



# International Indigenous Salmon Peoples Gathering

*Connecting Salmon Peoples in a World of Cumulative Effects*

November 17-20, 2025 | Shxwhá:y Village | Chilliwack, BC

**Proceedings Report**

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## Background

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Indigenous salmon management and knowledge systems have been sustaining salmon and people across the Northern Hemisphere for millennia. These systems have been increasingly eroded. These ancient management and knowledge systems have been replaced by salmon management practices rooted in Eurocentric worldviews and western science. Reaffirming Indigenous rights, governance, and jurisdiction over salmon and their ecosystems is a matter of immediate global concern for the future sustainability and survival of salmon and people.

Recognizing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,<sup>1</sup> an affirmation of Indigenous self-determination, researchers and Indigenous peoples from the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic have been creating opportunities for bringing Indigenous Salmon Peoples together in international forums to share knowledge and ideas relating to Indigenous salmon management and knowledge systems.

This gathering follows earlier International Indigenous Salmon Peoples Gatherings held in x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Vancouver, BC; 2022) and Sápmi (Karášjohka, Norway-Finland border; 2024) territories that advanced international cultural sharing, policy, and action. These gatherings open the floor to discussions of Indigenous sovereignty over Indigenous resources, the redefinition of bridging knowledge systems, and the decentering of western



*2025 IISPN Gathering at Shxwhá:y Village*

science. Through relationship-building and information-sharing, participants considered solutions to barriers and threats to Indigenous self-determination in salmon management and knowledge systems, with the theme of connecting salmon peoples in a world of cumulative effects.

Discussions and presentations at the November 2025 Gathering were structured around the Kárašjohka Declaration,<sup>1</sup> that was developed at the 2024 gathering in Sápmi territory. The Declaration focuses on communicating the governance and rights Indigenous Peoples have with respect to salmon.

Held in Shxwhá:y Village, near Chilliwack, British Columbia, from November 17-20<sup>th</sup>, the 2025 Gathering brought together over 80 people in-person and virtually from British Columbia, northern and eastern Canada, Alaska, Finland, and Norway to advance key themes such as: honouring ancient traditional governance and laws; showcasing the action of youth and communities; and addressing the climate crisis through decolonization and Indigenization.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iispg.com/karasjok-declaration>

## Welcome

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As with previous gatherings, the first day focused on cultural sharing and relationship building. The connection to salmon was shown through song, dance, and storytelling. Chief Robert Gladstone of Shxwhá:y Village welcomed guests and spoke of the great importance of salmon, “Our DNA is full of salmon. We’re salmon people.”



*Chief Robert Gladstone of Shxwhá:y Village welcomes guests*

Performances by local artists, the Sasquatch Dancers and the Tzinquaw Drum Group, shared relationships with the land, water, and salmon, as well as highlighted teachings being passed from generation to generation.



*Cultural performance by the Sasquatch Dancers*

# The Kárášjohka Declaration

Day two began with an overview of the Kárášjohka Declaration. The sections of the Declaration provided the structure for this Gathering:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Connection
- Ecosystems and Habitat
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Stewardship

Wickaninnish Cliff Atleo Sr., of Ahousaht, provided some background on the previous Gatherings and the development of the Declaration at the 2024

Gathering in Sápmi territory. He commended the Sámi Parliament for their hosting and sees the Declaration as a stepping stone for protecting all salmon populations. He highlighted the Nuu-chah-nulth view of *Hishuk-ish tsawak*—all things are connected, or all things are one, and lessons from his father about looking after the people, territory, and rivers in the *Ha-ha-houlthee* (Nuu-chah-nulth Chiefs' territories). He also shared challenges that salmon are facing in Ahousaht due to poor management and habitat destruction, as well as his excitement for this Gathering as a process for people to come together—especially to discuss rights and responsibilities.

Vegar Baehr, from Sámi Parliament, highlighted that the Declaration is a starting point. He emphasized the need to keep the work moving forward and that other groups are welcome to make their own local versions of the Declaration, using it as a model.



Wickaninnish Cliff Atleo Sr.



## Health and Wellbeing

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**From the Declaration:** *We, as Indigenous Salmon Peoples, declare that we are the rightful stewards of the lands, waters, and Salmon for the prosperity of Salmon themselves, our current generation, future Indigenous Salmon Peoples and all those who benefit from the health of Salmon.*

### **Presentation: Brandy Mayes**

Brandy Mayes from Kwanlin Dun First Nations Heritage, Land and Resources is a Yukon Salmon Subcommittee member, sits on the Yukon River Panel, and is the Fish and Wildlife Manager for her Nation. She emphasized that the health of salmon is the health of the people and that work to protect salmon must happen at every scale—each part is essential and connected. Her work honours the Declaration at the transboundary tables as well as at the local level with hands and feet in the creeks—this is where global commitments become real. “The words of the Declaration aren’t only political; they are deeply personal. They speak to our ancestors, to our children and they speak to every Nation who stands together in this work.”



*Brandy Mayes, Kwanlin Dun First Nation*

The story of Michie Creek shows the importance of salmon to the people who rely on them and how salmon teach about reciprocity. For countless generations, Chinook salmon have returned to Michie Creek. “The Creek is a womb holding the life that sustains us—salmon are the great connectors.” There used to be tens of thousands of salmon returning to the Creek, however, monitoring by Kwanlin Dun First Nation showed only 3 salmon returning in 2019, over 70 in 2024, and over 200 in 2025—something to celebrate even though it’s so much less than historic levels. “This stream isn’t a ditch – it’s an organism!”

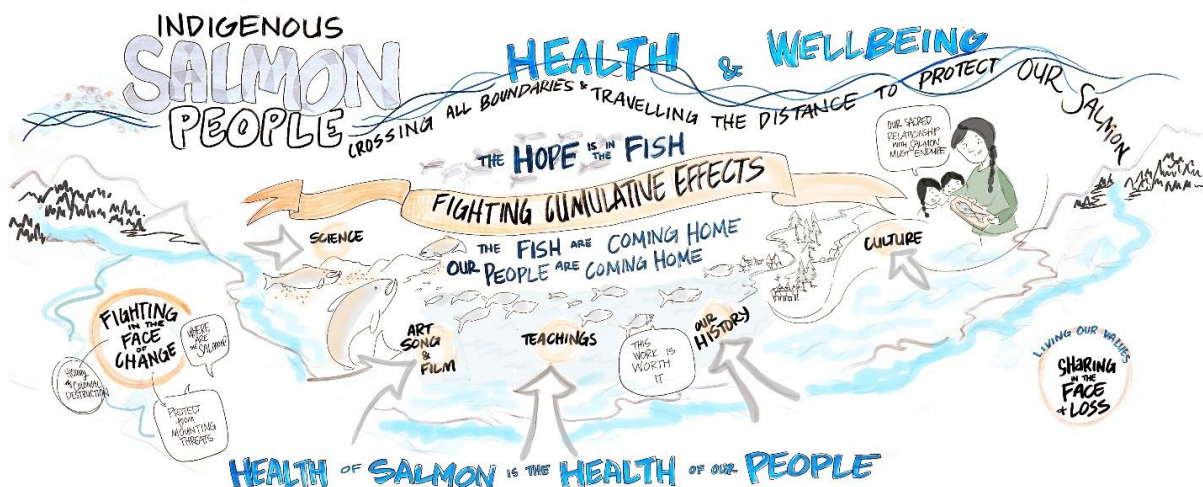
Brandy shared a video of the work being done by Kwanlin Dun First Nation and emphasized that it’s unacceptable that government decisions are leading to the demise of salmon. Additional pressures are also coming from mineral exploration in otherwise healthy lands in salmon territory. “When we share our teachings, we become stronger than the challenges we face. If the salmon can travel thousands of kilometers in their life cycle, we can travel to come together to work to protect them.”

## Presentation: John Henderson

John Henderson, North Vancouver Island delegate of the First Nations Fisheries Council, commented on how powerful it was to see the children in the cultural performances show pride in their heritage. He shared teachings that he received as a child from his Elders and family about providing and giving rather than just taking, as well as working together to understand and respect one another. He highlighted some of the key challenges being faced by communities:

- Having to travel 3-4 hours by boat to go food gathering
- The shift from fishing to having to buy fish to survive
  - Fish arrived packaged/canned— “How do we teach our children? Our smokehouses are no longer smoking.”
  - This year they had about 20 fish per household—not much to go around
- Climate changes—“The glacier used to come to the end of the river, now it’s 5 miles up.”
- Contamination in shellfish beds
- Changes in diets are changing health—diabetes is running rampant
- Population has increased tenfold in less than 60 years, from 100 to 1,200 people
  - How to provide food for that growth when the fish and plentifulness is no longer there?

He posed the question, “How do we build a platform where Indigenous people really have access to resources?” He shared an example of elk management with shared responsibility and sharing with neighbours among other Salish Tribes and wondered whether there was something similar that could be done for salmon. He expressed his frustration after working on these issues for over 30 years, but he’s still hopeful that building strength and making people understand how much has been lost can help move forward.



### Open Mic—Reflections and Discussion:

Elaine Shorty, Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Tlingit, emphasized the importance of the work that Brandy Mayes is doing and how she is a provider for their community. She expressed her pride in all of Brandy’s hard work and thanked her for making sure their Elders are fed and that they have their salmon.

Wendell Metallic, member of the Assembly of First Nations from Quebec, thanked the speakers and shared the efforts of Listuguj and other Mi’kmaw communities over the past decades to establish their own management plans and a team of people to protect the land. In 1995, they won an award for the best managed river and are having a celebration this year to mark the occasion. He expressed his appreciation for being able to attend this Gathering and share information between the East and West Coasts of Canada.

Kwilosintun Murray Ned, Semá:th (Sumas) First Nation and Executive Director of the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance, shared the impact of the draining of Semá:th Lake in 1924. It was the breadbasket of their community and the Stó:lō. It was done to expand settler agriculture, and it displaced the Semá:th community, fish and wildlife—there are no longer elk or wolf, and fewer salmon. In 2017, they endeavoured to enact a Declaration but struggled to operationalize it and move it forward. He expressed his frustration over being tired of managing what’s left and emphasized the urgency for this new Declaration to be operationalized at all levels—“We can’t wait any longer.” He also acknowledged the important work being done on the ground by guardians with the S’ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance.



*Kwilosintun Murray Ned*

## Connection

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**From the Declaration:** *We declare that as Indigenous Salmon Peoples we continue to steward and live interconnectedly with the Salmon and Waters and it is our responsibility to uphold our relationship with the Salmon and their habitat.*

### **Presentation: To Swim and Speak with Salmon**

Jared Gonet, Program Director of To Swim and Speak with Salmon (TSSWS), introduced the program that focuses on fostering youth leadership in the salmon realm, training young leaders and advancing salmon knowledge, and reconnecting youth with ancestral knowledge and

cultural practices. The first campaign they're tackling is personhood for the Yukon River and pushing for rights for the waters. The mic was passed to other members of the program to share their connections with salmon and lessons learned during their time in the program.

Nika "Sänch'īa" Silverfox-Young, Youth Lead for To Swim and Speak with Salmon from Little Salmon / Carmacks First Nation, shared how she was encouraged by Elders and community to reconnect with language. With To Swim and Speak with Salmon, she is focusing on how to braid current work with ancestral learnings and has enjoyed travelling and meeting with other Nations and learning about connections and similarities between stories. She shared the story of Mouldy Head, instructing teachings not to play with our food, to let the first salmon go by, and to return parts of the fish back to the river.

Keyshawn Sawyer, Tutchone – Selkirk First Nation, told how the program is teaching youth how to be leaders in their own communities and to exercise their rights to speak. It has opened his eyes to how important it is to speak for the salmon. He shared how upsetting it is to not be able to fish anymore and stressed the need to respect water and nature.

Carissa "Ékè Éwe" Waugh, Kwanlin Dun First Nation, is an elder youth in the group and an ambassador for the reconnection vision. She currently sits on the National Wellness Council for Yukon First Nations women and girls. Her family reclaimed their family fishing site 30 years ago but haven't been able to set nets for about 10 years. She has always had a deep connection with salmon and does activism through artwork.

MacKenzie Englishoe, Gwichyaa Zhee, Fort Yukon, Alaska, joined To Swim and Speak with Salmon just over a year ago and it has been an incredible journey. She is part of the first generation that hasn't been able to fish after the Yukon River was closed to fishing. Resource extraction is pushing into all regions of Alaska and funding for protections are being cut. She is part of the fight for salmon and is grateful to be part of this group.

Zakayla Netro, Vuntut Gwich'in, Old Crow / Whitehorse, Yukon, said that To Swim and Speak with Salmon has changed her life and has been an excellent opportunity for youth to speak up. She shared the huge disconnection that is happening and the need to focus on knowledge transfer between generations.

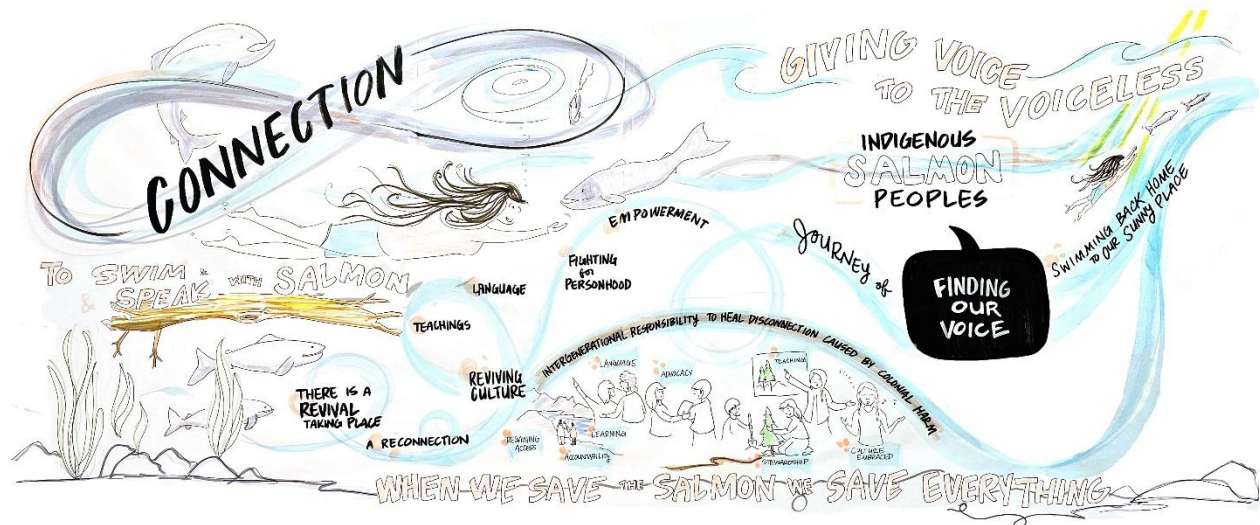
Emily Ross, settler born and raised on Kwanlin Dun territory, is very grateful for this program and the creation of allyship and connection. She is passionate about education and is currently training to be a teacher. She recognizes the need to transform education systems to honour the land and us. Her biggest takeaway is that salmon are connected to everything.



*MacKenzie Englishoe, Zakayla Netro and Emily Ross (left to right) with To Swim and Speak with Salmon*

Johnathon Robinson, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation, said that even though he is young, he has seen changes happen within his lifetime. He has learned a lot of respect for salmon, food, teachings and is ready to fight for the future.

Elder Ron Chambers, Champagne Aishihik First Nation, shared how much of a change it’s been going from his past in a Residential school to speaking at Gatherings like this. He spoke of the history of his regalia and the need to get out there and let people hear the stories and learn.



International Indigenous Salmon Peoples' Gathering 2025

LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING | Drawing Change  
Melissa Kendzierski

## Ecosystems and Habitat

**From the Declaration:** *We declare that the impacts from climate crisis and climate change-related stressors and industrial and commercial activities must be addressed with meaningful and holistic salmon rebuilding plans backed by significant resourcing and led by Indigenous Salmon Peoples.*

### Presentation: Jonathan Moore

Jonathan Moore, with the Salmon Watersheds Lab and Watershed Futures Initiative at Simon Fraser University, studies salmon watersheds and partners with local rightsholders to better understand the many pressures they face—working to translate the problem space into a solutions space.

He shared art from Joshua Watts and other graphics showing the many pressures facing salmon including forestry, urban development, mining, harvest, aquaculture, predation, and climate change. All these pressures are set within an incredible complexity of different laws under many jurisdictions that allow some level of “acceptable harm”—death by a myriad of laws and policies. The result is salmon decline and harm. In western Canada, commercial harvests have

declined by 70% over the past 40 years, and work by Dr. Andrea Reid shows declines are even larger for First Nations harvests.

He posed the question, “What are the pathways forward for watersheds in a warming world?” and said that there is an opportunity to look at what steps must be taken to get this right as well as what steps take us further in the wrong direction. Jon shared several stories from collaborative work that is being done in relation to the Ecosystems and Habitat portion of the Declaration.

- Habitat and how it’s used can provide resilience to climate change
  - Salmon are a cool water species—water that is too warm decreases health or causes mortality
  - It isn’t just climate change that warms water—synergy of changes as forestry, agriculture, mining, etc. can exacerbate climate change
- Distilling the complexity
  - Looking for patterns in the complexity in geography and other factors across 152 BC watersheds—found 8 clusters, or archetypes
  - Can be a building block for rebuilding plans across the province—if we understand clusters of pressures, we may be able to understand clusters of solutions
  - Also reviewing legislation to understand legislative tools available and work towards potential solutions
- Land Use Planning in Northern BC
  - As glaciers retreat, there is a loss of cool water flow, but also access to new salmon habitat—future habitat isn’t protected by legislation
  - Mining companies are staking claims for new opportunities
  - How do we want the future to look?
- Taku River Tlingit work
  - A waterfall was causing mass salmon mortality when flows were too high or low—series of years where less than 100 salmon made it past
  - Carefully widening the waterfall resulted in 10,000 fish successfully passing the obstacle in 2024—an example of local action with a huge impact



## **Presentation: Jamison Squakin**

Jamison Squakin, Okanagan Nation Alliance and member of the Penticton Indian Band, provided an overview of restoration efforts in the Okanagan River Basin. She shared how she had been inspired by her grandmothers and the importance of water and the work that she's doing is trying to follow a path to be the best future grandmother she can be. She is encouraging young people to pursue the work to protect salmon—"We are the river, we are the fish."

Challenges in the Okanagan River include:

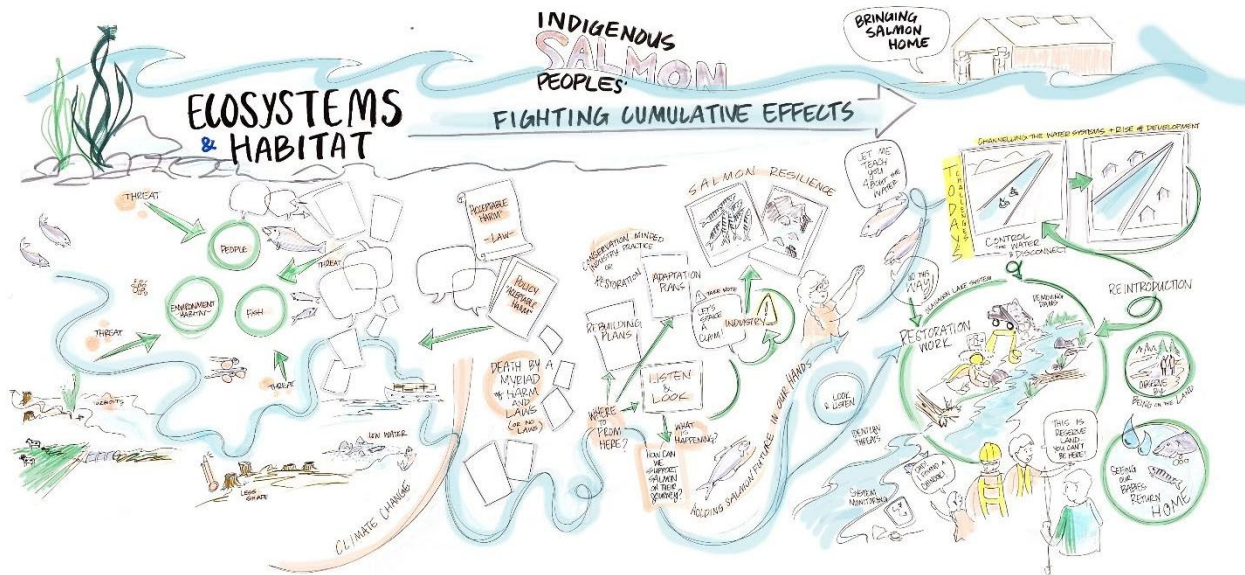
- 84% channelized
- 90% riparian habitat lost
- 50% length lost
- Diking the river system has impacted access to water, fishing and salmon
- Building along the channelized river prevents it from responding and behaving as it naturally would

The Okanagan Nation has been providing opportunities to work in restoration as they restore these channelized systems:

- Originally led by Chief Albert Saddleman's vision to put the river back, bring the fish back
- Okanagan River Restoration Initiative (ORRI) Phase 1
  - Constructed connections from disconnected oxbows
  - Lots of pushback from land owners, mostly about flooding concerns
  - Setting the dike back to let the river do its work, as well as creating wetlands and ponds
  - Area now teems with returning sockeye salmon
- Salmonid restoration
  - Added gravel, spawning beds and boulders
  - Sockeye, steelhead, and Chinook are now in this river channel
- Floodplain reengagement
  - Developed backwater ponds for Chinook to rear in
  - Lots of community involvement in the restoration—especially youth
- Mission Creek through Kelowna
  - Building riffles to slow water down
  - Restoring balanced profile of the creek
- Addressing fish passage issues due to vertical drops added to control flow
- Creating diversity of habitat
- Community support is growing due to the success of other projects
- Sockeye reintroduction program since the mid-1990s—hatchery system now led by one of the young Indigenous summer students
- Okanagan Lake dam passage officially opened this year

Jamison shared how she is inspired by the youth in her community and how this work is becoming inter-generational as people involved are bringing their children in. Growing up, she never had access to salmon, but after the fish passage on the McIntyre Dam, salmon are returning: sockeye are rebounding; Chinook are starting to come back.

Because of how busy the team is on the ground, there is limited time for sharing their stories. She emphasized the importance of continuing to share the success and passion, especially with youth who are taking pride in protecting their land and waters.



International Indigenous Salmon Peoples' Gathering - Ecosystems and Habitat | November 19, 2025

LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING | Drawing Change  
Melissa Kendzierski

### Open Mic—Reflections and Discussion:

Artist Melissa Kendzierski with Drawing Change provided an overview of the graphics from the earlier sessions. These graphic recordings provide an additional way to capture the key messages delivered at this Gathering and she invited guests to come over and provide input and feedback.

Saul Milne reflected on salmon, and other community members, being teachers as well as the intimacy and validity of that teaching. He also highlighted the concept of “acceptable loss” mentioned in earlier talks and how different groups can have drastically opposing views of what is “acceptable” to lose.

Elaine Shorty, Kwanlin Dun First Nation, stressed the importance of including Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers who have a vast memory of how things were. They have inside knowledge of why and how things have changed.

## Rights and Responsibilities

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**From the Declaration:** *We declare our rightful role as the caretakers of Salmon. We affirm that all other parties must obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples with respect to Salmon and Salmon habitat, and that Indigenous Peoples jurisdiction over our lands and waters must be upheld. Indigenous Peoples' self-determination and sovereignty must be respected, and not be interfered with.*

### **Presentation: Chief Dalton Silver**

Chief Dalton Silver, Semá:th (Sumas) Nation, expressed his appreciation for the Assembly of First Nations Fisheries Committee coordinating their meeting to align with this Gathering so members could attend. He recognized the importance of having people at National tables, like those in the upcoming panel.

Chief Silver shared that he was taught that salmon were given by the Creator, and in turn we have to look after them as well and be strong leaders and advocates— “People talk about ‘natural resources’, but these are our relations.”

### **Panel Discussion: North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO)**

Shelley Denny, Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, Charlie Marshall, Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat, and Vegar Baehr, The Sámi Parliament, provided an update on their involvement with the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO).

Shelley provided some history on the management of Atlantic salmon and shared some of the differences in management and the similarities in the importance of salmon to Indigenous culture between the Atlantic and Pacific. She also provided some history and the structure of NASCO, which formed in 1984.

There was previously no role for Indigenous people in NASCO. In 2019, they recognized the need for education relating to Indigenous Peoples. In 2022, the Atlantic Policy Congress review showed that NASCO didn't operate in a way that satisfied the legal requirements for Canada (e.g. UNDRIP), and in 2024 NASCO agreed to have Indigenous observers.

Shelley and Charlie pointed out that they can't represent all Indigenous Peoples of the North Atlantic by themselves. At the 2024 Gathering in Sápmi, they discussed the potential of Sápmi rejoining NASCO.

Charlie gave an overview of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual NASCO meeting this year in Cardiff, Wales where there were four in-person Indigenous delegates, from the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, Atlantic Policy Congress, and Samediggi, plus one virtual attendee from Houlton Band, US.

Charlie was also appointed to a NASCO working group to evaluate habitat guidelines—the first time an Indigenous person was included in one of these working groups. He was there to ensure there was Indigenous inclusion—identified as rightsholders and partners, not just stakeholders.

Vegar provided an update on the issue of pink salmon in the Atlantic. Sámi are currently pushing for the ability to fish pink salmon to sustain culture and respect what the river is providing, rather than continuing fishing closures and throwing away food.

Shelley said that there is progress being made at NASCO tables, and it's been very eye-opening to see where Indigenous Peoples can be part of processes like these. Charlie said there have been challenges, but it has been empowering overall. Vegar emphasized that it's been a lot of work to get to where they are now, but that they should be aiming to be at the highest table of NASCO, where the decisions are made.

### **Open Mic—Reflections and Discussion:**

Chief Nang Jingwas Russ Jones, Haida Nation, who spent ten years on the North American Anadromous Fish Commission as well as time on the Pacific Salmon Commission, has lots of experience working in a similar sphere as NASCO, but with a different structure. He asked how the members of the panel work with the National Parties. Shelley Denny answered that it was a lot of time developing relationships with States. Charlie Marshall agreed and said it was a constant effort to develop these relationships outside of meetings. Vegar Baehr said that even as observers, their presence is important to the process.

### **Presentation: Salmon Allocation Policy Review**

Wickaninnish Cliff Atleo Sr., Ahousaht, provided an overview of the history of the Salmon Allocation Policy. It was developed in 1999 by DFO along with sports and commercial fishers with no Indigenous participation. Nuuchahnulth won their legal case in 2009 and went back to court in 2017 when the courts ruled that the Salmon Allocation Policy was interfering with Nuuchahnulth rights. It took 4 years to develop the Terms of Reference to review the Salmon Allocation Policy for sports fishing of Chinook and coho. He highlighted the inequality of the colonial system with Nuuchahnulth being allocated 7,000 salmon among several tribes while sport fishers get 10,000.

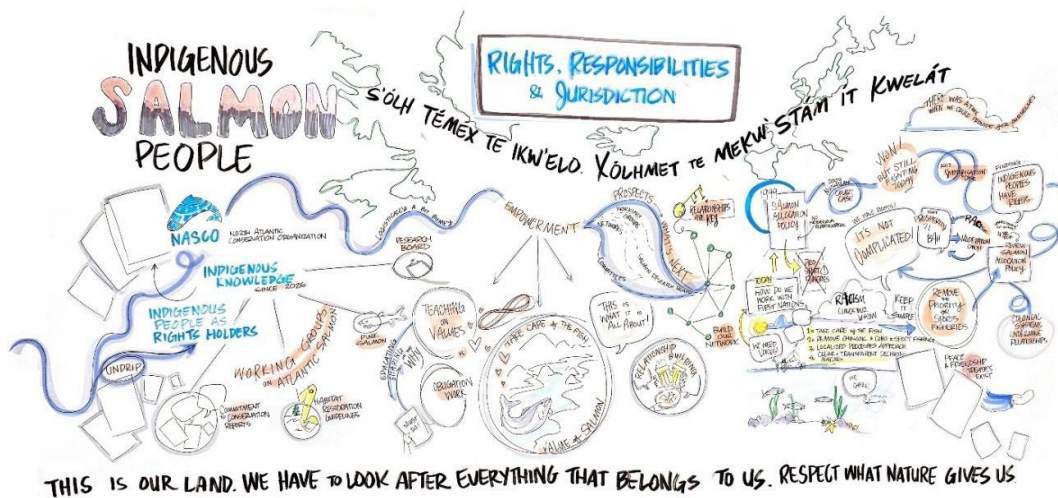
Wickaninnish said, "It's all we're after – to be able to look after ourselves," and to have a say in managing the resource. He shared the teachings of his Father to look after all of the territory and the resources—taking care of the *Ha-houlthee*. He grew up in fully self-sustaining communities before anyone needed government assistance to build houses.

Janson Wong, Senior Manager on Policy and Fisheries Management with the First Nations Fisheries Council, provided an overview of the Salmon Allocation Policy review process—currently in year six of the review. He highlighted that there isn't really any guidance on how to implement UNDRIP across many policies and that this is an opportunity for First Nations.

Four things that have been brought into the review:

- 1) Taking care of the fish, and the fish will take care of you—putting a conservation mindset into the work
- 2) Controlling and limiting impacts from extractive fishing—especially from recreational fishing, which is a big concern of many Nations
- 3) Moving decision-making to localized processes since coast-wide decision-making doesn't function well
- 4) Clear and transparent decision-making—not just DFO, but First Nations too, providing clarity on where and how decisions are made

There will be a briefing package that will be sent out to Nations and circulated broadly. Janson emphasized that Indigenous voices are critical and can influence this policy beyond what they've been able to do within the review process.



International Indigenous Salmon Peoples' Gathering - Rights, Responsibilities & Jurisdiction | November 19, 2025

LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING | Drawing Change  
Melissa Kendzierski

## Stewardship

**From the Declaration:** *We declare that Indigenous Peoples' authority, governance, jurisdiction and knowledge systems be recognized, respected and upheld. We emphasize that Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge must be the foundation for all stewardship of Salmon.*

### Presentation: Kii'illjuus Barbara Wilson

Kii'illjuus Barbara Wilson is from Haida but is not here as a Haida representative—she's here because this is what she loves. She is an Adjunct Professor with the University of British Columbia Centre for Indigenous Fisheries. She spoke of the importance of gatherings like this as an opportunity to come together as a community—standing together without government in the room.

She shared how she became involved in work to revitalize ancestral Indigenous laws, governance, and practices to restore ocean relationships with Robert Paine, who taught at the University of Washington, and Anne Salomon in 2012. They went to Nuu-chah-nulth and asked what they could do for them to help look after food sovereignty and food security. She emphasized the need to ask first and uplift hereditary leaders and governance with this work—“If they say no, we accept their answer.”



*̄kii'illjuus Barbara Wilson, Saul Milne, Dion Weisbrod, and Aslak Holmberg (left to right)*

The objectives of their work include braiding ancient knowledge and western science, diversifying sources of evidence, and expanding the time horizon. They are connecting Nations, ancestral laws, Indigenous practices, and science throughout our common bowl—the Pacific. Projects include:

- Indigenous Aquaculture Collective
- Clam Garden Network
  - Clam gardens optimize tidal height for clams and double production by buffering climate extremes
- Coastal Voices
- Pacific Sea Gardens
  - Examples of ancestral sea gardens exist across the Pacific (Swinomish, Hawaiian Loko i'a revitalization, Palau sea gardening)

She provided an overview of archeological work related to mussels and sea otters that shows our coast was thoroughly occupied. She emphasized that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The work is a weaving of knowledge of ancestral laws of Nuu-chah-nulth, Haida, Heiltsuk Nations. “We all have a right to food, the ones who can’t speak for themselves and us.”

̄kii'illjuus joined the Centre for Indigenous Fisheries (CIF) as an Adjunct Professor in 2022. She shared a video featuring the CIF and Andrea Reid. Last year, there were 150 applicants for their course, Governance and Relationality in Indigenous Fisheries—15 students were chosen. Activities are held in the Nass Valley, Haida Gwaii, and UBC. Within the CIF, retreats are held every year in the territories from which students and their partners come to build and strengthen research relationships.

̄kii'illjuus thanked everyone for coming together to face challenges and look for opportunities to do things differently. She said we must care for our human babies as well as our fish babies—“It’s like planting trees. We’re doing it for those who come behind us—we have to.”

### **Presentation: Aslak Holmberg**

Aslak Holmberg, a Sámi fisher, thanked everyone for sharing their knowledge, songs and stories over the past several days. He shared a Sámi yoik/joik (song) and told of his life in the Deatnu River valley (border between Norway and Finland). He grew up fishing (drift net and weir fishing) with his family and community, but the river has now been closed to fishing for five years. It is a similar story to other Salmon Peoples around the world—strong declines of salmon stocks and a generation growing up that hasn't had access to the river and learning to fish.

Aslak gave an overview of the history of fishing in the Deatnu River system. Up to the 1800s it was Sámi villages that governed the fishing of 30 genetically distinct stocks in this area (and the only ones fishing). The first State regulations were imposed on the area in 1872. Traditional fishing practices were selective and allowed sufficient salmon to pass and enter all the tributaries. Fishing rights are attached to ownership of the property. There are five different fishing cooperatives along the length of the river. Even though Sámi are majority owners, they don't have much say in the governance. Cooperatives and Sámi Parliament are included in negotiations but ultimately government ministries make decisions. Traditional knowledge isn't being effectively incorporated into status reports resulting in fragmented information and increasing restrictions on fishing and hunting. Restrictions on traditional hunting practices is also causing an increase of salmon predators in the river.

Significant numbers of pink salmon (a non-native species) have been returning to the river for the past six years and are now outnumbering Atlantic salmon. The government of Norway views pink salmon as a threat and erected a 400m wide barrier across the river. Norway considered it a success because they caught 28,000 pink salmon but didn't allocate any to Sámi.

Aslak said there is local will to have a more proactive approach to Sámi governance, but there isn't much will from the States of Norway or Finland to respect the rights of Sámi to govern locally. He believes that focusing on climate "winners" (like pink salmon) who can better adapt to new climate profiles and focusing on knowledge and traditional fishing practices would be much better than a large barrier across the river.

### **Presentation: Dion Weisbrod**

Dion Weisbrod with the S'ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance (STSA) spoke to the concept of S'ólh téméxw te íkw'elò. Xyólhmet te mekw' stám ít kwelát (This is our land. We have to take care of everything that belongs to us). The STSA Guardians are from 17 communities in the Fraser Valley and are the "eyes, ears and moccasins on the ground."

Dion shared examples of the STSA Guardians involvement with:

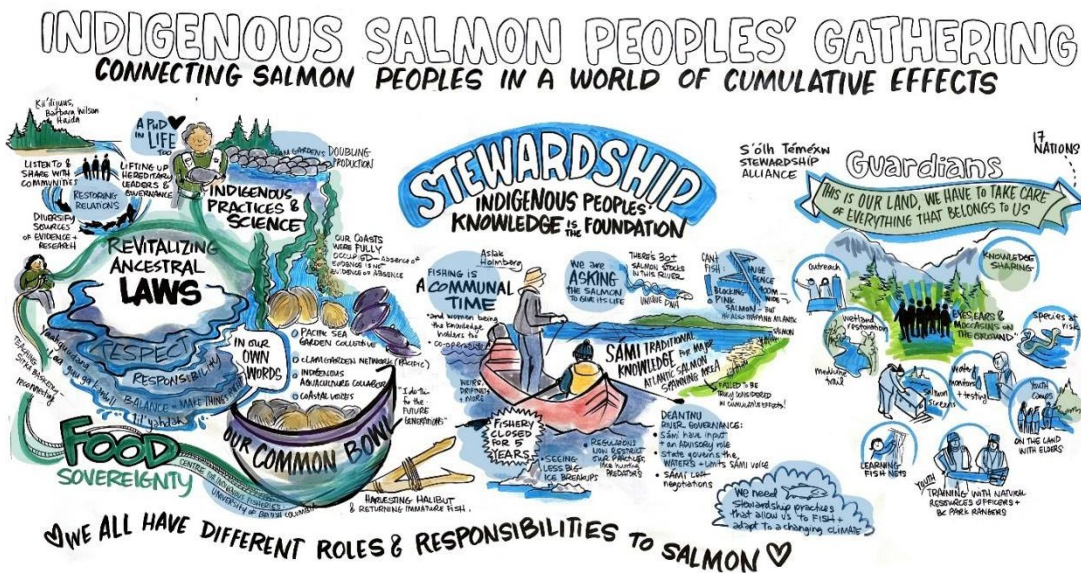
- Major projects like the Transmountain Expansion and Sunrise Expansion (Enbridge)
- Emergency response

- Car that went into Hope Slough—making sure that the extraction didn't damage a nearby restoration site
- Seining fish out of Stoney Creek after a spill in Abbotsford
- Water quality monitoring
- Protecting wildlife and species at risk
- Knowledge sharing—the importance of having culture at the forefront and it guiding what is done in the field
- Buxton Wetland Restoration work (2024)
  - Land was covered in blackberries
  - Included trail access for medicine access for Elders
  - Created meandering wetland for coho rearing—also blue heron
- Youth camps and community outreach to promote learning on our land
- Collaborative Stewardship Forum—two-way knowledge sharing with certified biologists including water, vegetation and soil sampling
- Natural resources and conservation officer training
- Fish sampling with Pearson Ecological
- Pushing back against urbanization and industry



STSA Guardians singing and drumming

He shared that he personally works in honour of his Grandmother and that the Guardians focus on the concept of Tómiyeqw (seven generations back and seven generations forward)—“We don't do the work for us, we do it for our children and children's children.”



## Local Tours

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To connect with the land and learn more about local salmon history, stories, habitat, and restoration efforts, local tours took place on three of the afternoons of the Gathering.

### S.A.Y. Lands

A tour of the restoration efforts of Chilliwack Creek on the lands of Sq'ewqéyl (Skowkale), Áthelets (Aitchelitz), and Yeqwyeqwí:ws (Yakweakwoose) First Nations was led by Steve Clegg, Lands Stewardship Manager. Steve highlighted efforts to restore several kilometres of the creek that included: culvert replacement; strategic riparian planting; shifting the course of the Creek to add complexity, length, and increase the buffer from the road; improving climate resilience by adding natural storm water reservoirs and heat-tolerant trees/plants; and working with neighbouring farms to reduce agricultural runoff. This work has greatly improved water quality and salmon are reaching areas where they haven't been seen in over 75 years. The restoration focuses on mimicking natural processes as well as providing an opportunity to connect with surrounding communities and allow for engagement and education.



*Steve Clegg provides a tour of S.A.Y. Lands restoration*

### Yale Canyon

Keith Carlson, Professor of History at the University of the Fraser Valley, provided an overview of the cumulative impacts of colonization throughout the lower Fraser region as we travelled to Yale Canyon—the main historical gathering place of the region. We visited one of the top three dip net fishing sites in the Fraser Canyon where the conditions are ideal for wind-drying sockeye salmon. Keith discussed the history and impacts of reservations, the banning of cultural practices (traditional fishing practices, potlatch, etc.), the genocide of the 1858 gold rush, and the construction of infrastructure



*Keith Carlson provides a tour of Yale Canyon*

throughout the Fraser Valley that diverted water and decimated some runs of salmon—some of which never recovered. Stories were shared about local landmarks, highlighting the deep connection to the land and the concept of the Halq'eméylem word Tómiyeqw, which means seven generations back and seven generations forward.

### **Cheam First Nation**

Roxanna Kooistra, Environmental Manager with Cheam First Nation, shared two ends of the spectrum between healthy and unhealthy salmon habitat. Nevin Creek, and other nearby creeks in Annie Clegg Forest, have some of the latest running coho in British Columbia. Water was clear and salmon were visible during our visit. In contrast, Hope Slough is an example of ongoing challenges with water quality and eroded salmon habitat. The top end of the Slough was disconnected from the Fraser River during the construction of the railway, and extremely high levels of fecal coliform have been recorded. In recent years, lack of oxygen created a 3km dead zone killing fish in the area. Recent efforts by Cheam First Nation to work with local farmers has resulted in many agreeing to restoration work on their land to improve habitat and water quality for salmon and other fish in the area.



*Roxanna Kooistra provides a tour of Hope Slough*

## **Witnessing**

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At the start of the Gathering, Chief Robert Gladstone (Host) and Saul Milne (Facilitator) asked all participants to be witnesses to what was shared here and “write the event in our heads and our hearts and then share those messages with our communities.” To close the event, several attendees were asked to share their key takeaways.

Mackenzie Englishoe, To Swim and Speak with Salmon, shared the following:

- When I think of salmon in our language, I think of the relatives who have always shown up for us—those who teach us how to cut fish and how to smoke fish, never taking more than we need
- Now showing up in Gatherings like this one where Indigenous people return to each other is like salmon returning home—we gather in the same spirit, with the love of generations that come after us
- Salmon show us strength and how to travel far, even with burdens
- We must show up for one another for our families and loved ones

- We hold a responsibility to the salmon—we can see the signs that they’re giving us, even through their absence
- We speak for them because they have no voice in the political system that takes their homes
- We’re already rich through the relationship we have with them
- For some here, salmon are still part of every day or seasonal lives—I ask softly but deeply to continue to care for them, also for those of us who can not
- There are entire communities that cannot taste, touch or care for salmon any longer
- When the salmon do not return because of colonial control, something goes quiet in us
- As a young person, I really do feel the absence of salmon
- Can feel the united love and how the love connects us in this room through people who make offerings, sing songs, teach children that forms a web among all the salmon peoples and Nations—this love shows we aren’t just witnesses, we are part of it
- We have a responsibility to speak up for salmon
- This week, I have seen the honouring of salmon, honour the youth who are still listening and learning and stepping into responsibilities of true Indigenous stewardship
- Thank each of you for passing down way of life as Indigenous salmon people
- Salmon, our friends, our relatives, and most importantly our teachers

Aslak Homberg, Sámi Fisher, thanked MacKenzie and agreed with everything she shared. He added:

- There are so many similar stories being shared here—we have a shared witnessing of the loss of salmon, loss of knowledge, and loss of culture
- Wish for ways to overcome this and modify our practices and find ways to maintain knowledge and culture
- We as peoples define ourselves through salmon, but many Nations aren’t able to access this fundamental piece of our culture shifting societal structures, food security and food sovereignty
- There are many differences between communities, but it is valuable to share our experiences and find ways to address these challenges—raise them with a collective voice
- The Declaration was an important result from last year’s Gathering in Kárášjohka—it would be good to have something concrete and actionable to come away from these Gatherings—hope that there are other communities that can bring their voice to this process
- Salmon are our teachers and hold so much diverse value for us
- Learning to adapt to new normal
- Cannot trust States to be the stewards of salmon and our waters—applaud all who are doing the work to restore salmon habitats and it’s valuable to hear about work being done to safeguard salmon and their habitats
- All the initiatives we’ve heard this week are vital for salmon to adapt to this rapidly changing world we’re living in

- Look forward to gathering with you again and continuing to grow the Network of Indigenous Salmon Peoples

Hasheukumiss, Ahousaht, thanked the hosts and all the guest speakers who have acknowledged the importance of salmon. He highlighted:

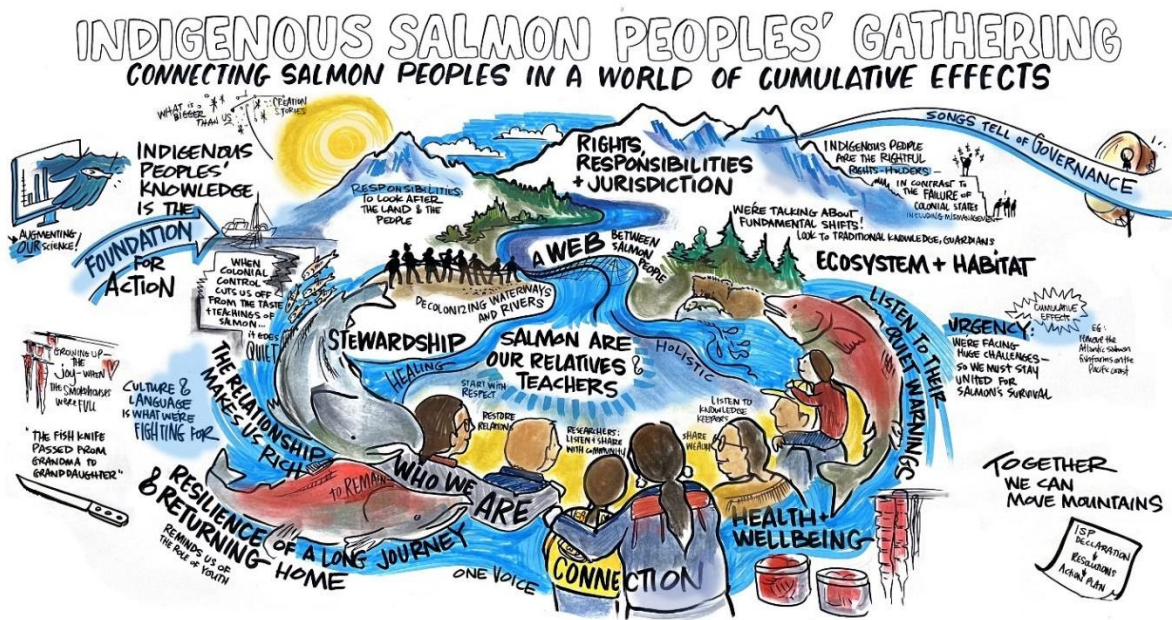
- The continued reminder to Canada that we are the rightful stewards of our lands and waters
- The top priority is the watersheds—logging had devastated habitat, out of 22 rivers, only one has been rebuilt
- The importance of connection—have to bring back the balance
- Common ground and coming together collectively is key—we are the knowledge holders
- Acknowledge the Guardian program in Ahousaht
- Colonial government missed warning signs (e.g. closure of canneries in the 40s and 50s was a clear indication that the resource had limits) and has failed to take responsibility for the past
- Have to find solutions going forward
- Global warming is the biggest concern we should all have

Shelley Denny, Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, thanked the hosts for inviting us to this beautiful territory and agreed with everyone who has taken the floor. She added:

- I have been involved in salmon work for a long time and the challenges are the same as they have been for her 30 years
- The difference now is us—there are new levels of solidarity
- People working together in a way that feels good to them is important
- The Declaration is an image of how we can develop the actions that are needed
- Feels peace and inspired at all the work that is going on—we have the same goal and need to keep people together and keep these relationships strong

Saul Milne, Facilitator, thanked the witnesses, all the speakers, the hosts, the attendees, and the organizers for this Gathering. He highlighted that this is a network that isn't static between Gatherings—it also includes people who weren't able to attend this week. He urged everyone to consider ways to best help the Declaration find life.

Chief Robert Gladstone, Shxwhá:y Village, shared that he was raised in this village and wants to instill in the young people that things may look bleak at times, but with faith, belief, determination, and will, you can move mountains. He thanked everyone for the sharing that took place here.



Indigenous Salmon Peoples' Gathering 2025

LIVE GRAPHIC RECORDING | Drawing Change  
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- Watershed Futures Initiative, Simon Fraser University
- Centre for Indigenous Fisheries, University of British Columbia

The following Nations and organizations were represented in-person or virtually at the Gathering:

**British Columbia:**

Ahousaht	Semá:th (Sumas) First Nation
Aitchelitz First Nation	SFU Watershed Futures Initiative
Cheam	Shxwhá:y Village
First Nations Fisheries Council	SkeenaWild Conservation Trust
Gitxsan/Tsimshian	Skwah First Nation
Haida Nation	Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh Úxwumixw
Itelemen People	S'olh Temexw Stewardship Alliance
Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance	Stó:lō Nation
Maaqutusiis Hahoulthee Stewardship Society	Stó:lō Resource and Research Management
Nlaka'pamux (Lower Nicola Indian Band)	Tzinquaw Drum Group
Okanagan Nation Alliance	UBC Centre for Indigenous Fisheries
Sasquatch Dancers	University of Victoria
Seabird Island Band	

**Northern, Central and Eastern Canada:**

Assembly of First Nations	Mi'gmaq First Nation Government
Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat	Prince Albert Grand Council
Champagne Aishihik First Nation	Qalipu First Nation
Deh Gáh Got'îê First Nation	Selkirk First Nation
Dene Nation	To Swim and Speak with Salmon
Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations	Tobique First Nation
Gwich'in Council International	Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
Keewatinook Fishers of Lake Winnipeg	Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources
Kinonjeoshtegon First Nation	Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
Kwanlin Dun First Nation	Wolastoqey Nation
Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation	

**International:**

Akiak Native Community	Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Aleut International Association	Riddu Riđđu Festivála
Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna	Sámi
Curyung Tribe	Smokehouse Collective
Gwichyaa Zhee	The Sámi Parliament of Norway