

New Names for some Pacific Northwest Locales by Linda Schroeder



"The Salish Sea Map, Stefan Freelan, WWU, 2009"

We have two new names to learn here in the Pacific Northwest – the Salish Sea and Haida Gwaii. As with many changes of this nature, there are still some political and cultural debates going on over the need for the changes and the actual names chosen. We'll not address those issues here. What is important here is how those changes will affect us.

The name Salish Sea has actually been around since the 1980's. The first proposal to legally adopt the name occurred in 1990 but was unsuccessful. Since that time, the term has been increasing in usage, especially by the environmental community, resource management professionals and the ecotourism trade. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names officially adopted the new name as of November 2009.

The Salish Sea refers to the inland waters of Washington and British Columbia. It covers 5,500 square miles and includes the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Strait of Georgia, Puget Sound and all the adjoining waters of these areas. It reaches from Desolation Sound in British Columbia to the southernmost reaches of Puget Sound in Washington. To the west it begins where the Strait of Juan de Fuca meets the Pacific Ocean. All of the existing names remain in place.

The new name is helpful to us in identifying our region in two ways. Wildlife certainly doesn't acknowledge political borders. Much of the native marine life in these areas occurs all throughout the interior waters of Washington and British Columbia. Also, the inland waters exhibit a different diversity of marine life than the open coastal waters facing the Pacific Ocean. The new name helps simplify our references to the area, allowing us to group multiple geographic locations while at the same time differentiating them from the

Pacific Ocean locations. It gives us a simple way to refer to this unified ecosystem.

Salish refers to the common language group of most of the indigenous peoples who live in the area and historically traveled these waters. The second name change also refers to native culture. Haida Gwaii means "islands of the people" in the Haida language. This is the new name of the Queen Charlotte Islands, which are located off the northwest coast of British Columbia. This change was implemented in December of 2009.

The first question we always ask ourselves is "do we need to make all new labels for our shells?" Salish Sea is the addition of a name to our region and will have no impact on our labeling. Haida Gwaii is a complete change of name. Future generations may become unaware of the moniker "Queen Charlotte Islands" except as a trivia question on *Jeopardy*. For many of us "Haida Gwaii" will take some getting use to. I, myself, find the new designation of Salish Sea to be a useful addition and hope it adds to the ecological awareness of the inland waters in our own backyard.



www.canadiangeographic.ca/magazine/MA07/indepth/images/haidaMap