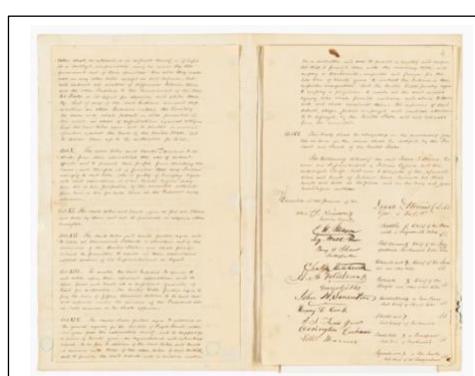
Thank you for continuing to hold space, to learn with us, and to grow alongside us.

Read the Treaties

[Treaty of Point Elliott \(1855\)](#)

[Treaty of Point No Point \(1855\)](#)

[Medicine Creek Treaty \(1854\)](#)



*Point Elliott Treaty,
Washington Territory,
first signature page,
1/22/1855.*

BRINGING IINNII AND NITSITAPII BACK TO THE LAND

Many of us may have watched the documentary, “[Bring Them Home](#),” a film documenting how the Blackfeet Tribe restored Buffalo (the linnii) to their lands, currently showing on PBS. (If you haven’t seen this 1:20 hr. film, it is well worth watching.) Another fifteen-minute video, “[Bringing the linnii and Nitsitapii Back to the Land](#),” announces a multi-tribal movement of land restoration and food sovereignty. The film makes clear the connection between nature restoration and cultural restoration. Anyone wishing to contribute to this effort can donate through the Piikuni Lodge Health Institute, a 501c3, located in Browning. Dr. Kim Paul, director of the institute is featured in the film. <https://www.piikanilodge.org/donate>

“A RETURN TO THE EARTH”, BY NIA TO GO THERE (CREE)

In January and February, you can participate in a series of four transformative webinars with Nia To Go There, hosted by [Toward Right Relationships With Native Peoples](#). Nia will guide us through different cultural perspectives on a path toward decolonizing consciousness and our relationships.

These webinars are presented as a series, in which each session speaks to the others. However, registration for each is separate. Please join for as many as you are able. Click on the “Register Here” buttons below for more information about the series.

Module 1: January 10, 12:30-2 pm PT: **CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES**, [REGISTER HERE](#)

Nia explores the notion of culture and how the cultural lens of ourselves and our ancestors informs our relationships.

Module 2: January 24, 12:30-2pm PT: **SEEING WITH A NATIVE EYE**, [REGISTER HERE](#)

Module 3: February 7, 12:30-2pm PT: **COLONIZATION**, [REGISTER HERE](#)

Module 4: February 21, 12:30-2pm PT: **DECOLONIZATION**, [REGISTER HERE](#)

BEFORE WE WERE WHITE: A 6-PART SERIES

January 18 and 25, February 8 and 15, March 1 and 8.

1:00-3:30 pm PT

“Before We Were White is a core piece of curriculum that [Comrades Education](#) (formerly known as White Awake) has offered annually for the past eight years. The program offers an ancestral recovery experience for people with European descent (whether you are white or multiracial) that is explicitly antiracist and decolonial.

“The work of the course centers historical analysis, family history, reflective & spiritual processes, nature connection and an active contribution to the struggle for collective liberation.”

This course comes highly recommended to us by several NCI participants.

Lars reports: “These Comrades in Education folks serve up an undiluted strong cup of race and class solidarity education, tempered with creativity and conversations of care. In my opinion they’ve done a lovely job of curating and making visible aspects of US history so often suppressed. Reminds me of our friends Michelle and Tony’s experience at BeaverTales sharing their truths and history.”

If you are a person with European ancestry who would like to commit yourself to the work of collective liberation with increased capacity and wholeness, in service to learning respectful allyship with Native people and communities, jump in! There are 6 online sessions; attendance is not mandatory; sessions will be recorded. Begins Jan 18.

[More information and registration](#)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 6-8 PM: LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND, A CALL TO ALLYSHIP

Though Beaver Tales Coffee has transitioned out of their space on the Coupeville Wharf, nothing will stop their vibrant work of building community and the cultural center and creative hub. The Community Potluck and story-telling goes on! Join them at the Pacific Northwest Art School at 15 NW Birch Street in Coupeville. Contact Stephanie for more info: stephanie@7thgenerationlabs.com

THE NUANCES OF LAND-BACK FOR TRIBAL NATIONS

In this YouTube interview of author Rebecca Nagle on **The Take** by Al Jazeera, Nagle discusses the nuances of the “Land-Back” concept and how it has played out on the ground.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1p1kudgF1M>

RETURN TO YUROK TRIBE OF 47,000 ACRES IN THE KLAMATH BASIN

For the past two decades the Yurok Tribe has been working with the nonprofit Western Rivers Conservancy to get its land back. The non-profit acquired the land in pieces from a timber company, and with creative funding was able to complete the transfer in 2025, just months after the dams on the Klamath came down. [Read the full story here.](#)



WINTER STORYTELLING

Winter, for the Samish and most Coast Salish peoples, is traditionally the season for hearing stories in the longhouse.

“One of the most important aspects to note about the winter season is the wisdom of oral tradition that is shared from one generation to the next. Time spent in the long house allows for stories to solidify the interconnectedness of the world.”

from the [Samish 13 Moons Calendar](#).

Story of KO-KWAL-ALWOOT (The Maiden of Deception Pass, guardian of her Samish People)

As told by Leslie Eastwood, Samish Elder, in the Samish 13 Moons Calendar

<https://youtu.be/lzaHYpJwOo8>

In the Samish calendar,

Ng'ingene7 Moon of children/beginnings (Mid December to Mid January)

This is the time of the winter solstice, which is the darkest day of the year, and the onset of longer days to come.

[From the Samish 13 Moons Indigenous Calendar](#)



INDIGENOUS NEWS SOURCES and Resources for Action:

If you'd like to stay current on the news from Indigenous people and their communities, here are some excellent sources:

[Underscore Native News](#) (Indigenous-centered journalism in the Pacific Northwest)

[Native News Online](#)

[Indian Country Today](#)

[High Country News, Indigenous Affairs](#)

ACTIONS TO TAKE: Stay informed by the [Friends Committee on National Legislation](#), (FCNL) focused on Indigenous issues. You can sign up with FCNL for monthly justice updates. This group makes it easy to take appropriate action. “The federal government has a trust responsibility to protect and enhance tribal self-determination and prosperity. FCNL advocates for legislation that will protect tribal sovereignty and treaty rights.”

The UUCWI and WIFM convene on the traditional lands of the sduhubs (Snohomish People), the Lower Skagit People, Swinomish, and Samish.

Descendants of these Tribes have lived here continuously since time immemorial.

Many other people of Coast Salish Nations utilized the coast and nearby waters, and still do.

*We acknowledge the significant ways the Native People, their families and their communities **are still here**, continuing to steward this island in ways physical, spiritual, political, and social.*

We honor the elders of the past, present, and future, with profound gratitude.

Whidbey Native Connections Initiative

is a justice initiative of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Whidbey Island, (UUCWI) and is supported by UU infrastructure, visionary foundations, and regional and national social-justice sister organizations, such as JUUsticeWA. We are also supported in numerous ways by Whidbey Island Friends Meeting (WIFM) and the broader Quaker justice work.

Contact us at nciwhidbey@gmail.com