

# Epistemological Differences Between Western Societies and Indigenous Peoples of the Chehalis Basin

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## Abstract

- The goal of this project is to make information about the relationship between local Native American tribes and the Chehalis Watershed available to the community of Grays Harbor.
- Information was gathered in a literature review and through personal communication with tribal members.
- The information gathered will be used to write the text for informational signs to be placed around the Grays Harbor College campus.

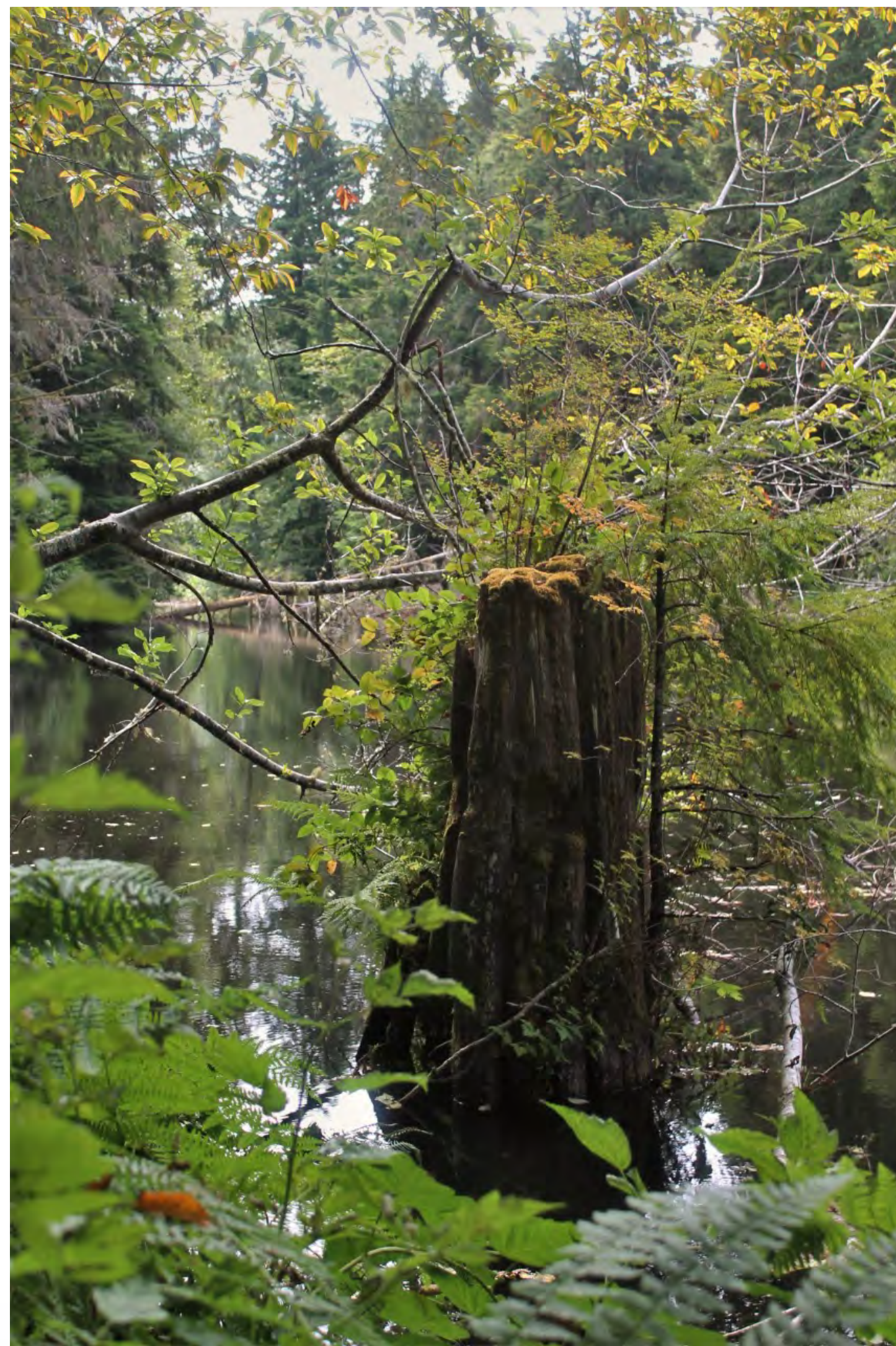


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## Introduction

The purpose of this project is to gather information about the cultural and scientific relationships between the Chehalis River Watershed and the Coast Salish tribes of Western Washington and make that information accessible to the general public of Grays Harbor. These tribes include the Chehalis, the Quinault, the Chinook, and the Cowlitz, among others. The information gathered will be displayed on interpretive storyboard signs around the Grays Harbor College campus.

Interpretive signage will be an effective way to display the information because it will “help to promote inquiry and to stimulate constructive discussions” and create “a larger and more communal information display area” than other methods of distributing information, such as pamphlets or other non-permanent methods of (Wandersee 2007). Part of the information gathered and displayed will come from interviews with members of the local tribes who have first-hand knowledge of the role of the Chehalis River in the life of the tribes.

This project is intended to help spread awareness about the historical and continued impact of the Chehalis River on the wellbeing of the groups of people who rely on the river and the resources it accommodates (Amberson 2016). Displaying this information will help to preserve a part of the history of the local indigenous peoples and to emphasize the importance of maintaining the health of the Chehalis Watershed.

## Methods

- A literature review was conducted.
- Community members who could potentially contribute information were contacted.
- Interviews were conducted with Justine James and Bethany Barnard.
- The information gathered from the literature review and the interview was summarized.
- Other successful information signage projects, such as those at the Crosby Arboretum at Mississippi State University, along the Lake Swano trail at Grays Harbor College, and along the trail at the Cape Meares Lighthouse near Tillamook, Oregon, were studied.
- The gathered information was converted into a similar format to that of the successful signage projects, and supporting quotes and poems were added to supplement the information.

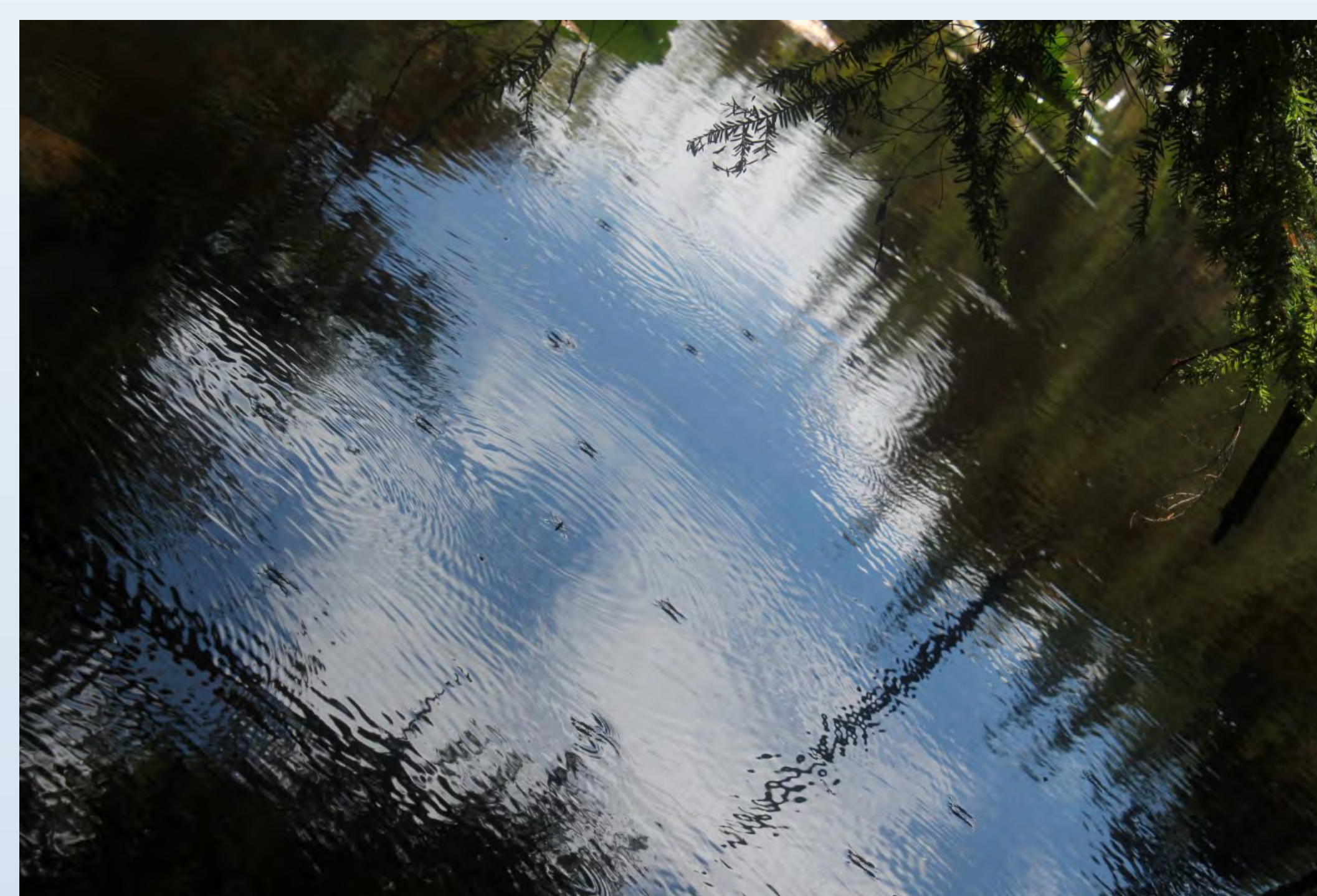


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## Discussion

Because the aim of this project is to educate the community of Grays Harbor about the relationship between local Native American tribes and the Chehalis River, members of the Quinault, Chehalis, Chinook, and Cowlitz tribes who could potentially contribute information on that topic were contacted. There was not a very large response to the inquiries, so the first-hand information that was able to be included is fairly limited. A literature review was also conducted to gather what information had already been published about the role of the Chehalis River in the lives of the local Native American tribes.

The information gathered from the interviews and literature review was used to create outlines for six informational signs. The theme of the six signs is the Nature/Culture Divide, or the ways in which the epistemologies of Western societies differ from those of indigenous societies. Each sign has a different focus – an explanation of the epistemological differences, the cultivation of marine resources, the way in which the way the indigenous epistemology's perspective on water differs from that of the Western epistemology, the use of and respect for plants in each society, and a discussion of the significance of the Nature/Culture Divide in and around the Chehalis Watershed.

Excerpts from novels and poems written by Native American writers were selected to go on the signs along with the information. The excerpts support the topics and show the relevance of discussing the Nature/Culture Divide and the epistemological differences.

Informational signage will be an effective way to make the gathered information available to the community because it will create what Wandersee calls a “communal information display area” (2007). This means that the information will be consistently available in a set location, making it possible for many people to see and interact with it.

When the informational signs are made to be placed around the Grays Harbor College campus, they will include original artwork that supplements the information and adds to the impact of the signs by drawing the attention of viewers and thus helping to stimulate interest and encourage contemplation and discussion of the topics and the relationship of the topics to the Chehalis River and the local environment.

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