



A Case For Hope

■ We were smart people, we were rich. We had ways to live off the land and we were wealthy in our own ways. There's wisdom in this knowledge (in this lifeway) that we must use to face our current situation. Listen to the wisdom of our ancestors. They survived and thrived off hard work and ingenuity, not off luck and not driven by greed or individual gain. They learned through the continued practices of gratitude, generosity, and the strength of the collective. Giving and sharing were the measures of wealth. We were always taught One heart, One mind.

Our culture derives from the water, from that connection. Our song and ceremony come from there. When our fishers go out on the water they all say the

same thing - they're going home. There's an identity of place and moments in that place. Knowledge, identity and our Tribal names come from those fishing villages because that's where salmon was collected. We followed the salmon. We are Salmon People. It's the only relative we have a ceremony for, the First Salmon Ceremony.

A lot of these fishers don't go out fishing anymore, but does that mean they don't have a cultural identity? These are the questions we seek to answer while we fight to never have to answer the ultimate question: who are we without salmon?

- Darrell Hillaire

I wanna be a voice for our ancestors and our elders...I feel like everyone's finally starting to have a basic understanding of the urgency of needing to save the salmon for every single one. Not just for this Tribe or not just for that Tribe, that we need to come together. I think that's the right direction.

- Janelle Schuyler



The young leaders of Children of The Setting Sun Productions embarked on a journey to help reverse the devastating loss of salmon by catching and collecting stories and words from those who identify as Salmon People.

How does our methodology differ from other ways of approaching climate issues?

As the research began, a proper protocol was made to approach the work in a mindful way. Before we begin the work, we share a meal together and we explain the process of participating in the research. We also discuss the possibility of any sensitive or emotional subjects, reminding participants that they do not have to answer every question and can step away at any time. We are very sensitive to the possibility of mistrust in research amongst Indigenous communities, so we work to ensure that this process is transformative, not transactional. If they agree to continue, we then conduct the interview in a place they feel most comfortable.

We remind the participants that the work will be brought back to them in a good way. They have the final say on what information is used and have the option of adding, taking out, or changing anything that was shared. Our goal is to create the safest environment for them to express themselves. Our approach is also collaborative, in that we facilitate the process, but the interviewee is in charge.

Throughout the research we are guided by the Indigenous values of gratitude, generosity, respect, and responsibility. We believe a cultural and spiritual transformation is needed to solve many of today's climate issues. In order to do that we must look towards Indigenous leadership for solutions and guidance. We collect data that not everybody has access to; we understand the responsibility of carrying another's story and by following our proper protocols we are graciously let into the worlds and hearts of our participants.

Our methodology is also different in that it is youth-led. Some of our interviewees mention that with everything they have done in the past to preserve their rights and way of life, it is time for the torch to be passed down. And that is exactly what we're doing, carrying on that legacy.

How did we approach our research?

We interviewed a number of people from the regional area with a series of questions about the relation between their identity and salmon, and the history of fishing in their family. These were conversations between small groups of people with the mutual understanding that what was shared is sacred and it was a privilege for us to hear. We listened to stories that had been passed down for generations. These oral histories included knowledge of the past, wisdom to understand what is happening to us in the present, and prophecies of what we might do in the future. The stories collected express the importance of salmon not only to the ecosystem, but also to the identities of the Salmon People. The responses gathered will be used in policy and curriculum development to ensure that our inherent rights, written in our Treaty agreements, are protected. We endeavor to create change by informing the broader communities about the importance of salmon.

We always talk about the recovery of the salmon, it's the recovery of our people that's inevitably tied to the salmon. We need these salmon not only to sustain ourselves but for communities to survive and pass on this culture, not just the salmon culture, but our culture as a whole and the connectivity to each other.

- Scott Schuyler



Rec·i·proc·i·ty





Kenny Peterson 2023

What did we learn from our research that we would like to share with you?

While doing this research we learned so much about those who identify as Salmon People, including ourselves. Our identities as Salmon People are inexorably connected to salmon. This connection started through the long history of fishing in our families, which became a huge part of our way of life and culture. Going out on the water and sharing stories was our normal.

Without salmon, we're stripped. We can't exercise what's in our DNA. When everybody has all the salmon they need, there's no strife, there's no greed, there's no envy, there's no jealousy because you have everything you need. Your smokehouse is full. All your family is fed. My family's fed, your family's fed, his family's fed. Because we're not in this world to become rich. Indigenous communities are happy with having everything they need for their families.

- Phillip Williams

We also learned there is not just a loss of culture but a loss of identity when we cannot pass that knowledge down from generation to generation. Without those practices we start to get buried under the need to satisfy the empty space in our hearts. Some turn to drugs or alcohol because there is a craving for something that is no longer there. We are losing who we are at our core, and that is a devastating place to be. For some of us, this research has covered those wounds and we have been able to reconnect with that side of ourselves. There is a sense of peace in catching these stories, in connecting our histories. The interconnectedness that binds us to each other. And the common themes of identity, culture and family flowing throughout our research shows we are all bound to the salmon.

There's such an intention to heal, to move forward, and to be connected with our lands, with our ancestors, with ourselves. In our day-to-day everything that we do is a prayer. Everything that we do is an intention. Fishing, that's such a prayer. You're feeding your body. You're taking care of your river. You're taking care of your community. It's not this recreational thing. It's a very intentional sacred process.

- Te Maia Wiki

We also learned of the harsh realities that made the urgency of this work so much more important, such as resistance to dam removal and climate change.

[L]ike one of our late leaders here in the Pacific Northwest always told us salmon are the measuring stick of how we're doing here on earth. Their health will tell how we're doing here as, as people, how the salmon are doing, how the streams are doing, how they're surviving out in the sea. So it's like the salmon are the measuring stick of life.

- Cliff Cultee

Why should we, and you, care about this?

Salmon have nourished our hearts, our minds and also our bodies for generations. It has shown that straying away from those traditional foods takes its toll on our health, both mentally and physically. Without salmon our people will slowly but surely die out. And if salmon become extinct there will be a ripple effect within the whole ecosystem, as salmon not only feeds humans but also the rivers, trees, bears, eagles, etc.

We've talked to multiple respected elders in many communities and they have all come to the same conclusion:

Without everyone's help the salmon will fade away, and with them the Salmon People.

We also recognize that in order to fix the problem, it isn't just one group that is in charge. The help of everyone is necessary: we can't do this alone. We are spiritual people who honor Mother Earth because she takes care of us. Since time immemorial, we have taken only what is needed, ensuring reciprocity by always giving back through our ways of life. We always had just enough. This is no longer true.

We should also care about this because it doesn't just affect the Salmon People. It affects everyone, and we need everyone's help to solve the problem: policy makers, members of every community, the elders, the youth. In fact, we found some of our best inspiration in the young leaders we interviewed.

I want great, great, great grandchildren [to] know that me doing actions right this moment and putting love into the river, into the land is going to help them in the future. I'm hoping they can feel that energy and that care I put into what I'm doing today: Protecting the land and water so that my community's protected and in turn, it's helping me, protecting me. I'm nothing without my community.

- Brook Thompson

I come from strong people and can move forward because we're all part of this indigenous resistance and movement and fight for our rights...So even if I'm physically alone, I'm always in community. And because I have the community and strength and guidance for my community and ancestors, I believe I'm able to move forward and believe in myself, whatever I choose to do.

-Te Maia Wiki



**Children of
the Setting Sun**

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