

2008 Tribal Journey Water Quality Project



A new dynamic partnership between Coast Salish Tribal Chairmen, First Nation Chiefs, Canoe Families, and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) will blend Coast Salish Nations knowledge and USGS science to help manage and protect the Salish Sea environment. From this partnership the Tribal Journey Water Quality Project was created to measure the water quality of the Salish Sea (Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia) during the 2008 Journey to Cowichan. Protecting the health of the Salish Sea waters is important to Coast Salish cultural and spiritual survival. The Water Quality Project encourages the Canoe Families to continue their roles as stewards of the environment.

The Canoe Families traveling from the furthest points of the Salish Sea are each carrying a YSI water quality probe and global positioning system (GPS) with them along their ancestral canoe pathways, and across political borders. The probes will continuously measure temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen, pH, and turbidity of surface waters.

A canoe is ideal for towing the water quality probes. Motor boats, even at their slowest speed, move too fast and create air pockets around the sensors, and impact the readings. Blending new and old technology creates the ideal sampling design for water quality testing.

The Tribal Journey is a unique opportunity to measure the pulse of the Salish Sea's environmental health. During the 2008 Journey, Coast Salish and USGS will create a near real-time map of data captured simultaneously across the Salish Sea. Links to the real-time maps can be found on the USGS website (www.USGS.gov). The data collected in 2008 will provide a snapshot of conditions that can be compared year after year with data from future Journeys. The Project will help to address issues related to the recent deterioration of ancestral waters and marine resources that have sustained tribal people for millennia.

Coast Salish people have an intimate relationship with the environment and patterns of change across the Salish Sea. The Water Quality Project's goal is to combine traditional ecological knowledge and western science to improve our understanding of ongoing change to the region's ecological and cultural resources and the processes that affect them.

Along the Journey, everyone, from elders and youth, will be encouraged to ask questions, learn about, and participate in the water quality sampling. With more people involved, the Project will grow and the more successful it will become over the years.

Upon completion of the Tribal Journey, the water quality data will be compiled into a database and will include maps and reports that will help Tribal, Federal, State, and local entities identify water quality issues affecting Salish Sea resources.

For more information on the Water Quality Project, or if you would like to participate, contact Sarah Akin at sakin@swinomish.nsn.us