

The Epic Drama of The Damming and Undamming of the Elwha River

free the Skagit!

****SPECIAL****

Indigenous Peoples'
Day Event With
Journalist Lynda Mapes
and Tribal Elders

UNCONQUERING the

A FILM BY
**ROBERT
LUNDAHL**

Hosted By:
Scott Schuyler, Upper
Skagit Tribe, J.J. Wilbur,
Swinomish Tribe and Linda
Wiechman, Lower Elwha
Klallam Tribe

**OCT. 13, 2025
7:00 PM
LINCOLN THEATER
MT. VERNON, WA**



LAST

FEATURING

BEATRICE CHARLES
ADELINE SMITH
BOSCO CHARLES
DICK GOIN
PHILIP JOHNSON
BRIAN WINTER
HAROLD SISSON
RACHEL HAGAMAN
MIKE MC HENRY
LARRY WARD
PAT CRAIN
RUSS HEPFER

MUSICAL SCORE BY
TONY SAUNDERS
and **TOWER OF POWER**

Thanks to our friends at the



FRONTIER

PHOTOS COURTESY NORTH OLYMPIC LIBRARY SYSTEM
<https://robertlundahl.com>
UNASSAILABLE ECOLOGICAL


UNASSAILABLE ECOLOGICAL
<https://robertlundahl.com>
substack

09/05/25

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Agence Public Relations and Policy Communications

Filmmaker, Robert Lundahl

415.205.3481

info@studio-rla.com

"Unconquering the Last Frontier" motion picture, screening at the Lincoln in Mt. Vernon, WA, October 13, 7:00 pm reminds us of the fragility of Washington's forest ecosystems, vulnerable to devastating fire.

Robert Lundahl's "Unconquering the Last Frontier," a film depicting "The Epic Drama of the Damming and Undamming of the Elwha River" takes viewers from sea-level at the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the high glaciers of Mount Olympus, near where the river begins in a retreating "snowfinger," melting in the slow drip of an overheated climate.

This fragility is evidenced downstream as fisheries workers race against time to save the genetics of the last stocks of wild salmon on the Elwha as politics threaten an unraveling of their efforts.

It's a memory taken for granted today by some, in the years following a 14 year, 325 million dollar process of dam removal and ecosystem restoration, begun in 2011 with the breaching of the Lower Elwha Dam and continuing later in 2014, with the removal of the Glines Canyon Dam.

The salmon and seagoing anadromous trout species including steelhead are now returning in steadily increasing numbers, but not without threats and obstacles of the man-made kind as logging upstream on a major

tributary, The Little River, augurs dangers ahead for the spawning fish and young smolts from mudslides and sediment deposition.

Those dangers also include fire, as evidenced by the man-made Bear Gulch inferno, currently blazing in Olympic National Park, only 10% contained.

"Unconquering the Last Frontier," depicts the harm created by damming and logging of the Elwha River watershed, from the perspective of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, as told by tribal members Beatrice Charles and Adeline Smith. In the film, the past comes alive through a remarkable collection of historical photographs. There's no running from the conclusion there was an ongoing series of atrocities in these woods, culminating in a genocide, a willfully blind destruction and desecration of nature's bounty and the people who depended on it.

When the wind blows, the woods creak in pain. The settlers came and the trees were cut, and cut again, hoisted onto huge trucks with sputtering "Jake brakes," then onto ships, the forest itself chewed up for plywood, veneer, and easy money, even today. It's a tragedy not easy to forget or cover up, and one explored systematically in Lundahl's film.

There have been fires before, but today these conflagrations prey on ecosystems weakened by the extraction of old growth, and continuing industrial forest practices which have obliterated biodiversity over time and decimated the water-holding capacity of Western Washington's forested lands. The evidence is clear.

Bear Gulch warns us of apocalyptic "fire-bombing" to come. According to Wildfire Explorer, "The persistence and growth of the blaze have been significantly influenced by hot, dry weather patterns and prolonged drought in Washington. The current heat wave and lack of significant precipitation have exacerbated the fire's behavior, leading to increased activity and spread."

In “Changing wildfire, changing forests: the effects of climate change on fire regimes and vegetation in the Pacific Northwest, USA” by [Jessica E. Halofsky](#) et al., climate change has been cited as a leading factor increasing the risk of major wildfires in the region.

The forest is drying out. Logging and replanting “matchstick” monocultures are impacting once-verdant biodiversity-intense forest lands. According to a paper in the Journal of Hydrology by Catalina Segura, et al., converting a mature forest to plantations reduces summertime streamflows by 50 percent, and the effect lasts for decades.

And on the Skagit River, out to the East along the slopes of a predominant volcano known today as Mt. Baker, the forgetting decimated the ecosystem and bountiful resources as it did to its western counterpart. Only the Elwha was re-thought, reconnected with her people, and is rebounding. The Skagit on the other hand, supplying power to the heady technology centers of Seattle, is a cultural and environmental sacrifice zone, diverted and “dewatered,” stifled by three dams.

Referring to the waterless riverbed, Upper Skagit Tribal Elder, Scott Schuyler says, “The tribe would prefer to take out the dams and restore a free-flowing river.”

In the town of Mt. Vernon, *all that* is in the movie theater, the Lincoln, as Robert Lundahl’s film, “Unconquering the Last Frontier” reminds us what was and could be again.

“Unconquering the Last Frontier” screens October 13, 2025, 7:00 pm, followed by a panel discussion moderated by veteran journalist and author, Lynda Mapes. Tribal citizens and Elders, Linda Wiechman and Vanessa Castle (Lower Elwha Klallam), J.J. Wilbur (Swinomish), and Scott Schuyler (Upper Skagit) answer questions and tell *their* stories.

###

