

CASCADIA **DAILY** NEWS

First Sacred Earth Fair draws hundreds of visitors for climate justice

'This is not a political organization: this is a heart commitment to climate justice'

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Swil Kanim, a native storyteller and classically trained violinist from the Lummi Nation, performed several of his songs at the Sacred Earth Festival. He spoke about his struggles growing up in the foster care system and how he uses music to connect to the world around him. ([Julia Lerner/Cascadia Daily News](#))

By **JULIA LERNER**
Staff Reporter

Hundreds of locals gathered to learn more about climate justice at the Multifaith Network for Climate Justice's first Sacred Earth Fair on Sunday, an event celebrating Whatcom County's environmental and spiritual groups targeting climate change.

The event, hosted at the Center for Spiritual Living in Bellingham, brought environmental nonprofits and spiritual groups together for community building, yoga classes, outdoor music performances and walking tours in the forest.

The goal of the event: to unify climate justice groups in Whatcom County.

"Together, we have more hope than each of us does on our own," said Betsy Gross, one of the organizers from the Multifaith Network for Climate Justice. "We have a deep and abiding commitment to climate justice, and a deep awareness that the more unified we are, the more coalition building we do, the stronger our voice."

More than 40 local groups participated, sharing upcoming climate-related events in the community with attendees.

"It's wonderful to just be here among all these people and feel the energy of all of us caring for the environment," said Michael Feerer, executive director of the Whatcom Million Trees Project. "As a nonprofit, local is where our focus is. Local is important because it gives people an opportunity to be hands-on with the effort."

Feerer said the hands-on aspect of climate work is vital for keeping people engaged and participating in fairs like the Sacred Earth Fair can help inspire the community to continue coming out for projects and events.

Throughout the fair, speakers and musicians performed, sharing their experiences with climate justice.



Elizabeth Joy Clements, a sound facilitator and guest teacher-in-training at Inspire Studio, rang a Sedna Gong at several points throughout the Sacred Earth Festival to mark moments to pause and reflect. (*Julia Lerner/Cascadia Daily News*)

Swil Kanim, a Lummi storyteller and classically trained violinist, performed several songs on his violin and hand drum that he wrote about the Earth, honor and his inspirations.

“You could have been anywhere on this beautiful day,” he told the crowd. “But you saw the word ‘earth’ and the word ‘sacred’ and came here.”

This is the first Sacred Earth Fair the Multifaith Network for Climate Justice has organized, and Gross looks forward to more community-building events.

“In the past three years, we’ve been doing a variety of things to inspire people to start thinking about climate justice and climate change,” she said. “This is the largest gathering of environmental organizations in Bellingham, and on top of that, we have the faith and spiritual communities participating. And on

top of that, we have the active involvement, participation and support of our Indigenous neighbors.”

Judy Hopkinson, another organizer from the Multifaith Network for Climate Justice, said planning the event took a lot of work, but it was vital to bring all of these local groups together.

“The Multifaith Network for Climate Justice recognizes that the most important thing we can do is talk with each other about climate change,” Hopkinson said. “We’re all in this together. We need to show our kids that we recognize this, and show our kids that we’re ready to do something.”

The Multifaith Network for Climate Justice did not allow political speakers, those running for election or politically motivated groups to have a platform at the event. The group wanted to bring the community together, and not cause further division, they said.

“What we have tried to do, almost more than anything else, is to do this with good hearts,” Gross said. “This is not a political organization; this is a heart commitment to climate justice.”