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Written by Jeromy Sullivan, Tribal Chairman, Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe

Our Vision for the Future of Port Gamble Bay

An article recently appeared in a local newspaper about the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe's opposition to a proposed dock at Port Gamble. The story detailed our concerns relating to the project, which will negatively impact efforts to clean up and restore Port Gamble Bay. While we believe the coverage was fair, some of the comments from readers on-line deserve a bit more discussion.

It seems some believe tribes in Kitsap County—be it S'Klallam or Suquamish—block projects arbitrarily; that we don't value development or progress. Let me assure you: this couldn't be further from the truth.

While what's good for Kitsap County is generally good for the people who live here—tribal and non-tribal alike—a common misperception these days is that any proposed development is a positive economic force. Unfortunately, all too many projects only benefit a handful of individuals and result in long term impacts we all end up having to address. In addition, much of this development ends up disproportionately costing us when we consider the value of our fisheries, healthy ecosystems, and eco-tourism opportunities. One of the best local examples is in nearby Port Ludlow where a new marina closed the Bay forever resulting in, among other detriments, millions of dollars lost in state and tribal shellfish harvesting. This is why our Tribe must voice concerns over the Port Gamble dock proposal.

Port Gamble Bay is one of the last bays in the Puget Sound open for shellfish harvesting and home to a variety of marine and plant life. Plus, no one can deny its stunning beauty. The only way to guarantee its survival is to strongly consider the environment when making decisions about any possible development.

Some may have a negative view of “environmentalism”, thinking it a political idea. For the S'Klallams and many others around the County, there's nothing political about wanting to ensure our waterways are safe to swim in, fish from, and enjoy as long as there are people who call this area home.

While we can't support this dock project as proposed, there are ways to combine development with a healthy environment. Using Port Gamble Bay as an example: cleanup and restoration would encourage more abundant numbers of fish and shellfish for everyone to enjoy.

A revitalized Port Gamble Bay can be used to encourage more eco-tourism including guided kayak and tribal canoe tours or fishing excursions. These activities could extend outside the Bay and into Hood Canal and Admiralty Inlet, creating more jobs and opportunities. A community use dock could be built for kayaks and canoes as well as short-term use for small-to-mid-sized skiffs and boats.

Educational opportunities also abound: for some time we have been talking with Olympic Property Group (the company that owns the town of Port Gamble), the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, the Bainbridge Graduate Institute, and other entities about establishing a Shellfish Research and Restoration Facility in Port Gamble. The Bainbridge Graduate Institute has also been considering a campus facility in Port Gamble. This type of eco-friendly and sustainable development would create a wonderful opportunity for local residents while bringing jobs and students to the area.

Our vision for the future of Port Gamble Bay and Kitsap County is to create an example of how development and environmentalism can work in concert.

The decisions our Tribe makes consider all possible scenarios and outcomes. While there is a lot we're willing to negotiate on if it's clear something is beneficial to the community, the one thing we can't compromise on is the environment.

Doing that would be in no one's best interests.