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Connecting Culture and Nature for Future Generations: A Tribal Partnerships Gathering

Co-hosted by [Nooksack Indian Tribe](#), [Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education \(WCEE\)](#), and [North Sound Accountable Community of Health \(ACH\)](#)

With funding provided by [Whatcom Community Foundation's Project Neighborly Grant](#)

Friday, September 5 | Mi'sq'eq'o Nooksack Community Building

On September 5th, more than fifty people—Tribal Members, youth, families, and community partners—gathered on Nooksack Land at the Mi'sq'eq'o Nooksack Community Building to celebrate connection, land, and a shared purpose of supporting future generations. The Tribal Partnerships Gathering was a joyful and heartfelt space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners came together to deepen relationships and reimagine how outdoor learning can center Indigenous Knowledge, culture, and belonging.

The afternoon opened with a welcome and prayer by Zachary Williams (Nooksack Indian Tribe) and opening comments by [North Sound ACH's](#) Tribal and Community Liaison, Michaela Vendiola (Lummi Nation) and Zachary Williams (Nooksack Indian Tribe), followed by songs from the Sulkanum Singers. Over a shared meal, participants connected through conversation and cross-cultural learning. [WWU's Center for Community Learning](#) and [Whiteswan Environmental](#) hosted a creative station where attendees painted multilingual [Talk Tiles](#) in Xwlemi Chosen (Lummi), Halq'eméylem (Nooksack), and English—reflecting on eight dimensions of experience: Importance, Support, Identity, Changes, Actions, Feelings, Possibilities, and Place.

A highlight of the day was the Three Sisters Stew cooking demonstration co-taught by [Common Threads Farm's](#) Emily Hie and Zachary Williams (Nooksack Indian Tribe). Together, they blended food education and storytelling—sharing how the traditional crops of corn, beans, and squash embody the Indigenous “Three Sisters” planting method and symbolize interdependence between people and the land. The aromatic stew simmered as Emily discussed sustainable garden practices and Zachary shared cultural teachings about balance, reciprocity, and community nourishment. Common Threads Farm's, [Basil the Food Truck](#), shared samples to attendees of the Three Sisters stew and a refreshing blackberry mint lemonade.

Throughout the day, [Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education \(WCEE\)](#) community partners and Indigenous leaders invited movement, storytelling, and reflection. [Wild Whatcom's](#) Sammy Jolly and Chris Pañuelas facilitated an interactive outdoor learning lesson mindfully connecting attendees to the land. And an Indigenous-led panel, “*Telling the Story of the Land*,” was facilitated by Zachary Williams and featured Free and Raven Borsey (Lummi Nation), Sadie

Olsen (Lummi Nation), and Russell Roberts Jr. (Nooksack Indian Tribe), who spoke about how stewardship, tradition, and cultural values guide their visions for protecting the land and waters.

Generous donations from WCEE community partners made it possible to offer raffle prizes throughout the day—adding moments of fun and gratitude that celebrated the shared spirit of giving and reciprocity that anchored the event.

The gathering closed with reflection, song, and thanks—an expression of ongoing partnership and shared commitment to co-creating inclusive, place-based education that uplifts Indigenous voices and honors the lands we all depend on.

This gathering reflects the growing relationships between WCEE community partners and our sovereign nations—Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe—to build lasting, reciprocal connections that shape the future of outdoor learning across Whatcom County.

Our hands go up to the Nooksack Indian Tribe for the generous use of the Mi'sq'eq'o Nooksack Community Building, to Ben Greené, Zachary Williams, and Michaela Vendiola for facilitating, and to Whatcom Community Foundation for their financial support through the Project Neighborly Grant.

With gratitude,

Kirsten Anderson
Program Lead, [Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education](#)

Photos can be seen [online here!](#)

Connections Program Partners:

- [Camp Saturna](#)
- [Common Threads Farm](#)
- [Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association](#)
- [North Cascades Institute](#)
- [Wild Whatcom](#)
- [Nooksack Indian Tribe Department of Education](#)
- [Mount Baker School District](#)
- [Blaine School District](#)

Snow to Sea Program Partners:

- [Vamos Outdoors Project](#)
- [Mount Baker Ski Area](#)
- [Camp Saturna](#)
- [Whatcom Conservation District](#)
- [Garden of the Salish Sea Curriculum](#) (affiliate of [Pacific Shellfish Institute](#))
- [Community Boating Center](#)
- [Nooksack Valley School District](#)

Seed to Stem Program Partners:

- [Vamos Outdoors Project](#)
- [Nooksack Valley School District](#)
- [Nooksack Indian Tribe Department of Education](#)
- [Wild Whatcom SEED Program](#)