

SSEC 2011 Abstract

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Title: Has the Salish Sea Disappeared?

Shorter Abstract: The ocean is the lion's share of our biosphere and the Salish Sea is an integral part of the Pacific Northwest. But you wouldn't know it from the media. A brief survey of popular mass media, even "nature" oriented TV shows and periodicals, shows quite clearly that Northwest waters are conspicuous in their absence from the media. Even when our waters are featured, we're seldom given a peek into the biggest portion of the marine ecosystem: beneath the surface of the water.

Who cares what's in the media?

Our ability to understand our local and global ecosystems relies on indirect observations, whether from ROVs, satellites, microscopes, or social networks. These observations and attendant analyses can no longer be delivered to the public simply through the cultural, community channels used in past millennia. We are increasingly dependent on an ever-shifting network of corporate and independent media.

So when the Salish Sea is missing from the media, it is missing from our lives.

Still Hope Productions has been increasing the presence of the Salish Sea in the media 3 different fronts. First, short documentary videos are produced that provide virtual underwater tours, explain parts of the underwater ecosystem, and show marine science in action in a way that the public can understand. Second, Still Hope Productions produces a TV series about what's in Northwest waters. The show "SEA-Inside: Pacific Northwest" is seen on more than 60 community stations around the U.S. (and one in Canada, one in Paris). The several short videos in each half-hour episode illustrate diverse points of view from science to art, and they come from a variety of sources, e.g. educators, artists, PBS, NOAA, NGOs, and recreational divers.

Of course, none of these approaches is very effective if they don't connect with the public in significant numbers. So the third approach was to create a nonprofit organization, SEA-Media, focused entirely on creating a larger presence in the media for our local waters and to build connections between the media and the public. The first project of SEA-Media has undertaken is creating a web portal to existing and emerging media about Northwest waters, a portal with the public as its target audience.

BIO

John F. Williams has been producing short video documentaries about what's below the surface of the Salish Sea since the turn of the century. In the two decades before that, he sailed most of the world's oceans on research ships mapping the seafloor.

Longer Abstract: It's pretty clear that the ocean is the lion's share of our biosphere and that the Salish Sea is an integral part of the Pacific Northwest. But you wouldn't know it from the media. A brief survey of popular mass media, even "nature" oriented TV shows and periodicals, shows quite clearly that Northwest waters are conspicuous in their absence from the media. Even when our waters are featured, we're seldom given a look into the major portion of the marine ecosystem: beneath the surface of the water. What's more, the bulk of ocean related mass media is typically more sensational than accurate. We don't see much except what ends up in the supermarket, or what didn't make it to the supermarket because of some calamity or another, or we might occasionally see some charismatic megafauna.

Who cares what's in the media?

Our understanding of the world has been evolving from provincialism to more of an ecosystem perspective in which our immediate part of the world is inexorably tied to distant and often invisible forces, substances, creatures, and relationships. Because our ability to directly sense a larger world view has not kept pace, we are reliant on remote observations, whether from ROVs, satellites, or social networks to form an inclusive mental image of the world. These remote observations and rapidly expanding analyses of them are delivered to the public not through cultural, community channels used in past millennia, but through an ever-shifting network of corporate and independent media.

So when the Salish Sea is missing from the media, it is missing from our lives.

It's not that there isn't any great Salish Sea related media out there, there are exceptional examples of informative and inspiring media. But what little there is, on the average, competes poorly for audience attention with media about more familiar and more immediate subjects.

Still Hope Productions has been increasing the presence of the Salish Sea in the media 3 different fronts. First, short documentary videos are produced that provide virtual underwater tours, explain parts of the underwater ecosystem, and show some of the marine science in action in a way that the public can understand it. Second, Still Hope Productions produces a TV series about what's in Northwest waters that is seen on more than 60 community stations around the country. Each half-hour episode consists of several short videos from a variety of sources and from diverse points of view, from science to art. Examples of some of the sources besides Still Hope Productions include educators, artists, PBS, NOAA, various NGOs (e.g. Northwest Straits Initiative, Seattle Aquarium, Our Oregon Oceans), and recreational divers.

Of course, none of these approaches is very effective if they don't connect with the public in significant numbers. So the third approach was to create a nonprofit organization, SEA-Media, focused entirely on creating a larger presence in the media for our local waters and to build connections between the media and the public. The

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