

PEI Celebrates Latino Conservation Week with Outdoor Learning – and Food

by Heidi Smith

One way to measure an event’s success: tamales. More specifically, the consumption of tamales.

PEI’s recent Latino Conservation Week events are a case in point. PEI’s Multicultural Program Coordinator Lourdes Flores brought 30 tamales to an activity at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve on September 14, and by the end, they were all gone. “That’s how you know it was a good event,” says Flores.

At Padilla Bay, an educator from the reserve introduced the site, explained the importance of the estuary in the region and the Salish Sea, and gave a brief history of the Center. After she explained how salt and freshwater mix in an estuary, two young volunteers gave a hands-on demonstration.

Then it was time to visit the mud flats. Dr. Jesus Perez-Linares, a 5th grade teacher at West View Dual Language School in Burlington, shared information about the estuarine reserve and guests from the surrounding community – including some all the way from Anacortes – broke into small groups to explore the area and examine the many creatures inhabiting the flats before reconvening at the visitor’s center to debrief and enjoy tamales.

“It was a joyful event,” Flores says. “We were worried that the tide was too high, but the water level was perfect to be able to see and handle the sea life in the mud flat. The environmental educators who spoke were great and the families who attended were very happy.”



At Padilla Bay, visitors learned about the importance of the estuary and watched a demonstration of how fresh water and sea water mix.



Families explored the tide flats and the many creatures who live within them.

Food also played a role at the second PEI event at Woodard Bay Natural Resources Conservation Area three days later. In collaboration with the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) which manages the site, PEI co-hosted a dual-language interpretive walk in English and Spanish and multiple stations where visitors could learn about local birds, macroinvertebrates, and other DNR sites to explore or they could make leaf prints, a hit with the younger attendees. In this case, tortas were on the menu.



Interpreters led walks through Woodard Bay in both English and Spanish.

“We had two great interpreters who led walks for different groups, along with Daniel Cuevas from Tacoma Bird Alliance and Stephanie Bishop from Thurston Conservation District who had a very interactive station on invertebrates,” Flores explains. “People were fascinated by the birds and by the microscopes. The general atmosphere was happy.”

The week culminated in a Salmon Celebration at Tumwater Falls Park in collaboration with the City of Tumwater and the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife on September 21st, where participants could enjoy pupusas from a food truck.



The microscope station was a hit with visitors of all ages.

“We achieved our goals, which were to get Latino and Hispanic people outside and make sure they know about the outdoor resources available in their communities,” Flores notes. “Everyone who came was glad to be there.”