

INTERSPIRITUAL GATHERING TO BLESS THE SALMON AS THEY HEAD TO SEA

Background:

Every year in the late summer and fall, the people of British Columbia gather near rivers and oceans to watch the spectacle that is created when various members of the *Oncorhynchus* Family, better known as Wild Pacific Salmon, travel back to the river where they were born.

What is less known and celebrated is the emergence of the new fry which, in the words of biologist Otto Langer, “first appear in the Fraser River in early March and build to significant numbers in mid March and trail off into early June.” We wish to create an event that calls attention to this initial part of the salmon’s wondrous cycle of life.

In 2005, there was a request put out by Alexandra Morton, a prominent biologist who works on the West Coast of Vancouver Island and is very concerned about the serious effects of fish farming on wild salmon. She asked that we offer our concern for the fate of our salmon by heading down to a local waterway and gathering with community members to offer blessings to these very young creatures as they head out to their life at sea.

April 27 event

This year, False Creek Watershed Society created the 3rd Annual Interspiritual Blessing. We invited the community to come down to the water’s edge for an:

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People of different faiths joined us as we offered our combined blessings to the young salmon who were traveling down the local rivers and preparing for their epic ocean journey.

The event took place under very rainy skies. As people were gathering, we were entertained by the Ahavat Olam singers who lent their voices to some beautiful songs about the earth in Hebrew.

Celia Brauer, of the False Creek Watershed Society spoke about how the history of the salmon in our local waters and how important it was to be aware of the life cycles of these remarkable creatures.

Then we heard from Terry Slack who gave us some history of the salmon in the area. Next was Jeanette Macdonald from Kairos, Cyndia Cole from the Sokka Gakkai Buddhist Earth Charter group, Rabbi David Mivasair from the Jewish community and Usama Al Atar from the Muslim community.

A defining moment of the afternoon was the arrival of the Squamish Ocean Canoe family. They drummed several of their traditional songs for the group and all of us were asked to join in. The Musqueam, Tseil-watuth and Squamish Nations traditionally fished the waters of False Creek and the site behind the Maritime Museum is very close to where there was a village called Sun'akh, which was situated at the entrance to False Creek where the Burrard Bridge is now.

Simple, earth-based ceremonies bring us all together with the earth, the creatures, each other and our teachings. We are looking to start a dialog between people of different backgrounds, about our natural world, how we feel about it and what our traditions teach us. In many cases, these teachings (and the people that bring them) may originally come from far away, perhaps halfway across the earth. Yet, they often speak a common language of earth stewardship. Everyone lives in a watershed. Many of us connect to animals, some eat fish, and many have strong spiritual beliefs. So this gathering gives us a chance to share diverse teachings while coming together in our own environment to celebrate the wondrous event of the young salmon going out to sea.

The ceremony took place the day close to Earth Day. We hope our successful event can inspire other groups to have similar gatherings next year.

Sponsoring Organization:

False Creek Watershed Society

Funders:

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Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Rivershed Society of BC

Unitarian Church of Vancouver

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Friends:

Jonathan Macleod

Celia Brauer

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