art by Peggy Janicki, Indigneous Mentor Teacher Feb 2025

sw̓íːwe

eulachon

https://stoloshxweli.org/units/word/1992/

Links goes to Halq'eméylem
language website: Stó:lō Shxwelí

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Swi:we Sxwōxwiyám

A Sxwōxwiyám documented by anthropologist Wayne Suttles describes the origins of eulachon from the Katzie people and specifically to the family of James Adams, who was interviewed in 2015.

The narrative depicts Sky-Born Swaneset's wife coming from the world above, and bringing with her a dowry for their marriage. The dowry was a box which contained food which she opened over a period of two days and released into the river: "At day break she opened the other half of the box and emptied its contents into the river. Forthwith immense shoals of eulachon crowded the water from bank to bank. She waited until the sun rose, and then ordered the people to rake the fish into their canoes. "For one month only each year will these fish appear," she said. "Gather them diligently. None of them must die and rot. I will show you how to hang them up to dry, suspended from light racks of split cedar."

The people obeyed her commands and caught and dried an immense quantity. Quickly the news of what was happening spread down the river, and other Indians gathered at Katzie to reap the new harvest of fish. Swaneset then travelled around the country inviting the more distant people to come and share their good fortune. Some did come, but many were senseless and would not believe him. Time went on, and there came a day when Swaneset said to his wife: "To-morrow I shall leave you. Do watch over my people even as I have watched over them." In the morning he mustered all his men and loaded a large canoe with dried eulachon, and paddled away to the southward, where he knew that that other people had been created by Him Who Dwells Above." (Suttles, 1955)

This story has variations that stem from different families and Indigenous communities. Some families are from the Sky-born Nation who speak of this story from their perspective; whereas, some families were witness to the marriage that brought Swi:we to the Lower Fraser River but in both cases the story is alive in the Indigenous communities of the lower Fraser River.

(emphasis added, pp. 9-10, Hemmera, 2015)

Reference

Hemmera. (2015). HSP eulachon report: 2014-2015. Prepared for Fisheries and Oceans Canada. https://www.projects.eao.gov.bc.ca/api/public/document/5e6907649b692d00217076f0/download/HSP%20eulachon%20report_2014%2015.pdf
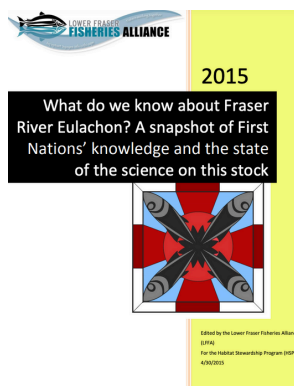
Image 1
screenshot of report cover, (Hemmera, 2015).

Resources

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tags: ooligan, oolichan, eulachan, saviour fish, grease trail, food sovereignty,