

Indigenous Peoples' Day - October 14, 2019

DUWAMISH ALLIES STAND WITH THE DUWAMISH TRIBE

We, the undersigned, write in solidarity with the Duwamish Tribe and in support of the Seattle Human Rights Commission and Seattle School Board resolutions that affirm the Duwamish.

We respond in particular to letters written in May 2017 to the Seattle City Council members from the Muckleshoot and Tulalip Tribes regarding the City's relationship with the Duwamish Tribe, and to statements made by the Muckleshoot representative at the Seattle School Board meeting of June 2019.

Our standing in the matter is that we are "Seattleites" and members of the local community and we want justice for Seattle's First People, the Duwamish.

The *dx̣ẉḍəẉʔaḅṣ̌* have resided in this place now called Seattle for millennia. Si'ahl, also known as Chief Seattle, signed the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855 on behalf of the Duwamish and Suquamish people, both of which recognize him as their leader. Recognizing only one of those tribes erases one of those heritages.

The Duwamish have yet to be treated in accordance with the Treaty; they have not been acknowledged by the United States government or been officially recognized by the City of Seattle. The Duwamish have been continuously connected to this place; they have never surrendered their sovereignty, and they have not been justly compensated for their land.

We, and a growing number of Seattleites, want our City to put right its relationship with the Duwamish Tribe upon whose land we reside. **We can no longer witness the diminishment and ongoing attempts to erase the Duwamish Tribe.** We recognize our collective role in the current situation and we ask our City to act on our behalf to address the situation.

We ask our City to undertake a review of Seattle's history and consider its relationship to the Duwamish and its responsibilities to the Tribe. We believe our City would be visionary, abundant, and working better for more communities if we collectively made sure the Duwamish have a role in Seattle leadership.

We believe the Duwamish People and the City of Seattle are inextricably linked and that the Duwamish should be acknowledged, valued, celebrated and nurtured as the City moves toward a future rooted in:

- Centering the Duwamish Tribe and history in all Seattle city life
- Building community around the Duwamish Longhouse & Cultural Center
- Raising Duwamish voices in leading Seattle.

When the place we now know as Seattle was settled by non-natives, settlers took Indigenous peoples' land, divided and relocated Native people, and decimated fish and other sources of sustenance. Settler culture harshly impacted Duwamish culture, their people, their land, language, and well-being.

The Duwamish River was part of the local ecosystem for thousands of years, and was used by the Duwamish for transportation, fishing, and shellfish harvesting. The name Duwamish means 'people of the inside' referring to the inland waters of the Salish Sea. Fishing and canoeing were integral to Duwamish life and critical to their culture. The River was dredged and straightened in 1913, going from nine meandering miles down to five miles of deep channels for industrial access to the nascent city. The impact on the Duwamish people was tremendous as this change displaced them and deprived the Duwamish of vital sustenance. The Duwamish River is a toxic waterway full of creosote and industrial waste, a superfund site under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's care. Such is the impact of settler culture.

Along the Duwamish River, at the only remaining stretch of the original Duwamish River, is a major archeological site, Duwamish Site No. 1, 45-KI-23, designated in the National Register of Historic Places. At this place was a major village dating back to 600 A.D. that was occupied by Duwamish people during the fall, winter and early spring seasons. The place was known as a gathering place for shellfish from the original tide flats of the Duwamish River. Shell middens can still be found along the riverbank. Duwamish tribal elders in 1927 called the village Ha-AH-poos and there were hundreds of inhabitants living there in the 1800's. Ha-AH-poos is one of 29 Duwamish villages listed in CoastSalishMap.org. The village was burned down by settlers in 1895.

Over the years, the Duwamish have been continuously subjected to local and federal government rules that were strategically set up to make survival nearly impossible for Indigenous people. **Despite the many challenges, the Duwamish persevered - and the Duwamish are still here.**

Though they have lived here continuously for generation upon generation over thousands of years, the Duwamish are required to prove themselves in the eyes of Washington bureaucracy to secure rights agreed in the Treaty. Indeed, in the Point Elliott Treaty the Duwamish are the first tribe named explicitly and upon whose behalf, along with the Suquamish, Chief Seattle signed in 1855.

The Duwamish have been working to clarify their status with the United States government since the 1970's. Their efforts have been frustrated time and again, but their case is now in the U.S. Interior Department's Board of Indian Appeals and from there it will move to a U.S. District Court where other tribes such as the Samish Tribe, and Snoqualmie Tribe and the Cowlitz Tribe have successfully gained their acknowledgement.

In the 1990s, the Duwamish raised funds to purchase a quarter acre of their ancestral homeland, and they designed and built a longhouse across from the River - the first longhouse in Seattle since 1895. The Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center is now located on the west side of West Marginal Way in West Seattle overlooking the Duwamish River valley near a village site where the young Chief Seattle grew up.

It is a painful fact of history that settler extraction of 'natural resources' which, viewed as commodities by the new arrivals, stripped Indigenous people of their very means of survival. The result today is a disparate availability of resources among tribes. Huge investments have been made to create non-traditional economic opportunities for federally recognized tribes. Concerns over competition in these local economic pursuits have pitted tribe against tribe. This is a very delicate and extremely complex situation brought on by our white and colonial institutions.

The Duwamish have not been fully supported by all other local tribes. The Muckleshoots and Tulalips have weighed in opposing the Duwamish's federal acknowledgment case, and have written letters in opposition to the Seattle Human Rights Commission's resolution that supported the Duwamish.

Furthering these tensions, resources available to federally acknowledged tribes enable greater participation in the political arena by tribes with money as they are able to make political contributions to candidates and elected officials. This dynamic reinforces the power of the already powerful, amplifying and exacerbating the injustices of the past and making efforts to address those injustices more challenging.

When faced with the dilemma of risking further damage to intertribal dynamics, non-native people tend to take a hands-off approach which, to some, feels like further complicity. Coupled with the inclination of the dominant culture to avoid certain conflicts, we find it demands humble courage to speak up in the hopes of improving inter-tribal relations without perfect knowledge about what is right or how to move forward. Yet that hope inspires this letter. While we have deep discomfort about risking further harm to those relationships, we feel we must raise the question of justice for the Duwamish.

Personal and familial ties complicate political and social dynamics in periods of tremendous change. Those relationships are important, too, as are the legal issues between tribes. Though it is difficult to understand the complexities of inter-tribal relations, and it is not our place to be the arbiters of intertribal tensions - indeed, we have caused so much harm already - yet we must recognize that colonization and "development" of our region has contributed greatly to conflicts in intertribal relations.

So we urge the City of Seattle to recognize the harm caused to the Duwamish, and that the harm continues today for people whose home this has been for thousands of years. A reckoning with our past can bring integrity to the City's existence in this place among all its current residents - Native and non-native.

Seattle prides itself on being a progressive city. In 2012, Seattle City Council unanimously passed Resolution 31420 declaring itself to be a Human Rights City. In 2014, through Resolution 31538, Seattle declared Columbus Day to hence forward be called Indigenous Peoples' Day. And the following year, again unanimously, the Council passed Resolution 31621 acknowledging harm caused to Native children in Indian Boarding Schools.

The progress toward justice continued. The Seattle School Board passed Resolution 2016/17-1 supporting the Duwamish. The Seattle Human Rights Commission passed a Resolution in 2017 supporting the Duwamish, and the Seattle Human Rights Commission conferred their 2017 Lifetime Human Rights Leader Award on Cecile Hansen for her outstanding leadership fighting for the Duwamish Tribe.

A group of local grassroots activists, Duwamish Solidarity Group, launched Real Rent Duwamish on Indigenous Peoples Day 2017, inviting people who live and work in Seattle to voluntarily pay 'real rent' to the Duwamish. Despite the negative associations with the word 'rent' these days in expensive Seattle, nearly 3000 people are making these voluntary rent payments as of September 2019. (<http://www.realrentduwamish.org>)

Additionally, over recent years several notable individuals have recognized the Duwamish despite the official federal deficiency:

Mayor Jenny Durkan acknowledged the Duwamish publicly at a town hall in West Seattle on May 29 this year saying, "...I also want to again thank the Duwamish and recognize that we are on Duwamish lands. And we know that you're standing in a place that it has special meaning and one of our best youth programs that is here, is the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps. And that that means something, that it's not just a place, it's not just a people, it is the first people of Seattle." (<https://westseattleblog.com/2019/05/video-mayor-acknowledges-duwamish-tribe-answers-community-questions-south-park-town-hall/>)

Sally Jewell, former Secretary of the U.S. Interior Department and resident of West Seattle, greeted Cecile Hansen when Hansen knocked at the door one Saturday morning in 2015. When she followed up in November 2015 in a letter to Hansen, Jewell did recognize that the City of Seattle and her home were homelands of Hansen's ancestors. Despite this acknowledgment, Jewell declined to support the Duwamish on whose land she resides, though her office presided over the Duwamish application for federal recognition. Jewell directed Hansen to consider seeking recognition through an act of Congress, a problematic recommendation.

Fawn Sharp, President of the Quinault Indian Nation, recently announced a new consultation and consent policy for Washington tribes with the State of Washington's Attorney General's office. She earlier stated that her "... policy objective is to ensure no other sovereign is able to take unilateral action affecting our land, territories or people without our consent. It's a pretty basic principle, but it's been so difficult to achieve, just a basic understanding of inherent civil rights, basic human rights, that all tribes should possess." At the press conference announcing the policy, May 21, 2019, Sharp said "Washington tribes such as the Chinook and the Duwamish, who have been fighting for federal recognition for years without success, are not covered by the mandate. Sharp told Indian Country Today that she feels this situation is regrettable and all Indigenous nations deserve to be asked permission regarding actions that affect them." She continued, '[e]very indigenous voice has meaning and is authentic whether you're a constitutional government, a traditional government, or a customary government.'" (<https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/news/state-attorney-general-announces-free-prior-and-informed-consent-policy-with-washington-tribes-tCS6UGajiEuGVf-Z3JVQgQ/>)

We honor all Indigenous people. We commit to upholding tribal voices and sovereignty. We respect the Samish, Cowlitz and other tribes who have federal acknowledgment and exercise their sovereignty and protect their rights and resources. We respect the Lummi for their work and leadership for orcas and for the Sound. We are grateful for the Nisqually for their persistence in protecting the land and waters of the south Sound. We celebrate with the Snoqualmie Tribe who recently gained federal acknowledgment. We support the Chinook whose struggle for federal acknowledgment is documented in the film "Promised Land" alongside the Duwamish's story; and we celebrate the Chinooks' recent acquisition of Tansy Creek, a historically significant site, protecting it from commercial use and revitalizing the Tansy Creek watershed.

We raise our voices in support of the Duwamish. Bart Freedman, an attorney working with the Duwamish Tribe for years in their federal case was quoted in an April 29, 2019 article by the South Seattle Herald, "I think ultimately if there was broad interest and concern about the Duwamish, then that would have more effect than probably a lot of legal briefs."

That is our purpose in writing this letter.

Below are possible actions for your consideration:

- A resolution by the City Council that acknowledges the Duwamish, their ongoing existence in the City, the historic injustices done, with a formal apology, and affirms the City's respect for the Duwamish going forward and the mutuality of Seattle's future.
- Recognition in public places of Duwamish story(ies) - plaques, monuments, language, cultural influences, and protection for places significant to the Tribe.
- A formal meeting between the Mayor and the Duwamish chair at the beginning of each mayoral term of office.
- Dedicate funds in support of the Duwamish Longhouse in a manner that ensures Tribal autonomy of operations.
- Support for the Tribe's efforts for federal recognition through the Department of Interior process and through an act of Congress.
- Encourage the reincorporation of the Duwamish as a sovereign nation in the "Since Time Immemorial" curriculum in Seattle Public Schools.
- Promote engagement between City agencies and the Duwamish in decisions that affect the Tribe despite lack of federal recognition.
- Rename a street in honor of the Duwamish and/or Si'ahl.
- Integrate Lushootseed language onto public signage in streets and places alongside English.

- Consider what role the City and/or Seattleites might play in fostering better relationships between and among tribes in the region.

Most importantly, **we ask that Seattle's Mayor and City Council Members sit with the Duwamish Tribe and converse.** Talk together.

Respectfully,

Duwamish Solidarity Group
Faith Action Network

Confirmed:

Aneelah Afzali, Executive Director of MAPS-AMEN

Abbot Genjo Marinello, Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Ji Buddhist Community

waiting to hear confirmation:

Rev. Douglas Avilesbernal, Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches

Michael Ramos, Executive Director, The Church Council of Greater Seattle

Rev. Jonathan Neufeld, Seattle Mennonite Church

Rev. Mike Denton, Conference Minister, Pacific Northwest Conference, United Church of Christ

REFERENCES

State Attorney General announces free, prior and informed consent policy with Washington tribes

Indian Country Today, May 21, 2019

<https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/news/state-attorney-general-announces-free-prior-and-informed-consent-policy-with-washington-tribes-tCS6UGajiEuGVf-Z3JVQgQ/>

Mayor acknowledges Duwamish Tribe, answers community questions @ South Park town hall

WestSeattleBlog, May 31, 2019

<https://westseattleblog.com/2019/05/video-mayor-acknowledges-duwamish-tribe-answers-community-questions-south-park-town-hall/>

Coast Salish Map

http://coastsalishmap.org/Village_Descriptions_Duwamish-Seattle.htm

Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name: the change of worlds for the Native people and settlers on Puget Sound

Buerge, David M., 2017

"Promised Land" documentary film by Tall Firs Cinema, 2016

<http://www.PromisedLandDoc.com>

"Princess Angeline" documentary film by Upstream Video Productions, 2010

<https://upstreamvideos.com/wp/dvds/princess-angeline/>

Letter to Cecile Hansen, Duwamish Tribal Chair, from Department of Interior Secretary Sally Jewell

November 2015

Real Rent Duwamish

<http://www.realrentduwamish.org>