
Lummi Nation: About Our Homeland

Narrator: In Lummi territory, the rivers, estuaries, and ocean abound with life. This environment is home to more than 200 species of fish, 200 kinds of birds, and many species of mammals. There are vast forests of cedar and other trees, bushes, and small plants. It's also the home to several species of salmon. The Lummi developed a deep knowledge of the environment by careful observation. They were experts in biology, botany, and medicine. And most importantly, they learned how to use the resources without using them up. In the Lummi language, this way of life is called schelangen.

James Hillaire, Director, Lummi Nation Culture Department: There used to be a saying among our people that when the tide is out, when the tide is low, our table is set, because we got our food. We'd walk out, dig some clams, get some cockles, oysters, mussel, sea urchin, whatever. We believe that we were meant to be the caretakers of those things.

Narrator: The elders have always taught the children to show respect for the gifts of the earth.

Steve Solomon, Lummi Fish Commissioner: We are stewards of the land, the water, the sea. We was always told, "For every one you take, you put a handful back." That was our, that is still our way today.

Leroy Deardorff, Environmental Director, Lummi Natural Resources: The tribes that have, for eons, harvested from the sea and from the rivers. And they have been cognizant of the fact that you can harm those species if you are not careful with them, you don't respect them and honor them.

Narrator: Using their knowledge of the environment and fish behavior, the Lummis long ago invented an innovative way of catching salmon.

Felix Solomon, Lummi Artist and Former Commercial Fisherman: Reef netting was a very, very old style of fishing. You'd have to anchor the two boats a specific distance apart. And then they made an artificial reef, because they knew that when salmon were swimming toward the river, toward the Fraser River, toward the Nooksack River, whenever they hit a reef, they would surface.

Narrator: The elders passed on the knowledge of the earth and how to use it properly. They taught their children using stories, songs, and ceremonies.

Doug Bob, Lummi Singer: The power and the strength that comes through these songs really helps our people out, helps our families, how we live, how we take care of one another through song and dance, through prayers, asking for guidance and strength from our Creator. This is who we are, this is what we do, this is our schelangen—schelangen—our way of life.

James Hillaire: We have stories of the Salmon Woman that brings her children, the salmon, to feed the people. There was hunting stories, fishing stories, whaling stories, and all relaying messages to the younger generation on how they should take care of themselves. The main one is not to waste.

Doralee Sanchez, Culture Education Coordinator, Lummi Nation School: When we were all fishing, it's tradition that when you catch your first salmon, we eat it and we offer the bones back out of respect. And each family did that, I think each fisherman family did that, and nobody really talked about it, we just did it. We just knew that that's what we had to do because we grew up doing it. I always thought, "Okay, my kids are going to grow up doing this too, because that's what I did." But that's not the case.