

The Mary Thomas Heritage Sanctuary A Proposal

What follows is a description of the proposed Mary Thomas Heritage Sanctuary on the floodplain of the Salmon River at its mouth in Salmon Arm, BC.

The Name

In a formal sense, she was Dr. Mary Thomas, beloved Neskonlith elder of the Secwepemc Nation <http://www.firstnations.eu/development/secwepemc.htm>. She received honorary doctorates from the University of Victoria and the Thompson Rivers University. Dr. Thomas received many other honours for working to support her people and reviving their culture and for working tirelessly to build bridges of understanding between Natives and non-natives. She was the first Native American to receive the International Indigenous Conservationist of the year award from the Seacology Foundation and also received the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Environment.

To those who knew her, Mary was a warm and wise lady with dancing eyes and a love of life, the land, and people, all people, native and non-native. She was equally at home tanning deer hides, telling school children Secwepemc legends, and working with anyone interested in understanding and enhancing the land and its non-human inhabitants. Mary believed strongly in *knucwetwecw*, helping one another. Because of all of the foregoing, and for her work in restoring the Salmon River (http://www.srwr.ca/about_us.php) and the floodplain at its mouth (<http://www.wa-ter.ca/MaryThomas.pdf>), it is entirely fitting to name the proposed Sanctuary, the Mary Thomas Heritage Sanctuary.

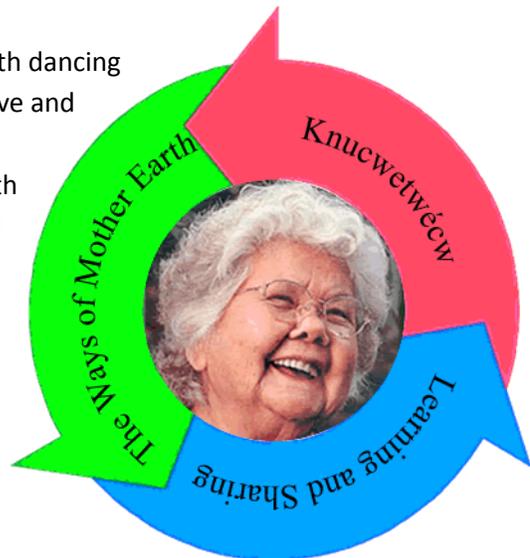
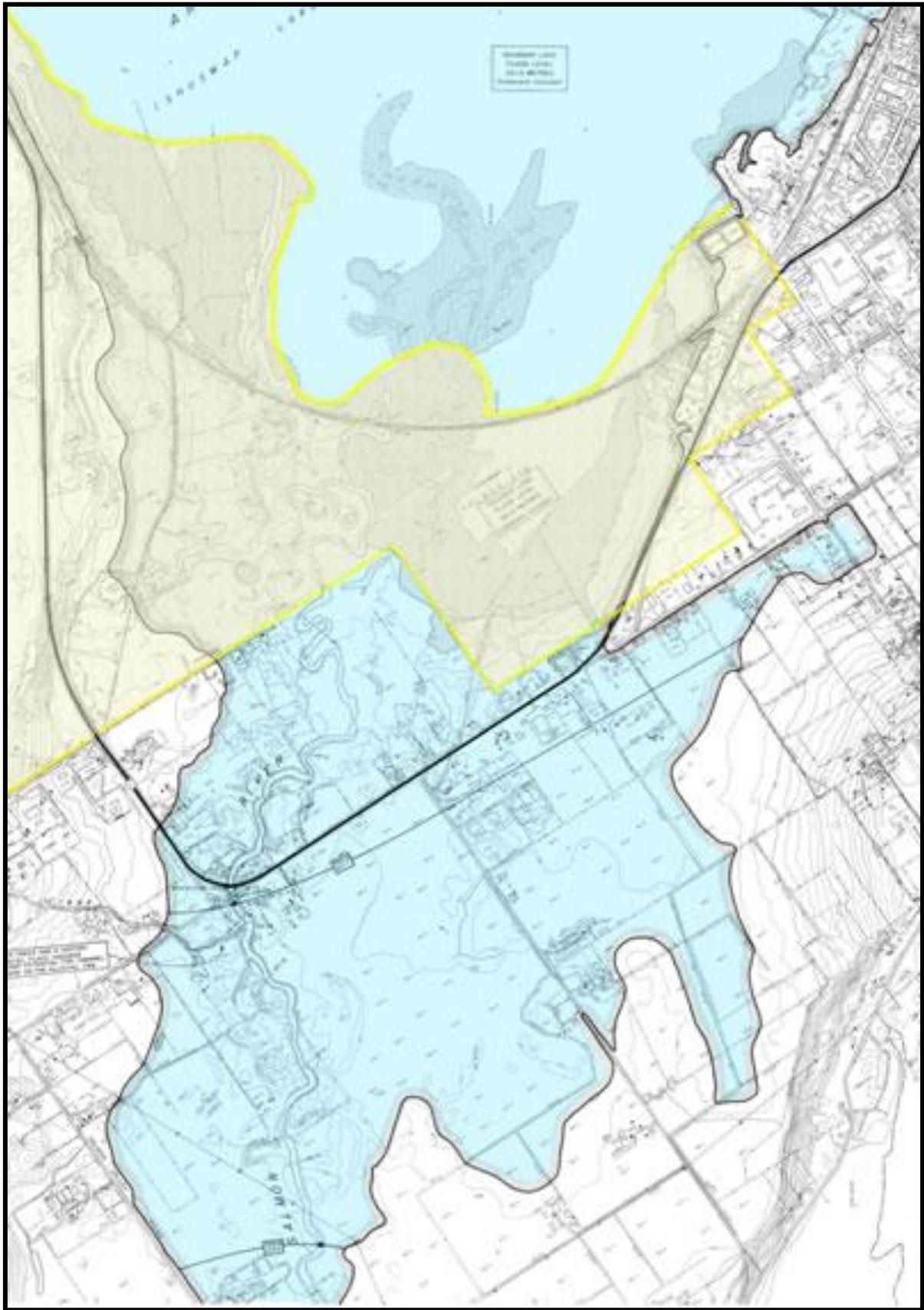


Figure 1. Dr. Mary Thomas

The location

The Sanctuary is located on the floodplain of the Salmon River where it enters Shuswap Lake in the City of Salmon Arm, British Columbia. The Sanctuary is an extension of the work of the Salmon River Watershed Roundtable, which Mary Thomas helped to create and which has been very successful in restoration work upriver (<http://www.srwr.ca/index.php>).

Figure 2 shows the floodplains of the Salmon River delta and adjacent Lake Shuswap. They were delineated, September 30, 1991, by the Province of British Columbia based on an estimate of the 1 in 200 year flood. The lake and floodplain are shown in blue except for that portion on First Nations reserves, which is grey. The reserves are outlined in yellow.



Floodplain Management

The area of the floodplain can be thought of as an overlay of three primary systems.

- A hydrologic and land-form system involving a wide area of almost imperceptible slope, silt and soils, and surface and groundwater movement, involving storage for later release, and purification.
- A biological system of plants, animals, birds, fish and other living organisms, which are interdependent with one another and dependent on the site's land forms and water.
- A human system of farms, residences, industrial and business installations, roads and other infrastructure, which is interdependent with both the hydrologic and the biological systems.

Wise management of the floodplain requires careful consideration of all three systems. For instance, people and property are subject to possibly damaging floods, regularly on part of the floodplain and occasionally on the rest. Fish, waterfowl and their prey and predators can be nurtured by those same floods. People can impact the storage of both ground and surface water by filling to protect against floods. People can also introduce chemicals toxic to fish and other organisms or nutrients that increase undesirable algal growth in the lake. Such chemical and biological impacts can negatively impact tourism and the cost of water purification for human use. The floodplain is a maze of human and non-human interconnections and interactions.

Because these systems are so interdependent the Mary Thomas Heritage Sanctuary is defined as co-existent with the entire floodplain. However, the management of the Sanctuary will be dramatically different for different classes of land ownership.

Land Ownership Classes

The area of the floodplain is made up of three different classes of land ownership:

1. Private land used for residences, farms, and industry/commerce.
2. The Neskonlith and Adams Lake Indian Reserves with a complex mix of ownership by the Bands and individual band members, administered by the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.
3. Crown land, principally the Salmon River and Shuswap Lake foreshore.

For purposes of Sanctuary management, the floodplain is divided into two classes of land. Land voluntarily placed under perpetual covenant by the owner will be held by a land trust and will be used only for protection of the natural systems, research and education about those systems, and eco- and cultural-tourism. All land not under covenant, even though within the boundaries of the Sanctuary, will be managed by the owners according to their best judgement and the usual government regulations.

It is expected that the first area to be put under covenant will be land on the Neskonlith Reserve donated by Mary Thomas to the Switzmalph Cultural Society in pursuit of her dream (<http://www.shuswapcentre.org/index.html>). Hopefully, Crown Land, the river and lake foreshore,

north of the TransCanada Highway will be placed under covenant and the Native and non-native owners of undeveloped land, particularly that between the TransCanada Highway and Shuswap lake, will consider placing their lands under covenant. The ultimate goal is to have a large, contiguous block of covenanted land, managed as described in the previous paragraph. It is hoped that the owners of non-covenanted land in the floodplain will learn about the features, functions and conditions of a healthy floodplain and will incorporate that knowledge into the management of their land. To this end, the Sanctuary's management team will provide educational materials, demonstrations and participant opportunities open to the public.

Supporting the Proposal

People can support the Mary Thomas Heritage Sanctuary in several ways:

- Learn about sensitive ecosystems, their vulnerabilities, and ways to protect them, and applying that knowledge to lands over which they have some influence, whether in their own backyards or in their community
- Support the placing of covenants on First Nations' and Crown Lands within the Sanctuary boundary, so they can become part of the core management area.
- Place lands, within the floodplain, which they directly control under covenant, so they become part of the core management area.
- Donate time, money or other resources to Sanctuary operations.

Examples

Some First Nations interpretive centres and conservation centres follow:

- Video of Wanuskewan Heritage Park in Saskatchewan
<http://www.travelvideo.tv/videos/saskatchewan/wanuskewanheritageparkvideo.html>
- Video of Blackfoot Crossing Museum - east of Calgary on the Bow River.
 - Video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHr0gmOCaYA>
 - Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park website <http://www.blackfootcrossing.ca/tours.html>
- Ksan village, Hazelton, British Columbia
 - Video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsQhn0NvcDM>
 - Ksan village website <http://www.ksan.org/html/village.htm>
- Swaner EcoCenter, Utah <http://www.swanerecocenter.org/>
- Conservation Ontario <http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/resources/guide/index.html>