

Big Eddy International Scientific Symposium

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Scientific Symposium

In May 2004, a joint Canada/US scientific symposium was convened on the Big Eddy. Over two days, more than 60 participants, including scientists (government and non-government), managers, Canadian First Nations and Native American tribes:

- exchanged and shared scientific information with a focus on the interconnections and linkages between ecosystem components (cross-border and cross-sector information sharing)
- raised scientific awareness of the values of this region;
- enhanced the linkages between current scientific inquiry and ecosystem management;
- raised awareness of the First Nations/Tribal traditional values of this region; and
- fostered international cooperation.

The symposium confirmed the ecological, economic, social and scientific importance of this transboundary marine region driven by the Juan de Fuca Eddy. The overall conclusion of the symposium was that this region has a unique identity, exceptional values, provides significant opportunities for international cooperation, and has the potential to establish a global model for transboundary ecosystem-based management (CPAWS 2005).

Some Key Findings of the First Big Eddy Symposium

The first Big Eddy Symposium provided an important summary of the key values of the ecosystem and highlighted the regional and global significance of this region.

“In human terms, the area represents a dramatic transition between a pristine ocean environment and a heavily urbanized area. This gateway to a region of high human population with cities and ports lies between two major rivers – the Fraser and the Columbia. In ecosystem terms, this is a dynamic area where deep ocean currents funnel through to the shore to meet and mix with massive amounts of nutrient rich runoff waters from the adjacent rainforests.” (CPAWS 2005).

In addition to providing a summary of what is currently known about the Big Eddy ecosystem through traditional knowledge and scientific research conducted to date, the first Big Eddy Symposium also identified the significant gaps in fundamental baseline information about the ecosystem and ecological linkages and interactions. Symposium participants called for long-term observation and monitoring of the region in order to understand trends and evaluate variations, and to build ecosystem-based models. The important role of traditional ecological knowledge

and the special understanding and knowledge of First Nations and Tribes in the region was emphasized at the symposium.

Discussions of human activities in the region and existing and potential threats to ecosystem values highlighted the need to embark on ecosystem-based management and international cooperation, as well as the need to identify potential tools, like marine protected areas, that are available to protect biodiversity. The symposium culminated in a discussion on cooperation – both international and with First Nations and Tribes. A key learning from these discussions was the link between the holistic perspective of indigenous people and ecosystem-based management and the need to embrace more personal interactions in order to facilitate better cross-cultural understanding.

More effective management of the Big Eddy ecosystem requires clearly articulated and shared priorities that are embraced by the public. Building public awareness and support is clearly linked to building political support for the policy and management innovations required to protect and manage the ecosystem values of this region. Improved understanding and expanded public awareness of the ‘Big Eddy’ was seen as key to ensuring a healthy ecosystem and sustainable use of its resources.

The proceedings from this symposium are available at: <http://bigeddy.net/publications.html>

References

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-BC (CPAWS-BC). 2005. The Big Eddy: Proceedings of the Western Juan de Fuca Ecosystem Symposium. Vancouver, BC: Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-BC Chapter.