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Sculpture by Yvonne Thomas
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Cover Photo:

Lummi Indian "Seyown" spirit dancers, L to R Joseph Bill, Thomas Tom, Frank Hillaire, Joe Hillaire, and Matt Paul. Courtesy of the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, WA. (Image # 2716)

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Lummi Nation Emblem courtesy of Lummi Communications Department.

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After we returned from Clayoquot Sound and finished our “Clayoquot Compromise” issue of The Planet last quarter, one of the Friends of Clayoquot Sound sent me a video tape of a speech by Kenny Cooper at a rally in the sound. Kenny is a Lummi Indian who had gone to Clayoquot to give a speech to acknowledge and motivate the protesters. His words struck a deep chord in me: both the Lummi and The Planet were working toward the same goal, and even though the Lummi reservation is only across the bay from us, we had both journeyed the seven-hour trip to Clayoquot, perhaps passing each other on the way, and not known anything about each other’s efforts.

This was what I was thinking of when Michael Frome, our faculty adviser, suggested an issue on the Lummi. Yet even though I could see the importance of getting to know these people, I could also foresee problems. The main one was that we were white people writing about Indians, following a very dubious tradition. Whites have labeled Indians as savages, as noble, as targets for so many bullets in western movies, and as being so spiritually connected to everything like in Dances With Wolves. But as one Lummi said to me, the Indian has told the white what he wants to hear, and the white has written what he wants to write.

In the hopes of changing this, I decided that we should devote this issue to the Lummi. I didn’t want to idealize the Lummi. I wanted to learn about the Lummi, to break down stereotypes by listening to their real stories, to get them to sit down with Western students and open lines of communication.

I still think that this was a good goal to strive for, but also a very optimistic one. Lummi culture is far too complex for us really to do justice to in these few pages, especially for we who knew so little to begin with. Also, while we all attempted to meet individually with the Lummi, some students had an easy time getting information while others had a more difficult time. The Lummi are careful about the image they present, and are concerned with preserving their culture by allowing few Lummi to speak about it. The problem boils down to trust. The few weeks that we tried to pursue this issue were not enough to get to know one another well enough for trust to grow, yet I hope the seeds for future trust have been planted.

But then, trust is easy for me. I am not one of those on the receiving end of prejudice. In a Ferndale elementary school during a show-and-tell one white student showed an Indian skull found at Semiahmoo, a nearby burial ground. The teacher allowed this presentation, even though there were Lummi children in the back of the class. As there are only 3,500 Lummi, the Lummi children could well have thought that this skull was one of their great-grandmothers or grandfathers. I wonder how different it would have been if an Indian boy had brought in some bones he dug up in a Bellingham cemetery, saying: “Look what I found Miss Smith.”

I believe the best way to break down prejudice is with knowledge. I have heard a lot of prejudiced remarks against Canadians since I have been in Bellingham, and as I am Canadian I can’t help but listen. But I have felt no prejudice against me from Americans who know me. I know that Canadians are discriminated against to a far lesser extent that the Lummi, but I hope that this same principle of acceptance through learning holds true.

So read this issue and get to know a few of our Lummi neighbors and their concerns. We have done our best to listen to the Lummi and write what we have heard. They wanted to be called Lummi or Indians, not Native Americans, and we have respected this wish, and they didn’t want to be just labeled as environmentalists so we did our best to write about their culture with what we could find out. So what you are getting here, while not a truly comprehensive coverage, is our experience with the Lummi. What information they gave to us was open and friendly, and with more time and effort their full story could be realized and an enduring link between the Lummi and Western forged.
Kenny Cooper, Cha-das-ska-dum

REAWAKENING

Excerpt from a speech given to the conference "Reflections on Common Ground: 500 years."

We're indigenous people. We were here many, many years ago, and we're still here. We're here because we love the land. We're here because we've learned how to walk on the land, and not trample on her. In the old days it was told that our old people wore moccasins so they could walk softly on Mother Earth and feel everything they were stepping on as they walked along.

In our beliefs, the way we're taught as children, we go up to the mountains early in the morning when the snow is deep on the ground. We go up there with our poles and we bust the ice in the river in clean places, isolated and above the damages of mankind. We take off our clothes and ask permission to enter the land of the water people. We go into the water and we pray to the four directions. We speak to those four directions which are also the four colors—the red, black, yellow, and white—the colors of the four original races of Mother Earth. We were all one at one time before we got too smart for our own good, then they scattered us all over the face of the earth and gave us a different tongue so we couldn't communicate no more. We learn from the land what we need to know to honor and respect her and live in harmony with others and ourself.

We go up there and we practice; we go swimming up in the mountains from November to April. We use those mountains. It's not just something that we talk about. It's a reality. We use the mountains. We have Indian gear stored in the mountains. Our ancestors, some of them are buried in the mountains. Our medicines come from the mountains. Eighty-five percent of the drugs you buy in the stores comes from the mountain, from the medicine people. And ninety percent of what was here in the time of my old people is now gone. Gone to where? Gone for who? Gone to never come back as it was.

When we go up to the mountain we fast and pray and learn how to listen with our heart; our third ear. When we learn how to listen with this third ear, then you can talk to the trees. You can talk to the water. You can talk to the most patient thing God made: the rock. The rock knows how to wait. It is very patient. I use the rock to fast and pray and learn patience. Whatever it is we're looking for, this third ear can hear it and teach us to talk.

The only reason you don't think so is because you've been educated and talk from the mind. But our mind, in time, gets filled with the four sins and nothing can filter down to the third ear. If you don't use it, you lose it. A lot of people don't know how to use the third ear and it gets plugged up and it can't hear. Nobody knows how to talk from down there, no more, so it don't know how to talk no more.

Things are very hard when you come from an Indian family and you are pushed into a white school system, especially if you hear the Indian language when you're growing up. And you hear the legends, like the stuff I'm talking about. How to live with Mother Earth. How to get along with one another. Then you go to school and they teach you things that you can't live off of and mold our lives into—what? I'm not against education, but they must instigate into the system more things that are Indian.

Our culture is something that is hard to talk about in a very short time. I've always said this watch is our worst enemy. When they gave us that, it was the worst thing they ever did to Indian people. We take the watch, put it on, and it leaves a mark. We get branded. It rules our life.

I used to like it when I was growing up in Hoh River, on the Olympic Peninsula. We didn't have no electricity. There was no roads. All we had was canoes to go back and forth up the river. It was a real good life, that way. Every night, when we got through with the day, everyone brought their food to the middle of the village. We would have a big feast of everything. After we were through eating, the elders would sit down and tell us Indian legends. The old people told us legends. We would get up in the morning and we would start over again. We would go out and gather our octopus, gather our smelt, our salmon, our deer, and our roots from the mountain. And at night we would come together and have the feast. Every day we broke bread together. Every day.

Then some people come along and said, 'If you cut a trail into your reservation and carry these big poles in and stand them up, we'll hook you up to free electricity.' That sounded good. So we got our axes and made a trail and we packed in the power poles. And we stood them up. Sure enough, we got electricity. And refrigerators. So we didn't bring our food to middle of the village no more. We could put it in the 'fridge. Along with the refrigerator came the tall talking box: the radio. The radio came in and we didn't sit around and listen to the legends no more. We sat around and listened to stories that come with electricity and totally turned our culture around.

Now, in 1991, we're reawakening again. At our Northwest Indian College, they're teaching the language, basket making, canoe carving, totem pole carving, and drum making—anything pertaining to our Indian, due to our Councilmen—four of them are here, tonight. Here in 1991, we have a Council that can think with both minds—they're not just thinking from up here. I applaud them for that, because we've got to have back into our system: teaching our children how to get along with one another and how to love one another so we can hear all the words that we heard here today.
THE CYCLE OF SALMON

The old people of the household awaken at four or five in the morning and while still in bed they talk of the dreams they had or tell stories of times past. When dawn comes, they all rise from bed. The men go fishing until eight or nine o’clock, while the women prepare the morning meal. When the fishermen return they eat and discuss important events before returning to work for the day.

This is how the typical day would start for most members of the Lummi Nation during the 1800’s.

Preparation of the fishing gear required many long hours of work from men and women alike; beginning months before the first salmon returned from the sea.

The preparations begin in June, when groups travel to where large numbers of willow trees grow. Plants and trees have to be gathered to make the fishing gear--the women collect bark and willow saplings to be used in the construction of reef nets. Each woman makes a section of net about two feet wide and six feet long. Twenty sections are woven together in two rows of ten each to make one reef net. The men gather cedar saplings for rope to be used when fastening the reef net to anchors.

When the time to fish comes, usually in late September, large rocks are taken by raft or canoe to be used as anchors for the reef nets. A tree on the shore is then chosen as a marker and the first boat lines up with the tree and drops anchor, with the other boats following until the net is in place. In the front of the net there are ropes running crossways, with grass guides tied in place to funnel the fish up to the net.

When the net is in place all is quiet until the fish are seen. Each man has a post and stands ready to haul the net in. As the fish reach the center of the net the leader yells at all to lift the net and bring the canoes together. When the net reaches the surface the struggling fish cast a mist of water into the air, which, on sunny days causes a rainbow to stretch from one end of the net to the other.

This is the first catch of the sockeye salmon season. No other fishing season is waited for in such great anticipation, nor is there any other fish held in such high regard as the sockeye among the Lummi people.

With the first catch each year there is a ceremony performed in honor of the salmon. Winter fern, duck-down, red paint, cedar bark, and spice plants are gathered in preparation for the ceremony. The children have their backs painted and put duck-down in their hair. When the canoes come in, each child has a salmon laid across his or her arms. The fish are then carried to the women who will cook them. Before cooking, each fish is laid down on a winter fern with its head toward the water. When all the fish are brought to shore in this same fashion, elders put kernels of spice plant and duck-down and red paint in front of the fish and a bundle of shredded bark is lit to burn the food set in front of the salmon. This symbolic meal for the salmon shows the good will of the people to the fish.

Then, the women, with duck-down in their hair and red paint on their arms and faces, prepare the fish to be cooked. As the fish are cooking an elder sings a spirit song. During this time the elder also speaks about the many different kinds of fish and where they are caught and a gift is thrown in the water for each kind of fish. When this is done, and the fish are cooked, the children are permitted to eat first. When the children are done eating the salmon is passed out to individual families until all have had their fill, then the remaining salmon is dried while the sticks used in the fire and the fish bones are put into the water.

Finally, the children all gather to sing a song and dance around a tribal elder. Then, very quickly, all of the children rush away leaving the elder alone. This completes the first salmon ceremony, insuring that the salmon can be fished and will return the next year in abundance.

I had the opportunity to go to the Lummi Indian reservation and speak with Jim Wilson, a sixty-seven-year-old Lummi elder. Jim has fished for fifty-five years. He has eight children, and more than thirty grandchildren.

Many things have changed for the Lummi people, from the number of salmon available to the way most families perform the first salmon ceremony. The reason
for the first salmon ceremony was to teach the younger generations the importance of the salmon. They still have the first salmon ceremony every year, but it has changed.

"Nowadays you don't know whether you are going to get a salmon anymore" Jim said. I asked Jim about the symbolism in throwing the sticks and bones from the first salmon ceremony back into the water. He said this was to make sure that the salmon would return the next year and as "a way of saying thank you."

Over the course of sixty-seven years Jim has seen the rivers and salmon runs exploited to the point of near extinction. Jim talked of days when there were many fish with enough water to spawn. "In my time I filled a skiff up with salmon, you can't do that now. The salmon I was talking about—we can't even fish them any more. People thought it was going to last forever, so did I. It doesn't work that way. Everybody has the idea that nothing will ever go away."

The Lummi people have always been conscious of the need to preserve and not overburden nature, that the habitat that surrounds the rivers and streams must be preserved.

When the salmon's natural habitat is lost and nature's filtration system for the water becomes clogged from logging and wastes, our river and streams fill with silt and other debris. The salmon cannot survive when their eggs are continually being covered with silt; the runs diminish, the fish die out and do not return.

On the way home from the Lummi Indian reservation I saw an eagle perched high up on a power line overlooking the Nooksack. I thought for a moment about the rights of the eagle and the Lummi to a clean environment with trees and food. I thought of how the salmon runs have decreased so that the Lummi have been forced to turn to newer, more efficient fishing methods, an adaptation not so easy for the eagle. For the Lummi, this means losing part of their cultural heritage, for the eagle it means losing habitat, viability in this region. And for all of us, it means losing a small, but irreplaceable part of this region that, like the salmon, will not return once it is gone.
The only fat Indians Lewis and Clark ever saw were the ones living here in the Pacific Northwest. When obesity was still considered a universal sign of prosperity, these corpulent Indians were incredibly rich in resources. All along the rivers and out to the ocean, there was such an abundance of game, salmon, and shellfish, that these Native Americans could afford to be gluttons. The Lummi were too far north to have had any contact with that expedition, but at the time they were among the wealthiest Indians in the United States. That was a hundred and ninety years ago and almost everything has changed. They are now considered an independent nation within the U.S., but this sounds better than it actually is. The resources that were once theirs exclusively were taken by treaty, abused to the point of irreversibility, and then partially given back. Because of the Boldt decision, half of the annual commercial salmon catch in Washington, and therefore half the responsibility for maintaining a viable fishery, now belongs to Native Americans and is divided among the Pacific Northwest tribes. It is in their efforts to improve salmon habitat that the Lummi are being constantly frustrated.

The first salmon I ever saw bumped into my legs as I was wading across an Alaskan stream in 1973. I was five. From the moment I stepped into that stream, my eyes had been focused on the other side, the dry rocks, my destination. The current was strong and my body listed upstream against it as I carefully shuffled one foot past the other over the slick rocks. Near the middle something solid bumped me and I looked down expecting to see a small log. Instead, I was looking, not at one salmon, but at hundreds of salmon. I stopped midstream, afraid to take another step. There were so many they didn’t have room to swim around my little black rubber boots. And they had teeth, sharp looking teeth. My dad started explaining how harmless they were, but I wasn’t listening. The current was pushing me one way and salmon kept bumping me the other. Alaskan salmon are big and I was positive the moment I tried to take another step I’d get knocked over. So my dad had to carry me the rest of the way across on his shoulders.

If I had never been to Alaska and never seen a healthy river ecosystem, I might be able to look at the Nooksack, or any other river in Washington, and not get upset. All I can see now though is the damage that’s been done, how much work is needed to repair it, and how little is actually being done.

The Nooksack river used to be navigable by deep-keeled boats, but the diversion of water and the build-up of sediment have combined to drastically reduce the depth of the river. Salmon, especially the larger Chinook, require pockets of deep, cool water to rest in as they move upstream. What is important here, at least for the Chinook,
are the holes. There aren't enough left on large sections of the Nooksack and last year the water temperature in portions of the river reached seventy degrees. That may sound great for people to swim in, but it's lethal for salmon.

What caused this increase in water temperature? El Nino? Global warming? No. The hot water in the Nooksack is just another unfortunate result of logging. Clear-cutting has removed the canopy cover over the small streams that feed the Nooksack and the sun easily warms slow, shallow water. Clear-cutting is also responsible for the extra cubic tons of sediment in the water that eventually settles over the spawning beds. Over-allocation of Nooksack water doesn't leave enough to flush out the sediment. According to Merle Jefferson of the Lummi Nation, this vicious cycle has accelerated in the last fifteen years and, if we start now, it will only take the next hundred years to repair.

In this age of scapegoats and finger pointing, commercial fishing has long been an easy target and often gets blamed for the shrinking numbers of salmon returning to spawn. At the Ballard Locks, they even blame California sea lions for the dismal numbers of salmon passing through. Overfishing and other natural predators may be a factor in the declining populations of salmon, but they aren't the main problem. A proposed moratorium on all commercial and sport fishing of salmon won't dramatically increase native stocks. Even at one hundred percent escapement (the number of salmon that escape to spawn) there aren't enough undamaged and unpolluted spawning beds left on any of our rivers. For some species of salmon, it may already be too late.

Some of the problems with the fishing industry can be attributed to a form of governmental subterfuge. If people are able to buy salmon at the supermarket, order salmon at their favorite restaurant, and send smoked salmon to their relatives at Christmas, how can there possibly be a problem with the salmon populations? I suppose that question depends less on people's palettes and more on their consciences. It will always be easier and cheaper to build hatcheries, to rear and release millions of salmon, than it will be to restore spawning grounds, but it's these man-made hatcheries that should become obsolete—not the natural ones. Hatcheries were designed to supplement native stocks of salmon, not replace them. Unfortunately, hatchery salmon have already usurped native stocks of salmon in many places. In a sense, hatcheries have become glorified, low-overhead versions of catfish farms. Salmon are bred, released, and return four years later fully grown. The consumer can't tell the difference.

One year, not far from where I learned to fish, workers from the Alaskan department of fisheries were forced to airlift salmon with a helicopter. Heavy rains caused the Russian river to run so high that millions of extra gallons an hour were being funneled through the narrow canyon. The salmon were stacking up in a pool below the rapids, so thick and red you could hardly see the water. Every few seconds a salmon would leap up into the white water, thrash wildly against the current, and be thrown back into the melee. The workers, in bright yellow chest-waders and orange rain parkas, stood among the salmon with their nets full, waiting for the helicopter. It would come swirling in low, just above the tree line, slinging a large perforated bucket. You couldn't hear it coming because of the roaring water but the rotor kicked spray off the backs of the salmon and blew it into the faces of the workers as they loaded the bucket. Those men standing with their nets, looking like a group of bearded midwives in the rain, remind me that somewhere native stocks of salmon are still important.

Several weeks later, after the high water had receded, fish bodies were scattered on the rocks in various states of decomposition. The smell was not pleasant, but bearable. In places, only the outline of fish was visible beneath white mounds of writhing maggots. Closer to the river the bodies were fresher, some still barely alive. As strange as it may sound, this is a sign of a healthy salmon population. Even though there are always some that never reach their birth streams, most of these salmon managed to spawn before dying. After more rain, the river rose again and flushed away the bodies as if they had never existed. None of this is sad or disgusting; it's natural, and, unlike my faith in humankind, my faith in nature never wavers.

After spawning
When the Lummi people speak of the old days, they always say that one could virtually walk across the Nooksack River on top of the salmon. Now it takes techniques such as aquaculture and fish hatcheries to perpetuate salmon populations. Logging roads, urbanization, clearcutting, pollution, overfishing, and dams have seriously damaged the natural spawning runs, and hatchery salmon now make up more than half the remaining salmon in Washington state.

This is why the Lummi people built the Skookum Creek fish hatchery in 1968. The hatchery is run solely by the tribe and has been a welcome success in their community. "Fishing was all our people knew how to do," Linda DeCoteau, Assistant Manager of the Salmon Enhancement Program at Skookum Creek, told me. "The idea was to create jobs for our people and it succeeded."

Linda and others at the hatchery explained to me how it works. The hatchery releases about four million Coho salmon each year into the creek which drains into the Nooksack River. Most of the Coho reach the ocean and travel as far north as Alaska and as far south as California. Once they mature in the ocean, the salmon naturally return to their native river to spawn. Upon their return to freshwater they quit feeding, then travel as much as several hundred miles upstream, following their innate sense of smell. When the hatchery salmon return to spawn, their eggs are taken from them, incubated, and then allowed to hatch. As soon as the young salmon, or fry, grow to the smolt stage, at about eighteen months, they are released. This process is then repeated, insuring a continued salmon run through
the aid of human technology.

In recent years, however, the number of salmon returning to spawn at Skookum Creek has sharply decreased. About four years ago, the hatchery was getting back around sixteen thousand Coho. In a one-year time span, that number dropped to about five thousand. The actual cause for the decline has not been confirmed, but speculations abound. The El Niño has been suggested as one possibility, but represents only one year in four in which the returning populations decreased. This phenomenon, El Niño, displaces cold water currents with warm, forcing salmon north away from United States waters. Others believe that Canadian anglers have taken the lion’s share of available salmon, or that the hatchery salmon simply cannot adapt to the wild streams and rivers, having been reared in a tame environment.

Indeed, research does show that problems develop among hatchery-raised salmon. Hatchery salmon adapt to concrete runways, but have a hard time on rocky beds of streams and rivers. When they interbreed with wild salmon, they saturate the population with these deficiencies. This affects the salmon’s ability to adapt to environmental changes. As an elderly Queets Indian fisherman describes it in Bruce Brown’s classic book, Mountain in the Clouds, “You can tell the difference between wild fish and hatchery fish the minute you cut them open. The wild ones are redder flesched, and firmer. They fight harder too—as if they’ve got some urge to live that a hatchery fish doesn’t.”

Through genetic isolation, whole stocks of hatchery salmon are raised with homogeneous traits. This results in genetic weaknesses—for example, if a disease is introduced to the hatchery environment, the population is far more apt to be susceptible to an epidemic than wild salmon. This susceptibility to disease, however, also in turn threatens the wild population with the possibility of contamination. An acceptable risk though, many would say, when weighed against the extinction of entire salmon runs.

When I toured the Skookum Creek Hatchery in the company of its manager, Bill Finkbonner, the hatchery had just received nine hundred pounds of fish eggs, a mass of small pink balls, each with two minuscule eyes. I watched the eggs being placed into large, flat metal containers, or troughs, with grill-like bottoms that allow water to pass, simulating a natural habitat. Each trough holds about 165,000 eggs. I saw a dozen such troughs filled with eggs, hatching eggs, recently hatched fry, and older fry. When the salmon reach four months, they are transferred to the four ponds outside, each with a 333,000 fish capacity. At eighteen months of age, the fry are released into the creek. As Bill showed me around, I began to recognize how important the hatchery project is to all the Lummi, not just to the people who work there. It symbolizes a continuance, not only of the salmon population which the Lummi have lived on for centuries, but of the culture itself.

Lummi friends explained that salmon are essential to the survival of the culture of all Northwest Coast Indians. The salmon is to the Northwest Indians what the buffalo once was to the Plains Indians. As Victor B. Scheffer writes in A Voice for Wildlife, “It is an integral part of their way of life, and any tampering with their ancient fishing rights constitutes a threat to their cultural survival that goes far beyond the issues between conservationists and recreationists.”

Fisheries biologists fear that artificial propagation of salmon will ultimately kill the wild runs, however, because we have degraded natural spawning areas with dams and logging, and have over-fished our waters. Hatcheries have become essential to shoring up declining salmon populations until alternative solutions can be formulated and tested.
BUILDING BRIDGES, NOT DAMS; LUMMI REACH OUT TO NEIGHBORS

In the past couple of decades, many non-Indians have taken on the tag of "environmentalists." Indians, by their very nature and values, don't need this label anymore than they've needed any label attached to them over time; they have always had a respect for and connection with their environment.

People from many different backgrounds are waking up to environmental problems and attempting to find solutions. Certain governmental agencies and local corporate groups are showing concern. Motives for these actions may be mixed, but it's a start.

The point of this article is to show that these cooperative efforts do exist. The Lummi have been fighting hard to preserve natural resources within the Nooksack Basin. In their opinion, no one entity outside of Nature can claim ownership of natural resources, be it water, land, fish, game or timber. It is the right of humans to care for all living beings, take only what is needed, and replenish what is taken.

The Lummi often work closely with members of the Nooksack Tribe, the only other Indian community within Whatcom County. Both tribes also deal with other Northwest Washington Indian communities, non-Indian landowners, corporations and state agencies. While environmental concerns are a primary issue, the Lummi enjoy intertribal cooperation on education and tribal self-governance issues as well.

Although individual Indian communities have internal problems and don't always find constant agreement with neighboring tribes, the bottom line is consistent: preservation and respect of the Earth.

Bob Davis, Deputy Director of Policy for the Lummi Department of Natural Resources, explains the function of the intertribal joint technical team:

"We try to meet once a month. The main players (are the)...Nooksack, Tulalip, Upper Skagit, Swinomish, Stilaguamish, Makah, Nisqually, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, and we've also had some cooperation with Quinault.

"Thermal cover is one goal...we've run into problems with the watershed; thermal cover for the elk and deer was being cut at a rapid pace. The elk herd was disappearing, as well as the deer."

We went into a plan of just staying out of the elk’s corridor (for hunting), but in the meantime, while we entered into this 'contract' (with the Washington Department of Wildlife), all the cutting kept going on. This disturbs me...we're trying to stay out, trying to build the herds back up, and then private landowners come in and tear their home down. What the heck are they doing? If we're not taking the kill (game) that we're entitled to, there shouldn't be any forest cutting in there. But the tribes are all trying to work together on this."

Cooperation between tribes and state and county governments is essential. The situation gets extremely complicated, as many Indian tribes, such as Lummi and Nooksack, are sovereign entities; treaties are negotiated only with the federal government, not state, county or city. Tribes do, however, consult with state and local agencies on devising solutions.

The Nooksack Tribe, located in Deming, exchanges valuable data with the Lummi. Dale Griggs, Director of Fisheries for The Nooksack Tribe explains: "We are exchanging information and share much on environmental issues regularly. Over the last year, the Nooksack Tribe has served notice on most of the other tribes in the region that TFW (state committee on Timber, Fish and Wildlife) was not working adequately to preserve resources. So we've started shifting our emphasis away from the TFW...it's constant negotiation."

Griggs pointed out that some environmental groups have recently sued the EPA for not upholding the Clean Water Act. Environmental groups, such as Audobon and the Greater Ecosystem Alliance, also work closely with Northwest tribes on environmental issues.

"We (the tribes) work well together...as far as fish in general, ecosystem health and how to get things done, because we've taken things out of the hands of TFW. And it's important that we work outside of the EPA soup," Griggs said. To this end, the Lummi are trying to finance a biologist separate from the state to investigate these issues in order to maintain a data base of their own.

Griggs did point out, however, that disagreement on fishing numbers and percentages does...
arise between the Nooksack and Lummi; two court cases are currently pending between the two tribes.

Aside from these differences, the Lummi and Nooksack combine efforts on many programs such as their annual chum broodstock project. Members work together setting nets on the Nooksack River to collect young salmon and transport them to a nearby hatchery to rebuild stocks.

The Lummi and Nooksack are also trying to get approval on a fish ladder at the Nooksack Middle Fork dam. Opinions have varied in the past over whether spawning salmon could make it through, even with a fish ladder present. Griggs says he has no doubt they could.

Lummi and Nooksack are among several Washington tribes belonging to the Environmental Policy Committee (EPC). The EPC is completely separate from state committees such as Timber, Fish and Wildlife, Water Resources, and the Water Caucus. Tribal representatives meet to discuss environmental policy issues and decide how to implement selected proposals.

Lummi and Nooksack representatives have numerous channels for devising solutions before approaching Congress. Some of these include the Tribal Water Quality Coordination meeting, working with the Department of Natural Resources, Timber, Fish and Wildlife, Northwest Indian monthly meetings (which determine policy and financial allocation), Water Quality Authority meetings, and many others.

Another program which has enjoyed enormous success within the past five years is the Tribal Self-Governance Demonstration Project. This project, however, does not eliminate the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) completely. As stated in the preface of the project's introductory guide, "Self-Governance returns decision making authority and management responsibilities to Tribes. Self-Governance is about change through the transfer of Federal funding available for programs, services, functions, and activities to Tribal control. Tribes are accountable to their own people for resource management, service delivery, and development."

The Self-Governance Project is involved in environmental issues and resource management, in addition to many other areas. It allows individual tribes to decide where best to use funds and how to control their own communities, without affecting other tribes. Individual tribal needs are met by placing control at the local level. This is extremely important on environmental issues, because, while traditional values of natural resources are common to Indian tribes throughout the country, specific needs and concerns vary by geographic location and tribe.

Raynette Finkbonner, Lummi Coordinator for the Self-Governance Demonstration Project, points out the importance of control in Lummi environmental concerns: "Our land, the natural resources, have direct implications and meaning to our day-to-day life...they always have. A critical concern at the bottom of all this is sovereignty jurisdiction of our land, water and natural resources. This is where our ties are."

While intertribal cooperation is critical, the Lummi and other tribes are truly concerned with working with non-Indian people, corporations and agencies. No one person likes to be made to feel that they're wrong or to receive blame. But, without exception, those who are willing to learn will reap the greatest of benefits.

Obviously, local corporations such as Trillium and Georgia Pacific need to worry about restrictions imposed upon them by legislation such as the Endangered Species Act. If operations severely affect endangered species such as the Spotted Owl, Coho and Chinook salmon, no one will win. Corporate logging activities will be shut down. Therefore, in addition to tribal cooperative efforts, local government, landowners and corporations must be willing to give. To their credit, Trillium, one of Whatcom County's largest logging corporations, has been doing some of this needed giving.

"My boss (Merle Jefferson) went to Trillium about this (forest management practices). They asked, 'Why did you pick on us? ' Merle said, 'Well, you're the biggest ballplayer in our watershed, so we want to come to the best and biggest first. If we can get you to go along with what we're trying to do, the other landowners and industry will follow along in the Nooksack watershed.' And they agreed, so now we're having meetings. Of course they don't want to get shut down, but they're willing to talk." Davis said.

Trillium has now agreed to finance a recovery plan.

Jewell James of The Lummi Tribe's Treaty Protection Task Force perhaps best expressed the hopes for a continued cooperation during his speech at the "Reflection on Common Ground: 500 Years" conference held recently in Seattle:

"Look for the next Full Moon and remember the Moon's Prayer: 'O Mighty Spirit, Great Father, Forgive us for not loving Mother Earth; but, saveher for the Children.'"

WE'RE TRYING TO STAY OUT, TRYING TO BUILD THE HERDS BACK UP, AND THEN PRIVATE LAND-OWNERS COME IN AND TEAR THEIR HOME DOWN. WHAT THE HECK ARE THEY DOING?
ON THE NOOKSACK: THREE DAYS IN THE LIFE OF A RIVER

A long time ago, a man of the Swallah people from Orcas Island was murdered by the Skalakahn people who lived at the mouth of the Nooksack River. To avenge this murder, the man's brother sought out and obtained a spirit power which helped him to kill all but a few of the Skalakahns. The Skalakahn people that survived gave over the Nooksack River to this hero and his descendants to have for salmon fishing. In this way, the people of the islands came to live on what is now the Lummi reservation.

January 31, 1994

The sign at the mouth of Skookum Creek is clear. Where this main tributary feeds into the South Fork of the Nooksack River, just outside the small town of Wickersham, a white, metal gate bars vehicle access to the clear-cut ridge line that borders the creek. Across the width of the gate, scrawled in letters that belie an angry hand, are the words, "GO HOME ENVIRONMENTALIST COCKSUCKERS." The message stops me—a reminder of where I am, of who now lays claim to this territory, of how strong the emotional current draws through these parts. After an involuntary glance over my shoulder, I snap a photo and stumble up through the thigh-deep growth at the base of the cut hillside.

Fish, dead from high water temperatures, were found in streams in Skookum Creek Watershed on Wednesday and Thursday of this week, according to fisheries staff at Lummi Nation. Decreased average water depths means the sun warms the water faster, degrading water quality for the fish who need cool water to thrive. A problem is the filling in of the deeper pools in the streams, places where fish naturally congregate to avoid the warm shallow waters. Most of the pools in the Skookum Watershed have been filled in by siltation...

Lummi Press Release, Aug. 5, 1993

Skookum Creek is the first of my three locations to view the Nooksack River. A river without which, as one person on the reservation mentioned, the Lummi would not exist. Could a non-expert like myself go to the Nooksack and see, even in the most basic way, evidence of the environmental degradation I had read about? White settlers have only been in Whatcom County for a century and a half. Would I still see signs of what the Nooksack was like when the Lummi held sovereignty over this land? From the top of the clear-cut, I look three-hundred feet down a precipitous slope, which then drops another two hundred near-vertical feet to the creek bed. Here and there, a replanted sapling pokes up as high as the tangled overgrowth, greener and more hopeful than the artificial Christmas tree my folks kept for years in a box in our garage. Along the point where the steeper slope begins, a thin line of the original
trees have been left standing. I am curious to traverse to the edge and look over. Even with roots to bind the slope together, I don't understand how anything could stick to such an angle; with the trees removed, it seems the soil wouldn't have a chance. But I am too sweaty and full of stickers for further clear-cut hiking. A logging road across the ravine provides a better view and easier travel.

Log production in Whatcom County continued to increase steadily until it reached a maximum of 147.7 million board feet in 1925. In that year, denudation of the forested areas in low-land Whatcom County was complete...After 1925, logging operations moved into more mountainous portions of the Nooksack River Valley.

Curtis Smelser, environmental scientist

From the other side of the canyon, the view of the wall above the creek is both surprising and predictable. What surprises me is the amount of foliage. This is especially noticeable upstream from the clear-cut, where vertical walls of rock are entirely covered by a plush layer of moss and ferns. It is like a travel poster for the Amazon. Gaudy, almost—it is so entirely draped in emerald flora. From a ledge the size of a dinner tray, a single tree grows on a cliff so steep that if I could shinny up to the tree’s tip, I would still be able to reach out and touch rock.

But downstream, this hanging garden is cut by several erosion troughs. Ten feet wide and replete with whole displaced trees, root systems intact, hanging upside-down above the creek bed, these channels begin at the cliff top with ten feet of exposed dirt and travel down the wall in streaks of greenish-brown to great heaps of debris along the bank of the creek.

Under natural conditions, sediment loads in the streams measured 10 parts per million or less. By comparison, suspended sediment concentrations in a stream immediately downstream from an improperly logged area exceeded 70,000 ppm—a measured increase of 7,000 times the natural sediment content.

Federal Water Pollution Administration

The road wanders away from the Skookum for two miles, then brings me down close again. The hillside isn’t as steep here and I hike to the water through brush stripped clean by winter. All around are thickets of slim alder trees, no bigger around than my leg, their bark splotched in a white-gray the color of ash. The creek runs slow in this open valley. Like the walls downstream, everything near the creek is covered in a coat of shaggy moss which the slanting winter sun seems to light from within. The contrast makes the pale alders look even paler, a mass of intersecting vertical stripes. As if someone has carefully, repeatedly, drawn a piece of chalk over a landscape painting.

Leaving the creek, I seek the easiest path back to the road. The growth is thinner in spots and I make my way according to the path of least resistance. I come across a hoof print in the leaves. A deer, perhaps. It is large, though. An elk? In another fifteen feet I notice more prints and some droppings. I am following the same path as the deer! I feel the pleasure of a greenhorn outdoorsman, of interpreting the natural obstacles and following them just like an animal in the wild. Some smaller prints step alongside the larger ones. A mother and her young? The prints lead up a small slope and as I step up and over, I come across a stump.

It is red cedar, like the trees that once covered Whatcom County. Grainy, amber-tinted photographs from the turn of the century show bearded men in front of trees, eighteen and twenty feet in diameter. “Ten hugs around” they used to say. The stump in front of me is seven feet wide. Not so big. I forget about the hoof prints and look up at the alders, imagining the time when the Lummi tracked elk through the giant conifers that once filled this valley. And the time, in later years, when these hills were all a mass of sticker bushes, loose dirt, debris, stumps.

Some of the timber...around lake Whatcom was of tremendous size, and the stand per acre was so heavy that the cruisers’ figures were often questioned. [In 1898], in order to cut one tree near Alger, two nine-foot saws were brazed together.

Donald Clark, logging historian

Through the policy of clear-cutting...approximately 250,000 acres of forest were removed from the Nooksack River basin between 1890 and 1937...By 1937, most of the 116,480 acres of the South Fork basin had been logged out.

Curtis Smelser, environmental scientist
February 3, 1994

The sky is windless and clear; the temperature, just below freezing when I put my kayak into the Nooksack at the small town of Everson. Several weeks without rain in this seventh year of drought has left the water especially low. For fifty feet I pull along the bottom with my hands until it is deep enough to paddle.

There was once a big stern wheeler boat used to come up the Nooksack River. Nowadays you couldn’t make that boat float around at all. Too shallow. The big industry up the river took so much water out. When the river gets shallow it harms the fish; they can’t get up. There’s no current to wash the river out. It just gets green and polluted. They have big three, four-foot pipes using this water. I was one who went back to Washington D.C. to have my say. I talked to a man in the Bureau of Indian Affairs...and he said the Lummi Indians solely own the Nooksack River. But he said there’s nothing the Lummi can do to get the water away from the industries. They already have it.

Ronomus “Toddy” Lear, Lummi Elder

The exposed river bed is made of light gray gravel and stones, never bigger than a fist, and of charcoal gray sand. Along the banks are blackberry bushes and scraggly trees or, just as often, artificial dikes made from “riprap” — blocks of stacked concrete roughly the size and weight of a V-8 engine, used to reduce the river’s tendency to cut new channels and spread onto the flood plain during high water. Gravel and riprap are mostly what I see during my four hour trip; from down in the channel, I can’t look over the bank to the miles of flat farmland around.

Homesteads were chosen adjacent to the river and subsequently cleared prior to farming. Removal of forest vegetation from the river banks accelerated the natural process of bank erosion and increased sediment input into the drainage system.

Curtis Smelser, environmental scientist

I pass a group of nearly twenty bald eagles early in the day, but see little wildlife for the rest of the trip. Just a few seagulls and ducks, and two pairs of absurdly thin Blue Herons, their legs dangling behind as they fly, delicate as balsa wood. On the river today, the most common creatures are the fishermen, lined along the bank in well-used pickup trucks. Some are friendly and talkative. Some just nod as I drift by. One cries out as I pass, “You’re scaring the fish!” But as far as I can tell, the fishermen haven’t caught anything today. Mostly, the men just sit, watching and drinking coffee. Their pole tips motionless as the river moves by.

As late as 1890, many farmers of Whatcom County pitchforked the lordly salmon out of the streams...and used them by the wagon loads as fertilizer for the soil or as feed for hogs.

Lottie Roth, historian

It’s difficult to see the bottom despite the shallow depth of the water. Anything deeper than two feet remains hidden in a brown sediment haze and I wonder how this affects the salmon’s ability to take oxygen from the water. North American White Perch die from gill-clogging when sediment concentrations reach 19,000 milligrams per liter. What would we do if our air pollution increased by 700,000 percent? A hellish view of Los Angeles in future centuries.
February 5, 1994

By the time I zip up my wetsuit and walk back to the river, the sun has melted the fine layer of ice on my kayak. The current is slow at Marietta Bridge as I push off towards the mouth of the Nooksack; my return trip upstream will not be difficult.

In 1883, the settlement of Marietta was platted on the shore of Bellingham Bay, directly opposite the mouth of the Nooksack... In 1891, Marietta still retained its shoreline position... By 1905, the delta had more than doubled its 1891 size and the bay near Marietta was beginning to shoal badly... By 1947, the emerged-land...had more than quadrupled its 1905 area and it had advanced approximately 1.25 miles into the bay... At present, the [river] delta continues to advance seaward at a rapid rate.

Curtis Smelser; environmental scientist

The occasional car crosses the bridge behind me, breaking the quiet of the water as I paddle past fishing sheds on the Lummi side of the river. Newer boats are tied up at makeshift docks or rest out of water, on trailers. Three old dingys, sunk near the river’s edge, are half-submerged in river silt. I try to resist seeing them as a metaphor.

Once, a long time ago, the Salmon Woman took her children and went away. Some say she went away because the Lummi children did not appreciate the gift that Salmon Woman gave to them. Some say it was because her husband—the great Lummi leader, Raven—had been abusive to her. When her children were gone, the Lummi began to starve and everyone was unhappy.

Beyond the shacks, there are no roads. Only thin, pale trees and calm water. Ahead of me, a Blue Heron takes off and flaps 100 feet down river. As I approach, it flies again, keeping its distance as I paddle toward the mouth. The land around is beautiful and untouched, this newly-created land. As I draw to shore, pushing through the thin skin of ice on the water, I can almost forget how and why it is here. How and why I am here. I have read that at the current rate of sediment load, the Port of Bellingham will fill with Nooksack silt in four hundred years. Across the Bay, a great, gray GearBulk cargo ship is moored on the water below my indiscernible house. I think of the “seaside” town of Marietta.

Four hundred years. What will the view be then?

The people were suffering and they asked Raven to find Salmon woman and to plead with her to come back and live with them. Raven knew she had a good heart and so he went upriver to ask her forgiveness. Over and over, he promised her that he and his people would never again show disrespect to her and her children. After a time, Salmon Woman came close and bearded the canoe. She would come back. But first, there were going to have to be some changes.
"They cut the mountains until they slide into the streams, destroying our salmon. They cut all the trees, leaving us no place to store our traditional gear. They take down the mountains and walk off with the money, leaving us scars on the land and in our hearts."

-- Ken Cooper “Cha-das-ska-dum”

The Arlecho Creek Basin of Whatcom County is one of the areas sacred to the Lummi Nation. This area is home to 552 acres of ancient forest, 452 of which comprise the largest privately owned stand of old growth remaining in Puget Sound. The Lummi Nation opposes continued clear-cutting within the basin and has been the most vocal and influential group seeking, in conjunction with numerous other groups, to gain public and private funds to purchase and preserve this tract of ancient forest.

The story of Arlecho Creek does not fit into the controversial Clinton Forest Plan that protects the Spotted Owl and its old growth habitat in federal forests. The ancient forests around Arlecho Creek are owned by a private company--Mutual of New York (MONY)--and in this case it is the state that regulates the land, leaving no federal protection for the area.

The Lummi Nation and the Nooksack tribe have significant spiritual and cultural sites located within the Arlecho basin in which they practice traditional rituals such as the Seyown (Indian Song) and gather materials for ceremonies--materials which are only available in old-growth forests such as Arlecho. Ken Cooper, a respected traditionalist and member of the ‘Seyown’ society, speaks of this tribal practice:

“When we go to the mountain we fast and pray and learn how to listen with our heart: our third ear. When we learn how to listen with this third ear, then you can talk to the trees. You can talk to the water.”

The remaining old-growth in the Arlecho Creek basin is one of the areas Seyown practitioners seek the se’li’ (spirit), their sti’lem (song) and temanowes (power). These areas are valued because of their purity, privacy, isolation, and seclusion. According to the Lummi Cultural Resource Center, traditionalists place their ceremonial regalia in the area as part of their offering to the Creator.

Potential historic use, artifacts, and possible burial areas are all of specific archaeological importance. The Lummi have corroborated with an archaeologist from the National Parks Service to determine the possibility of preserving these sites.

In addition, the Arlecho Basin is invaluable to the continued well-being of the Lummi fisheries program. Downstream from Arlecho, the Lummi run the Skookum Creek Fish Hatchery. Since 1968, an average of 4.5 million salmon have been released from the hatchery annually. Yet due to heavy timber harvests in upstream areas, sedimentation has increased in Skookum Creek. This, in turn, builds up in the hatchery, threatening fish stocks.

According to the Lummi Department of Fisheries, it is estimated that over 200 yards of sand and silt coming into the hatchery from upstream will have to be removed from the settling pond and raceways this year. “As far as the Lummi are concerned, siltation from the clear-cut would make the hatchery no longer viable.”

Arlecho and Skookum Creeks are also spawning grounds for Chinook Salmon. Chinook runs have been declining, and are nearly depleted to the point where they will have to be placed on the endangered species list. The proposed logging of Arlecho would decrease these spawning areas even further, thereby having ill effects on all of those in the local fishing industry, both Lummi and non-Lummi alike.

In 1990, Merrill Ring Green and Crow (MRGC), a local land-management group in charge of the Arlecho Basin, announced plans to harvest the remaining “over mature” timber in Arlecho by 1995. In the fall of 1993, MRGC conducted a voluntary Watershed Analysis. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources
reviewed the study and found a number of omissions or inadequacies that needed to be addressed prior to final acceptance by the DNR.

In addition to causing harm to water quality, the clearing of this forest would cause a diverse species of wildlife, ranging from deer and elk to the Marbled Murrelet to become vulnerable. The Marbled Murrelet was placed on the endangered species list in October, 1992. These seabirds nest exclusively in the high, moss-covered branches of old-growth forests. The Arlecho Creek Basin, located only 19 miles from the sea, provides the murrelets with an ideal habitat. According to the Washington Department of Wildlife, threatened murrelets were discovered in Arlecho old-growth in 1991. However, MRCG has denied requests for further surveys.

The murrelet's discovery was vital to the reclassification of this ancient forest. The purchase of the land was reclassified in 1992 from Class III to Class IV—the most restrictive classification the DNR can designate to a Forest Practice Application. This means that a State Environmental Policy Act survey of possible imminent threats to the environmental degradation, or imminent danger to private property, public health and safety is studied and evaluated before any decision to log can be approved. Although it is not required under state policy, local governments can request a survey of cultural and economic impacts as well.

Other species such as deer and the declining elk populations are dependent on this ancient forest as well, especially during the winter months, when the forest's thick canopy of trees supplies thermal cover.

Theodore Muller, the Regional Habitat Resource Manager of the Washington Department of Wildlife, confirmed that MRCG did complete a “Wildlife Report” which took a “broad brush” look at the wildlife impacts in the basin. “In my opinion” he said, “that report was fairly superficial. It contained mostly unsupported opinion and conjecture.”

The protection and management of these vital resources are of great importance to the Department of Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources. The Lummi Nation’s interests are even greater, for their culture and history are tied to this forest as well.

Jewell James and Kurt Russo from the Lummi Treaty Protection Task Force have been involved in this issue since 1990. Their goal is to raise funds—approximately $18 million—to purchase this land from the current owners, MONY, so that it can be preserved. Public and private assistance will be needed to purchase the land and establish a long-term preservation and management plan. Linda C. Bock, vice-president of Communications (for MONY), stated that “...we intend to be active during 1994 in meeting with various groups interested in the future of Arlecho Creek, and we are open to all ideas pertaining to its future management.”

The Lummi Nation has been successful in the past with similar land acquisitions, such as Madrona Point, a historic Indian site located on Orcas Island. Russo and James hope the same for Arlecho, as Russo explains, “The battle for the (old growth) remnants will hopefully lead to the future preservation and acquisition of this land.”

If Arlecho is acquired, the Lummi Nation, the DNR, and the Washington Department of Wildlife will take part in its management. The site will be used for fisheries enhancement, Native American cultural practices and programs in environmental education which will be administered through Western Washington University and the Northwest Indian College.

If Arlecho is lost, the last old-growth forest in the region will be gone forever, and with it the spiritual and environmental values unique to this ancient place.
Entering the ancient forest was like a shift through time. We had crossed a window into the past.

Towering mountain hemlocks flanked the entrance to the ancient forest boundary. These Hemlocks were sentinels—guardians of the old forest. Episodes of the television show, "The Land of the Lost," flashed through my head, but this place was more peaceful. Not a dinosaur in sight. It was a tranquil primeval forest, an example of the glacial process of change. My friend Mike and I had arrived at the Arlecho Creek basin, the largest remaining privately owned stand of ancient forest in the Puget Sound region, all 452 acres of it.

Traffic was sparse on the North Cascades Highway the January morning we made our way toward Sedro Woolley, and the weather turned bitterly cold as we headed up into the quiet foothills of the Cascades.

Traffic was sparse on the North Cascades Highway the January morning we made our way toward Sedro Woolley, and the weather turned bitterly cold as we headed up into the quiet foothills of the Cascades.

The maze of unmarked logging roads, leading through the checkerboard pattern of alternating raw clearcuts and commercial tree farms, made it nearly impossible for us to orient ourselves. Our only landmarks were the Twin Sisters mountain peaks, the daughters of Mount Baker to native peoples of the area.

We spent the majority of the day riding and hiking on abandoned snow-covered logging roads in pursuit of the elusive patch of ancient forest near Arlecho Creek.

Lost and weary from the journey, I began to question the significance of Arlecho. Maybe it was the sheer inaccessibility of the place that made it unique. The place was certainly isolated, and after a couple of hours of hiking I began to think we wouldn’t find it. My attention wandered until a cocked alder branch cracked my face like a whip. I felt like I had just been reprimanded by the place. What was so special about Arlecho? Who cares about an isolated and fragmented patchwork of old-growth? I wasn’t an Indian or a Marbled Murrelet, what did this place mean to me? I cursed at the overgrown road. We pushed on.

Some time later, my mind again wandering, I was startled by a retreating grouse. Looking up toward the horizon, I noticed a change in the landscape. On the crest of the ridge, the afternoon sun illuminated a different forest structure. Large trees stood out from the adjacent crop-like stand, intruding like weeds in a manicured lawn.

I recognized the multilayered canopy of old-growth, the craggy tops of ancient trees, each reacting differently over hundreds of years to storms, wildfires, disease, and available light. The faint trail had vanished, forcing us to leave a trail of blaze orange markers to show our way back as we slowly continued cross-country in pursuit of the ancient forest.

Soon, the desolate tree plantation gave way to a beautiful old-growth mosaic. Here it was obvious where man had replaced natural disorder with neat rows. Abruptly the forest composition changed from evenly-aged young Douglas firs to prehistoric old-growth—a miracle of complexity. The boundary was as clear as the weather; after spending five hours journeying through the sterile brown floor of tree farms, Arlecho was an oasis in the middle of a desert.

We took a break in between two giant Douglas firs, perhaps some of the largest in Arlecho. I heard a woodpecker, working on the wrinkled bark of an ancient fir, a world of varied shelter for bats, spiders, ants, and tiny mammals.

This place was textbook old-growth. The low to mid-elevation forest contained valuable Western Red Cedar and moisture loving hemlock. Ghostly Silver firs and the most dominant of all conifers, the Douglas fir, blanketed the steep hillside. A lush carpet of salal, Oregon grape, and swordfern flourished where the afternoon sun penetrated the broken canopy—nature unleashed.

You can feel an ancient forest.

So characteristic of old-growth, tiny hemlock
seedlings grew slowly on the moist and shaded fallen cedars. Dead trees are the life of the forest, providing nutrients for the next generation of sapplings. Large downed trees crisscrossed the forest floor, nobly accepting their vital role in the ecological stratification of the forest. They hold the fragile soils in place, and act as life boats during wildfires. Downed logs provide shelter and food for a variety of animals and invertebrates as well.

We came to Arlecho because this small isolated grove of trees is a natural museum to history and the peoples of this area. It serves as a vital culture memory bank and critical biological gene reserve.

This area has a unique concern to the Lummi beyond the status of their downstream hatchery. The Lummi and Nooksack peoples share a traditional claim to this area. Not only do they cherish sites of archaeological significance, but Arlecho Creek is one of the last places natives can go to practice spiritual activities sacred to their culture.

Arlecho and ancient forests are pristine places—undisturbed areas. Loss of such wilderness demoralizes the psyche. It’s really an ethical question. Did all of Iowa have to be converted to cropland, or could we have left some free roaming prairie? The prospect of this stand being cut was profoundly depressing.

I looked toward the numerous snags which pierced the sky on the ridge opposite us and noticed that the sun was beginning to set; it was time to head for home. We never made it down to the creek where they practiced spirit questing, but then the thought of jumping into an icy creek in the middle of winter did not really appeal to me anyway. Maybe in the summertime. That was not my culture anyway; I would have been trespassing. Lewis and Clark were all I had to identify with here. I was just an explorer, devoid of spirituality—ignorant of Sacajawea and what she represented.

The remaining forest groves in Arlecho Creek represent a tiny part of the great natural forest that once covered much of northern Washington. The Arlecho basin was once home to the grizzly bear and gray wolf, rare nesting birds like the Western Tanager and the Red-breasted Sapsucker, and, in the more recent past, it was prime habitat to the northern spotted owl, and the threatened bull trout which once flourished in the clean waters of the creek. These species are as irreplaceable as the old-growth forest itself; this place is like one interconnected biological entity, a place where we can learn from the wisdom of evolution.

As Lummi advocate Kurt Russo said, “Arlecho is a battle for the remnants...that's all there is left.” A Department of Natural Resources forester, Joe Blazek, confirmed this: “there’s some [ancient forest] down around Sultan, but that has been proposed as a timber sale area, otherwise, Arlecho’s it”.

One important thing that Arlecho illustrates, is that the retention of old-growth is beginning to stand on its own merits rather than just being shored up by an endangered species crutch; the harvesting of the ancient forests surrounding Arlecho Creek is not only a violation of the rights of indigenous peoples and threatened wildlife, it is a violation of common sense.
Although there is no word in the Lummi language for environment, Tom Edwards Jr. likes to talk about the lands and wildlife of Whatcom County. "Last year we counted 47 eagles nesting on the reservation, this year we counted only 37 eagles." He hopes the decrease is not a pattern.

"I can really smell Bellingham when I drive into town," he says. "Bellingham Bay is of concern to the Lummi. Pollution, like runoff from the roads, boats, and industrial pollution are hurting the bay. The crab taste better over here in Lummi Bay."

Tom (Xwomiksten) works in the Lummi Timber, Fish and Wildlife department as a fisheries technician. Xwomiksten is his Lummi name.

Tom is a barrel-chested man, as are many of the Lummi men. Their large upper-bodies seem to make many of them natural canoers, a sport in which the Lummi are champions. Training is a rigorous six-day-a-week activity, and usually the seventh day is spent on activities related to canoeing (or "pulling" as they call it) as well.

Being raised in a traditional Lummi family taught Tom a great deal about tradition, including instruction in the Lummi language which he learned from his grandfather and Lummi Indian College linguist Bill James.

"I learned the language, because I saw my culture gradually deteriorating. I get my kindness from my grandfather, Isadore Tom Sr. So I try rubbing it off on others. I go up to them and shake their hands and talk to them. Never sit back when people need it."

Tom wants to see more bonding between the young and the old on the reservation. "I always go up to the elders and talk to them. Say 'Hi, how are you? We want you here with us. You are holders of our traditional ways. We need your knowledge, support, guidance, and wisdom.'"

"That's why we are in a predicament. Indians weren't listening to the wisdom of the elders. They're trying to prepare us in the knowledge they share. It's important. It's the way of our life, our culture."

At 31, Tom isn't married, so he spends a lot of time with his family. "My mother taught me how to cook. She used to say, 'Son you never know, you might be a bachelor or meet a girl who don't know how to cook much.'"

Tom is also a recovered alcoholic and is proud of the recovery he has made. "Each weekend, I try to spend time with the elders. They tell me, 'Hey, we're proud of you, stepping into a new life like you're born again.'"

But there is much of an old life that Tom remembers as well, like when he was a child and other kids from Ferndale would bring their new toys to school, while he had nothing. "We had no toys. We almost had no food. We made paper decorations for the tree. We still had fun though. We would sit down close and talk to each other, support each other. We're better off now, but we still use paper decorations."

Today, Tom is working to help conserve and protect the environment of Whatcom County. Among other things, he reviews forest practice...
applications, which are public notices that a company intends to log a tract of land. He enjoys his job, because he is protecting the land, and he gets to go outdoors.

If the Lummi are concerned that the logging is on too steep a slope, too close to a stream bed, or is of historical significance to their people, then they contact the logging company and tell them their concerns. The company usually investigates to see if the concern is legitimate, then makes a decision on what to do.

I was impressed by the amount of statistics that the Lummi gather on Whatcom County. They compile information on stream channel shifts, velocity of streams, stability of soils, slide areas, eagle nesting grounds, and tree species composition. In addition, the Lummi are also surveying the herring runs along Lummi and Portage Islands as well.

These herring runs were, at one time, a traditional source of food for the Lummi, as were the ducks that dove down to eat the herring and got caught in the fishermen’s nets.

Other monitoring projects Tom is involved with are the surveying of the 100+ crab traps in Lummi and Bellingham Bay, and the identification of salmon spawning grounds in various creeks around Whatcom county.

When he gets a break from his busy schedule, Tom likes to play Indian bone games (sla-hal). He started playing at the age of four, and has since played in Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, and on Vancouver Island, representing his deceased grandfather Isadore Tom Sr. The game incorporates singing and drumming, and the outcome depends on luck and skill.

His family is known and respected for their songs. "Here comes the Tom family" they say at competitions. People have offered to buy songs from the Isadore Tom family, but they refuse. They do not want to sell off their traditions. His family once won $1,500 in a bone game and have won many championships.

Tom told me some of the day-to-day things he likes to do. He likes to play basketball, draw pictures, eat seafood and play the Indian hand drums. But he shrugged it off, as if these details weren’t as important as other things.

At the end of our interview, Tom showed me around his office that he shares with two other Timber, Fish and Wildlife workers. The office is filled with files, papers, maps, and pictures. Tom's ink-on-paper drawings hang on one wall. The style is partly is individualized and partly Northwest Indian.

Tom sees himself as a "proud Native American, proud of our culture and beliefs. Indians care for other tribal peoples. Care for the sick. Care for and respect elders."


“My dad always made us go up and shake elders’ hands. Even if I don’t know them, it’s important for me to go shake hands with Indian people.”

“I respect and care for all people. Not only Indians, whites also, even if they don’t want to talk to me.”

But, he adds, “I spend a lot time to myself, just thinking about things.”

This surprised me, because Tom is friendly, relaxed and informal talker. When I first met him, he eagerly shook my hand, lightly, as is the Lummi way. I asked him if he wanted to go get something to eat, but he said he was going to speak to an elementary school class about water quality and that he’d have to take me up on it some other time.

“I’d like to see the younger generation stand strong for their beliefs, stand up for the fish, water, seafood, wildlife. We are teaching them now. I’m still learning. It’ll take me another 20-30 years. Then I’ll pass it down to my sons or nephews or their kids. I’d like to see them get involved in their culture, language, customs, beliefs, learn how to hunt, shuck oysters, and know where to dig for clams, prepare deer. I had to skin a deer. Elk too. It’s important to know how.”

Tom hopes the younger generation will have a cleaner, better life. He wants to teach his nephews and other children about water quality and resources.

“Water is very important. All living things need water. Water has a special part in Lummi beliefs. Food comes from water, is made of water. We drink water.”

“I’m trying to teach kids not to dump chemicals down the drain. Trying to teach them about (the toxicity of) pesticides and herbicides.”

“A man without a vision will perish, we have to have one. We respect the trees, the water, the air, the earth. Without protecting them, the human race wouldn’t exist.”

The Planet 21
Rachel C. Platt

LACANDONE

Deep in the Lacandone rainforest of southern Mexico, Lummi tribe member, Ken Cooper begins to play a song on a large drum. The dim glow of an oil lamp casts Cooper’s shadow around the walls of the small hut and his song continues until a new song, unknown to Cooper, overtakes him. He begins to sing this song to the Lacandones who sit in a circle around him, then passes his drum to Kurt Russo, who sits beside him, and begins to shake and cry in gratitude for this song. Kin Bor Panagua, a Maya Lacandone tribal leader, has listened to the song and feels its spirit. Through this song he now knows that Cooper and the Lummi are no tourists, no oil drillers or cattle ranchers; they are Native Americans from a tribe that is still connected to the land. Kin Bor knows they have come to help.

At this first meeting with Kin Bor and the villagers, Cooper warned them about the empty promises people outside the village will make to take their land, one of the last lowland rainforests in the Americas. He made this clear through stories of Lummi history. “The government brought us electricity and paved the road with broken promises. They told us they would respect and protect the land...but they are cutting down the last of the ancient forests. When they do that, they cut out our culture. They don’t listen. Or don’t care. Or don’t believe us. Or can’t afford to.”

I went to the Lummi reservation to talk to Kurt Russo, an instructor at the Northwest Indian College, and coordinator for the Lacandone trips. I wanted to know what happened on his and Cooper’s first trip to the Lacandone villages in Chiapas, the poorest of Mexico’s states. He described the Lacandone welcoming the Lummi into the village, despite the villagers’ normally apprehensive nature.

The first step the Lummi took after this initial trip involved the Northwest Indian College. Russo organized a 5-credit class for students and other Native Americans in which they stayed with the Lacandones, usually for two weeks, with but three basic goals: educating the Lacandones about their environmental rights, showing them how they can enforce those rights and teaching them how to live with the increasing intrusion of society.

A year of planning must augment the students’ short stay, though, in order to reach these goals. I could tell that long hours of hard work go into the trip before their plane leaves the ground. I understood this just by glancing around the project’s headquarters before I even met Kurt Russo.

Giant posters paper the walls with pleas for every environmental and cultural cause. One reads, “The buffalo were wiped out. But you can still save the caribou.” The office workers have piled two-foot-high stacks of paper on every office furnishing and every inch of floor. Papers stick out of the six huge file cabinets that sit along the back wall. The first thing Russo said to me was, “This office is the hub of a lot of international activity.” No kidding.

He sat at his desk, the one with the most papers on it, and sipped tea from an etched-glass mug while he gave me some history of the...
Lacandones. The two Lacandone tribes remained isolated until missionaries "discovered" them only 50 years ago. Until recently, they have lived mostly by traditional ways; they wore cedar tunics and lived in mahogany huts taken from the rainforest's trees which surround them. Since their "discovery" though, much of their forest has fallen to cattle ranchers, oil drillers, and loggers. Simultaneously, another invasion threatens the unique culture of the Lacandone rainforest's 600 villagers.

The recent insurrection by Mexican guerrillas in Chiapas threatens the villagers most now. The guerrillas have situated themselves in the rainforest to hide from the government's forces; they come out of the forest to fight, then retreat back into it after an uprising. If the army comes into the rainforest, the war could wipe out all that remains; one incendiary bomb could start a raging wildfire, especially in the dry season. This possibility coupled with the violence already in nearby San Cristobal holds back the 1994 student trip, the trip's fifth year.

Russo explained how cattle ranchers pushed deeper into the rainforest first by clear-cutting, and then by burning everything left to make room for cattle. After only five years, the cattle deplete the soil of all its nutrients, so they must repeat this process, but the land they leave soon becomes a desert, the uncovered ground baking too hard for seeds to take.

The oil industry further endangers Chiapas, as oil prospectors clear forest for highways to test drilling sites. As Russo put it, "They've got the uprisings on several sides, narcotics trafficking in the rainforest, a civil war in Guatemala, oil exploration all around the perimeter and cattle ranchers coming in illegally and not being stopped by the government. They're under enormous pressure."

Last year's student trip beat the insurrection by only half a year. I talked with John Vaara, a soft-spoken Tlingit Indian originally from Alaska who went along. He went out of his way to help me experience the trip, even lending me his journal; a small red notebook he described as "a part of him" by the end of the trip.

Vaara's journal talks of his drive toward the village on a highway, newly paved for Mexican President Carlos Salinas' tour of Chiapas. Vaara drove past the smooth road and turned onto a bumpy dirt road for the last few miles into the Lacandone village. Ken Cooper most likely first journeyed to the village on the same route in 1990, except he hiked through the dense rainforest for days. His second trip in 1992 was on the president's highway. "The forest had been cut clean to their village. Their houses were sitting in the middle of nothing."

Though one of the students' main purposes of the trip was to save the Lacandone culture and prevent the intrusion of civilization-- such as a highway into their village--not all villagers resist civilization's influences. Vaara told me about children running around in high-top sneakers. "Who are we to deny that from them because we have romantic notions about native people living in traditional ways?" Vaara asked. Of course, sneakers aren't threats, but they do represent increased connections with the industrialized world.

Russo said the students and other Native Americans have successfully set up a chain of connections from the Lacandone villages to the Mexican government. The villagers now know to whom they can report the environmental crimes going on around them to, but their reporting of crimes isn't enough. Russo warns that as soon as the Lacandone rainforest leaves the international focus the Lummi have brought to it, it will be devoured. "Six hundred people can disappear in a day in Mexico."

The only drawing I saw in Vaara's journal showed a thin sliver of an upside-down crescent moon hanging under a bright Venus. Below, fireflies dot the landscape and illuminate the small, mahogany huts. A scene like this will soon disappear without international attention and care.

And without such care, the Lacandone people may soon disappear as well.
The Lummi Indian Reservation is the site of a major controversy between Lummi and non-Lummi residents over water rights. Barbed wire surrounds the new well drilled on the reservation by the Lummi; nearby is a well owned by the Sandy Point Improvement Company, a non-Lummi homeowners association on the reservation. The water from the well drilled by the Lummi is used in their hatcheries, and the other, non-Lummi well, is used for Sandy Point residents.

Currently, the Lummi draw their domestic water from ground water wells on the reservation. This supply is supplemented in various annual amounts by water purchased from the city of Bellingham. In addition to their domestic supply, they also use freshwater in their salmon, oyster, and clam hatcheries. The water for the hatchery comes in part from the lower Nooksack River, and in part from a well drilled in 1991 to supply water to the Sandy Point salmon hatchery, constructed that same year. This hatchery now supports 6-8 million salmon that the tribe release every year. These salmon are caught by everyone, not just the Lummi. The new well which was drilled in 1993 was built to increase this salmon production.

The Sandy Point Improvement Company has lowered the water table by 15-20 feet in the last 20 years, until today it is nearly at sea level. This lowering could lead to salt water intrusion, which would pollute the freshwater aquifer until it becomes undrinkable. Despite this, the state has recently permitted an increase in withdrawals from Sandy Point. The tribe notified the State Department of Ecology that the Lummi have senior water rights in that area, but they were ignored.

Sandy Point is populated largely by non-Lummi, with 49% of the total population on the reservation being non-Indian. Citizens from this area have expressed concern about tribal jurisdiction over freshwater resources. Some are concerned that the Lummi are seeking control of the non-Lummi residents on the reservation by controlling the water. The Lummi say they are just trying to preserve a resource that they never gave away in the first place.

This is not the only area on the reservation experiencing problems with ground water. The water in the Gooseberry Point area has already had severe problems with salt water intrusion; the well water here no longer meets even secondary drinking water standards. As a result, wells have had to be abandoned or have their use curtailed to protect the aquifer. The state, however, has allowed the non-Lummi water associations in this area to continue to pump water anyway, and permits have even been filed to increase usage.

Even though Lummi water rights are very old and protected by federal law under the Point Elliot Treaty of 1855, they are still having difficulty in securing these rights. All over Whatcom county water rights are an issue, since as the population of Whatcom County increases, there is growing competition between homeowners, golf courses, businesses, farmers, and municipalities for freshwater resources.

Because the federal government has consistently failed in preserving Lummi resources, the tribe has recently set into motion a federal negotiations process which will involve four groups: the Lummi, the Nooksack, the federal government, and the state. Since the Lummi tribe has begun the process of self governance, they will be dealing with the federal government on a nation to nation basis, instead of merely as an interest group.

This new round of negotiations is not likely to resolve much of the controversy surrounding water rights on the Lummi reservation, but hopefully it will at least put to rest some of the legal issues involved with this problem. Until then, the Lummi will use one well, and the non-Lummi another, while both sides argue for their share of this all-important resource.
The Lummi water resource office is located in a plain brown building on Kwina Road. It feels like somewhere you would go to vote—the halls echo like an empty, unfamiliar school—and it's patriotic, with flags and the Lummi symbol stamped on everything; I feel as if I'm entering another country.

When I called to set up this interview, the person I spoke to wanted to know if I'd ever been on an Indian reservation before. I thought maybe I had, but realized I'd only driven by the brown signs on I-5 without ever actually stopping. Oh no. I thought, as dry as the subject of water resources is, I still have to deal with race relations.

So now I'm trying to find my interviewee and I'm stumbling down the halls wondering what I'm trying to achieve, looking at people's door decorations: articles from the Bellingham Herald, maps of Whatcom County, and 'Far Side' comic strips. I'm really nervous. I'm really really nervous.

A non-Indian woman with friendly eyes smiles at me and asks me if I am Gillian. Well, yes, I am. "I figured you were. A lost looking non-Indian." My first thought is 'But I'm part Powhatan,' except of course, mentioning that I'm a direct descendant of Pocahontas seems inappropriate, at best. Besides, I want to go through this as a white person. Mentioning my less than one one-thousandth-part-Indian blood I would be trying to claim I'm something I'm not.

I wait for the woman to come back in. There is a big computer with manuals and programs stacked next to it. Shelves are lined with Huxley textbooks, some still proudly bearing a 'Used' sticker. I can instantly relate. She comes back and I like her—a woman scientist. She reads my questions before I ask them and watches me write down the answers. She tells me all of the answers to questions I tried for weeks to squeeze out of the Bellingham Herald. I ask her: Where do the Lummi get their water from? What are the problems with each of these sources of water? How are they being allocated? How are they being polluted?

The more we talk, the more comfortable I feel. (I can't use her name because she is a technical staffperson, and not an official spokesperson for the Lummi Nation. I become excited about the Lummi too. Leroy Deardorff, the water resource administrator went to our own Huxley College. His knowledge can help in planning wise resource use. When salt intrusion occurs on Gooseberry Point, they have the extra clout when saying, 'Stop pumping the wells or our water quality will be ruined.' Problem, of course, is the white people. And no, I probably don't mean all of them, though I feel like I do. The state has permitted non-Lummi water associations to continue pumping water out of the Gooseberry Point Aquifer, even though the water doesn't meet secondary drinking water standards anymore and continuing to pump is endangering the Aquifer. Translation: by allowing continued pumping the water could be contaminated so badly that it will be of use to no one. Translation: once again white people are exploiting a resource the Indians have moral and legal priority to.

During my interview, I learn that the Lummi's dispute over water rights is county-wide. The population of Whatcom county is growing. There is increasing competition between homeowners, golf courses, businesses, farmers and municipalities for freshwater resources. Of particular concern is the use of the Nooksack River, a main source of fresh water in this county.

On the Lummi reservation there is also a dispute over groundwater wells. Currently, the Lummi have set a federal negotiations process into motion to assess exactly how much water they are entitled to.

GILLIAN VIK
DIVING IN HEAD FIRST

A NON-INDIAN WOMAN WITH FRIENDLY EYES SMILES AT ME AND ASKS ME IF I AM Gillian. Well, yes, I am. "I figured you were. A lost looking non-Indian."
Since the Lummi have begun a program of self-governance, they will be dealing with the government on a nation to nation basis instead of as an interest group. Because there are problems with both of their main sources of water, the Nooksack river and groundwater wells, the Lummi have legitimate reason to make sure their water rights are insured.

The groundwater wells on the reservation are threatened by salt water contamination. This happens when wells are drawn from faster than they can re-supply themselves with new water, causing the water table to drop and salt water to seep in. Recently, the Lummi drilled a controversial new well on Sandy Point—a part of their reservation that has a non-Lummi majority—in order to supply their fish hatchery located there. Some non-Lummi residents saw this as unfair—an effort to control non-Lummi residents by controlling the water. Then the staffperson gave me the ‘I’m about to tell you the sleazy part’ look. “The Sandy Point Improvement Company, a non-Lummi homeowners association, lowered the water table by 15-20 feet in the last 20 years.” The state recently permitted an increase in withdrawals from Sandy Point to allow them to build more homes in spite of the fact that the tribe had notified the Department of Ecology they planned to exercise their senior water rights for salmon hatcheries.” I am beginning to think the definition of self-governance needs to be clarified. I am also beginning to wonder what one does do with non-Indians on an Indian Reservation. After all, they do make up 49% of the population on the reservation. For the Lummi however, it is a question of the future as well; if the Lummi ever want to move near Sandy Point, they simply will not have the water to support building homes.

Unlike groundwater, the Nooksack River is not used for drinking water, yet it is used for salmon, clam, and oyster hatcheries run by the Lummi. It is of great importance to the Lummi as a habitat for salmon, which are extremely important as a food source, as well as to their economy. But here again there are problems with water usage. A restricted flow of water resulting from upstream withdrawals causes several disruptions. It disrupts migrating fish populations, concentrates pollutants, and causes navigational problems for fishermen. The levees built on the banks of the river to provide protection from flooding have also disrupted salmon habitat. Nonpoint pollution including soil erosion, runoff from dairies and agriculture, and upstream industry, as well as from cities like Deming and Lynden also disturbs the salmon. The long term effects of exposure to pollutants are not really known.

Once, the river was deep enough that people used to jump off the bridge over the Nooksack head first. Now however, the Nooksack flows like a slow, cloudy mud puddle moving sluggishly toward Bellingham Bay. The depth of the water is closer to two than to twenty. Needless to say, you can’t jump off head first anymore.

My interviewee is dragged away by her boss and we say good-bye quickly. I walk out the doors into unseasonal sun and see two Lummi women taking a smoke break. It’s odd to have come to an Indian Reservation without talking to any Indians. I smile at the women holding the cigarettes. One of them looks straight into my eyes, and we smile at each other. As I break away from her gaze, I realize that there is still so much I don’t know, may never know about what it means to be Lummi.

I begin driving home in my art car with a dolphin painted on its side. A school bus drives in front of me. A Lummi boy who is just barely old enough to make fun of my car looks out the window. He doesn’t make fun of my car though. He smiles and waves instead. We make faces at each other all the way down Kwina Road.

Mark Lehner

Headwaters of the Nooksack
Maurice Austin
Staff Distorter

CITY COUNCIL PROPOSES WALL

The Bellingham City Council has proposed a solution to the current battle over water rights in Whatcom County, but members of the Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Tribe have expressed concern over what they consider a "blatant example of environmental racism."

The proposal, based on the landmark 1974 Boldt decision, divides water resources between natives and non-natives equally. Bellingham City Council member Arne Klaw said the Lummi and other Treaty of Point Elliot tribes will be guaranteed one-half of the water, "whether it be from underground aquifers or the Nooksack river."

The proposal describes three separate plans for the allotment of water resources:
--Dam the Nooksack: The Lummi would then pick as their resource either the water above or below the dam.
--Put the Nooksack in a tank: The tank would empty into two smaller tanks; one for the Lummi, one for the non-Lummi.
--Split the Nooksack: By far the most popular plan. A wall would be constructed from the exact center of the Nooksack's headwaters to its mouth in Bellingham Bay. Lummi would use one side of the river, and non-Lummi the other.

The Lummi have been struggling to regain their right to water resources ever since the City of Bellingham and the Whatcom County Key Industrial Development Association (WHACKYIDEAS) began using water without Lummi permission decades ago. Control of water and sewer utilities is considered vital to the Lummi goal of maintaining sovereignty.

"Proposals such as this are not going to be conducive to further talks," said one Lummi spokesperson.

Arne Klaw disagrees. "Look," she said, "when the Lummi gave us half of their salmon catch in 1974, we immediately began researching other resources the fifty-fifty arrangement could apply to. Water's one."

A federal court recently ruled that the Makah and other Point No Point Treaty tribes are entitled to 50 percent of the allowable halibut harvest. An independent consulting firm is examining possible locations for a sea wall in those fishing areas, but has been "unable to find a point at which to begin or end the wall."

Bellingham Mayor Porkal Barrell appeared pleased with the proposal yesterday morning at the Bellingham Golf and Country Club, but a statement released today announces his disappointment that the council didn't seek a "greater compromise." An aide said that the owner of the golf course had told the mayor that the club would be closed unless they could secure more water than the proposal affords. The mayor plays golf five days a week at the club.

One Lummi Nation member, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the proposal "stinks. How can they expect to build a wall? Are they crazy? What if a male salmon went up one side, and a female up the other--how would they spawn? How can you love your spouse when there's a wall there?"

Mr. and Mrs. Silver Salmon, of Milepoint 0.4 Skookum Creek, appeared distraught at the proposal. "We hope the city council abandons this absurdity," they said. "The Lummi have always taken good care of us. A wall would only divide our children against themselves."

Salmon, however, aren't on the minds of the Bellingham City Council. "What we're looking at is increasing the opportunity for oil refinery and golf course settlement in our area. A few more courses and we'll be just like San Diego," said one council member.

"Golf balls don't feed people. Golf balls don't shelter people. But they sure are fun to hang around between meetings and hearings," said Mayor Porkal Barrell.

Doug Fir, who lives on the north bank of the Nooksack river near Silver Lake Road, said the wall would permanently separate him from his sister Sally Cedar, who lives directly across from him on the south bank. "Maybe the mayor should move to San Diego," he said.

The Nooksack Tribe has vowed to cooperate with the Lummi Nation in what could become the longest series of court disputes focusing on water rights to date.

A spokesperson for WHACKYIDEAS said the wall could be made "in such a manner as to be aesthetically pleasing to the eye, such as painting pictures of trees, salmon, or automobile advertisements on it."

"Ah," said a Lummi Nation spokesperson, "a kinder, gentler Berlin Wall."
The only things I really know are what my heart tells me. Most other things I think I know I’ve learned only from books or picked up from chance observation.

I wanted to know how your hearts feel—what they tell you about how to live your lives, how they counsel you to make certain choices. But I can’t get close enough to hear your voice.

I don’t think it’s intentional, this wall of silence. I feel that you are willing, though I sense your hesitation. From what I have heard of local history, your hesitation is justified.

I know how busy you are. I see and respect what you have done for yourselves and other indigenous groups, not only here, but in Central America too. You’re busy fighting the good fight.

I only wish you could help me understand and let me into your vision of the world. My European-American education has provided me a stereotype of your spirituality. It shows you walking with the world as one, that you are the spirit sometimes, and not yourselves. I’ve come close to such a feeling only twice in my live.

Once, an old man—I thought he must be ancient—came to my elementary school in Concrete. He told the story of the walking cedars. He said each tree made its song and called to one of his people. If one needed a canoe and the time was right, the tree and the man would sing together as the tree made its way toward the water.

The speaker told us the man’s song was honoring the tree’s sacrifice. I was entranced by this tale and I wanted to believe. To this day I’ll grant that such power is real and strong for those who value it. Western learning tends to tell us such power cannot be, because it can’t be seen. I think Western learning can poison the eye which sees such power, if one isn’t careful.

The only other time I remember being close to such power, I was eight. A few of us children were visiting one of the first Indian cemeteries in Northwest Washington. My heart felt as if I somehow knew the people long buried there. I felt that they were not angry; that there was happiness and peace in that place. I could almost hear them—they seemed more real than those breathing next to me.

But that is a part of life you keep to yourselves and this silence leads those with incorrect impressions to stereotype you. Yet your silence gives you power as well, it requires strength. I think I see why you won’t let me get close.

I was born in the Skagit Valley, where my people have lived for a century—no time at all compared with the heritage of Isabelle Warbus, an elder, whose grandfather was a Skagit. Isabelle told me how white men burned the Skagits’ homes and took their land when her ancestors couldn’t make it back from picking hops down south, near Puyallup.

Lawyers and the courts decided to give the Skagit people a mountainside of timber in exchange for the fertile ground on which they’d grown carrots, beans and potatoes. Isabelle said. It is odd to me that the Skagits were “given” something they’d had access to all along.

Isabelle told me too, of smallpox-laden blankets that were a gift from the white men, of pot-shots taken at Indian fishermen and of white fishermen who had laid their nets, not to catch fish, but to give the Indian fishermen a hard time.

She said she’d once been on her husband’s family island and found beautiful red and blue beads. When she took them home, her husband asked where she’d found them. When she told him, he told her to put them back, that the beads belonged to the dead laid on the ground in haste; The Indians had died so quickly from the pox there wasn’t time to bury the dead.

“People wonder why we resent the white people so much—because they’ve done so much to us in the past,” Isabelle said. It stands to reason you would look at me with some suspicion, not because I’m a stranger, but because my skin is white.

And so many white people, those with ignorant or greedy hearts, betrayed Indians with words and treaties and “gifts.” How valid, reasonable and justified is your hesitation.

But it doesn’t help me to understand you. Nor does it help others who are finally ready to listen and learn from you. Perhaps your voices could be heard this time—this is why I wanted so much to speak with you—I wanted you to know this.
Rock of My Foundation, silkscreen by Yvonne Thomas
I have been dreaming of ancient cedar trees. Cedar, hemlock, spruce, fir and yew, they once grew here. I have tried to picture them as they were. From Bellingham Bay east to Shuksan and Koma Kulshan (Place of the Storm Wind; Mount Baker), from the Fraser River south to Clear-sky (Takhoma or Mount Rainier) and beyond was virtually unbroken forest. Streams and rivers ran cold and clear. Bellingham Bay was mercury-free and to the Xwlemi (Lummi) living in the North Straits, this land was not wilderness, it was home.  

“In the old days,” relates Lummi Ken Cooper, “it was told that our old people wore moccasins so they could walk softly on Mother Earth and feel everything they were stepping on as they walked along.”  

The slow-growing yew yielded excellent wood for bows. Vine maple was used for fish traps, hemlock poles for dip nets. Fir was used as firewood and for the shafts of spears and harpoons. Sweat lodge frames were made of big-leaf maple. But most important of all was the sacred, ancient cedar tree, x'pai'epl.

Cedar trees provided bark for clothing, baskets and rope. The wood, easily split, provided long planks used to build traditional cedar longhouses. Totem poles told stories of villages and clans, honored guardian spirits, and animated popular legends. Cedar buds were chewed to remedy sore lungs and to avoid nausea when burying a corpse. Cedar boughs, singed by fire, were used to sweep the spirits of the recently deceased out of the home and into the spirit world.

But the Lummi had other uses for the cedar tree as well. The Lummi say x'pai'epl possesses a powerful spirit. The quest for the song of this sacred spirit was, and is, the foundation for their traditional religion. The Lummi “spirit dancers,” or Seyown, found trees in pure, private, isolated and secluded spots in the forest. As Lummi elder Joe Washington, Sr. explained, “Trees are granted life, the secret of life, so when you pluck a branch and rub yourself, the gift absorbs into your system.”

Author Holger Kalweit says, “The power of absolute concentration and total dedication is the gateway to higher consciousness.” A Seyown preparing for contact with a cedar spirit, or se'li, removes all traces of human existence, and rubs his body with cedar branches during ritual bathing to cleanse both body and spirit. While naked, fasting, and meditating, a Seyown seeks the cedar’s song, or sti'lem, with his “third ear.”

Each cedar tree is an individual possessing a unique spirit. Each Seyown finds a different tree, therefore each Seyown song is special. At the festive winter ceremonies, held “after the frogs stop, but before the snakes come out,” the Seyown shares the new song and accompanying dance with other tribal members. The shared experiences of ceremony connect people and express a sense of our place in the physical world. Life, birth, growth and death are woven into the fabric of community and family living. Thus, the changing of the seasons, the changes in families and changes within people are occasions for ritual ceremonies.

Lummi Ken Cooper, known and respected as a keeper of Lummi cultural heritage, says “We learn from the land what we need to know to honor and respect her and live in harmony with others and ourselves.”
But in the time since George Vancouver, many trees have fallen, many fields have been plowed and many streams destroyed. The Lummi no longer have access to ancient cedar trees for their winter ceremonial and cultural long-houses, nor do their traditional cedar carvers have access for canoes, sacred dress, totem poles, or cultural arts.

Traditional plants and medicinal herbs, like the Wild Rose, Stinging Nettle, Trillium, Devil’s Club, Elderberry, Maidenhair Fern and Kinnickinnick gathered and used by the Lummi, have disappeared with the forests. Salmon Woman’s children are not respected. Sugar and carbohydrates are replacing traditional high protein diets of salmon, elk, deer and shellfish. But more than plants and animals have been lost.

The United States’ Government confined the Lummi to their traditional wintering grounds, took away their native tongue, destroyed family institutions and banned their traditional religion in the treaty of 1855. But there are more recent examples of injustices.

In 1979, and again in 1983, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies raided Lummi Seyown winter ceremonials and confiscated eagle feathers and sacred regalia, some several generations old. A number of Lummi were even sent to jail.

Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York plans to clear-cut what remains of the Arlecho Creek watershed. A new dock is being planned for Cherry Point. Where can the Lummi still find the land and the clues connecting them with their culture and past?

Lummi Jewell James explains that, “Our oral traditions, teachings and spirituality taught respect for all things. From one generation to the next we were taught the glorification of respecting nature and creation. All things were once spiritual and transformed to provide the human children the gifts of the creating spirit. The Earth was our mother, the sky was our father, and our prayers brought the two together to form one unified spirit.

“Our ceremonies and traditions were like the umbilical cord that attaches the mother and child, and bonded the father to children. Without this connection we would forget respect and die. Without Mother Earth we would not be nurtured. Without Father Sky we would have no air to breathe or life-giving rains to cleanse our souls. Respect connected the youngest to the oldest, the strongest to the weakest, the wisest to the most humble. We were part of a circle.”

In his book Spire of Form: Glimpses of Evolution, Victor Scheffer agrees with Jewell James. He says, “Whole communities have evolved as if they
were one great organism. Thus all evolution is coevolution and the biosphere is now a confederation of dependencies.

Ken Cooper says, "Nobody can recreate what the Creator has done. If they try, they break the spirit of nature. And if they break the spirit, they break the thing that connects everything."

We are active participants in this world. Our extended family includes all people, all life and even inanimate objects like rocks; everything is connected. When everyone supports each other, we truly support ourselves and find our own answers to the questions of existence. The voids in our lives can be filled with love, affirmation and the living spirit.

Holding hands, hugging, dancing, creating art, singing and playing music, healing each other, finding meaning in everyday activities, finding challenges, looking for goals, embracing new ideas and shaking hands, these acknowledge something greater than ourselves. In recognizing, respecting and celebrating all varieties of spirituality and life, it becomes apparent that everyone and everything has a capacity for spiritual connection.

Jewell James says, "We forget that we are only a part of a much bigger and more divine plan for creation." Ritual ceremonies animate similarities, differences and interdependencies between humans and the world.

I recently attended a planning meeting for the upcoming Spiritual Unity of the Tribes: Gathering of Eagles VIII. Native people from many tribes gathered with European descendants to share ideas about how to host 5,000 visitors from around the world. It became a forum addressing the healing of physical, racial and spiritual wounds.

Lummi elder Arlene Hillaire-Trouse recalled a story told to her by prominent writer, activist and Sioux elder Vine Deloria:

Young people recovered ancestral land leased to white farmers; it was barren. The young people went to their elders asking for help. The elders said that when plants become endangered, they grow down. But when the environment is safe, and the plants are feeling safe, they come back up. Returning to the desolate land, the young people did as the elders directed. They did a spiritual purification ceremony and then planted the dominant plant of the land. Within a few years the plants started coming.

After hearing this story, Arlene asked herself about the Lummi. "We’re fishermen," she said, “and I thought Bellingham Bay was that desolation."

"Bellingham Bay is not that desolation; we are. We have covered up the pain and the vision of our becoming extinct with gross materialism, forgetting the spirit, alcohol and drugs, becoming workaholics, and living on adrenaline. We’re losing our babies and we’re losing our young families; our elders are prematurely leaving us.

"A spiritual purification needs to happen. Our dominant plant is our children and when we as the adults, we as the parents, we as the grandparents can see this plant growing and developing, it will be safe for us to grow upward.

"You all have dreams, you all have visions and you all have ideas as to how we can connect and communicate and start the spiritual healing. We need all those ideas, we need to find how we can go in that direction. There is so much that we have to do to find balance, to find unity and that spiritual level that we all need to come to. And I feel that each and every one of us has a part of that key. Our role is to find that point of unified action.”

"We can feel sorry for ourselves," says Jewell James, "we can sit back and join movements that demand justice. But, it will not matter what we demanded if the world dies."

Joe Washington, Sr. says “When the environment is as natural a state as possible, it is most useful to the Indians.”

Old-growth forests are striking examples of this. Many different plants and animals depend upon each other for continued physical existence. People could learn from this example of harmony. Indeed, a trip into the remaining ancient forests is like a trip to Mecca for Muslims or a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for Christians.

Clear-cutting old-growth forests is like smashing the stained glass windows in European cathedrals for the raw materials needed to make ash trays—are we prepared to trade short-lived paper conveniences for the song of these ancient trees?
Tommy Edwards Jr. pointing at the Trillium owned old-growth forest at Canyon Creek.

Back cover: Lummi basket weaver, Leslie Corbett photographer, the Mount Baker book.