

Treaty Reflections from the Snohomish Homelands

An open letter to the NCI community from Carly Mathews, Vice-Chairperson,
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As we move through Treaty season, marking the 171st anniversary of the Treaty of Point Elliott, signed January 22, 1855, remembering the Treaty of Point No Point, signed January 26, 1855, and reflecting just beyond the anniversary of the Medicine Creek Treaty, signed December 26, 1854, we find ourselves thinking less about dates and more about the people who stood inside those moments on these shores, beside these rivers, under these same skies.

These treaties are not relics of the past. They remain legally binding commitments today.

We think about how those treaties were made.

Not in comfort.
Not with full information.
Not with shared language or equal power.

They were signed under duress.
They were signed amid pressure and threat.
And in some cases, they were not signed at all.

Our ancestors did not come to those gatherings thinking about modern governments, corporations, or future recognition systems. They were thinking about survival. About salmon and rivers. About villages and burial grounds. About how to preserve lifeways, land, language, and kinship for children not yet born.

Some signed because they believed it was the only way to protect their people.
Some refused because they believed the cost was too great.
Some fought in the treaty wars that followed, believing resistance itself was an act of care.

None of them did this for only some of their children.
None of them did this so that only some of their grandchildren would be remembered.
None of them made these decisions so that entire bands, families, or peoples, including those who descend from multiple treaty signers and multiple nations, would later be forgotten.

What followed was not accidental. It was intentional.

It was enforced through removals, boarding schools, confinement, and laws that criminalized Indigenous languages, ceremonies, and ways of life, and later through federal policies such as the General Allotment Act, Indian Reorganization Act, enrollment systems, and recognition frameworks that deliberately redefined identity, fractured families, and excluded entire peoples from the protections treaties were meant to secure.

Many treaty-descended Snohomish families, along with many of our Duwamish, Steilacoom, Chinook, Chemakum, and other relatives, remain outside federal recognition today, not because we ceased to exist, but because federal systems were designed to narrow who would be seen.

That is not what our ancestors agreed to.
That is not what they fought for.
That is not what they prayed into the future.

When we speak of treaties, we speak with our ancestors beside us. Their footsteps are still on these beaches. Their prayers are still in this wind. They remind us that responsibility does not end. **It is handed down.**

This reflection is both a call out and a call in.

It is a call out to systems and narratives that continue to benefit from selective memory, selective recognition, and selective responsibility.

And it is a call in to relatives, neighboring tribes, and communities to remember that treaties were made by human beings under impossible conditions, acting with care for the future as best they could.

Honoring the treaties means more than marking anniversaries.
It means telling the truth about how they were made.
It means recognizing all the descendants they were meant to protect.
It means refusing stories that narrow Indigenous existence to what fits on paper.

Treaty rights are not special privileges. They are reserved rights, retained when vast homelands were taken.

This is not about undoing treaties.
It is about completing them.
About remembering that treaties were promises rooted in relationship, not mechanisms of erasure.

To Our Allies and Those Learning with Us

To our allies, we say this gently: When you walk these lands, you walk inside our ancestors' promises. Treaty responsibility is not a moment. It is a relationship; one that grows like cedar, slowly, through seasons of listening.

We acknowledge that we have been quieter since our November 12th panel. As winter comes, and continues, so has the need for internal work. This quiet is not absence. It is tending. It is strengthening roots beneath the surface.

We ask you to continue learning with us and growing with us, not as observers of history, but as people who now live inside its consequences. Treaty responsibility is relational. It deepens over time through listening, humility, and care.

We have not left.
We have not gone away.
We are still here. Still thinking, still listening, still carrying what needs to be carried forward.

We thank those who have continued to hold space and who understand that growth, like the seasons, includes rest.

We offer this with love and with strength.

Because our ancestors carried responsibility for us under impossible conditions, we too must carry it forward with honesty, care, and courage.

Stay Connected

If you would like to stay in touch and receive updates as we begin to share more of our history, our vision, and ways to learn, support, and walk alongside this work, we invite you to sign up: [Stay connected with Snohomish Allies](#)

Thank you for continuing to hold space, to learn with us, and to grow alongside us.

Read the Treaties

[Treaty of Point Elliott \(1855\)](#)

[Treaty of Point No Point \(1855\)](#)

[Medicine Creek Treaty \(1854\)](#)