



# Salmon Habitat Restoration, Farmland Preservation and Environmental Drama in the Skagit River Valley

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Floodplain State of the Science Panel

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# Major Research Question

- Why is there a conflict in the Skagit Valley?
- Compared communities:
  - Tribal
  - Farming
  - Restoration
- Asked:
  - Whose story is being told? (history)
  - What's at stake? (senses of place)
  - Why is there disagreement? (ways of knowing nature)
  - Why is there mistrust? (prejudice and power)



# Methods

- Political Ecology
- 2 years cumulative field work, 2001-2006
- 150+ interviews
- 50+ meetings and events
- Ethnographic research & analysis
- Historical, legal, fisheries analyses



# Why do farmers resist salmon habitat restoration on farmland?

- Interviewed 36 in farming community:
  - 16 crop farmers
  - 6 dairy and livestock farmers
  - 13 farming & farmland advocates
- Farmers did not believe habitat is limiting salmon recovery

# How do different groups explain the causes of salmon decline?

<b>Causes of salmon decline expressed in interviews</b>	<b>Tribal N=8</b>	<b>Restor N=5</b>	<b>Farm N=16</b>
<b>Habitat loss</b>	5	5	1
<b>Fishing</b>	6	4	10
Tribal	4	3	6
Commercial (non-tribal)	5	2	4
Sport	3	1	1
<b>Other factors</b>			
Development	2	2	6
Farming (in general)	4	2	1
Climate change/warming	3	3	1
Logging	3	3	-
Etc. ...			
<b>Historical explanation</b>	2	2	7
<b>Spatial explanation</b>	3	3	0



# A History of Blaming Tribal Fishing

- 1890s – Public rhetoric blaming “Indian fishing” for affecting salmon runs
- 1897 – Tribal fishing methods first banned by WA State in name of conservation
- 1930s-1960s – Tribal members fishing for subsistence harassed and arrested
- 2001 –

*Nobody believes it's the netting that's the problem. They'll say you're racist or that it's in the treaties. - Skagit landowner*



# Historical vs. Spatial Analyses

*When I was a kid... there were 150 gill netters that lived in that bay. They went out, all summer long, seven days a week, every night, and if you could've walked on the floats you could've walked to Victoria. I mean there were nets everywhere. They caught everything that moved. And when they weren't gill-netting at night the purse-seiners were purse-seining during the day. And these guys wonder why there's no fish left? "Oh, it's they farmers. They took the habitat and if they don't suffer we're not even." – Skagit farmer*



# Distrust of Urban Outsiders

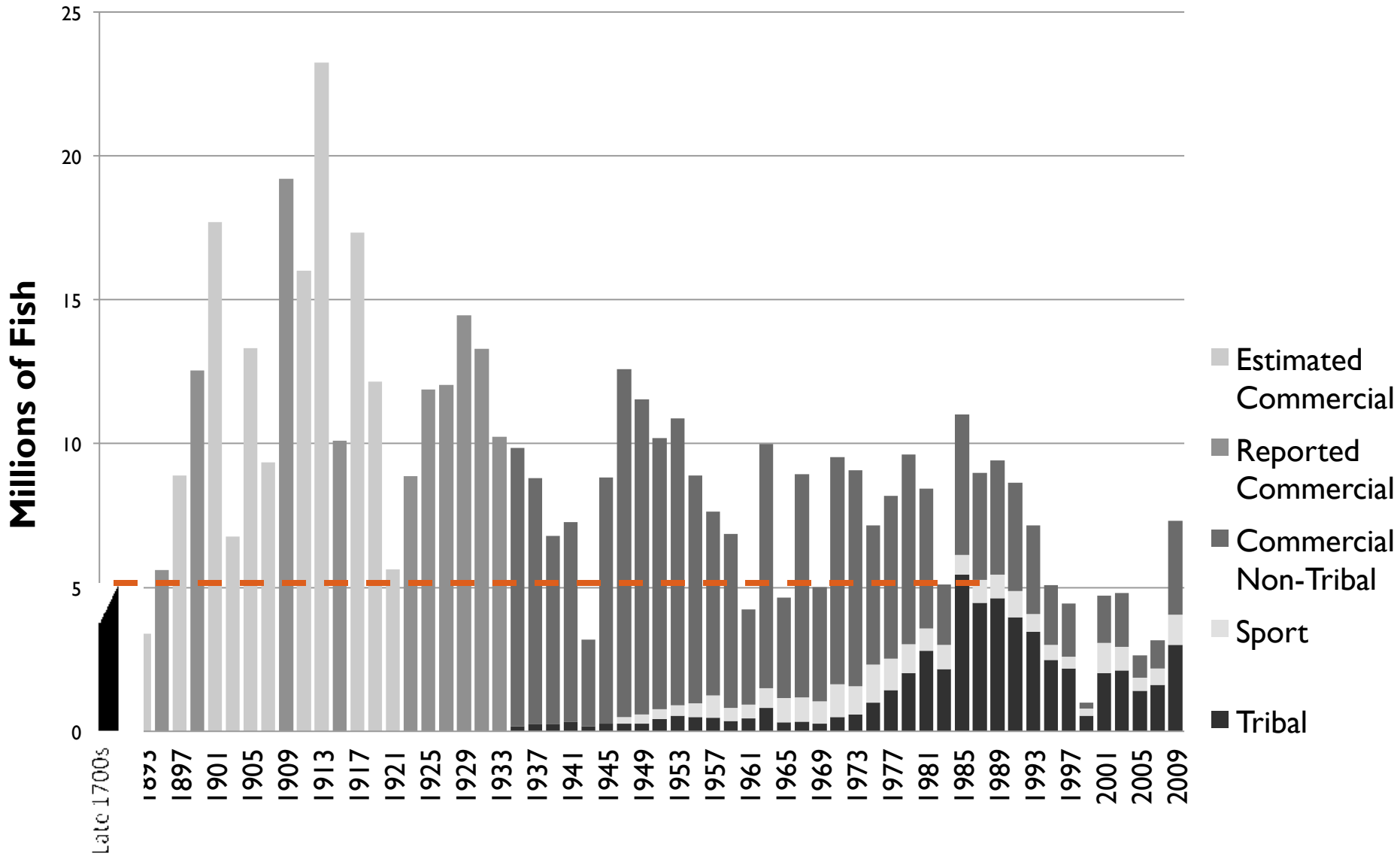
*I think many are nice people, well-intentioned. But, after seeing how they think, how they didn't have any practical land management experience and were mainly a bunch of armchair "experts" ... I could envision them, newcomers, driving their gas-guzzling cars, wearing leather shoes, having come from a restaurant serving farm food, and yet claiming to be purists – and then telling farmers what they were going to do with their farmland regarding buffers and habitat restoration.” – Skagit landowner*



# Farmland Loss & Stewardship

*I guess for me [farming is] in a way an opportunity for prayer, because you're out amongst it. It isn't formal, it's probably not necessarily always on your knees, it's – ... It's very hard to articulate it, but I think it makes you feel closer. I don't know how I would feel close to God sitting in a high rise in front of a computer screen. I just can't see that connection. I feel responsibility, too, to take care of the earth, because it is symbolically special, and you have been given an ancient role, as a farmer, to take care of it. – Skagit farmer*

# Salmon Harvest by User Group, Washington State, 1889-2009





# Conclusions

- Roots of Skagit conflict are in colonial era
- Farmers' perspectives reflect previous governmental policies
- Conflict a result of changing relationships of power
- Conflict is predictable in the Skagit
- Conflict is not necessarily bad



# Thoughts for Working with Farmers

- You eat food; show your appreciation
- Consider farmers experts on the local landscape – they work with it on a daily basis
- Remember that farmers want to be able to *work* the land
- *Work with* not *against* their passion, knowledge, skills and labor



# Thoughts for Floodplain Recovery

- Identify the stakes of local communities and include them in your goals (e.g. protect farming)
- Frame the problem so you are addressing a common threat (e.g. development)
- Pursue compatible solutions to broader goals (e.g. local food movement)
- Give up on “natural”; embrace nature-culture hybrids
- Identify the “stories” that are at work, including your own
- Recognize and address how social justice, equity, prejudice, and other humanistic problems are central concerns of ecosystem recovery



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