

Intercultural Dynamics in Addressing  
Ecological Issues in the Columbia River Basin  
**Capstone Draft**  
Section 1 - Introduction

*“You have to give a lifetime. You have to tell this story of  
change continually...We’ll be way out – 100 years of planting  
trees, getting our watersheds back, getting our oceans clean –  
but we’re gonna do it.  
We’ve got to do it.”*

**Billy Frank, Jr.**

Nisqually leader, who successfully fought to uphold  
Washington tribal fishing rights and co-management.

March 9, 1931-May 5, 2014

([Edible Portland, Summer 2014 p.48](#))

We face a precipice of global change. This change has been foretold by indigenous prophecies for centuries. It has been anticipated by earth scientists for more than half a century. Young generations today bear the burdensome costs of unbridled industrial and technological expansion that contributes real threats of ecological ruin. Effective climate change adaptation depends on principled decision-making. These decisions are determined by cultural values and political participation. The unprecedented scope and consequence of environmental degradation begs for skillful leadership in governance. Few regions in the world are devoid of climate change impacts and are facing substantial pressure in the coming decades to safeguard against predictive losses by restoring natural resources and their ecological function. It is common knowledge that decisions today are critical for the future of food and water security, public safety, economic stability, and cultural survival.

Indigenous leaders are increasingly at the forefront of critical management decisions that affect millions of native and non-native residents. Foresight and expertise in ecological governance among indigenous communities comes from thousands of years of observational science and relationship with the elements. Fishing, hunting, gathering traditional foods, and sustaining interdependent habitats are synonymous to cultural knowledge being passed from one generation to the next. Despite historic atrocities and enduring trauma from colonial settlement, traditional practices continue today because these values live to uphold fundamental needs that include subsistence and cultural way of life. The moral guidance from indigenous leadership brings governance back to its original and primary purpose – to accurately observe past and present conditions, and to act in accordance with those indicators for the health and continuation of life. The human right to environmental and atmospheric equilibrium is held in public interest. It is universal. Indigenous peoples time and again advocate for *shared* governance that affirms plant, animal, and human life as interdependent and indicative of mutual survival.

Cultural adaption is integral to environmental and community resilience. ([Resilience defined here?](#)) Learned values determine perceptions, social norms, and behaviors that underpin priorities in natural resource use and governance. Climate change mitigation seeks to stave off negative effects, but the only long-term strategy is to adapt.

Flexibility in management requires diverse sovereign entities and regional stakeholders to effectively communicate in order to make consensual decisions. Cultural differences are too often minimized in the negotiation of political interests. Opposing cultural priorities can moreover create and perpetuate political conflicts. The ability to move forward with shared strategies in a common geography evolves with inclusive and judicious leadership.

## **Orientation**

The capstone contextualizes indigenous collaboration in the *Columbia River Treaty 2014/2024* (CRT) renegotiation between Canada and the United States. The project focuses on a coalition of 15 Columbia River Basin tribes of the Pacific Northwest, and their growing collaboration with three First Nations of British Columbia. Their inherent sovereignty as indigenous peoples affords the legal authority to strengthen ecological adaptation in policy and in river management.

The CRT renegotiation is one story that highlights unprecedented collaboration and shared solutions. It is a story told from an outsider's analysis and aligned with tribal perspectives to achieve intercultural understanding. It is not the first nor the last story of its kind, subject to continual evolution within social and political landscapes. However, it powerfully exemplifies the importance of indigenous leadership in water governance regionally and internationally.

This paper characterizes intercultural dynamics between indigenous nations and non-native entities participating in the 2014/2024 Treaty process. The purpose is to consider diverse cultural perspectives and the importance of inclusive leadership for a collaborative response to the most urgent and dramatic issues of our time. The CRT renegotiation spawned a unified voice of tribal leaders, whose shared vision enabled ecological and cultural values to guide regional agreement and federal negotiating positions. Conflicts of interest between tribes and participatory entities make for complex intercultural collaboration across jurisdictions and sectors. The success in consensus among decision-makers in the Columbia River Basin demonstrates effective basin-wide one river governance, bringing diverse strategies to the table for mutual decision-making and equitable outcomes.

This research is a guide for individuals to achieve inclusive and culturally competent participation as a basis for leadership in governance. Section II provides background information on the Columbia River Basin and the Columbia River Treaty; Section III delineates value differences, historical power dynamics, and communication styles between native and non-native perspectives in the Pacific Northwest; Section IV presents Native American leadership values and follows the process of building consensus between tribal nations and across US jurisdictions. Section V **Conclusion** (Still determining approach)

## **Acknowledgements**

I am not writing as an indigenous person, rather an advocate for international indigenous human rights by standing with native leaders advancing sovereignty, self-determination, and shared solutions for ecological and cultural resilience. In contribution to initiatives in the Columbia River Basin, I am following the leadership of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Spring Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, Coeur D'Alene Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Spokane Tribe of Indians, Burns Paiute Tribe of Indians, Fort McDermitt Paiute Shoshone Tribes, Shoshone Paiute Tribe of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation, Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Pacific Northwest, and the Ktunaxa Nation, Okanagan Nation, and Secwepemc Nation of British Columbia.

I consider achievement to be a result collective action. I acknowledge with respect those who have paved the way for my privilege and opportunity to participate in initiatives for the river basin and its' stewards: The people whose hard work and devotion to the vitality of this river system have become the lifeblood of these flows.

I acknowledge family as my backbone through their example of integrity, perseverance, compassion and inclusivity. My respect is

dedicated to the Intercultural Communication Institute for decades of administering intercultural competency. Respect and gratitude goes to my premier academic advisor, Janet Bennett, and to Benjamin Broom, Carlos Cortes, Chris Cartwright, and Adair Ngata for their guidance. My appreciation to tribal and First Nation leaders, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and many other contributors, for sharing knowledge and perspectives on Columbia River Treaty renegotiation, traditional ecological knowledge, regional collaboration, and consensus building. My gratitude to DR Michel, Paul Lumley, Pauline Terbasket, John Sirois,, David Browneagle, Katherine Brigham, Jeremy Wolf, Marlowe Sam, Lori Faeth, Bill Bradbury, Bill Green, Rob Lothrop, Jim Heffernan, Matt McKinney, Richard Paisley, Tom Iverson, and Jeff Goebel, ([and Jennifer Arnold?](#)), who gifted their time and expertise during personal interviews.

I take responsibility for the capstone project design and I attest that the document could not be complete with countless voices missing in this academic discussion from all regional sovereigns and stakeholders. The accuracy, currency, and totality of this research are limited, and are the product of changing political, social, and ecological conditions. The intent is to address intercultural dynamics and to highlight outstanding commitments to shared values. The visibility of growing collaboration across institutional divides will continue to reflect the excellence in leadership for generations to come.

Finally, I dedicate this work to Billy Frank Jr. and to all whose legacy lives on in the people, in the salmon, the deer, the roots, and berries, and in the great, enduring Columbia.