

## **Puget Salish People of Washington**

The Puget Salish are the Native Americans whose ancestral home is located along the shores of Puget Sound. Today, there are nineteen (19) different Puget Salish tribes. One hundred and fifty years ago, before they had treaties with the U.S. government, there were more than fifty (50) named tribes. The Puget Salish tribes share both a common language, Lushootseed, which belongs to the Salishan family, and many cultural traditions.

If you were to follow along the shores of Puget Sound, starting in Whatcom County in the northeast corner, and moving clockwise around the Sound, the 19 different Puget Salish tribes would be found in the following counties:

**Whatcom County** – Lummi, Nooksack

**Skagit County** – Skagit, Samish, Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle (straddles border with Snohomish County)

**Snohomish County** – Tulalip, Snohomish, Sauk-Suiattle (straddles border with Skagit County – near to Darrington)

**King County** – Duwamish (Seattle area), Snoqualmie (eastern King Co.), Muckleshoot (southern King Co., near Auburn), Sammamish (considered an eastern sub-group of Duwamish)

**Pierce County** – Puyallup, Nisqually

**Thurston County** - Sahewamish

**Mason County** – Twana (Skokomish), Squaxin Island

**Kitsap County** – Suquamish, Klallam (one band of the tribe)

**Clallam County** – Jamestown S’Klallam (just east of Sequim)

### **Cultural Background**

Historically, the Puget Salish sustained themselves by hunting deer, elk, and other game animals. They fished for salmon and other saltwater and freshwater fish and shellfish, and gathered berries and wild plants for food and medicinal purposes. They lived communally in longhouses that housed large, extended families and tribal groups. All of the Puget Salish people lived on or near to rivers, lakes or to Puget Sound, so their primary means of transportation was by water – usually in dugout cedar canoes.

**For a description of traditional Puget Salish Village life, go to the following website:**

[http://coastsalishmap.org/start\\_page.htm](http://coastsalishmap.org/start_page.htm) [Note: this website is particularly interesting for it’s mapping of sites that are identified in specific Native stories and stories about local Natives]

**For more about Puget Salish canoes see:**

[http://www.jamestowntribe.org/jstweb\\_2007/history/hist\\_canoes.htm](http://www.jamestowntribe.org/jstweb_2007/history/hist_canoes.htm)

Puget Salish peoples believe that the natural world is filled with spirits. Spirits were not only found in living beings or objects, such as animals, plants, and human beings, they also inhabited inanimate objects, such as mountains or rocks. These spirits were central to their lives and could be called upon to help the Salish people by providing skills and knowledge necessary to survive and flourish. [Thrush essay] Certain spirits were known for their ability to help you with specific tasks or skills, such as healing, food gathering or hunting, basket making, etc.

Spirit powers were felt most strongly during Puget Salish ceremonial events that tied in with the different seasons of the calendar year. Music and dance played an important role in these ceremonies, as well as storytelling, feasting and gift giving.

Music and dance were important to other celebratory community events – such as the intertribal canoe gatherings – where arriving canoes performed canoe paddling songs and welcoming tribal hosts would perform canoe welcoming songs. Storytelling was a very important traditional art form in Puget Salish communities, as stories were a means by which young people learned about proper behavior, family connections, and relationships between the world’s peoples, human and otherwise. The lessons in stories were not always immediately apparent and were left to be “discovered” by the listener upon repeatedly hearing a story. [Thrush essay]

The Puget Salish developed many craft skills that helped provide them with functional as well as artistic items. They were highly skilled basket makers, crafting baskets that were used for many purposes, including food gathering, storage, cooking, floor mats, and even wove clothing items from basket materials such as hats and vests. Their wood working and carving skills extended beyond canoe making to include house construction, ceremonial costume and mask making, and art work. Puget Salish were known for the weaving of textiles from fibers such as mountain goat and dog hair. **For more about this, see:** [http://www.jamestowntribe.org/jstweb\\_2007/history/hist\\_weaving.htm](http://www.jamestowntribe.org/jstweb_2007/history/hist_weaving.htm)

The tradition of *Sgwigwi* (*inviting*), or what has come to be known as *potlatch*, was important to maintaining positive relationships and a sharing of resources between neighboring tribes and communities. Potlatches were usually held in the fall, the season of plenty, and sometimes the occasion marked a birth or death in a family. During a potlatch ceremony, wealthy people within a tribe would display their social status by sharing their wealth with others, giving away gifts to others.

Gambling was an active part of Puget Salish life in the form of *Slahal*, the Bone Game. This was a competitive game of skill that included the invoking of spirit forces and musical performance. Marked deer bones served as the game pieces. Bone games could last for hours or even days.

### **Brief History of the Puget Salish**

Archaeological sites in the Northwest have shown that Native Americans lived in the Puget Sound region for over 10,000 years, arriving just after the Ice Age. An interesting example of a Puget Salish myth about their origin is the story the Snoqualmie people tell. They believe that *Moon the Transformer* (also known as *Star Child*) created First Woman and First Man and “transformed” or changed all of the earth and it’s creatures to be as we now know them.

To read one version of the Snoqualmie legend of *Moon the Transformer*, go to:  
[http://coastsalishmap.org/moon\\_the\\_transformer.htm](http://coastsalishmap.org/moon_the_transformer.htm)

The lives of the Puget Salish people were dramatically affected by the influx of white European explorers, and later settlers who first came to the Pacific Northwest in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Much to the misfortune of the Puget Salish peoples, white explorers, traders and settlers brought with them new diseases, against which local Native peoples had little defense. White European diseases had wiped out large segments of Puget Salish populations by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In spite of this, Puget

Salish and other Northwest Native American peoples were largely welcoming – or at least tolerant - of the early white people, and were eager to trade goods with them.

There are documented marriages of Puget Salish peoples to local white settlers. Consider the life of Kate Kanin Borst: [http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=294](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=294)

A significant point in their recent history came in 1855, when Puget Salish tribal chiefs, such as Duwamish and Suquamish Chief Seattle and Snoqualmie Chief Patkanin, signed the Point Elliot Treaty with the Washington Territory. This treaty created a government-to-government relationship between the United States and the Puget Salish Tribes and the Tribes ceded much of their land to the federal government. The Tribes received federal money as a provision of the treaty. Many of the tribes were then to move to the Tulalip Reservation.

Over the past 150 years since the Point Elliot Treaty was signed, some of the Puget Salish tribes (such as the King County-based Duwamish and Snoqualmie) lost federal recognition when federal policies limited recognition to tribes having reservations. Many Washington tribes have subsequently struggled for years - petitioning the U.S. government for federal recognition based on evidence that they had maintained a continuous community from historical times to the present. Some have succeeded (like the Snoqualmie, in 1999), while others have not (like the Duwamish). Today, most Puget Salish tribes are relatively small in number, having approximately 500 – 2000 members.

## **Bibliography**

It's hard to improve on the excellent short bibliography provided at the end of Coll-Peter Thrush's on-line essay titled, "The Lushootseed Peoples of Puget Sound Country" at: <http://nooksack.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/thrush.html>

### **However, we would add these other important sources not found in Thrush's bibliography:**

Amoss, Pamela. *Coast Salish Spirit Dancing: The Survival of an Ancestral Religion*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978.

Amoss, Pamela. Coast Salish Elders. In Pamela Amoss & Stevan Harrell (Eds.), *Other Ways of Growing Old: Anthropological Perspectives*. (pp. 227-261). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981.

Smyth, Willie and Ryan, Esme, editors. *Spirit of the First People: Native American Music Traditions of Washington State*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999.

Waterman, T.T. *Puget Sound Geography*. Federal Way: Lushootseed Press, 2001. Edited with additional material from Vi Hilbert, Jay Miller, and Zalmai Zahir.

### **For a much more extensive bibliography on Coast Salish sources, see:**

<http://home.istar.ca/~bthom/salish-rev.htm>

## **Web-based Resources**

<http://nooksack.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/thrush.html> This is an excellent introductory essay to Lushootseed or Puget Salish culture – covering history, spiritual and religious traditions, village life, foodways, mythology.

[http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/north\\_america\\_canoe\\_racing.html](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/north_america_canoe_racing.html)

[Note: While this is a Canadian website, there is lots of very useful information about Coast Salish canoe traditions, and other cultural traditions – that apply to Coast Salish peoples living in Washington as well as British Columbia. Check out references #1-7 at the bottom of the page]

[http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=2458](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=2458)

[http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=8156](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=8156) [Note: To hear words spoken in the Lushootseed language, go to this URL].

The following Puget Salish traditional artists in King County and in the Puget Sound region can be found on the searchable database, *Folk & Traditional Artists in Washington State*:

**Whatcom County** - Pauline Hillaire – **Lummi**  
Anna Jefferson - **Lummi**

**Skagit County** - Vi Hilbert – **Upper Skagit**  
James Lawrence Joseph – **Sauk Suiattle**  
Barbara Marks – **Swinomish**

**King County** - Ray Mullen – **Snoqualmie**  
T'ilibshedeb – **Duwamish**

**Pierce County** - Karen Reed Peter – **Puyallup/Chinook** (Puyallup is Puget Salish - but Chinook is not)  
Sharon Nelson – **Puyallup/Chinook**

**Mason County** - Bruce Subijay Miller – **Skokomish/Twana**  
Leona Miller – **Skokomish/Twana**  
Susan Pavel - **Skokomish/Twana**  
Pete Peterson - **Skokomish/Twana**  
Andrea Wilbur-Sligo - **Skokomish/Twana**

**Kitsap County**  
Ed Carriere – **Suquamish**

**Clallam County**  
Elaine Grinnell – **Jamestown S'Klallam**