



Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest

# Forest FEATURES



## Native Youth Connect to Traditional Tribal Foods



*Samantha James comes across stinging nettle plant while using loppers to clear brush away from Boyd Creek Interpretive Trail.*



*Samantha James, Ferndale High student and Lummi member.*

Eating skunk cabbage leaf salmon or stinging nettle soup doesn't sound like an entrée at a local restaurant, but Pacific Northwest Native Americans have eaten these foods for centuries.

"I liked the stinging nettle soup but the aftertaste numbed my tongue," said Samantha James, Ferndale High student and Lummi member. "It felt like my tongue was asleep. I tried to talk but no one understood me," she said. Samantha learned about nettles and other traditional native foods at the Northwest Indian College in Bellingham, Wash. She enjoyed the salmon wrapped in skunk cabbage, it was juicy and

tender, but the leaf stunk.

Samantha's interest in native foods and heritage led her to participate in the college's Saturday Science Academy. High school students meet with college students every second Saturday of the month to learn about a science, from physics to astronomy. This month the academy took a trip to Boyd Creek Interpretive Trail on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest to help open the ADA accessible trail.

Here Samantha and the students did trail maintenance: hacking away encroaching shrubs, brushing off winter debris from



*Samantha James spots a salmonberry bush, not ripe enough to eat, along the trail.*



*Eric Lewis, Diné Tribal member and a freshman at NWIC, rakes up brush to open up the Boyd Creek Interpretive Trail.*

the boardwalk and cleaning moss-covered signs; but what they took away was more than sore muscles and blisters. They learned about a healthy forest ecosystem and made another connection to their tribal heritage and the land.

Boyd Creek is a salmon-spawning creek that feeds into the North Fork Nooksack River. The Lummi Reservation sits at the mouth of the Nooksack River. “Many of the kids have never been out to the headwaters of the Nooksack,” said Lindsay Taylor, volunteer coordinator with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association. “Most of them don’t realize how far the salmon travel to spawn. From ocean to Boyd Creek is over 60-river miles,” she said.

Taylor explained to the students that spring-Chinook salmon are now waiting in the river before traveling to their spawning grounds. “They come into the river around March or April and settle in deep, cool, calm pockets of water until the fall,” she said. “Spring Chinook spawn higher up the river than fall runs,” she said.

Salmon need clean, cool water to survive. Planting native shrubs and trees along the waterways help shade the water, keeping soil and runoff from entering the system. “Salmon cannot breathe in cloudy murky water. It would be like us trying to breath in a smoke filled room,” said Taylor.

Salmon lay eggs in a nest in gravel called a ‘red.’ The gravel provides safety for the eggs and allows water to flow through, giving oxygen to the nest. After a month or so the eggs hatch, in two months they are ‘fry’ and are eating macro invertebrates and insects. A female can lay 3,000 eggs in a red. “The ocean provides more food for salmon and plenty of room to grow,” said Taylor.

Salmon are a keystone species in northwest forest ecosystems and provide a food source for bears, eagles and other plants and



*Wayne Fornsbys, 16, a student at La Connor High School and a Swinomish Tribal member, scrubs away the winter mild dew from the interpretive signs around Boyd Creek.*

animals. Gravity pulls everything downstream towards the ocean. Salmon swim upstream and bring with them marine nutrients. “Trees use the decaying salmon carcass for fertilizer. Nitrogen and phosphorus are two basic building blocks for the development of life,” said Taylor. “Trees along a salmon-bearing stream grow three times faster and have traces of Omega 3 amino acids in their system,” she said.

Salmon are not only a food source but a way of life for tribal fisherman. First Salmon ceremonies celebrate the return of the salmon, signifying the tribe will eat for the next year Taylor told the youth.

“Most salmon spawn within 100 yards from where they are born,” said Taylor. “Here at Boyd Creek you will be able to watch. We need to take care of their habitat from forest to the ocean,” she said.

**Learn more:**

Northwest Indian College - <http://www.nwic.edu/>

Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association - <http://www.n-sea.org/>

Lummi Nation - <http://www.lummi-nsn.org/>

Nooksack Indian Tribe - <http://www.nooksack-tribe.org/>

Swinomish Indian Tribal Community - <http://www.swinomish-nsn.gov/>

Recipes for stinging nettle soup - <http://allrecipes.com/Recipe/stinging-nettle-soup/detail.aspx>

Skunk cabbage salmon - <http://www.recipebinder.co.uk/recipe.aspx?rid=20351>

*Story and photos by Kelly Sprute  
June 2011*