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If Port Gamble Bay could talk, what would she say?

She'd probably tell stories about a time when there were no people living on her shores; when the fish, birds, bears, and other mammals were her only companions. The woods were dense and hugged her from all sides.

She would talk about the first humans who settled the land and the arrival of the Nux Sklai Yem or S'Klallam people who originally lived in a small village at the site of the town of Port Gamble. She might reflect on these earliest people who got everything they needed to survive from her waters and the surrounding woods while paying their sincere and devoted respect. And, who still, today, look to her waters for sustenance and guidance.

Then there would be the stories of when a different kind of people moved to her shores and, with them, large ships and industry bringing dredging and fill that narrowed her precious outlet to the ocean beyond. The sound of sawing wood and a town being built overwhelmed the songs of local birds and the gentle echoes of her rippling waters.

The world around Port Gamble Bay has changed, but she has remained an active force in Kitsap County. A source of life and comfort. Entertainment and survival. Need and hope. Even though their numbers have shrunk, marbled murrelets still swim on the water's surface. Pacific loons sing out on the early morning fog perhaps urging us to protect the forage fish they depend upon.

The Bay's past is filled with good intentions, but the use of bad practices that have left her waters less-than-pristine. This hasn't stopped her from becoming one of Puget Sound's largest and most productive bays, home to a abundance of species—from the miniscule plankton and the still abundant herring to larger critters like harbor seals. Members of the S'Klallam family still regularly feed their families directly from her waters and shores, while others make their livelihoods from the salmon, geoduck, and other species that call the Bay home.

While we're closely tied to the Bay's past, we prefer to focus on her future; a future where her waters once again are strong and healthy; where Port Gamble Bay fosters conservation and restoration and is only presented with sustainable development.

A revitalized Port Gamble Bay can help encourage more eco-tourism including guided kayak and canoe tours or fishing excursions. There are some companies doing this now and they (and others!) could extend their services outside the Bay and into Hood Canal and Admiralty Inlet, creating more jobs and other tourism opportunities. A community-use dock at Port Gamble could be built for kayaks and

canoes as well as short-term use for small-to-mid-sized skiffs and boats. This structure would support tourism and outdoor recreational options.

Research, restoration and educational opportunities also abound: for some time we at the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe have been talking with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, a native shellfish restoration group; the Bainbridge Graduate Institute, Olympic Property Group (the company that owns the town of Port Gamble, and other interested entities about establishing a Shellfish Research and Restoration Facility near Port Gamble. This educational institution would insure additional research and restoration to protect and restore shellfish populations and kelp habitat in the Bay for generations to come.

With all of the challenges that Port Gamble Bay still faces—precarious health, proposed development that could further put the Bay's fitness at risk—it's biggest ally is you. This invaluable resource needs the help of anyone who appreciates her beauty and bounty.

There are several ways you can help: Learn more about the history and ecology of the Bay. Check out the MTCA cleanup efforts and progress at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites/psi/portGamble/psi_portGamble.html Organize a clean-up group to pick up litter from around the Bay. Show your family and friends why the Bay is such a gem to Kitsap County.

We would also encourage you to contact your Kitsap County Commissioner or other local representatives and tell them that only sensible developments that carefully balance economic development with the environment should be considered.

Port Gamble Bay is a precious jewel. Once she's gone, there's little chance of bringing her back. Now is our opportunity; now is our chance. Let's stand together and make a difference—for our families and future generations.