

Award recognizes Coast Salish Tribal Journey partnership

Originally printed at <http://www.indiancountrytoday.com/global/46245062.html>

The Coast Salish – U.S. Geological Survey [Tribal Journey](#) Water Quality Project was recently recognized with the Department of the Interior's Partners in Conservation Award for their studies to help restore nearshore marine habitats and ecosystem functions across the Salish Sea.

The award recognizes the strength of collaborative activities such as the USGS partnership with the Coast Salish western Washington tribes and British Columbia First Nations. This cooperative effort combined traditional tribal ecological knowledge and [USGS](#) science during the [2008 Tribal Canoe Journey](#) to research resources experiencing decline in the Salish Sea, which includes Puget Sound, Georgia Straits and Straits of Juan De Fuca.



“The Salish Sea ecosystem sustains our indigenous life way as people of the salmon and shoreline,” said Swinomish Chairman Brian Cladoosby. “We say in our lands, when the tide is out, the table is set. Our way of life depends upon a healthy ecosystem that stretches from the mountains to the tidelands. Through the partnerships and project, we have a stronger science and policy capacity to protect the human health of our people, our culture, and aboriginal and treaty rights of our nations.”

During the journey, members of western Washington tribes and British Columbia First Nations traveled in more than 100 canoes from locations throughout Washington and British Columbia to Cowichan First Nation in Duncan, British Columbia.

Five of those canoes were very special. Each

Photo courtesy John Clemens/U.S. Geological Survey

USGS scientist Eric Grossman installed water-quality instruments in a canoe at the Swinomish Tribal Community Center in La Conner, Wash. during the 2008 Coast Salish Canoe Journey.

canoe towed state-of-the-art water quality probes and GPS units. From north of the Strait of Georgia to southern Puget Sound, canoe families played a big part in recording the health of the Salish Sea.

In all, 607 miles of the Salish Sea was mapped and more than 45,000 data points for specific water quality components were recorded including; surface-water temperature, salinity, pH, dissolved oxygen, total dissolved solids and turbidity.

Canoes are ideal because they are slow moving and do not add any toxins to the environment. USGS scientist Eric Grossman and Swinomish scientist Sarah Akin collaborated with USGS scientist Paul Schulster to develop a marine-based gathering project and support technical expertise in planning and conducting the study and analyzing the data.

The Coast Salish Nation is the trans-boundary indigenous and aboriginal group that stretches from north of Powell River through all of Puget Sound and down the Washington coast. Approximately 550,000 square miles and 600 million acres of the Coast Salish region were represented by more than 50 tribes and bands.

In February 2008, elders, chiefs and representatives from more than 50 tribes and first nations formally adopted a mission and action agenda at the third Coast Salish Gathering with a goal of developing policy and supporting sound science for the restoration and protection of coastal ecosystems of the Salish Sea.



Photo courtesy John Clemens/U.S. Geological Survey

The skipper and crew of the Grande Ronde Chinook canoe family prepare to leave from the beach at the Swinomish Tribal Community Center in La Conner, Wash. during the 2008 Coast Salish Annual

The director of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, Jon Waterhouse, brought the Coast Salish Gathering leaders the experience of conducting water quality studies during a canoe voyage that was successfully demonstrated during a 1,200-long canoe trip down the Yukon River in 2007.

“The Yukon River Healing Journey was developed to check the pulse of the river and it was up to our team to find a way,” Waterhouse said.

Yukon River’s biologist, Bryan Maracle, and Schuster developed the concept of “marrying culture and science,” by dropping a water quality

Canoe Journey.

probe on the side of a canoe along the Yukon River. The Healing Journey started from Moosehide, Yukon Territory, Canada and landed in St Mary's, Alaska, a 1,700 mile paddle.

The Healing Journey and the Washington Tribal Journey share the common purpose of blending culture and science through water quality testing and testimony from indigenous communities along the water's system of environmental changes and issues.

The 2009 Tribal Journey Paddle to Suquamish is scheduled for Aug. 3 - 8.