

*Imagining Climate Resilience in the Pacific Northwest*

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Oil on Canvas | Triptych, 57"x 36" panels

As part of celebrating its 25th anniversary, the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group commissioned this piece to celebrate progress towards climate resilience in the Northwest and illustrate a future where we have adapted our systems so all can thrive.

During the period of time which this work was painted, June through November 2021, the Pacific Northwest experienced some of its most extreme weather events on record. Seattle saw its hottest day ever, on June 28th, 2021, at 108 degrees Fahrenheit. On October 25th, 2021, NBC news reported a storm system with a barometric pressure of 945.2 mb, the most powerful storm ever to hit the Pacific Northwest — All of this, let us not forget, taking place on the already-set stage of a global pandemic. This list of records goes on and on. If you trace back along the chain of cause and effect, however, there is only one record to speak for them all: record levels of greenhouse gasses in our planet's atmosphere released by the burning of fossil fuels.

The Pacific Northwest will see more frequent extreme weather events, causing 100 and 500-year-floods to come more frequently than their names suggest. This is pictured in the upper left-hand corner where storm clouds and a lightning storm press up to Mt. Tahoma (Mt. Rainier). A forest fire is portrayed near the base of Mt. Tahoma west of the mountain, as the west side will begin to see more wildfires as temperatures rise. Mt. Tahoma itself will see less and less snowpack as the years go on, reflective of declining snowpack worldwide, and sea level will rise.

The conversation about climate change tends to stop there, leaving people with knots in their stomachs and a feeling of helplessness, but there is so much more to it.

Fuels reduction projects (middle panel) not only prepare a forest to survive a fire, they also create jobs and can produce timber to be made into cross-laminated timber or other products. In the Pacific Northwest, we are lucky to have clean hydropower, though ideally all rivers would be dam-free. For now, we need this clean source of energy while we adopt other renewables such as wind (right panel), solar (left panel), and geothermal, to name a few. In urban areas, cities can be made more bike-friendly. Improved public transportation reduces commuter stress, pollution, and saves urbanites from car-related expenses. Public transportation also makes travel economically and physically accessible to all residents while cutting down on carbon emissions. In rural areas, electric vehicles can be used to eliminate the use of fossil fuels (right panel).

Many climate solutions result in happier, healthier communities. Community gardens (middle panel) not only provide healthy food with a negative carbon footprint, they can eliminate food insecurity. Permaculture and biodynamic agricultural practices produce copious amounts of food of much variety in a small plot. Garden "waste" can be turned into compost, or used to feed animals which produce milk, eggs, and meat, as well as fertilizing manure. Food produced in this way is not only healthy and full of nutrients, but is delicious. The act of gardening itself gets people outside, which

time and time again has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety. Such agricultural practices are also better for native flora and fauna, especially aquatic life, which is exposed to any harmful materials that are washed down the watershed.

Local production also allows for residents to support their neighbors instead of relying on the global supply chain, which we have seen collapse in multiple instances over the course of the pandemic. Locally-sourced products are also more likely to be repairable if broken, moving away from disposable culture. Supporting thrifting, trade, repairs (left panel) and the sharing of skills saves people money, lowers carbon outputs, and creates community connections.

Green spaces and food production can be incorporated into our cities, improving air quality, lowering heat retention, reducing stress, and providing access to fresh food (left panel). Green spaces in cities also provide corridors for wildlife to move. Wildlife overpasses (left panel) such as those built over I-90 on Snoqualmie Pass and wildlife-friendly culverts and/or bridges (middle panel) also allow for the free movement of wildlife.

People should be able to continue to enjoy the natural beauty and resources of our land. Hunters, hikers, fishers, boaters, and bikers can all agree that they want the forests, the deer, the lakes, fish, and the trails to be there when they come back. For members of native tribes across the Pacific Northwest, these activities mean even more. The collection of huckleberries (right panel) and maintenance of huckleberry patches in the mountains means a dependable, delicious source of food. On the east side of the mountains, sagebrush, cedar, sweetgrass, lavender, and sage are gathered to make medicines. The catching, preparing, and eating of salmon is a central part of cultural identity and tradition, to which tribes have the right (though many tribes are still fighting for the legal rights to fish their traditional rivers). In order to maintain this right, we must make sure there are salmon to fish and berries to pick. Bears and other wildlife also need these resources!

Indigenous knowledge of how to care for this land will be invaluable as we strive for a climate resilient future. At the bottom of the middle panel, native members are leading a crowd with a banner that says "Water is Life" in Southern Lushootseed, a dialect in the Salish language family. Among their followers are two people carrying signs that say the same message in English and Spanish to show accessibility of environmental knowledge across languages. The tribal members leading the group is also meant to symbolize that native peoples and their values should be looked to when deciding on actions which will affect land, environment, and natural resources.

The future will bring change, but that is not to say it all needs to be for the worse. Instead of being motivated by our anxieties, let us be motivated by what makes us happier and healthier. As Brianna Fruean, a Samoan climate activist said at the COP26 U.N. climate summit, "I am a very happy person, and this is the happiness I'm trying to save."

This painting is just one portrayal of climate resiliency, there is so much more that it could not capture. I hope that many more such imaginings of a climate resilient future will begin to surface, inspiring people from all walks of life to work together toward that vision.

### **Special Thanks**

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