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## Cultural Politics and Transboundary Resource Governance in the Salish Sea

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the cultural politics of water governance through the analysis of a new governing body created by indigenous leaders in the Pacific Northwest of North America – The Coast Salish Aboriginal Council. This paper investigates how the administrative structures and physical boundaries of water governance are both socially constructed and politically mobilised. The key moments explored in this article are closely linked to the power dynamics constituted through postcolonial constructions of space. Inclusion of cultural politics of scale will, arguably, provide a more nuanced approach to the study of transboundary environmental governance. This has important implications for the study of natural resource management for indigenous communities, whose traditional homelands are often bifurcated by contemporary border constructions.

**KEYWORDS:** Water governance, politics of scale, cultural politics, borders, river basin, First Nations and Native Americans, Salish sea

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### INTRODUCTION

Most environmental issues – ranging from habitat loss to climate change – connect and transcend 'local' and 'global' scales. Water particularly exemplifies the difficulties in managing resources at a fixed territorial scale (Swyngedouw, 1999, 2006a, 2006b; Bakker, 2007a, 2007b; Budds, 2009; Linton, 2009, 2010; Molle, 2009; Cohen and Davidson, 2011). Water is a local resource, yet part of a global system, perhaps to a greater degree than any other resource (Conca, 2006; Gleick, 2007).

Given the complex interconnectedness of human-environmental issues, scholars have made great gains in rethinking the 'fixity' of scale (Delany and Leitner, 1997; Swyngedouw, 1997; Marston, 2000; Brown and Purcell, 2005; Marston et al., 2005), as well as how the framing of scale impacts natural resource governance (Rhodes, 1997; Mansfield, 2001, 2005; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Mollinga and Bolding, 2005; Furlong, 2006; Cohen and Davidson, 2011). The issues surrounding scale and natural resource management are particularly acute at the site of political borders, where management systems, policies, and laws often terminate abruptly (Barman, 1999; Griffin, 1999; Fischhendler and Feitelson, 2005; Blomquist and Schlager, 2005; Jarvis et al., 2005; Cumming et al., 2006; Brun and Lasserre, 2006; Norman, 2009; Norman and Bakker, 2009; Cohen and Davidson, 2011).

An increasing number of voices have advocated for the primacy of hydrologic boundaries for the purposes of water governance, prompting a call for a post-sovereign, hydrologically-based approach to water governance (O'Connor, 2005; Budds and Hinojosa, this volume; Johnson, this volume). These discussions have led to a nuanced conceptualisation of the hydrosocial cycle (Swyngedouw, 1999, 2006a, 2006b; Perreault, 2005; Budds, 2008; Linton, 2008, 2010), which then facilitate new interpretations of how to address issues related to water governance, borders, and scale, such as transboundary inter-local water supplies (Conca, 2006; Forest, 2011). A few scholars have linked these scalar debates to issues of transboundary natural resource management (Fall, 2005, 2010; Fischhendler and Feitelson, 2005; Furlong, 2006; Norman and Bakker, 2009).

Largely missing in the discussions on resource geographies and transboundary resource management, however, are insights from political geographers and border scholars into how power is mobilised at the site of the border (Dalby and O Tuathail, 1998; Newman and Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 2003; Agnew, 2007), as well as the implications of this power dynamic in a postcolonial context (Harris, 2000, 2002; Gregory, 2004; Sparke, 2006). Don Mitchell (2000, 2003) and Kay Anderson (2007), for example, have made great strides in linking cultural politics within the field of geography to show how power dynamics play out in resource management (see also Anderson et al., 2002). However, little crossover exists between discussions of colonial constructions of borders and the governance of transboundary environmental resources (for exceptions, see Fall, 2005, 2010; Evans, 2006; Evenden, 2007; Hele, 2008). I suggest that including insights from political geographers and border scholars in the study of water governance and scale improves our understanding of water as a socionatural hybrid.

In this paper, I explore the cultural politics of water governance through the analysis of The Coast Salish Aboriginal Council (the Council), a new governing body created by indigenous leaders in the Pacific Northwest of North America, and the enactment of the annual Coast Salish gatherings. The Council was created to manage and protect resources for and by their Coast Salish communities. The annual gatherings are places where the Council, tribal leaders, governmental officials, and decision-makers interface. The Council has emerged as a highly important and innovative effort at regional governance that draws on the strengths of traditional leadership to successfully deal with complex transboundary environmental issues (Thom, 2010). The Council represents more than 70 tribes and bands that span – and predate – the Canada-United States border, and approximately 72,000 square kilometres of the Coast Salish region.

For the Coast Salish, as for other indigenous communities throughout the world, ecosystem health is a critical aspect of sustenance and the overall physical, economic, and cultural wellness of a community. Harvesting marine resources is integral to preserving traditional Coast Salish lifeways.<sup>1</sup> Since the Pacific Coast region is experiencing massive declines in availability of traditional foods such as salmon and shellfish, these indigenous communities are developing self-generated methods to address such environmental issues (Donatuto, 2008).

Analyzing the Council and gatherings as governance tools to address these declining resources provides three entry points into understanding how reconstructed borders (and reimagined scales of governance) might inform transboundary environmental governance. First, governance mechanisms like the Council can socially reconstruct a new geographic region (the Salish sea basin), thereby challenging and disrupting imposed nation-state borders. Second, the development of the Council is motivated by a concern for the social and cultural implications of a degraded physical environment, and is achieved by reconnecting (politically, socially, and culturally) with bands and tribes spanning the nation-state borders. Finally, the development of a governance structure based on traditional protocol can help to reinforce goals of self-governance and self-determination, as has been laid out by scholars such as Deloria (1984), Deloria and Wilkins (1999), Little Bear (2000), and Wilkinson (1987).

As the collective rights of the indigenous communities 'scale up' (Cox, 1998) from individual tribes and bands to a collective Coast Salish Nation, they are reconfigured and expanded from non-contiguous territorial pockets (i.e. 'reserves' or 'reservations')<sup>2</sup> to an inclusive territory based on traditional boundaries. As part of the rescaling process, the Council identifies issues that are priorities throughout the Coast Salish region and then suggests plans of action that can be implemented by individual tribes and bands. In work focusing on political ecologies, researchers have analyzed the scaling up of particular issues with the intent of garnering international attention or support networks, with the anti-dam network serving as a classic example (Cox, 1998; Benhabib, 1999; Hirsch, 2001; Herod and Wright,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'lifeways' is commonly used in Indigenous literature as a replacement for 'way of life' to indicate that there are multiple ways of living that are traditional.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'reserve' is used in Canada, whereas the term 'reservation' is used in the United States.

2002). The Coast Salish case pushes these conversations in a new direction: the politics of scaling up in a postcolonial landscape.

Figure 1. Map of Salish sea basin and locations of Coast Salish gatherings.



Source: Original map. Cartographer: Eric Leinberger, Department of Geography, UBC.

The application of the nation-state system as a project of spatial occupation raises issues surrounding colonialism, power, and privilege (Clayton, 2000; Harris, 2001; Evans, 2006). In the North American context, the 1849 settlement of the border dispute between England and the United States with the demarcation of the 49th parallel had direct and immediate impacts on indigenous communities. In many cases, culturally connected groups became part of divergent, foreign systems whose power and authority had severe impacts on indigenous ways of living. Social structure, education, access to resources, and physical placement all changed as a result of the creation of the United States and Canada as individual nation-states. The rescaling occurred through the disruption of intertribal communications throughout the coastal Salish basin and through the relocation of indigenous peoples to reserves.

Insights into rethinking 'citizenry' beyond a nation-state framework provide an important entry point to explore the politics of scale in a postcolonial landscape (Ehrkam and Leitner, 2003; Mostov, 2007). Standard interpretations of citizenship often link citizenry with state, and locate citizenry as the place of birth (Brubaker, 1992). However, scholarship by Ehrkam and Leitner (2003), for example, argues that "citizenship is not just about passive criteria of membership in national community and/or rights and duties conferred by the state". Rather the social practice of citizenship frequently engages and challenges the state, and thereby should be theorised as actively constructed.

The notion of disentangling citizenship from the nation-state is particularly relevant for members of the Coast Salish Aboriginal community, whose identity is based simultaneously on the individual tribe and/or band (and foundationally based on kin relationships), yet intricately reliant on the wider Coast Salish community – which is transected by the Canada-US border. For the purpose of contemporary negotiations on issues of shared concern (in this case, degraded environmental resources), it behoves the Salish community to (re)unite under a singular Nation. As described in the case below, the rescaling process aids in political negotiations with 'outside agencies' in regard to resource management, as well as in realigning communities to work with one another, rather than against one another, for critical issues such as salmon management.

As I discuss below, situating individual bands and tribes within a wider Coast Salish Nation is an example of reclaiming authority (and aligning scales accordingly) in the context of increasing recognition of Aboriginal group sovereignty. Furthermore, the Council's governance structures reinforce Coast Salish communities as the locus of power for the management and protection of their natural environment.

Situating the transboundary governance process in the historical context of the development of the border and the constructed scale of the bounded nation-state at the 49th parallel help to bring the materiality of the modern border into the discussion of water governance. This framing is consistent with calls from border scholars for a more sophisticated treatment of the border itself (Newman and Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 2003; Agnew, 2007), but is relatively rare in the geographies of environmental governance.

The inclusion of cultural politics in analyses of politics of scale provides greater insight into the study of transboundary environmental governance. This has important implications for natural resource management in indigenous communities<sup>3</sup> whose traditional homelands are often bifurcated by contemporary border constructions (Simpson, 2000, 2007; McManus, 2005; Hele, 2008).

This project is part of an ongoing study analyzing the shifting scales of governance along the Canada-US border and the increasing role of indigenous communities (First Nations and Native Americans) in transboundary governance. I base my analysis primarily on my observations as a participant in Coast Salish gatherings (2005 and 2008), and through selected interviews with Council members and tribal

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term 'indigenous' to describe people who self-identify as 'First Peoples' or 'First Nations' in Canada and 'Native American' or 'Indian' in the United States. The term 'indigenous' or 'indigenous communities' is commonly used in the Coast Salish literature and is often used synonymously with other terms such as 'aboriginal' or 'Native'.

employees involved in natural resource management in the Coast Salish region.<sup>4</sup> In addition, my position as a faculty member at a Coast Salish tribal college informs this discussion through sustained engagement (and lengthy conversations with student and community members) in this topic.

## IMPACTS OF CHANGING HYDROSOCIAL NETWORKS ON COAST SALISH PEOPLE

### Water pollution and changes to traditional lifeways

Water sustains life, and for the First Nations and tribal communities in the Salish sea<sup>5</sup> basin protecting water is part of an ancestral responsibility (Sampson, 2006). Protecting the water sources of the Salish sea is also a practical part of preserving traditional lifeways. A Coast Salish leader and fishing rights activist in the opening ceremony of the Tulalip articulated, "[w]e are the Indian people, the Coast Salish Indian people, who live on all the watersheds, on the headwaters and on the bays throughout the Salish sea region" (CSAC, 2008).

However, over the past 150 years, the fresh and marine waters of the Salish sea basin have faced increased pollution pressures and a decline in fisheries. Industrial and agricultural run-off, urban development, and forest conversion all contribute to the region's declining water quality. Water quality tests routinely find heavy metals and chlorinated pesticides throughout the marine waters (Donatuto, 2008). The degraded marine environment disproportionately affects Coast Salish communities because traditional lifeways are based on a seafood diet (Judd et al., 2005).

The bioaccumulative effects of pollution coupled with years of overharvesting have placed tremendous strain on the natural resources of the Salish sea, thereby disrupting the political, economic, and cultural fabric of many Salish communities (Donatuto, 2008). In the Salish sea region, differing governing mechanisms in Canada and the US complicate the management of shared environmental issues (Kennedy, 1993; Barman, 1999). Because of the transboundary nature of flow resources such as water and salmon, and nonpoint source pollutants such as polychlorinated biphenyl and mercury compounds there is a need to address these issues in a multi-jurisdictional fashion (see Steinberg, 2001 for critical engagement of social construction of oceans and politics of open spaces).

The Coast Salish people, whose traditional territory spans and predates the politically fragmented basin, are potential leaders in establishing effective models of transboundary resource governance. However, for the Salish communities to effectively address these diverse, numerous and far-reaching environmental issues, work needs to be done to rebuild cultural connections and traditional governance structures (Thom, 2005, 2010). At the first Coast Salish gathering in Jamestown, a well-respected elder articulated the need to reconnect Coast Salish communities in order to resolve environmental issues of shared concern: "[f]irst, we need to learn how to trust each other again". Furthermore, the creation of the Council acts as a way to socially reconstruct a new borderland (the Salish sea region), thereby disrupting imposed nation-state borders and recreating a political scale based on traditional territory. As such, the Council arguably transcends what Agnew (1994) refers to as the 'territorial trap' to which many other environmental organisations fall prey (Sparke, 2000). To better understand the complications associated with governing transboundary resources, I turn briefly below to the materiality of the constructions of these borders.

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<sup>4</sup> In accordance to confidentiality requirements, the names remain anonymous.

<sup>5</sup> Salish sea ecosystem encompasses Puget Sound and the Straits of San Juan de Fuca and Georgia. The name 'Salish sea' has only recently been confirmed by the state of Washington and the province of British Columbia as the 'official name' of the waters (November 2009). However, the name has been used by Coast Salish communities and select environmental groups for more than two decades (Rose-Redwood, 2011).



## Borders and power in Coast Salish territory

The cultural experience of the newcomers<sup>6</sup> and the indigenous communities that pre-dated the demarcations influenced each other through reflexive processes (Harris, 2002; Evenden, 2007). The delineation of the Canada – US border and its subsequent provinces, states, and regions is part of the construction of a cultural landscape and identity built by culturally specific meanings. As Canada and the US built their cultural identity as bounded nations, the Indian tribes and bands in the region continually redefined and shaped their identities and roles within the changing political geography of these emerging nation-states.

Although the relationship between indigenous groups and newcomers was indeed reflexive, it is clear that over time, the newly defined governance systems designed to manage people and resources became institutionalised as part of the dominant worldview (Harris, 2001). This worldview is closely linked to power and privilege asserted by, and for, the newcomers. As part of this process, a matrix of new laws, policies, and landscapes were formed and normalised overtime. In this process, traditional indigenous interpretations of the landscapes were often overshadowed.

The production of divergent political systems in Canada and the US affected and continues to affect environmental governance – particularly access to, and management of, resources – for indigenous communities. The political demarcation not only severed a cultural continuum that spanned and predated the 49th parallel, but it also created different national identities, rights to ownership of land, and land and resource policies that continue to impact indigenous communities (Boxberger, 1989; Harris, 2000, 2001, 2002). As the divergent political systems strengthened and developed national identities, indigenous communities, whose traditional territory spanned the international divide, became increasingly fragmented.

Shortly after the 1849 demarcation, yet another bounding of space occurred in the western Pacific with the creation of the reserve system. The establishment of the reserve system (which occurred in both Canada and the US) was a physical and political restructuring of indigenous communities, and of the access to resources such as salmon- and shellfish-colonised indigenous space (Boxberger, 1989; Harris 2000). A new tribal system was imposed on a cultural group based on family units unified by cultural practice, language, and intermarriage (Suttles, 1974). As noted Coast Salish scholar Wayne Suttles (1960) reflects, groups of villages in the Coast Salish region were linked by "common dialect and traditions as 'tribes' but in recent generations these village groupings were certainly not separate 'societies'".

The creation of the reserve system significantly altered settlements, migration patterns, and access to resources for the Salish communities (Boxberger, 1993; Barman, 1999; Miller, 2006). The new system disrupted traditional property rights, where family lineage and class demarcated rights within the Salish communities. As Thom (2010) reflects:

The strength of the village-based identity is underscored by Indian Act<sup>7</sup> driven membership codes, through which eligibility to receive benefits and services – from housing and land to social programs – is derived. These issues challenge both state and indigenous actors endeavouring to reconcile cultural differences through negotiated self-government arrangements.

Thus, the political demarcations drastically changed participation in subsistence activities throughout Coast Salish territory, since access to marine and freshwater resources were regulated under divergent sets of codes, laws, and principles.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'newcomer' is commonly used in environmental history and historical geography as a way to identify immigrants new to an area (or 'settlers'), replacing words such as 'European descendant' or 'coloniser' – as these are less accurate.

<sup>7</sup> The Indian Act is a Canadian Statute that concerns registered 'Indians', their bands, and the system of Reserves. *Indian Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c.I-5.

The fragmentation of communities due to the application of the nation-state system has ongoing consequences on power geometries (Gregory, 2004; Harris and Hazen, 2006), and these consequences are both complex and reflexive. Raibmon (2005), for example, has written in the Coast Salish context about how cross-border migration and travel associated with wage labouring reconfigured Western economic expectations into indigenous social action. In addition, Kennedy (2007) investigates how cross-border intermarriage in the Coast Salish region remains integral to maintaining patterns of Coast Salish extended kinship. Although tribes and bands are very connected, historically the kin-based system produced distinct governing structures, norms and practices for each community (band or tribe) (Thom, 2010). Despite slight variations in governance structures, the communities are strongly reliant on networks of exchange (economic, social, cultural, etc) with other Coast Salish communities, particularly in regard to managing once abundant food sources (Mitchell, 1983; Thom, 2005).<sup>8</sup>

The implications of the changed governance structures post-contact are especially acute in the management of highly mobile marine resources, such as salmon. The access to, and distribution of, salmon are integral components to the societal make-up and identity of Coast Salish communities (Suttles, 1964; Boxberger, 1989; Wolf and Zuckerman, 2003). The shift from internally governed systems (pre-contact) to externally monitored systems (post-contact) has ongoing consequences and implications for cultural preservation. As one elder Salish fisherwoman described to me: "when we needed fish for our family, we set out our nets and had food on our table in the evening – we did not need to wait for someone to *tell* us that the season was 'open' and then have to report our 'catch' to an external agency". Beyond rights of access to individual families, the reorganisation has had dramatic impacts on relationships between tribal members and non-tribal members, and between tribes, themselves. The contentious relationships, known as the 'salmon wars' in the Pacific Northwest (Rogers and Stewart, 1997; Lichatowich, 1999; Taylor, 1999; Findlay and Coates, 2002; Brown, 2005) were fuelled by shifting economic structures that supported competition of resources for cash rather than cooperation for subsistence (Singleton, 2000). Adding to the tensions, are the extraterritorial impacts of environmental degradation on critical fish habitat (spawning grounds) and the impacts of global climate change on fish populations.

In the Coast Salish case (similar to other indigenous communities throughout the world), social structures were adversely impacted by disease outbreaks of diseases at the time of contact (specifically smallpox), enforced laws that banned cultural exchange (such as potlatch and other ceremonies), and the attempt to eliminate the Native language (through boarding schools) (White, 1980; White and Cronon, 1988). As such, the Council and the gatherings are not just about addressing environmental issues; rather, the governance structures have far-reaching goals that include revitalisation of language and self-determination.

## **RESPONSE TO FRAGMENTED SPACE AND POLLUTED WATERS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL, TRANSBOUNDARY GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS**

Despite the slippery and sometimes invisible nature of water, current environmental management systems require that water become 'fixed' to administrative structures and boundaries. In turn, the spatial fixity of water infrastructure and legislation reinforces the scales demarcated by colonial state delineation. As such, water governance is often fragmented between different sets of political systems, values, and ideologies, which meet (and terminate abruptly) at demarcated borders. Canada, for example, is considered one of the most decentralised water management systems in the world (Bakker, 2007b; Hill et al., 2008) with water governance largely in the hands of provincial authorities; while the

<sup>8</sup> The ethnography of Coast Salish communities is well documented (see, for example: Verma, 1956; Suttles, 1960, 1963, 1974; Allen, 1976; Boxberger and Miller, 1997; Angelbeck, 2009). However, it is important to note the distinction between individual communities. Thom (2005) and Kennedy (1993, 2007) provide a critical examination of the social relationships between individual bands and tribes.

United States has a stronger federal presence with federal legislation and law enacted through the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, setting the bar for state standards to follow (Conca, 2006, 2008). The asymmetrical management systems in Canada and the US complicate water governance as counterparts, laws, and priorities do not align (Alper and Monahan, 1986; Norman, 2009). In the Coast Salish case, these relationships are complicated as the respective tribes and bands have different relationships to the federal governments (in relation to sovereignty and treaty rights) (see Goodman, 2000; Singleton, 2002).

In an effort to manage environmental resources that cross political borders, a large number of transnational governance mechanisms have emerged. These governing mechanisms range from (bi)national approaches – where federal systems are rigidly upheld – to bioregional approaches where proponents seek to replace political with hydrological borders (Wolf et al., 2003; Fischendler and Feitelson, 2005). In addition, indigenous communities have emerged as a 'third sovereign', acting in collaboration with existing frameworks to address shared water issues (Simpson, 2000, 2007; Hele, 2008; Phare, 2009).

Although a growing number of subnational governance mechanisms exist that are designed to govern water locally, recent studies show that *participation* does not necessarily result in *local empowerment*, as decision-making authority is not necessarily transferred to the stakeholders (Norman and Bakker, 2009). The Coast Salish case presented here offers an example of a governance structure where stakeholder (or member) empowerment is a central goal. Thus, the Council and annual gatherings have dual purposes: addressing issues of shared concern (or 'issue-driven governance') and building (or performing) a new scale of governance.

I describe below the genesis of the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council. Telling the story of the Council's creation provides insights into the construction (or reconstruction) of a shared identity and the importance of including cultural politics in the analysis of borders, water governance, and scale. This story shows the deliberate intent on rescaling governance by 'scaling up' identities from individual band and tribe to collective Coast Salish Nation. Interesting here is the conscious effort to unify that draws simultaneously on historical connectedness and the shared desire to address issues of environmental degradation. In so doing, the Council members are deliberating the rejection of a scale of governance that bifurcates the Coast Salish community (based on the nation-state system) and adopting a scale of governance reflective of traditional Coast Salish geographies (the Salish sea basin). Strategic essentialism and performance theory provide frameworks to analyze the rescaling process.

Strategic essentialism is a concept that is often used in postcolonial studies to theorise unification of citizen groups. The term was coined by Spivak to describe a strategy that nationalities, ethnic and minority groups, can use to present themselves as unified. The rationale for the process of 'strategic essentialism' is that although significant differences may exist between individual members of these groups, the process of 'essentialising' themselves to represent a singular group identity in a simplified manner makes it easier to achieve their goals (Spivak, 1987, 1988, 1996; Guha and Spivak, 1998).

Similarly, 'performance theory' is another analytic tool to help describe and understand the production of scales and scalar hierarchies (Mountz, 2010). Through the analysis of 'performativity of scale' it is not the end products of social construction per se, but the produced discourse and practices that create the scale (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Harris and Alatout, 2010). As described below, the Coast Salish employs performative techniques to achieve their goal of reunification.

In addition, 'counter-mapping' is an increasingly common cartographic tool that groups use to reimage space and reunify disparate groups (Sparke, 1998; Zimmerer et al., 2004; Harris and Hazen, 2006). In the Salish region, the recent naming of the waters between Puget Sound and Georgia Strait to the Salish sea is an example of the persuasion of strategic cartography (see Rose-Redwood, 2011).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This renaming followed an earlier campaign by environmental groups and, more recently business entrepreneurs, to promote a shared identity and inter-regional cooperation. However, both the Cascadia campaign and British Columbia Treaty groups mentioned below (Thom, 2010) were less successful due to ambiguous physical boundaries and competing visions.



## The genesis of the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council

In November 2005, Jamestown S'kallam Tribal Center in Sequim, Washington held the first annual Coast Salish Aboriginal Gathering. This gathering brought together First Nation chiefs, tribal chairs and council members from around the Salish sea region. Invited delegates from Canadian and US governments and environmental organisations also participated in the dialogue with the tribal leaders in an attempt to address environmental issues of shared concern.

"It has been a long time since we have all come together as tribes", reflected a prominent Coast Salish elder and tribal leader on the first day of the gathering in Jamestown S'kallam (2005). "The last five hundred years", he stated solemnly, "have not been great ones for our people". The elder reminded the audience that the words spoken today "are the words from our ancestors" and that the purpose of the gathering is "to talk about the future of our children and the children yet to be born". The opening statement addressed several interrelated topics: tribal governance, ancestral rights, environmental degradation, and the connectedness of the Salish people. Although the words were spoken softly, they filled the long house in its entirety. Every one of the two hundred participants listened intently as one of the most revered tribal leaders of the Coast Salish communities opened the discussions.

At the end of the three-day gathering, the Coast Salish leaders committed their communities to finding solutions to the pressing environmental issues they faced. The leaders agreed that the most effective way to accomplish this goal was to establish their own governing body and speak with a unified voice. As a result, the Coast Salish leaders formed the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council.

The tribal and band leaders developed the Council as a first step in (re)connecting the geographic space known as the Salish sea socially, economically, and politically. Through the development of the Council, the tribes and bands are committed to working together to address shared environmental issues, drawing on a strong connection to their land, shared ancestors, and a commitment to the revitalisation of their culture. As a group, they share the goal "[t]o protect the environment and natural resources of the Salish sea for the sustainability of the Coast Salish peoples". The creation of the Salish governing body does not replace participation in other environmental fora; rather, it provides an organisation designed for and by Salish people that places the Coast Salish belief system at the forefront of the governance structure.

As one Council member explained at the Tulalip gathering: "When [Former Premier of British Columbia] Harcourt asked how we communicated with each other we said, "Ceremonies bring us together". We have our agreement, we have our drum". The Drum Declaration, signed during one of the original meetings, outlines the inherent right to the lands, waters, and resources within the Coast Salish traditional territories (see figure 2 and box 1). This declaration is important for a number of reasons. First, it declares that these rights have existed since time immemorial. Second, it specifically outlines the territory of the Coast Salish region. Third, it commits the Salish Nations to govern these resources for future generations with the spirit of sovereignty as a connected nation:

We declare and affirm our Inalienable Right of Aboriginal Title of Aboriginal Rights to the Lands the Mountains, the Minerals, the Trees, the Lakes, the Rivers, the Streams, the Air, and other Resources on our Land. We, Declare that our Aboriginal title and rights have existed from time Immemorial, Exists at the present time and shall exist for ALL Future TIME. We, Declare unto ourselves that Sovereignty is Inherent in our NATION.

As a connected nation, inherent rights and title to the land, water, and resources are articulated. The signing members articulate their vision, territory, and membership. This process is central to the rescaling process that includes aligning themselves under a reconnected nation and agreeing to common terms.



We declare and affirm our Inalienable Right of Aboriginal Title of Aboriginal Rights to the Lands the Mountains, the Minerals, the Trees, the Lakes, the Rivers, the Streams, the Air, and other Resources on our Land. We, Declare that our Aboriginal title and rights have existed from time Immemorial, Exists at the present time and shall exist for ALL Future TIME. We, Declare unto ourselves that Sovereignty is Inherent in our NATION.

#### TERRITORY

The TERRITORY OF THE XWE-NAL-MEWX of Southern Vancouver Island and Lower West Mainland, includes the Territory that bounds the Traditional Territory of the MUTHA'LEMEXH, North to the YEQW'LWHTAX Territory, and NL'AKAPAX, down to Jenatchee, in what is now the STATE of Washington, across to Aberdeen and 250 miles out into the Pacific Ocean.

We, Claim all the Islands that lie with the Straits of Georgia and the Straits of Juan De Fuca: As these are our Traditional Homes of Food Gathering, for Cultural and Economic needs.

Attached is a map showing ABORIGINAL TERRITORY of Claim for XWE-NAL-MEWX NATIONS and SUBMITTED WITHOUT PREJUDICE: The Actual Lines.

Signing the Drum Declaration served as a symbol of the leaders' commitment to ongoing cooperation throughout the Salish Nation. As one Coast Salish leader reflected, "[s]igning the drum was one of the best things that we have done. I believe there is cause again to reaffirm that relationship". "After all", he continued, "that continuity lies in the heart and minds of our people". The drum continues to serve an important role in the Salish gatherings. Strategically essentialising the individual bands under a singular Nation (represented as a singular drum that declares and asserts the rights of a Nation) serves as a discursive tool towards the 'performance' (and actualisation) of unification. These connections are reaffirmed every year, as the Council meetings and Coast Salish gatherings rotate between communities, displayed prominently at the meetings and referenced frequently.

In addition to cultural revitalisation, the Salish governance model employs a holistic approach in which the environment is an integral part of the wider cultural traditions rather than a separate entity. The indigenous view, still present within Coast Salish communities as 'water as sacred' (Sampson, 2009) rather than 'water as a resource', complicates the governance of these shared resources (Matsui, 2009). Even if these terminologies are deployed as a discursive strategy reputed to help increase bargaining power,<sup>10</sup> the different framings, lexicons, and worldviews require additional analysis (Sparke, 1998).

The governance structure also reflects a collectivist worldview, where its participants emphasise community benefits over individual needs (Suttles, 1963; Singleton, 2002). Furthermore, the Council places the Salish people at the locus of power for the management and protection of their natural environment. This organisational structure reinforces a governance model in which Salish people govern the resources for their community. The gatherings and Council meetings serve as a place for Salish community leaders to identify key priority areas for the Salish Nation – these priority areas are then brought back to the communities and built into localised efforts. In addition, the gatherings serve an important place for information exchange, and reaffirmation and revitalisation of shared identity. The gatherings help to keep the momentum for the work ahead, and keep the goals aligned. The description of pulling a traditional canoe in unison (rather than in a disjointed fashion) is often used as a metaphor in speeches to encourage working together towards common goals. In fact, the canoes (and canoe journeys more specifically) play a very central part in the revitalisation efforts of the groups as a connected region and with external agencies, as discussed in the last section.

The cultural politics of indigenous communities spanning these borders is well documented (Boxberger, 1989; Carlson, 2001; Huhndorf, 2001, 2009; Miller, 2001, 2003, 2006; Kennedy, 2007; Simpson, 2007). For example, Huhndorf (2009) engages in questions of transnationalism through the

<sup>10</sup> Thanks to François Molle for raising this point.

analysis of culture (including literature) in "ongoing colonisation and resistance in Indigenous North America". Similarly, Simpson's work on the Mohawk Nation addresses important questions regarding contemporary identity in relation to shifting power geometries and governance models.

In addition, a growing number of scholars have written extensively on the need for indigenous communities to reclaim their governance structures, breaking away from systems that perpetuate a dependence on federal governments (Deloria, 1984; Wildcat, 1987; Wilkinson, 1987; Little Bear, 2000).

For example, Deloria (1984) writes:

Citizens and tribal members often chafe at regulations and restrictions, not realizing that the burgeoning population has created a need for government to serve large numbers of people in a rather impersonal way. Some means must be found to humanize social and political institutions once again. Here traditional Indian customs, if properly incorporated in the functions and mission of government, can prove effective and important.

The spirit of Deloria's words comes through at the Coast Salish gatherings. The gatherings are organised carefully – both in structure and language – to preserve and revitalise Coast Salish cultural practices. Unlike other transboundary environmental meetings, the gathering does not immediately delve into policy talks and action items. Rather, the organisers design the entire first day of the gathering to "rekindle the relationship of Coast Salish First Nations and Tribes through traditional practices" (CSAC, 2010).<sup>11</sup> The conference programme for the Tulalip Gathering outlined the significance of this first day:

The ceremonies are an important traditional process that is valuable in unifying the Gathering and will include the introduction and honor of the Coast Salish leadership's gallant triumphs that support the efforts to protect our aboriginal rights.

Through an intricate web of ceremony, blessings, and introductions, the participants of the gathering become 'mentally and spiritually prepared' to participate in the coming days' policy talks. The Council achieves this by following protocol such as blessing the four corners, calling of witnesses, and praying for the participants and their families. "This is important work", as one Salish leader noted, and "we all need to be fully present – in mind and body – to do the work for our ancestors and children". After the ceremonies and blessings, the rest of the days are open for introductions and testimony.

For example in the Tulalip Gathering, the Council members,<sup>12</sup> elected officials, invited guests, veterans, and elders all had the opportunity to introduce themselves and reflect on the purpose of the meeting. The introductions often included their English and Salish names, the tribe or band they represented, and a declaration that they recognised this land as the traditional territory of the host tribe. The gatherings also follow traditional longhouse etiquette. The use of traditional Coast Salish language throughout the conference underscores (and embodies) the desire for cultural preservation, and is used as a way to challenge former practices of cultural dominance and forced assimilation. The deliberate planning for the gathering helped achieve many of its goals – employing innovative strategies to transcend the political geographies of imposed borderlands to reach cultural and environmental goals.

Thus, the work of the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council and the gatherings is part of the process to reclaim and rebuild some of the internal control to decision making and governance. It is also about strengthening the individual tribes and bands to think beyond the limits (geographic, economic, political, etc) that were placed on them during colonial times.

The Council and the gatherings are not an attempt to go back to pre-contact ways, necessarily; rather, their enactment is a deliberate attempt to regain some of the characteristics and strengths of the Coast Salish communities. This work is achieved, in part, through the 'scaling up' of individual bands

<sup>11</sup> The proceeding Gatherings in Duncan, BC (2007), Tulalip, WA (2008), Squamish, BC (2009), and Swinomish, WA (2010) also follow this protocol.

<sup>12</sup> Largely comprising tribal chiefs and band leaders and elected officials, such as tribal chairs.

and tribes to a singular nation. As described below, rebuilding the intricate networks and collective identities of kin-based communities through a regional council is simultaneously about reconstructing a cultural identity that spans the border and unifying to work more strategically with external agencies and groups.

Although this type of political aggregation is not uncommon within indigenous communities, it does have its trials. In the Pacific coast region of British Columbia, for example, the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group and the Mid-Island Tribal Council are other examples of attempts at political aggregation of individual bands and tribes that have experienced fissures and political reorganisation due to the complications of the treaty process (Thom, 2010). As discussed below, the difference for the Council is the unifying factor around a shared goal of habitat preservation (rather than the more politically contentious treaty negotiations).

### **Transcending borders: Performing unity to govern shared waters**

*We do not recognise the border.*

A Coast Salish leader

Participants at the gatherings continually emphasise the need to re-establish a sense of unity. Although the Coast Salish communities recognise themselves as a connected group, the realities of border crossing serve as harsh reminders of the politics of occupation and colonially constructed space. In fact, many Coast Salish people do not recognise the border as a matter of principle. Some even go as far as not declaring US or Canadian citizenship when crossing the border, choosing rather to self-identify by family, tribe or band.

Testimonies of participants attending the Jamestown and Tulalip gatherings reflect the hardships of the border and the ongoing impacts of political fragmentation on resource management. At the gatherings, participants provided testimony on the continued impacts of, consternation for, and resistance to their bordered homeland. In discussions, the border (or 'the line' as it is commonly called by Coast Salish community members) was described by many as something that needed to be overcome. The demarcation of this line was often viewed as something that was separating their communities: "Like the Great Wall of China, [the border] is separating us". In addition, the further bounding of land and people through reserves was also voiced as a major concern. As one elder from the northern Coast Salish territory indicated: "[o]ur people once controlled over 600,000 miles of ancestral land and now we live on reservations and they expect us to plan for the future of our children on small plots of land". In addition, the physical passage through the border brought up strong emotions related to identity and power: "Having to state, 'I'm American' or 'I'm Canadian' isn't right. 'No! 'I say to the guard, 'I am Coast Salish! '".

The act of convening as a group was also considered a way to socially reconstruct a shared cultural identity. As one Coast Salish leader noted: "As we travelled to this meeting, the border guard asked us, 'Why are you going down there?' The guards are concerned that we are coming together to talk. This is the first time in a long time that we are all together – and I have been in politics for twenty to thirty years... That border *really* bothers me. It is a way to dictate to us. I think we should start doing something". The 'doing something' in this case, is the continued engagement in the Council meetings and gatherings and the rebuilding of a shared identity with strategic and focussed goals.

The testimony also reflects that the gathering provides a sense of (re)connectedness, allowing families that span the border to come together. Several of the participants voiced this as an opportunity to reconnect with family and community throughout Coast Salish territory: "We are able to bring together our relatives. That border separates us, but we are connected in many, many ways". The recognition that this was an opportunity to reunify and strengthen their voice was also noted: "We need to speak with one voice. We need to continue to build upon that foundation of shared history. That is what we are doing. We are learning to speak with one voice again". This quote is a direct

example of how strategic essentialism is employed to push forward goals associated with a unified Coast Salish Nation – in terms of both self-determination and the capacity to serve as stewards of the shared natural environment.

In the discussions, the border was often linked to wider issues of natural resource management. As one participant reflected, "Natural resources bring us together. It bothers me that we have to *compete* for natural resources because we have always worked together. The way the system is now, we are set up against each other". The above statements capture a central driver of the establishment of the Council. They also reinforce observations by Thom (2010), who reflects about the changing fabric of Coast Salish community and the efforts to reconfigure strategically for a common purpose. Historically, Salish communities worked collectively to ensure adequate provisions for all family members. Intricate socio-economic networks based on trade and ceremony helped in the distribution of wealth and basic resources throughout the extended communities (Boxberger, 1993; Kennedy, 1993; Suttles, 1963).

The testimonies above reinforce earlier studies, which detail how the border and subsequent policies affect the movement of people and goods. Drawing on his work with Salish communities, Miller (1997), for example, illustrates how the border serves to undermine potlatch exchanges and winter ceremonies. It is quite common for border guards to accuse community members of smuggling, he reports. For example, after a border patrol officer found two hundred blankets in the trunk of a car en route to a family potlatch, the blankets were confiscated and the traveller fined (Miller, 1997). This continues to be a problem. In a 2007 interview, one Coast Salish community member stated: "The traditional gift-giving practice of potlatch exchanges are often limited because some families simply cannot afford to pay the high tariffs associated with bringing a large amount of goods across the border". The application of 'foreign' rules and norms that limit the flow of goods and people across the imposed border disrupts the cultural connectedness of the Salish community. Other scholars, such as Nadasdy (2004), detail the consequences of foreign-imposed regulations to maintaining traditional lifeways. The tensions between the mandates of the state and the Aboriginal person moving between systems is acute, particularly at the site of the border where power lies with the individual border guard whose mandates do not support the cultural connectedness of the Salish communities.

Another example that Miller gave, which was reaffirmed at the Coast Salish gathering and in my conversations with Coast Salish community members, was the issue of movement across international borders when a person is in training or participating in a ceremony. As one Coast Salish community member noted: "Traditions of spirit dancers are also compromised, because the rules and policies of the modern border do not coincide with the traditional practices of Coast Salish communities". For a traditional spirit dancer to participate in a ceremony, s/he must follow a set of rules that often contradict the protocol of border crossing. For example, the spirit dancer cannot look anyone directly in the eye or answer questions directly, and the wooden box containing the spirit mask may be opened only while in ceremony. These cultural protocols run counter to the practices of border crossing, where the guards expect full disclosure and full attentiveness as a rite of passage (Miller, 2006).

Profiling poses another barrier to crossing the border. Several Coast Salish community members reported to me that they hesitate to cross the border because of the racial profiling and subsequent harassment they receive from border guards. Racial bias, often embedded within legal systems, materialises at border crossings through acts of verbal and physical harassment, as well as car and body searches (Amoore, 2006). As a person travels across the international border, power shifts to the guard and most rights are suspended. By design, border checkpoints suspend the traveller's rights as an integral aspect of border travel. When that traveller has experienced a life of marginalisation and racial discrimination, border crossings are even more problematic. The heightened security practices put in place after the tragic events of September 11, 2001 accentuate the border crossing issues facing travellers, including the Coast Salish community members (Miller, 2006; Sparke, 2006; Norman, forthcoming).



### Re-imagining space through counter-mapping and strategic essentialism

The process of re-imagining and recreating new space is a documented strategy for activists through techniques such as performativity (Mountz, 2010) and counter-mapping (Sparke, 1998, 2006; Harris and Hazen, 2006). In an effort to mitigate the historical (and contemporary) divisiveness of the constructed international border, the organisers of the gathering employed strategic exercises to help reinforce cultural connections. In addition, they use discursive tools (i.e. maps, media coverage, literature) to empower communities and reframe governance structures. For example, the facilitator of the Tulalip gathering suggested that during the introductions, every Council member add the phrase "And I am Coast Salish" after their name. As the leaders affirmed their status, the powerful words became increasingly impassioned: "I *am* Coast Salish... We are the same". Some respondents uttered their statements with such passion that applause, cheers, and 'whoops' would spontaneously erupt. This 'performance' of unity helped align the material and the symbolic concept of a (re)connected community. Interestingly, this exercise plays on the very successful ad campaign by Molson, a Canadian beer company that used the patriotic phrase 'I am Canadian' to sell their product (Seiler, 2002).

This exercise was also a way of establishing consensus. By repeatedly emphasising the connectedness of the community, the aim was to rewrite the discourse of a fragmented community. As one participant of the gathering reflected, the affirmations remind the participants that "regardless of which side of the border our relatives happened to land, we are all interconnected". A Coast Salish leader further explained:

You might ask what we did today... We are learning to trust each other again. There are no hidden agendas. If we agree as to who we are, we are able to protect who we are. It is up to you to reach back and remember the works of our ancestors and bring it forward. We have to bring hope and life to our children.

Although the tribes and bands had and continue to have their own priorities, the intricate relationships and shared connection to the land are important components of the creation of the Council and of the dedication to address the environmental issues facing their respective communities – particularly the decline in salmon.

In addition to re-establishing cultural continuity, the gathering provides the space for the Coast Salish leaders to collaborate and speak with 'one voice'. Establishing consensus within the Salish communities serves an important purpose. It helps prioritise issues and strategically organise efforts to tackle increasingly complex and multi-jurisdictional environmental issues. The ongoing dialogue between the Council members helps to identify these critical areas. The objective is clearly stated in the literature put forth by the Council and the organisers of the gathering:

The objective of the Gathering was to provide a forum for tribal and First Nation leaders to collaborate on environmental issues and share that information with governmental policy makers to assist them in making more protective and culturally sensitive decisions concerning the future of this richly endowed, yet fragile, region that we share, the Salish Sea (Coast Salish Gathering Program, 2008).

With a unified voice, the Council has committed to meeting a series of goals and outcomes. Through the development of an environmental action plan, the Council aims to "Conserve and restore the Salish sea ecosystem to a level that ensures the sustainability of the Coast Salish People and our cultural lifeways" (Coast Salish Gathering Program, 2008). A number of priorities are identified in the plan, including the provision of adequate clean air, water, and land to sustain and protect the health of the Coast Salish people. These priorities represent the general pairing of environmental and cultural protection in the contemporary Coast Salish governance model. It also highlights how protecting water resources (both marine and freshwater) directly supports subsistence, cultural, and economic activities.

Establishing consensus amongst the Coast Salish tribes and bands also helps in coordinating with external agencies. The regional director of the United States Environmental Protection Agency expressed this point of view at the Tulalip gathering: "The more unified your voice, the more support

we can give you". The director further explained that although the department is "sensitive to the needs of individual bands and tribes, establishing a common position aids in the navigation through large bureaucratic systems". Thus, the creation of a unified voice among Salish communities and a (re)constructed space serve important roles both internally and externally.

Representative of this shift is a recent collaboration between Coast Salish communities and United States Geologic Service (USGS) to conduct water quality sampling on the annual canoe journey. Listed on the USGS website as a "blending of science and tradition" the organisers lauded the project as a unique new multi-jurisdictional partnership:

In an exciting new partnership between the Coast Salish (indigenous peoples of the Salish Sea ecoregion) and the USGS, members of western Washington Tribes and British Columbia First Nations will measure water quality in Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia during the Tribal Journey, the annual summer canoe voyage. The project will provide a snapshot of current water quality conditions and data that can be compared with future measurements along successive journeys. This information is important to improve management of ancestral waters that are experiencing environmental decline (USGS, 2008).

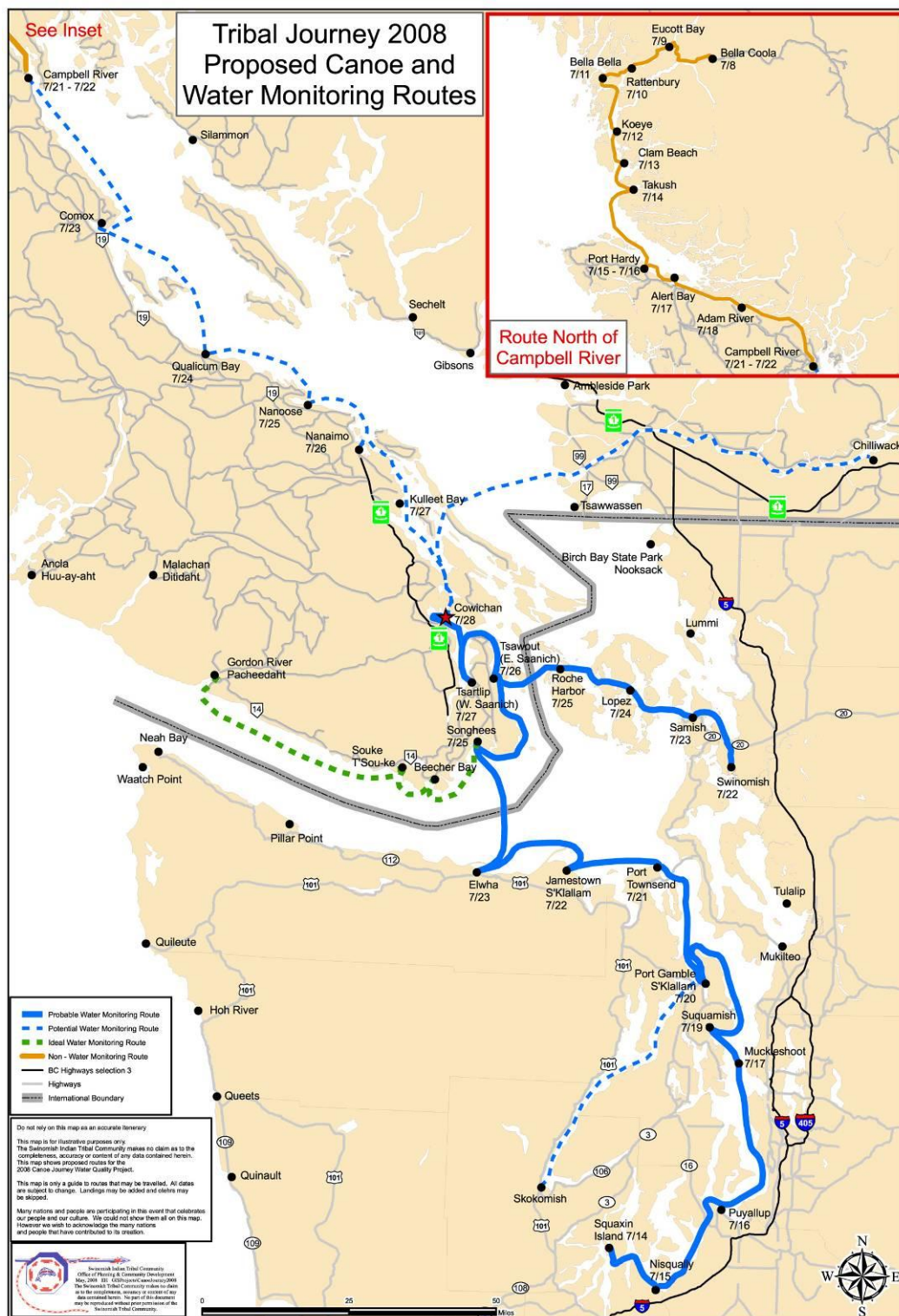
Indicative of this coordinated project, the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council website provides an electronic link to the water-quality sites and real-time information on the data collection (as well as video clips of the daily progress of the canoe journey). This is one of the first tangible outcomes of the creation of the Council and its commitment to, and facilitation of, multi-jurisdictional collaboration. Representatives from USGS working on the project spoke of the importance of acquiring comprehensive and recent data on transboundary water quality since a common problem in the governance of transboundary waters is fragmented data (Hill et al., 2008; Norman, 2009). Continued data-gathering, on an annual basis, will reduce fragmentation and provide a strong foundation for analysis. Figure 3 outlines the water quality site.

Facilitated by the Council, the tribes and bands of the Salish sea have aligned against the farming of Atlantic salmon in the Pacific coast. This issue is a top priority of the Council which lobbies governmental agencies to stop approving licences for new aquatic farms because of the negative impacts on Pacific fish stocks – most notably disease and out-competition for resources. The Council's unified voice against the development of more farms has broadened the constituency base and reduced legal and administrative costs for individual tribes and communities.

The Council has facilitated the consultation of Coast Salish members in the development of transboundary ecosystem indicators in the Salish sea. Regional divisions of the US Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada are developing ecosystem indicators for the shared waters between Georgia Basin and Puget Sound (the Salish sea). The agencies drafted indicators in 2002 and 2005, and are now working with Coast Salish tribes and bands to deepen the understanding of the changing environment and to identify priorities for setting ecological benchmarks (EC and EPA, 2002, 2005). In addition to indicator development, the agencies are creating an interactive map that will include Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the region and highlight areas of critical concern and priority for tribes and bands (such as traditional fishing and shellfish collection sites).

The examples above show three tangible outcomes of the creation of the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council. Despite these gains, progress towards a central goal of the Council – salmon recovery – remains slow. Extraterritorial environmental threats such as global climate change, over-harvesting, and habitat degradation within river basins and in critical spawning sites complicate efforts of salmon recovery. In addition, although the Council continues to meet annually, the consensus-model of governance slows the decision making process. This is particularly true during the early stages of the Council's existence, as the tribes and bands, 'learn to trust each other again'. Furthermore, some have questioned the Council's decision not to register as a non-profit group, which would provide access to grant funds and increase administrative support. However, maintaining internal control of the governance process is seen as fundamental to the Council and, at this stage of its formation, is prioritised over capacity.

Figure 3. Map of Tribal Canoe Journey water monitoring routes 2008.



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the politics of scale of water governance in a postcolonial context through the analysis of the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council in the Pacific Northwest of North America. This case provides an example of how collective rights (treaty and Aboriginal) are being 'scaled up' from individual 'tribe' or 'band' to 'Nation' and contributes to the nascent discussions of politics of scale within water governance, complementing other critical scholarship on rescaling of water governance (Swyngedouw, 1999, 2006a, 2006b; Budds, 2009; Cohen and Davidson, 2011). In addition, it responds to a call from political geographers and borders scholars to look more closely at how power is mobilised at the site of the border (Dalby and O Tuathail, 1998; Newman and Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 2003; Agnew, 2007).

This case is particularly noteworthy given that the governance structure presents an apparent contradiction: it is both transnational (as it spans the Canada – US border) and national (as it represents a singular Salish Nation). The creation of the Council thereby serves as a counter-narrative to a bordered geography by emphasising the connectedness of their communities, rather than the differences in national identities. The Coast Salish efforts to align under a single allegiance are in line with other documented efforts within political geography to construct or reconstruct scale that is meaningful to the user (Harris and Hazen, 2006) and to redefine citizenry beyond state borders (Ehrkam and Leitner, 2003; Mostov, 2007). This paper analyzed the creation of the Council as a form of strategic essentialism, in which the creators employ methods such as counter-mapping and performativity to help rebuild a shared identity.

This paper helps to document the growing movement within indigenous communities to reclaim traditional governance processes. As one participant at the first Salish gathering aptly noted, "We are the ones that we are waiting for". Overall, my research finds that the aggregation of historically connected tribes and bands for the shared benefit of environmental protection and cultural reunification is a first step in reclaiming space and reconstructing traditional governance mechanisms. These findings support Thom's (2010) earlier study on the Council. The case study also builds on the existing literature to evaluate larger issues of efficacy and power in tribal reorganisation across state boundaries.

This paper marks a deliberate effort to include the cultural politics of the border in the investigations of transboundary environmental governance. Investigating how administrative structures and physical boundaries of water governance are both socially constructed and politically mobilised provide a more nuanced approach to discussions of transboundary environmental governance. Including a critical discussion of the cultural politics of borders (and border making) helps to identify, and thereby address, more effectively, the power dynamics constituted through postcolonial constructions of space and hydrosocial networks. This approach should arguably complement other studies engaging in issues related to borders, scale, and governance of natural resources, particularly flow resources such as water.

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