

representing other big game, and then the roots and the berries," he says.

According to Paul Lumley, Executive Director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, the oral tradition is that the first foods made a promise to care for the people forever as long as the people cared for them in return. For Quaempts, this teaching is more relevant than ever.

"There's ecological and spatial information in that serving order that we can use to inform our management," says Quaempts. "And we use all of that to communicate our goals to people so that they better understand the tribe's culture, and why we want to restore these foods the way that we do."

In 2007, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Eastern Oregon went a step further, shifting its entire land management strategy towards the preservation and restoration of first foods – a transformation initiated and implemented by their Department of Natural Resources.

Quaempts says that restoring first foods can help provide additional food security in light of climate change. His office is currently working to secure a water rights settlement in the Umatilla Basin that will provide significant in-stream flows for fisheries, while also working to restore river connections to their

floodplains to create cooler water temperatures for the fish. Last July, high temperatures in the Columbia killed over 250,000 sockeye – the largest fish kill ever recorded in the American West. Quaempts says spilling more water from the dams can help address these high temperatures in the future, but that we will also need more extensive river restoration work that re-establishes the rivers' connections with their floodplains.

In urban areas, Quaempts says work can also be done to protect fish habitat and facilitate their safe passage. And in Portland there are other groups, like NAYA and Wisdom of Elders, who are working on native gardens to connect young people to traditional plants and medicines under the guidance of elders.

Chief Slockish shares that "in our way, when the animals were here, before the people were created, they all said what they would do. Every

living thing, whether it was a rock, whether it was a tree, they said what they would do for us. The water was the first one, the most important one, 'cause he was the one that took care of the land, kept it moist to grow our crops, and fed the people."

The loss of first foods

The destruction of the region's traditional foods followed the cultural and dietary pride of "land hungry" settlers. In 1912 the ethnobotanist Melvin Gilmore summarized, "The people of the European race in coming into the New Worlds have not really sought to make friends with the native population, or to make adequate use of the plants or the animals indigenous to this continent, but rather to exterminate everything found here and to supplant it with the plants and animals to which they were accustomed at home. It is quite natural that aliens should have a longing for the familiar things at home, but the surest road to contentment would be by way of granting friendly acquaintance with the new environment."

Instead of adapting to the local culture, settlers were angry-nostalgic – planting the aggressively invasive scotch broom, an ornamental plant from Western Europe, and filling the landscape with cows while forcing native peoples to give up their culture and become European farmers on the wrong landscape (documented extensively in Vine Deloria's "Indians of the Pacific Northwest"). Camas beds in the Willamette Valley were tilled for western-style farms, with people moving directly into the flood-plain and attacking the river in the name of "flood control." Eventually cows would compete with salmon as the region's major source of protein. One food anchored the region and made the forests grow; the other farted methane, but reminded settlers of home. In 1957 the federal government flooded Celilo Falls behind the Dalles Dam. Celilo was the oldest continuously inhabited village site in North America.

Due to hostility and neglect of the salmon – a keystone species for the Columbia River tribes – wild salmon currently return at less than 3 percent of their historical abundance.

"The roads go through a lot of our food gathering areas down in the lower part of the elevation," Chief Slockish says. "Nowadays it's very hard, where all of our bitterroots and other

medicinal plants, the berries, chokecherries, are located along highways, and the highway department comes along and sprays them with weed control, so we can't eat them."

This loss of traditional foods has also taken a serious toll on people's health. A 2010 report published by the Coalition of Communities of Color and Portland State University reported that more than 20 percent of Multnomah County's Native community experiences hunger on a regular basis. A full 69 percent of Native American elders said they don't have enough of the foods they actually want to eat, and 11.5 percent said they often do not have enough to eat at all.

The report also notes that diabetes is more prevalent among Native Americans than any other racial or ethnic group in the U.S., and its rates have been increasing.

This disproportionate burden of hunger traces back directly to the colonial policies that separated people from their traditional foods, which was also an attempt to replace the gift of food with commodities. This was accomplished both by attacking the food sources directly and by denigrating the cultural practices that bound people to them in mutual responsibility.

Paul Lumley of CRITFC emphasized that the right to all first foods, and the continued access to them, was reserved in the treaties "most explicitly. And it's pretty clear in the negotiations that the tribes would never sign the treaties without reserving those rights. It's a reminder that the tribes were not granted those rights – these were rights that the tribes already had."

This month the City of Portland is hiring a tribal liaison to work with urban Indian communities and fulfill consultation duties with local tribal governments. This marks the first time the city's unique tribal consultation program will be continuously staffed. One critical issue that can be addressed through this program is the advancement of local food sovereignty – a critical issue to the health of both our native communities and of the general public. Committing to the restoration of First Foods would demonstrate collaboration and friendship with our local neighbors, and demonstrate that we are finally willing to adapt – not only to the local landscape, but to our rapidly changing and heating planet.



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