

“Being Frank”

Step Forward for Puget Sound

By Billy Frank, Jr. Chairman, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

OLYMPIA, WA (1-26-06) –

Today we know it as Puget Sound. For thousands of years, my ancestors have known it as the Wulge, or the Salish Sea. Whatever you call it, this magnificent estuary that connects us with the great ocean beyond is critical to *your* survival. It doesn't matter whether you fish or not. It doesn't matter what your income or education levels are. It doesn't matter what your ethnic origin is, what your religion is, or even your political party. Whoever you are, whatever you do, your health and well-being—as well as that of your children—are directly connected with the health of the Puget Sound, its connecting rivers, groundwater and ocean.

Frankly, that health is not so good. That's not news to us tribal members. The locust-like swarms of Europeans and others who have migrated here over the past few centuries have been bent on over-exploiting virtually every resource the Northwest has to offer, and degrading land, water and sky in the process. Even the mighty Orca has now been listed on the Endangered Species List, due largely to the decline in the health of the water it lives in. All of these are indicators that your health and well-being are in trouble.

Tribal pleas to the state for greater accountability to Nature have almost always fallen on deaf ears. It has been a source of great frustration to us to be so often ignored. But now and then, when the timing is right, special state leaders step forward with the foresight and courage needed to make a difference. We saw it when Governor Dan Evans ultimately supported implementation of the U.S. v. Washington (Boldt) Decision. It was an unpopular thing to do, but it was the right thing to do. We saw such wisdom and courage surface again in 1989 when Governor Booth Gardner worked with tribal chairs to establish the Centennial Accord, an agreement that today still provides the framework for critically important government-to-government relations between the state and the tribes.

Such examples of wisdom, courage and foresight in state government have regrettably been rare. But I believe we may be witnessing the unfolding of another such historical landmark with Governor Christine Gregoire's proposed Puget Sound Partnership.

On December 19, 2005, she announced this major initiative, proposed a \$42-million supplemental budget to the 2006 Legislature and appointed a council of "Founding Partners" to accelerate protection and restoration of Puget Sound.

I was proud to be included on this council, known as the Puget Sound Partnership, along with Congressman Norm Dicks, Salmon Recovery Funding Board Chair William Ruckelshaus, King County Executive Ron Sims, University of Washington President Mark Emmert, People for Puget Sound Director Kathy Fletcher, Simpson Resource Company Chair Colin Moseley, Western Washington Agriculture Association Director Mike Shelby and shellfish industry executive Bill Taylor.

We are charged with making recommendations on a comprehensive effort for integrating the work of local, state, tribal and federal governments with private sector and citizen efforts to protect and restore the Sound. We expect to have a draft list of recommendations by June and a draft plan by October of how to have a healthy Sound by 2020.

To achieve this, the Partnership will engage an extensive cross-section of Washington citizens, businesses and governments. As co-managers of natural resources in this state, and as governments that have always spoken out for good stewardship, the tribes applaud these objectives. They are lofty goals and that is good because the situation is critical and the goals are achievable—if we learn to work together. We have no more time to waste. It will take solid funding and it will take dedicated, coordinated effort. It will also take a new sense of accountability—from every person in the state, whoever you are and whatever you do.

The need for solid state/tribal government-to-government cooperation in the effort is absolute. Forget about the stereotypes and learn to listen to the values we have always professed. Once and for all, treaty rights must be respected. Government-to-government relations and the long-term heritage of the Puget Sound must all be integral to this process—or it will fail.

It will be no easy task to turn the tide of disrespectful treatment of the Puget Sound. Governor Christine Gregoire has demonstrated great courage in standing up on this issue, and I, for one, will do all I can to help it become a great success. I hope you will, too.

opening paragraphs

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