Whidbey Native Connections Initiative Newsletter
November 2026

NOVEMBER:

One of the most important things we can do to support Native communities this month is to VOTE! You know the drill. Encourage and help a young person to vote. Then read below for talking points to immediately contact your Senators in support of Native people and communities, and environmental protections.

POLITICAL ACTION

Senate Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026 (BAAJA)

This so-called "Permitting Reform Bill" Negatively impacts Tribes and Irreversibly Damages National Parks and Other Public Lands

Contact your Senator re S. 5653, NOW! before Senate vote on November 9

We've been hearing from numerous news sources that the *Senate Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026 (BAAJA)* as written will have significant negative impacts on the ability of Tribal Nations to participate meaningfully in permitting applications that can affect their land, water, and cultural interests.

Click here to add your voice, or write to your Senators in your own words.

The Climate Justice Alliance hosted a webinar on Friday, October 30 at 10am PT to hear from Tribal leaders and Federal Indian Policy experts about how *BAAJA* would undermine important government-to-government Tribal consultation practices. If you'd like to listen to the webinar, here is the link and passcode:

Link to recording HERE | Passcode: WeB2D28!

Without meaningful consultation during the permitting process, there will be no voice to protect Tribal lands and waterways. Tribal Nations' right to protect sacred and cultural sites will be weakened by this Bill S. 5653.

A number of us attended the webinar, one of the best I've ever attended. Here are some salient talking points for you to bring up when you contact your Senators:

- Ask your Senators to please vote against S 5653 as it is written. The Senate should hold off on ratifying it so that amendments can be made that include the perspectives of Tribes.
- The bill as written would sweep away treaty rights of Tribes to engage in meaningful consultation before permits are issued for energy projects, new mines, more fossil fuel projects, data centers, and other major infrastructure on public and Tribal lands.

- The bill gives authority to Federal agencies to control which historic and sacred sites are worth protecting.
- After permits are issued, Tribes would have restricted rights to bring claims in court.
- Though there are some positive aspects to the bill, the disastrous effect on Tribes cancels those.

Read more about BAAJA at these sites:

Native American Rights Fund (NARF)
Claims vs Facts
National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers
Sand Creek Massacre Foundation
Sweeping Permitting Bill Risks Irreversible Damage to National Parks
Senate Permitting Bill Threatens Tribal Consultation Rights (Scroll down the page on this October Native American Legislative Update from Friends Committee on National Legislation)

Proposed Rule Changes to the 2030 Census

Tribal Leaders Oppose Proposed Census Changes, Warn of Harm to Native Communities

"Tribal leaders warn that proposed U.S. Census Bureau changes could erase critical data on American Indians and Alaska Natives, undermine tribal representation and threaten federal funding for Native communities." Read more in Native News Online
The public comment window was extended to November 2, 2026. You can submit feedback online via the Public Comments on Federal Regulations portal.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, November 4, 2026, 12:30-1:20pm: Online, through World Issues Forum

The River Remembers

The River Remembers is a character-driven documentary that follows Tribal members of the Elwha and lower Klamath Rivers as they lead the largest dam removals in U.S. history — restoring salmon and renewing culture after a century of struggle. The film is a story of resilience and hope, showing that when rivers heal, people heal too.

Friday, November 6, 2026, 2:00-3:00pm: Freeland Library, 5495 Harbor Ave, Freeland

Significance of Qwlho7el (Camas)

Presented by Sam Qol7ánten Barr (Samish), Executive Director of the Coast Salish Youth Coalition. Camas is a beautiful blue-purple Northwest wildflower with a sweet, edible bulb. Known as Qwlho7el to the Samish people, this native plant plays a star role in Coast Salish culture. Come learn about the history, cultivation, and significance of this iconic plant. Q&A session follows the program.

Nightly, after sunset, at the future home of Setting Sun Circle, 210 W Holly St, Bellingham

Coast Salish Living Mural

In October, the Setting Sun Circle activated and commemorated a stunning interactive mural on the side of the building that will house their future home in Bellingham. Light and motion brings to life depictions of the nearby original Lummi village site, Xw'otqwem (Whatcom Creek), along with animations of relatives like kweleng'sen (eagle), scha'newx (salmon), and qwe' thol' mechin (orca) and Lhaq'temish (People of the Sea) traditional ecological technology like the Sxwo'le (reef net) and clam gardens.

Didn't make it to the commemoration that honored the mural artists, Tsx'vilum Eagle Borsey, Xwesultun Raven E Borsey and De'sh'he'um Roy Alexander? Great news, the nighttime projection will be on every night after sunset, bringing light, culture and story to downtown Bellingham. Or take a peek at a reel on Facebook.

Saturday, November 14, 2026, 11:00am-4:00pm: Hibulb Cultural Center, 6410 23rd Ave NE, Tulalip, less than a mile west of I-5 at exit 199

14th Annual Hibulb Cultural Center Film Festival

They will be showing a variety of films. Some will be joined by a select panels of filmmakers. Check back at the Hibulb Facebook page for details and showing times.

Tuesday, November 17, 2026, 4:30pm-7:00pm: Hibulb Cultural Center

The Coast Salish Woolly Dog, film and presentations

The Hibulb Cultural Center will screen the PBS documentary film *The Threads that Bind: The Story of the Pacific Northwest Woolly Dog*.

This 26-minute documentary examines the story of the woolly dog — a breed domesticated for thousands of years by the signatory tribes of Tulalip and other Coast Salish. The thick white fur of these dogs, which went extinct in the late 1800s, was used to create intricate textiles and regalia.

Presenters will include Audrey T. Lin, DPhil. She has led the collaborative research that resulted in the whole genome sequencing of "Mutton", the only known woolly dog pelt, currently on display at the UBC Museum of Anthropology. Dr. Susan Pavel, a Coast Salish wool weaver & educator dedicated to preserving and revitalizing Coast Salish weaving traditions. Tillie Jones (Tulalip) a Coast Salish wool and cedar weaver who has dedicated more than 20 years to practicing and revitalizing ancestral weaving traditions. And Tessa Campbell (Tulalip/Tlingit), the former curator for the Hibulb Cultural Center where she curated (along with Hibulb's current curator, Emilie Smith) the exhibit on Coast Salish weaving in 2018.

NEWS

What's at Stake for Tribes in the 2026 Midterms?

From *Underscore Native News*, a four-part series

There is a long list of issues in Indian Country that tribal leaders are prioritizing from protecting tribal sovereignty to education, healthcare, housing and language and cultural preservation. There are eight Native candidates on ballots in Washington State, for the State House and Senate, and over 100 Native candidates throughout the country.

Diné Leaders Demand the Return of Bears Ears Fully Intact

From High Country News, Indigenous Affairs Desk

The Trump administration has once again gutted Bears Ears National Monument in southern Utah by stripping away roughly 90% of its acreage and dissolving the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Commission, the governance body that made tribally led management possible in the first place. What is at stake here goes well beyond one monument. Read more.

Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe's reservation will nearly double in Land Back deal

From KNKX Public Radio

The Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe fought for decades to free its river of dams in the heart of the Olympic Peninsula. The dam removal was the largest in the world at the time and is still widely known as an example of successful river restoration. Congress passed a bill this fall enabling the transfer of nearly 1,100 acres of federal lands uncovered by the dam removal. Read KNKX report here and Tewatati report here.

Samish Indian Nation Makes Strides Toward Bull Kelp Restoration In Multi-Year Project

From Underscore Native News

In partnership with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, bull kelp beds in the San Juan Islands are being brought back to life with stalks reaching over 20 feet. Reporter Lyric Aquino writes, "While reporting this story, I was able to learn how the Samish Nation was using ancestral knowledge and hand-drawn maps to trace where their bull kelp beds had thrived the most.". Read more.

For insights on Cultural Appropriation, Listen to *EPISODE 2, Playing Indian*, of Rebecca Nagle's podcast, *FIRST AMERICA*:

In this episode, Nagle explores America's obsession with playing Indian. This is an excellent and accessible introduction to the issue of cultural appropriation, as well as exploring little-known aspects of the history of our early republic.

Then read **Underscore News' article *Twilight Fandom Helps Fund Quileute Tribe's Move to Higher Ground***, about a current example of appropriation of a PNW Tribe's identity by the author of the *Twilight Series* and how some **fans are fundraising to support the Tribe**.

REBECCA NAGLE'S FIRST AMERICA PODCAST

We highly recommend this six-episode podcast, ***FIRST AMERICA***

Follow the episodes about how our current political moment was 250 years in the making.

"The true story of the founding of the United States actually explains our current political crisis and the chaos that we're all watching."

(www.kosu.org/rebecca-nagle-first-america-podcast)

With Prayers on My Heart

For our families, our communities, our people.
For those who are hurting, those who are healing, those carrying grief,
and those holding on to hope.
For our relatives who walk, swim, crawl and fly. For the water, the wind,
the land, and all the life we share this world with.
There is so much suffering in this world. So much anger, division and uncertainty.
And sometimes it feels like more than any of us can carry.
But we were never meant to carry it alone.
We were meant to work together. In tandem. To take turns, to tag in and out.
Each doing our part, sometimes several parts. Sometimes leading, sometimes following,
sometimes carrying, sometimes being carried.
Our ancestors understood this. Our survival was never the work of one person.
It took families, villages, generations. People caring for one another, sharing what they had,
doing what needed to be done.
And here we are, still.
May we remember our responsibilities to one another.
May we find our way through the hurt and division without losing our compassion.
May we remember that we belong to something greater than ourselves.
And may we never forget that we belong to one another.

From our dear friend, Carly Mathews, a Snohomish woman of mixed Coast Salish ancestry (currently serving as Chairwoman of the Snohomish Tribe of Indians).

NEWS ORGANIZATIONS TO FOLLOW

Now more than ever, it's essential that we keep our eyes on how Tribes and Native communities are faring in their centuries-long struggle, under the current administration. Here are some links to several sources of Native News by Native journalists.

UNDERSCORE NATIVE NEWS

This news source highlights issues concerning Culture, Justice, Land, and People in the PNW. Read here.

NATIVE NEWS ONLINE:

For up-to-date national news coverage by and about Native communities
Read here.

HIGH COUNTRY NEWS: INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

High Country News reports on issues concerning the West. Their Indigenous Affairs desk has archived articles worthy of reading. Read here.

INDIGENOUS COUNTRY TODAY (ICT NEWS)

ICT brings you Indigenous journalism that uplifts Native communities, supported by members, donors, and partners through the non-profit IndigPublicMedia. Read here.

FRIENDS PEACE TEAMS:

News, Resources and Actions from Native Organizations
Sign up to receive monthly news. from Friends Peace Teams

ACTIONS TO TAKE:

Stay informed on legislative actions by the **Friends Committee on National Legislation** (FCNL)

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."
November 2026: Native American Legislative Update (NALU)

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.

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