From: Gary Giovane
To: MakahDEIS.nwr@noaa.gov;
Subject: makah whaling issue
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I would like to give my support to allowing the Makah Tribe to continue hunting whales for subsistence and ceremonial purposes as guaranteed in the treaty between the Tribe and the US Government. Personally, I believe that whales, and all cetaceans, are unique and worthy of protection. There should be a world-wide ban on all commercial harvesting of them. However, in the case of the Makah's right to continue the whale hunt, I am strongly in favor of allowing this practice to continue based on the following.

As an archeology student, I had the opportunity to work at the Ozette site in 1975 and 1976. Just prior to my working there, House 1 had been excavated. In that house, many artifacts attributed to whaling were uncovered. One such artifact, the whale saddle (which, from what I understand, was meant never to be seen by the uninitiated), was the first bit of physical evidence showing me how important whaling was to the Makah. This was more than just hunting to "put meat on the table", so to speak. Whaling was a sacred and vital part of the entire community. At Ozette, gray whales pass by on their seasonal migrations to and from the Baja Peninsula---I remember seeing them myself and could imagine, in pre-contact times, what it must have been like to go out on a hunt. We saw the evidence that all parts of the whale were utilized by the Makah, with whalebone being used for clubs and for incorporation into the drainage systems between the houses. I learned that to successfully complete a hunt, all the members of the crew, their wives and family had to undergo many rituals beforehand to insure success. To guarantee that the harpooned whale would be easily returned to the village (and not swim out to sea), the whale was considered as an honored guest which would sacrifice itself for the good of the community—again much ritual was involved in this important aspect. With the voluntary ban on whaling, members of the Tribe kept these traditions alive in the hopes that someday, the hunts could resume. As a nonnative, my understanding of all of this is very limited, but I can see how spiritually significant whaling is to the Makah people.

I also had the privilege of being a teacher at Neah Bay for over twenty years. The students that I taught were (and still are) like family to me. In the past, the school had a negative impact on the kids---I heard stories of students being punished for speaking Makah in school. I'm happy to know that today, many of the teachers are Makah, and that Makah language and culture are promoted school-wide. Growing up in Neah Bay presents many challenges for the kids. Our educational

system is very future-oriented. We tell the kids, learn this stuff and some day it will help you go to college or you will use it in your job. However, to go off to college, kids must leave their family and community, and risk being forced to make a choice between two different cultures. As for work, unemployment is extremely high on the west end of the Olympic Peninsula. The time-honored occupations of fishing and working in the woods are still some of the only ways to make a living. Many kids feel that there is nothing to do, and so it's easy to fall into the trap of drugs and alcohol. However, the strong cultural ties—like the canoe club and Tribal Journeys—provide a way to travel another course. I was teaching the year "the whale" was taken after whaling was allowed to resume. It was an amazing experience! Our principal, Bill Pearl, released the students to go down to the beach in the village to await its coming in. He didn't want any of them to miss this historic event—and they would have gone anyhow. We went ourselves after school was over, to see the beach covered in people, in the rain, singing the whale ashore. This was a momentous day, not only for the Makah, but for all indigenous people in the country—a country that has historically broken its treaties with native peoples. Here, the treaty was honored and the Makah could once again experience this integral part of their culture—of "who they are". We also witnessed the threats and abuse the Makah people had to take from the Sea Sheppard and others. Most nonnatives just don't have a clue as to how important cultural traditions are to native people. In truth, the U.S. has become the "melting pot" it wanted to be, and so many of us have lost our own language, culture, and traditions. Hunting whale to the Makah is so much more than just hunting or fishing. It is the thread to generations past, it is what gives the Makah their unique identity. And because of this, I would like to strongly give my support to its continuation.

Gary Giovane

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