

# National Indian Health Board



## Tribal Climate Champions: Spotlight on Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

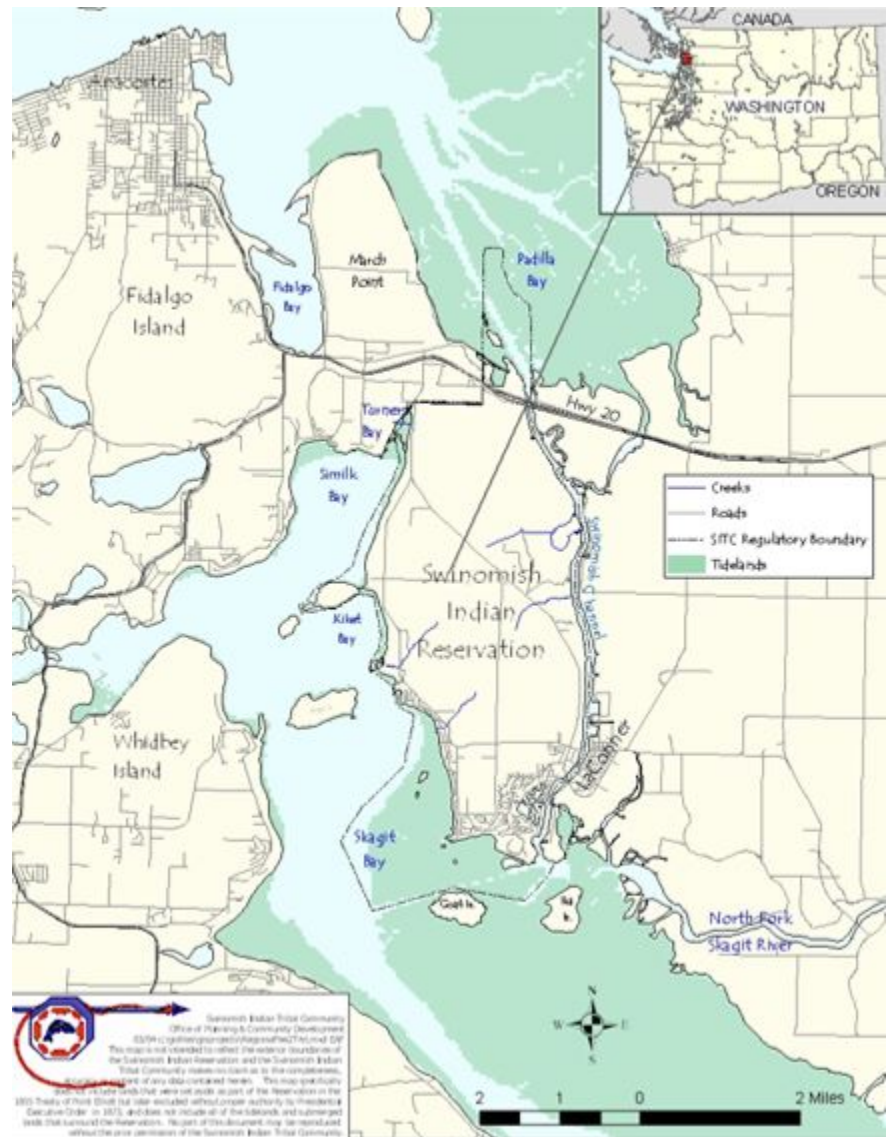
December 1, 2017

The National Indian Health Board (NIHB) funds three Tribal climate health projects as part of the [Climate Ready Tribes Project](#) with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Over the next several months, NIHB will highlight each of these Tribes and their climate health efforts through email spotlights.

Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (Swinomish) is a federally recognized Tribe with homelands in the beautiful Salish Sea and Cascade Mountains of northwest Washington State. In 2007, the Swinomish Senate signed a proclamation directing action to address climate change. As Swinomish Chairman Brian Cladoosby stated, the time to argue about whether or not climate change is real has passed. Now is the time to act and address climate change.

The Swinomish Indian Reservation sits on low-lying lands and is 90% surrounded by water. As sea levels rise and storm surges pound the Reservation shorelines, the frequency and amount of flooding increases. Important habitats for Swinomish foods and resources are threatened, and so too are the homes, cultural sites, and livelihoods of the Swinomish people.

In the Swinomish Impact Assessment and Adaptation Action Plan, physiological health impacts have already been identified and assessed. Yet other aspects of health - cultural, social, mental, and connections with the environment - were not included because methods to evaluate



Map of Swinomish lands

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them had not yet been developed. This project builds on CDC's Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (BRACE) framework by seeking to "indigenize" the framework so that these other aspects of health are included.

In order to develop a way to include health the way it is defined and prioritized by the Swinomish people, the project relies on the Indigenous Health Indicators (IHIs) - a set of metrics that assess non-physiological aspects of health that are important to the Swinomish people. These indicators are shown in the images in this article.

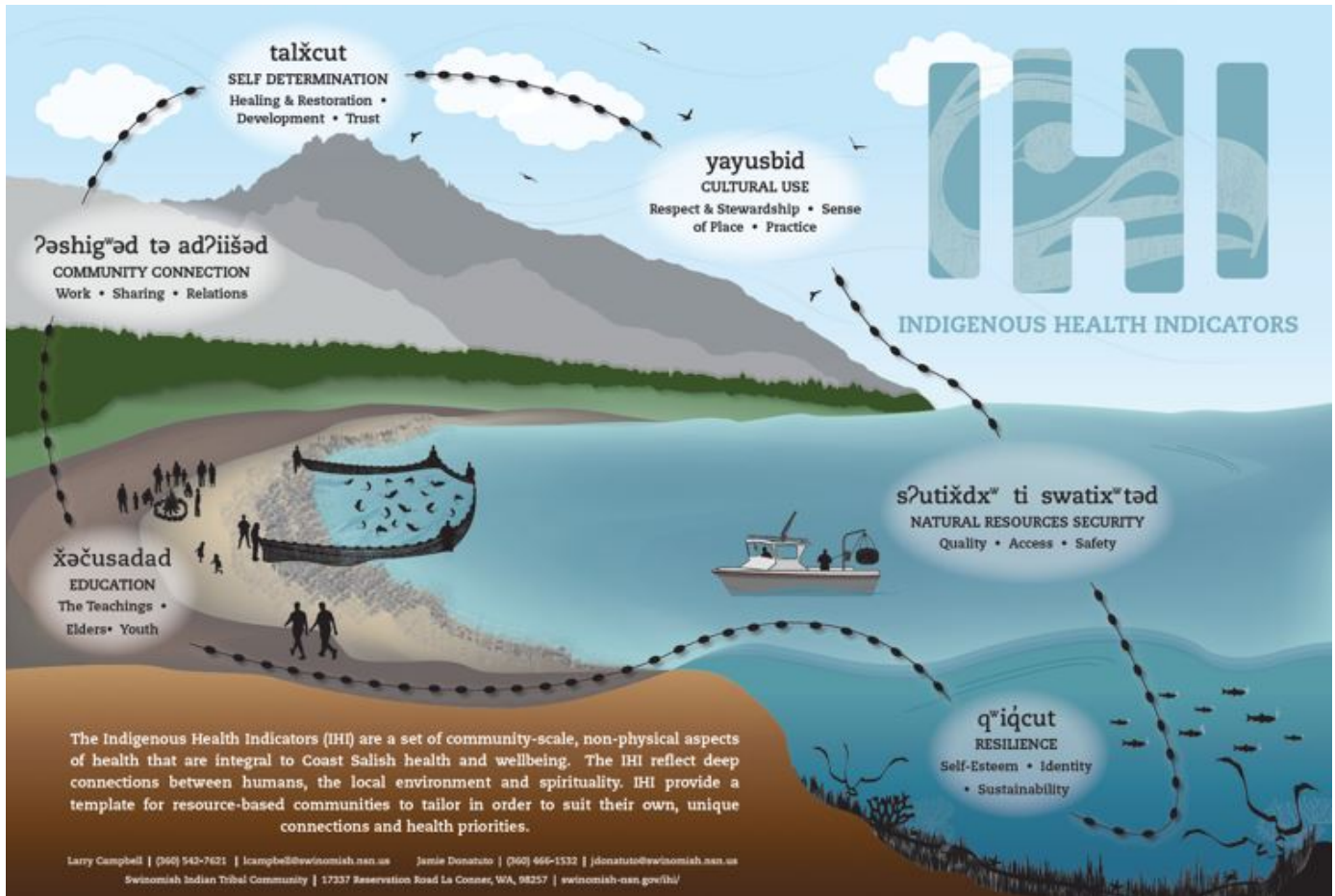
Using changes in habitat for three important Swinomish traditional foods - salmon, crabs, and clams - project personnel work with Swinomish community members to evaluate how the IHIs are impacted as climate change affects these foods' habitats. More than 70 community members participated and the results are currently being reviewed. Once complete, the findings will be included in an updated impact assessment and action plan. With a more comprehensive picture of health impacts, the Tribe will be better equipped in planning and decision-making to protect the health and wellbeing of Tribal members while adapting to climate change. As Swinomish Elder Larry Campbell says, "We have been here for more 10,000 years and we will be here for 10,000 more. We as a people will adapt; we will weather the change."



*Indigenous health indicators*

The project is currently underway and has been approved for an additional year of funding after excellent work during the first project period. Next steps include finalizing updates to the Swinomish impact assessment and adaptation action plan that reflect Swinomish health and wellbeing priorities. Swinomish will also develop a series of online modules about evaluating Indigenous health for use by other Tribal staff to use when developing impact assessments and action plans. This allows Swinomish work to benefit other Tribal communities.

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*Indigenous health indicators*

This project is led by Swinomish Community Environmental Health Program co-managers, Elder Larry Campbell (Wanaseah) and Dr. Jamie Donatuto. Larry and Jamie have been working together for 17 years to better the evaluation methods for Indigenous peoples' health and well-being, ensuring that health is defined and prioritized from the point of the of the people in question.

*Image Credits: Images in this article were provided by Swinomish.*