

Our Village column; Kingston Community News, May 2010
Written by Paul McCollum, Director of Natural Resources, PGST

The NaGISA Project: Making Scientific History in Kitsap County

In Japanese, the word 'nagisa' means "the seashore" or "waterside." It also happens to be the name of one of the biggest collaborative research studies in the world.

On June 14 and 15, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe will make history when they become the first participant in the state of Washington with the international NaGISA Project—a global field study that aims to take an annual census of nearshore marine biodiversity. NaGisa projects and global efforts are closely partnered with the Census for Marine Life (CoML - <http://www.coml.org>) program. Our main collection location will be Talla Point with a secondary site just north of Point Julia very close the Tribe's reservation.

The NaGISA Project, which was started in 2002, focuses on bringing together data from global affiliations of scientific teams for the purpose of studying and cataloging marine life. Why is this data important? Marine biodiversity can be used as a measure of ecosystem health and of biological interactions. Inventorying and monitoring biodiversity are crucial tasks for identifying and clarifying activities that impact ecosystems.

The great strength of NaGISA is the meeting of CoML goals of global biodiversity coverage by locally vested interests around the world, while creating a standardized data matrix suitable for testing a wide range of ecological theories and solving practical problems.

Even though there are collection points and centers all over the planet, Washington State has not yet been represented until this year. I suggested the S'Klallam Tribe became involved with the project. I worked with the NaGisa program with University of Alaska scientists and Alaskan Tribes while living in Alaska.

This study provides scientists and researchers the world over with a biological baseline; a clear picture of what's happening at test sites at that place and time. This is also why we're so honored to be a part of NaGISA: our findings may be just one cog in a gigantic international machine, but all of the pieces together will paint a picture of our environment at present and help us make better plans for the future. The Tribe is hoping to work with other project partners in the near future to scale up this effort to many more sites in Puget Sound in the coming years.

The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe also conducts nearshore marine research and monitoring for early marine juvenile salmon, forage fish, zooplankton and marine water quality including ocean acidification/climate change and collaborates with NOAA and the Skagit River Cooperative on similar and connected Puget Sound efforts. The Tribe is also a partner of NANOOS, the Pacific Northwest regional ocean

observing system of IOOS (Integrated Ocean Observing System) and works closely with the Hood Canal Oxygen Program on marine water quality sampling with UW and other partners and is helping to initiate a new series of chronic impact studies of eutrophication and associated low oxygen effects on various fish and shellfish species in Hood Canal.

While many environmental studies are closed to the public, NaGISA is different: they encourage community involvement with the sponsoring organization. For example, students from the Northwest Indian College will take an active part in the process. We will also be incorporating information about the project and its findings into our educational outreach programs.

We are excited to be a part of NaGISA. We all have a stake in what they find and how that information is used to protect and revitalize our waterways. To find out more about the NaGISA Project, go to <http://www.nagisa.coml.org/>.