

MAPPING PLACE, *Writing Home*

Interdisciplinary approaches to the Elwha Ecosystem Restoration Project

Kate Reavey • Center of Excellence for Environmental Humanities • Peninsula College

The largest dam removal and fisheries restoration project ever attempted is slated for the Elwha River in rural northwestern Washington state. In 1992, the U.S. Congress passed the Elwha River Ecosystem and Fisheries Restoration Act (Public Law 102495), which was the result of efforts by citizens, federal organizations, and the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe. This is a uniquely interdisciplinary project, involving treaty rights, hydropower, local resources, endangered salmon species, and a city dependent on the Elwha River for much of its water.



The Elwha River contains more than seventy-five miles of creeks and tributaries traditionally used by all five species of Pacific salmon and steelhead. The majority of the river has been protected from development (as most of it resides within Olympic National Park), yet the fish have been blocked from passage just five miles from the river's mouth since 1910. In 2012, the dams are slated for removal, allowing salmonid passage for the first time in more than a century.



Painting by Linda Larsen;
Book edited by Kate Reavey and Alice Derry

Photo by Robert Lundahl, "Unconquering the Last Frontier"

LANDSCAPES OF HOME:



A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE ELWHA WATERSHED



Work in progress includes links between English composition and GIS mapping through Google Earth. This exploration of the Elwha provides a conceptual look into history and a vision toward a future watershed, combining environmental science and humanities research in inspiring visual narratives.



Peninsula College has actively engaged students in the study of these dynamic ecosystems, from humanities/environmental science-based learning community courses to National Science Foundation grants that support undergraduate research.

Landscapes of Home is a student-faculty collaborative book published in 2006, the culmination of a Learning Community that combined Literature, Art (drawing), Environmental Science, and English composition.



Dozens of mammals and birds feed on salmon carcasses.
Drawing by Teresa Mason

The First Salmon Ceremony embodies ideals of strength and immortality. Klallam stories warned that if the natural systems were polluted or diminished, the entire habitat would suffer. Studies have shown that marine derived nutrients return to the riparian areas where salmon spawn, underscoring traditional knowledge through scientific data.

Just as the river and fisheries restoration projects gain momentum, more individuals are speaking the ancient language. When the dams are removed and wild salmon return to the Elwha River, the Klallam words will be there to greet them in story and in song.

"The Klallam language (nəxʷsʰləy'əmúçən) has since time immemorial been spoken on the north shore of Washington's Olympic Peninsula from the Strait of Juan de Fuca inland into the mountains" (<http://www.ling.unt.edu/~montler/klallam/>). However, by the late twentieth century, very few individuals spoke the language fluently, so the Lower Elwha Klallam tribe sought federal grants and hired expert linguist Tim Montler. After many years of collaboration among elders of the tribe and local teacher and tribal member Jamie Valadez, Montler assisted in transcribing the language to written form. Now Klallam is taught in local middle and high schools and spoken among tribal people in homes, as well. Peninsula College offered an ITV course in the Klallam language, in which elders joined Valadez in the classroom and Montler was connected via satellite from Texas.



Images courtesy of Olympic National Park, Peninsula College, and Google Earth



For more information, please visit these websites:

elwharivereducation.org
www.elwhainfo.org
pc.ctc.edu/coe/elwha.htm