

Wild Salmon Center Indigenous Engagement Framework

MISSION

The mission of Wild Salmon Center (WSC) is to promote the conservation and sustainable use of wild salmon and steelhead ecosystems across the Pacific Rim. We advance science-based solutions to sustain wild salmon and steelhead and the benefits they provide to human communities that depend on them.

VISION

We envision a future where salmon thrive. A future where salmon rivers flourish in their natural state, safeguarding the many species that depend on them for survival. A future where communities throughout the North Pacific work together as stewards to sustain wild salmon, trout, and steelhead and the immense benefits they provide local economies, rivers, and their ecosystems.

CONTEXT

Around the Pacific Rim, salmon have been the foundation of a social-ecological system supporting Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial (Atlas et al. 2021). Despite this inextricable link, throughout the conservation movement, the voices and leadership of Indigenous peoples have been overlooked and marginalized. When combined with many other atrocities executed upon their people throughout colonization, this exclusion has alienated many Indigenous communities from the conservation movement, and contributed to a mistrust, which must be overcome if we hope to collectively work to protect wild salmon for future generations.

Given this dynamic and ongoing relationship, as well as the moral and legal imperative to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples, we acknowledge that including Indigenous perspectives and uplifting their leadership is vital for salmon conservation.

WHY NOW

For WSC, this focus is essential. While the needs and objectives of Indigenous communities will be shaped by their unique knowledge, traditions, and priorities, implementing effective science-based solutions to protect and restore wild salmon and steelhead depends on collaborative partnerships with Indigenous and local communities where we work.

To achieve our mission, we must authentically engage with and support the Indigenous peoples who for generations have been stewards of wild salmon populations and their habitats (Atlas et al. 2021). To achieve our conservation goals, and especially to nurture durable, local conservation champions in our stronghold river regions, we must continue to grow our staff's ability to work cross-culturally and build strong, durable relationships. As with all partners and government entities we work with, there may be times when we do not have alignment with Indigenous communities on issues. It is during these times that the durability of our relationships becomes most important — that the relationships

we have worked to develop are deep enough to support dialogue and strong enough to carry the relationship through despite our disagreements.

OUR GOAL

Our conservation efforts will begin with engagement with local Tribes/First Nations. All WSC staff will instinctively ask, and be able to accurately answer at every critical project/program/campaign juncture, these three pivotal questions:

- 1. Where are the Tribes/First Nations on this issue?**
- 2. What is the best strategy for furthering thoughtful and respectful engagement?**
- 3. Are we fostering equal opportunities for Tribal leadership, collaboration, and engagement in our joint salmon stronghold work with Tribes?**

MOVING FORWARD

To achieve this goal, we will ground our work in clear expectations, and with cultural humility, commit to a continuing learning journey at all levels of our organization to help us more effectively and fully execute our mission.

OUR STRATEGY

EXPECTATIONS

WSC expects our organization, as well as individual staff members to:

1. Enter Indigenous engagement from a place of cultural humility, understanding, and respect.
2. Strive to develop the appropriate abilities and understanding needed to build effective relationships with Indigenous peoples throughout the stronghold geography.
3. Learn and understand the important authority, roles, knowledge, and leadership Indigenous peoples have in salmon conservation; build a watershed understanding of the Indigenous Community that has tenure in, has authority, is impacted by or depends on the fish and habitat you are or are intending to work on.
4. As WSC staff develop and implement effective science-based programs/projects/campaigns to protect and restore wild salmon and steelhead, we will work to build sustainable collaborative partnership with Indigenous communities in those watersheds.

CONTINUAL LEARNING

To meet our overarching goal for engagement, we need to continue to build our Indigenous IQ through learning – dialogue within WSC, conversation and workshopping with outside partners, and documenting best practices and emerging learning and knowledge.

A resource library will be developed to organize information about Indigenous populations within the stronghold geographies to facilitate improvement of staff understanding and skills. The center will also serve as a location for staff to share applicable resources.

There is much to learn about the Indigenous cultures across the Pacific Rim. Presentations and readings will be curated to enable the organization to understand:

- Core geographical knowledge of Indigenous cultures across strongholds
- Rights and authorities of Indigenous culture (Supreme Court decisions, constitutions, treaty rights, authorizes, roles, etc.)
- Indigenous communities, leaders, and relationships across strongholds

Additionally, the WSC JEDI Committee will facilitate cross-program discussions to help strengthen core competencies in how we work with Indigenous peoples. The Committee will engage outside experts for learning seminars and workshops to further build our organizational knowledge and awareness.

WORK PLANNING EFFORTS

Programs with existing Indigenous community relationships will incorporate work of mutual interest into annual workplans. Where such relationships do not yet exist, programs will work to develop them, and the organization will provide capacity that enables staff to do so. When a program begins to conceptualize a new campaign, project or focus area during the annual work planning process – or when a need for WSC involvement suddenly arises – without prior engagement on the issue with Indigenous partners, programs will ask:

1. Where are the relevant Tribes/First Nations on this issue(s)?
2. If unable to answer, the program will formulate and follow through on a plan to build knowledge and relationships to answer the aforementioned question as the first step of project/program/campaign development.

Additionally, the organization will develop a plan to build Indigenous capacity in stronghold regions, as a means for:

- Direct funding support to Indigenous partner projects
- Increasing capacity of Indigenous partners (human resources and skillsets)
- Science capacity and support
- Other salmon related needs as determined by Indigenous partner communities

During the work planning process, the JEDI Committee will support program staff's planning for Indigenous engagement in the year ahead. And subsequently, will reconvene with program staff at the end of each year to review the program's progress and challenges in achieving our core organizational goal.

STAFF GUIDANCE ON BEST PRACTICES

We must remember that relationship development takes work and is a never-ending process. Plan for the time this development may take. Even as you work to maintain relationships you have built in Indigenous communities, keep the following guidance in mind:

- Learn about and stay up to date on Indigenous issues and perspectives.
- When asked for WSC's opinion or support for specific projects, check in with your Tribal partners to determine if they have been consulted and if so, whether they are in support.
- Consider their response as you weigh public participation by WSC on the issue.
- Honor all agreements and commitments. Following through on your commitments is the most fundamental way to build trust and demonstrate respect.
- Governance/leadership within a Tribe changes – and it can change quickly. You may need to begin anew in building trust and relationships.

Working with Indigenous communities requires thoughtfulness. Relationships are not built overnight. They are built on numerous respectful interactions – and any relationship, even those that have been built over some time, can be seriously impacted by missteps.

- Respect Tribal sovereignty; Principle of Self-Determination. We do not speak for Indigenous Peoples.
- Be aware of how WSC projects and initiatives overlap with Indigenous interests; develop relationships and communication networks that best fit the situation.
- If working with individual governments, understand and respect their governance structure, authority, decision making process, and timing.
- Seek to find common goals for salmon and the watershed with Indigenous partners.
- Build honest, respectful, and trusting relationships. Building personal, whole relationships that precede, sustain and outlive programs and formal partnerships, and which stem from a capacity and willingness to honor Indigenous relationality and engage in relational accountability.
- Do not take credit for Indigenous work; nor seek token representation.
- Work to develop and maintain basic knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Peoples throughout our geographic programmatic area.

- Understand and use terminology that improves relationships rather than terms that get in the way of building or erode existing relationships.
- Value the unique knowledge, experience, and authority Indigenous Peoples represent in the watershed.
- Each situation and community are unique, requiring thoughtful and adaptive efforts to meet communities where they are at.
- Commitment to collaboration. Working in ways that work for Indigenous communities, including creating partnerships where the community has comparative or greater power in deciding what kind of work needs to be done, why it needs to be done, and how it should be done.
- Ensure early involvement and regular updates on shifts in progress, etc....
- Follow nation and community specific practices to demonstrate respect for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, to also include our willingness to grow beyond our own personal practices and institutional policies and procedures.
- Start from a point of listening and learning.
- Be generous and giving, use our power, privilege, and resources to extend support to the community, and follow through with any commitments that we make. Mobilize community assets when appropriate to build partner capacity.
- Indigenous Peoples vs. Native Americans vs. First Nations vs. Tribes: Use the identifier that they prefer to be called, but ultimately individuals tend to be tolerant if your intentions are sincere.
- Recognize that many Indigenous communities are governed by both elected tribal leadership and Hereditary Chiefs. Respect both forms of leadership equally.
- One individual does not represent a community. Inquire with the Chair, Council, or staff as to who they prefer to be your primary contact. When you are collaborating, respect their governance structure. Ideally, engagement should be occurring with the Council, staff, and community members. It is important to remember that Tribal governments are not Tribal communities.
- Be cognizant of potential territorial overlap issues between Indigenous Nations. These are not our conflicts to carry, so whenever this occurs, find ways to support Indigenous partner

communities without undermining the legitimacy and sovereignty of neighboring Tribal Nations.

- Be aware of who you are perceived to be aligned with when working in the community and manage those 'people alignment' dynamics.
- Time and ceremony are different. Work on their timeline. If invited to participate in their ceremonies (at any level) do not miss this opportunity. Incorporate Indigenous language into the work products if and when appropriate. Breaking bread still has tremendous value.
- Know that in many instances, it is going to be uncomfortable for them and for you. You will make mistakes. Your primary intent is to be genuine, sincere, and authentic. Your goal is to develop and maintain a long-term relationship rooted in respect and mutually beneficial collaboration.
- Where possible, invest energy and time in supporting youth within partner communities. Whether that's through youth participation in the work, hosting field trips, or making school visits, youth engagement is often an essential ingredient for collaboration with Indigenous communities.
- Build knowledge early.
- Assess existing relationships with Indigenous Peoples. What relationship do you already have and what work needs to be done to strengthen them? What has happened that has weakened trust?
- Do not be surprised when there is disagreement. Oftentimes there is disagreement between federal, state and Indigenous governments as well as disagreement between Indigenous communities on topics like 'usual and accustomed areas.'
- WSC has a role in making sure Indigenous people of the watershed are recognized/part of a plan/project/decision. For example, if you are organizing a working group, can/are you seeking Indigenous leadership for the group? Can you rearrange the structure so that Indigenous leadership is prominent? Does the working group's timeline include time to allow feedback/approval from Indigenous communities/leadership?

BEGIN EARLY

- If you are working on a project or initiative that affects Indigenous communities' land, food, fisheries, etc. – you need to be thinking about ways to make sure they have the opportunity to weigh in, be involved, guide, and direct.

- In the best of circumstances, you have been able to establish a relationship before you need something.
- Building collaborative relationships requires involvement from the beginning. Do not assume you can do a quick consultation and get buy-off and support once the project or process is finished.
- Approach with a collaborative mindset and be willing to adapt the plan just as you would with any other collaborator.
- Create space for Indigenous perspectives and leadership. Be deferential to their knowledge, history, and potential sensitivities. Accountability, follow through, respect, and sensitivity are essential to creating successful partnerships.

WHEN VISITING

- When invited to participate in cultural events, ask for protocol guidance from the host, and graciously accept these invitations whenever possible.
- Once invited, be sure to thank the community for the invitation onto their territorial land.
- At community meetings, when asked who you are and why you are there, do not bring your agenda to the table.
- When taking funders and guests onto Tribal lands, programs will provide appropriate briefings and an explanation of our expectations of their behavior prior to visiting.

SCIENCE, PROJECT AND CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION

- Work with partners to develop your strategy so that it aligns with the Indigenous community's decision-making structure. Inquire as to what a Tribe/First Nation's traditional decision-making process was and is. Work with your collaborators to develop your project specific roadmap using both.
- Work with Indigenous partners to uplift Indigenous knowledge systems alongside western knowledge systems. Strategy development should incorporate Indigenous world views. Utilize insight from local and traditional ecological knowledge about target species, essential habitats, and ecosystems throughout the process. Disseminate all conclusions of scientific research or policy outcomes related to project work throughout the community in a mutually agreed to format.
- Develop the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the collaborative work in partnership with the community. Depending on the nature of the work, where appropriate, where feasible, and

where there is demonstrated interest, community wide listening sessions and interviews can be a valuable step to help craft vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Work with the community to identify areas of collaborative interest.

- Share ideas, never solutions. Ideas are collaborative.

Sources Cited

Atlas WI, Ban NC, Moore JW, Tuohy AM, Greening S, Reid AJ, Morven N, White E, Housty WG, Housty JA, Service CN, Greba L, Harrison S, Sharpe C, Butts KIR, Shepert WM, Sweeney-Bergen E, Macintyre D, Sloat MR, Connors K. 2021. Indigenous systems of management for culturally and ecologically resilient Pacific Salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.) Fisheries. *Bioscience* 71(2): 186-204.