

2024 Slhawt'/Herring Program Activities Supported by the Pacific Salmon Foundation

Background:

Pacific herring, known as *slhawt'* in the *Skwxwú7mesh sníchim* / Squamish language, are not only very important in the coastal food web, but are also culturally significant to the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* / Squamish Nation.



Over the past several years, the Átl'ka7tsem / Howe Sound Marine Stewardship Initiative (MSI) has partnered closely with the Squamish Nation *Ta na wa Yúus ta Stitúyntsah* / Rights & Title Department to document herring spawn within their traditional territory, with a Two-Eyed Seeing approach. The Search for Slhawt' / Herring Program aims to establish a long-term dataset that tracks the status and trends of herring spawn distribution, abundance, and timing in Átl'ka7tsem / Howe Sound. Within this program, we enlist the help of volunteers to monitor sites by walking throughout *Skwelwil'em* / the Squamish Estuary, and staff from the MSI and Squamish Nation to monitor ocean sites via snorkel surveys.

The *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* / Squamish Nation and St'a7mes School host a Welcome Ceremony annually in March, at the beginning of *Tem Lhawt'* / the time of herring and herring spawns in *Skwxwú7mesh* territory. In recent years, this event has been primarily organized by Matthew Van Oostdam, who is both a school teacher at the St'a7mes School and the MSI's Search for Slhawt' / Herring Program Coordinator.

The funding received from Pacific Salmon Foundation (PSF) this year has allowed the MSI to support logistics of the Welcome Ceremony, as well as document activities surrounding *Tem Lhawt'* in photo and video.

Welcome Ceremony

This year's Welcome Ceremony took place on March 14th at Totem Hall, where over 200 attendees gathered to celebrate *Tem Lhawt'* / the time of herring. There were songs, dancing, and stories were shared by elders.

Hemlock and cedar boughs were tied together so that they could be set in the water for herring to spawn on. School children had prepared anchors made of river rocks and cedar bark.

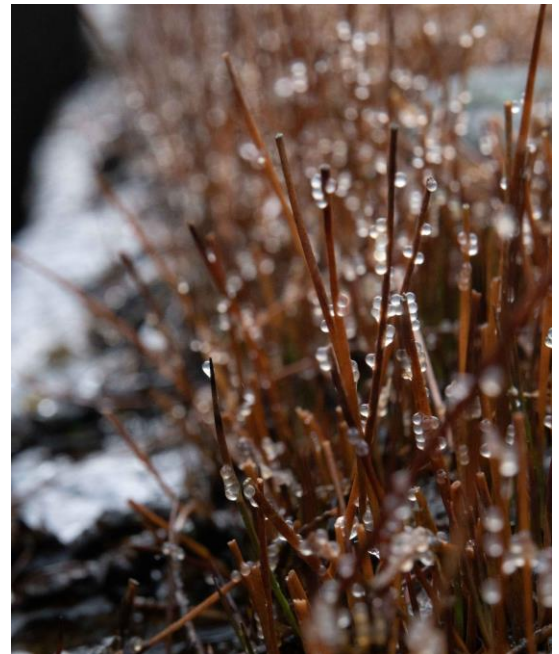
These boughs were transported and anchored in the water in front of St'a7mes Village, with help from Addison Farr of Sea Dog Expeditions, Jonny Williams, and Matthew Van Oostdam.

After setting the boughs, everyone returned to Totem Hall for a feast of salmon and bannock to celebrate.

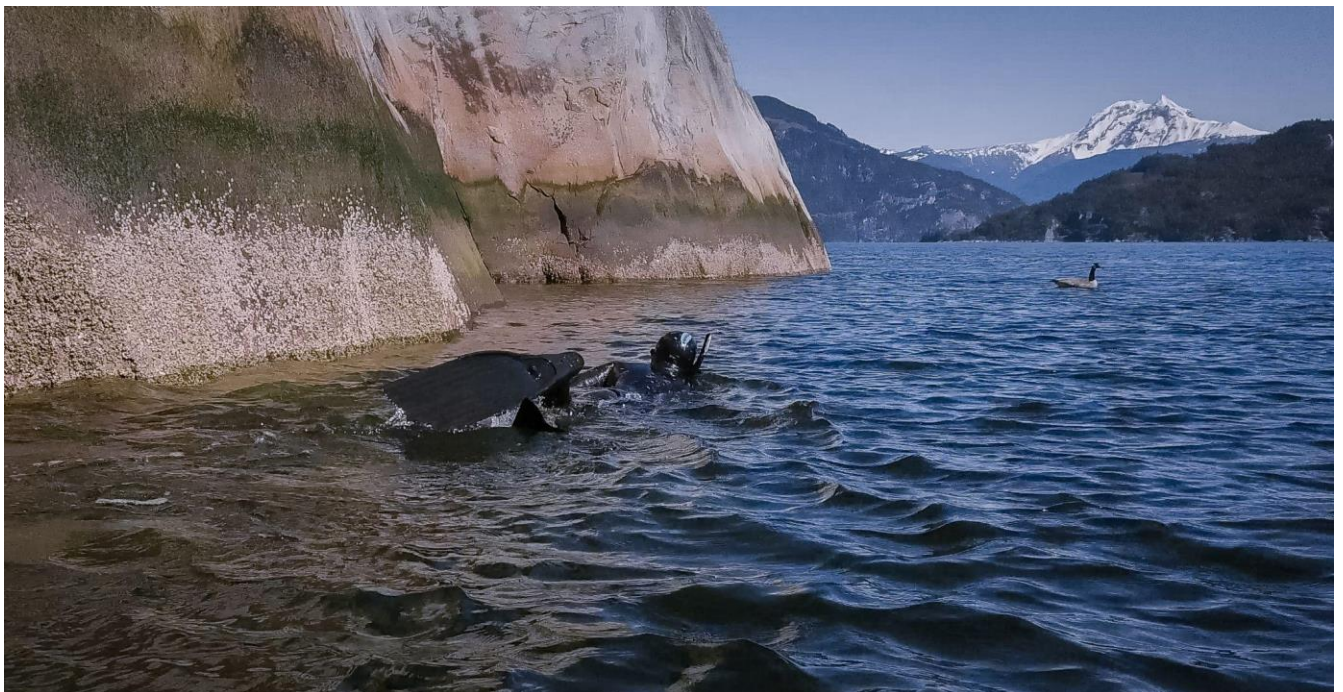


Search for Slhawt'/Herring Program

In the days leading up to the Welcome Ceremony, from March 9-12th, a large herring spawn took place throughout *Skwelwil'em* / the Squamish Estuary. Our volunteer surveyors found numerous shorelines coated in shimmering herring eggs.



Then, in the following week, our snorkel survey team documented the first spawn event at one of our ocean sites.



Our volunteers and staff have continued to document several subsequent spawn events in the northern end of *Átl'ka7tsem* / Howe Sound.

Most notably, on April 13th, the snorkel survey team found dense and extensive spawn along the shoreline of Foulter Creek. This location is just south of *Swiyát* / Woodfibre. Not only did the team find spawn covering the shoreline, but also coating hemlock and cedar boughs that had been placed in the water a week prior by the Squamish Nation *Ta na wa Ns7éyxnitm ta Snewíyelh* / Culture & Language Department.



Some of the *ch'em'esh* / herring eggs were harvested from the boughs and shared with Squamish Nation children and elders.

[Tem Lhawt' Videos:](#)

With the funding from PSF, the MSI contracted Kieran Brownie, a local photographer / videographer to create a series of four videos. Many of the photos featured in this report are stills harvested from video footage that Kieran has captured so far.

These videos document and share the story of how *slhawt'* / herring are connected to the *Skw̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw* / Squamish Nation, *Átl'ka7tsem* / Howe Sound, and all the species that call this region home.

Three of the videos are interviews, featuring Squamish Nation member Charlene Williams, Squamish Nation ACE Technician Matthew Moore, and Search for Slhawt' Program Coordinator Matthew Van Oostdam. Links to the videos:

- [Interview with Charlene Williams](#)
- [Interview with Matthew Van Oostdam](#)
- Interview with Matthew (Matty) Moore - coming soon

There will also be a short narrative film, that encompasses the broader story of herring in *Átl'ka7tsem* / Howe Sound, and how fluctuations in herring populations have impacted both the wildlife and *Skw̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw* / Squamish Nation. This film, along with the 3rd interview with Matthew Moore, will be finished in mid-May, and shared during our end-of-season event at the Brackendale Art Gallery on May 28th.

We are very grateful for the support from PSF, which has allowed the MSI team to contribute to the Welcome Ceremony as well as produce this series of videos. The videos will be licensed for sharing by the MSI, PSF, and Squamish Nation. We look forward to showcasing the important role that *slhawt'* / herring play ecologically and culturally in *Átl'ka7tsem* / Howe Sound.