

A Public Declaration to the Tribal Councils and Traditional Spiritual Leaders of the Native Peoples of the Northwest

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c/o Jewell Praying Wolf James, Lummi

In 1987 and again in 1997, bishops and denominational executives of churches in the Northwest offered letters of apology to the indigenous peoples of our region. These letters acknowledged the historical disrespect of traditional Native American spiritual practices and traditions. In those letters, the leaders of our denominations promised “to honor and defend the rights of Native Peoples ... [including] access and protection of sacred sites ... [and to] end political and economic injustice against tribal communities.”

In this decade a new threat has arisen against Native Peoples: the mining, transport, burning, and disposal of fossil fuels. Proposed coal export terminals would damage native fisheries protected by long-standing treaties and poison our shared air and water. Coal trains servicing these terminals would cut across lands sacred to indigenous peoples, and impact the health of those communities. In this generation we also acknowledge that the mining and burning of fossil fuels creates the terrible threats of climate disruption, ocean acidification, and pollution to the harm of all God’s children, especially the poorest.

Tribal leaders have asked us to keep our past promises, and to stand with them in defense of their sacred lands and fishing rights. And so we call upon the Northwest Congressional delegation and other elected officials, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and all people of goodwill to uphold the treaty rights of Native communities of the Northwest. We ask that all environmental and cultural harm to Native lands and peoples be considered in making public policy decisions about the mining, transport, and export of coal and other fossil fuels.

As religious leaders we call for the protection of the life we have been given and the Earth we all call home. Our greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Putting this ethic into action, we stand in solidarity with our Native neighbors to safeguard the traditional lands, waters, and sacred sites of their peoples from destruction.

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