

New Soundkeeper: Clean Sound A "Basic Right"

Puget Soundkeeper Alliance welcomes BJ Cummings as Puget Sound's new "keeper" – the Alliance's advocate for the 2200 mile² Puget Sound estuary. The Puget Soundkeeper is one of 13 estuary-keepers nationwide, representing Puget Sound in a growing alliance that includes the Hudson Riverkeeper, San Francisco Baykeeper, and – most recently – San Diego Baykeeper, established by former Soundkeeper Ken Moser.

Cummings comes to the job of Puget Soundkeeper after ten years of environmental research and advocacy, including championing a cause dear to Northwest conservationists – opposition to large-scale hydroelectric dams. The twist is that Cummings' early work on the issue was on the Amazon instead of the Columbia. "The parallels in terms of impacts to habitat, wildlife, local communities, and the tribes' livelihood are astonishing. Still, there is nothing to compare to Puget Sound salmon and their utter dependency on healthy, free-flowing rivers."

Cummings' work on the Amazon was published as a book in 1990. *Dam the Rivers, Damn the People* outlines her essential view of conservation: destruction of our rivers and marine waters will ultimately destroy our economy, our cultural resources, and our basic health. "En-

vironmental conservation is not an ethereal concern – it is our quality of life, a basic right. This is as true for Puget Sounders as it is for Amazonians."

Cummings brings her international experience "home" to Puget Sound, where her family first settled in 1855. Annual visits to her grandparents first brought her to Puget Sound from her New York home, where her mother moved in 1964.

Cummings recalls summers on Hood Canal gathering plump, rich oysters from the beach in front of her grandparents' home, waiting for the clouds to break for a glimpse of the Olympic mountains, and swimming in the green phosphorescent night water of the canal.

"Those summers are what made Puget Sound special to me. The moment I had the chance to bring my work here, I jumped at it. I want to share my love for Puget Sound with everyone who wants to work to really keep it clean. We are going to need a lot more than 'feel-good' token efforts. We need a concerted, devoted commitment to protect Puget Sound from irresponsible pollution and habitat loss."

Cummings began her environmental work in Massachusetts, where she campaigned for the Clean Water Action Project and be-

home, Cummings directed environmental and conflict resolution programs on the east and west coasts, and lectured on environmental issues in the U.S. and Canada.

Since returning to Puget Sound

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just over a year ago, Cummings has edited the Olympia-based *Green Pages*, developed a watershed education plan and coordinated habitat restoration programs for Snohomish County, and trained the Alliance's Citizen Soundkeepers and kayak patrollers to act as marine stewards, educators and watchdogs for the Alliance and other local environmental groups. At the same time, she completed a Master's degree in Geography from UCLA and prepared an article about her work in Brazil for a Dutch publishing house. "I am looking forward to channeling all of the energy I have been spreading around this past year into a single mission: to patrol Puget Sound and ensure its protection against all assaults."

The task is formidable, but with the help of a region-wide network of "citizen soundkeepers", she intends to create an alliance of stewards who can spot pollution, stop it, and work to repair the damage.

"We all have an essential role to play in ensuring our right to clean water. Our laws protect this right. In the next several years we will be exercising these rights, until it is clear to all who use the Sound that she will be protected by those who live here."



gan to lead local rainforest education campaigns. Her work took her to the forests and rivers of Panama, Belize, Kenya, and the Amazon. Closer to