**Headline:** We Are Surrounded by Local Solutions to Global Economic Challenges—Festival Brings Together Sustainable Leaders

**Teaser:** Free access event highlights solutions for communities to adopt.

By April M. Short

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**[Article Body:]**

As the human-caused planetary destruction and resulting climate crisis worsens, resources like drinking water dwindle and unsustainable modes of life—like our giant food systems—fray and weaken, the ongoing pandemic has further exasperated and exemplified these environmental and social destructions. The many oppressive and racist systems, preconceived notions held about how our society sustains itself, continue to crumble.

In this moment of upheaval, so much is murky, but what is clear is this: our ways of living must change. Local, self-regenerative and community-oriented economies are lighting the way to a more practical, feasible and sustainable future.

“Never before has the question, ‘What comes next?’ been asked so urgently,” states a narrator, as images of families protesting salmon farms, people wearing face masks, and devastating wildfires all flash across the screen. These images are part of a video announcing the second annual [Festival of What Works](https://www.festivalofwhat.works/)—a free access ($0-$100 sliding scale) online event dedicated to locally based solutions to global problems, organized by the eco-trust network [Salmon Nation](https://salmonnation.net/) based in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In the bioregion that stretches from Northern California to the North Slope of Alaska, known by many Indigenous groups as “Salmon Nation,” there is an upswell of creative solutions to heal many of the problems facing humanity today.

The eco-trust Salmon Nation, which has adopted this name, works with forward-thinking Indigenous leaders, activists, scientists, healers and artists to highlight some of the innovations in sustainability, collaboration and alternative methods of doing business that are happening in the region. Particularly, they look for models and examples that might be replicated and expanded upon around the world.

The second annual Festival of What Works from November 2-7 comes with a deep awareness of the dire state of global realities and the need for locally oriented solutions that are required to address them. The festival, which includes online panel discussions, workshops and film screening, aims to provide replicable models that can be adopted universally, not only in the bioregion but also in other regions, with the potential to help tackle global issues.

In an interview with the Independent Media Institute’s April M. Short, Salmon Nation’s co-creator [Ian Gill](https://salmonnation.net/speaker/ian-gill) and Festival of What Works director, or ‘festivator,’ [Kel Moody](https://salmonnation.net/speaker/kel-moody-moderator) shared insights and inspirations behind the Festival of What Works, and the project of finding replicable, local solutions to global problems that is Salmon Nation.

**April M. Short:** How did the concept for a “Festival of What Works,” which is focused on replicable ideas for living in-place, first emerge, and how has it evolved to respond to the current historical moment (with the ongoing pandemic, the current climate realities, and so on)?

**Ian Gill:** Almost exactly two years ago, about 40 people from the Salmon Nation bioregion got together in Sitka, Alaska, to kick around the idea of a new initiative to really accelerate the movement toward more regenerative ways of living and being in the world. Basically, we wanted to float the idea of a *nature state* that ignores administrative boundaries and actually encourages new forms of social, cultural and economic development that follow nature’s lead.

Our initial motivation was the threat of climate change, and the idea that on-the-ground responses to the effects of climate change were going to happen where [these] effects are being felt the most.

That national or state or provincial governments weren’t going to solve problems at the community level. So [the people who had gathered in Sitka] assembled some doers and shakers from California to Alaska and each person said yes, we need to collaborate and share success stories and figure this out for ourselves, and we need a lot more people to join us. Then, we’d barely said goodbye to each other and the pandemic hit—which made the work seem so much more urgent.

We had always intended to reconvene after Sitka, and to invite more people to join us. Reconvening in person proved impossible, obviously, but gathering online—and focusing on what works—actually enabled us to expand the conversation well beyond what a physical convening would have allowed. We were thrilled that thousands of people answered the call.

**Kel Moody:** We’ve found that people are very interested in talking about what works in a world dominated by doom and gloom. They’re not only interested in sharing their stories but also in connecting with other people across the bioregion working in many different ways toward the goal of finding ways to live well in-place.

There are a seemingly endless amount of stories about people with replicable models that can be tailored to many different communities. The power comes from sharing those models, building relationships and empowering people to take action in their own communities.

**AS:** What is different about this year’s Festival of What Works compared to the inaugural event in 2020?

**KM:** This year we are diving deeper into some topics from [2020], introducing some new topics and bringing in more focus on the audience integrating what we are sharing with them. It is one thing to hear a bunch of amazing stories and get excited by all the good work happening in our bioregion. It is another thing to integrate what you have learned and take some action in your community.

We are hosting daily sessions called Patterns and Possibilities to encourage just that. We will be hosting this year’s festival directly on the [website](https://salmonnation.net/whatworks), which should make it easier for people to find all the sessions and watch them even after they have [been] aired live. Plus, we will have some on-demand content that people can watch on their own time.

**AS:** Do you anticipate people from around the world in regions beyond Salmon Nation to attend and/or be inspired by the projects and people featured in this festival?

**IG:** In 2020, we had folks from all over the world tune in to different events at the festival. We hope that will happen again this year. We know there are aligned communities in places as diverse as Kenya, Hungary, Costa Rica, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, the United Kingdom, Australia… and in different regions in the U.S. We all have a lot to learn from each other, and it is our hope that what we learn in Salmon Nation is shareable, through the festival, and also across networks worldwide that are looking to each other for solutions to what are, after all, problems we all share.

**AS:** Are there particular projects or individuals that you found to be especially inspiring this year, and if so will you elaborate on this a bit?

**KM:** Gosh, it is hard to choose as they are all so inspiring. One [story] that has really stood out to me is the story of Paradise, California. They suffered a near-complete loss of their town to a wildfire in 2018, something that much of [the Salmon Nation] bioregion is dealing with at an increasingly alarming rate. Instead of giving up on the community, [the residents of Paradise] decided to take the opportunity to rebuild with intention. One of their community members who is leading the redevelopment is hosting a workshop on how to approach disaster preparedness and response as a community.

**IG:** It is increasingly obvious that communities want a lot more control over their governance. Part of this is the movement toward decolonization, which is long overdue. But also it’s because large institutions—government, commercial, legal, philanthropic, you name it—are so unresponsive to calls for change. So efforts like those of the Haida and Haíɫzaqv nations on the British Columbia coast to write and implement their own constitutions [are] hugely inspiring and replicable.

**AS:** Would you speak about why the festival highlights healers, artists and culture-bearers, in addition to activists, Indigenous leaders, scientists and other professionals?

**IG:** We focus on what we call “edge” communities. So much innovation and inspiration emerges from the work of artists and people who are used to making do with little access to financial capital, but [have] a lot of access to natural capital and to knowledge that comes from the lands and waters upon which we all depend. And when it comes to repairing the harm we have done to our natural systems, Indigenous people in particular have long, hard-earned experiences about being in good relationships with nature. Climate change, the pandemic—these are just newer expressions of trauma that we are all experiencing. Healers can help us to see that and to see ways through it.

**AS:** What have been the greatest challenges as far as organizing the festival, or more generally for Salmon Nation?

**KM:** Through the festival, we are trying to create a space for everyone in the bioregion (and beyond). That includes people with sometimes opposing views and beliefs, which is a precarious place to be if not done thoughtfully. We want to unite people around their shared sense of place, while honoring their unique identities. That is a big challenge, but when we focus on solutions and recognize that there is a lot of heart in this work, it tends to reduce tensions that may have been present otherwise.

We also have community guidelines for festival speakers and attendees as well as a PIER (process, integrate, express, reconnect) Support Team for people to connect with if something comes up during the festival that they need to discuss with someone.

This ensures we have some agreements to point to for how we are asking people to show up in the space and provides a pathway for accountability.

Another balance we try to strike is that we want to support the speakers [during Festival of What Works] and offer them a beneficial experience, while also not asking too much of these incredibly busy people. They are all giving everything they have to their communities, so we have to make sure this is going to be additive for them and not extractive.

In addition to the honorarium that each speaker is paid, we try to make sure there are also non-monetary benefits they receive from their participation in the festival, which might be connections, community-building, or other resources.

**AS:** What are some of the results or actions that came out of the last festival in 2020, and anything else you want to share about Salmon Nation’s prior work?

**IG:** We were beyond thrilled that so many people turned up at the festival last year, but it’s not really about numbers. It’s about having found a willingness, indeed, almost a hunger to share ideas that you pretty much won’t see in mainstream media because the world is mostly in thrall to a narrative of dysfunction and despair.

That might serve the interests of politicians and big business, but it doesn’t do much for people trying to make sense of their world and to contribute to a better one. What we have discovered is that solutions are out there—it’s just that someone needs to ask the W questions: who, what, where, why, when? And then share like crazy.

**KM:** There were a surprising number of connections that people built out of the festival. I personally made a lot of friends, both in speakers and the audience, but there were more than friendships formed. There were a few partnerships that came out of the festival and I still hear about people’s connections they made leading them in directions that could have only been possible because of the festival. These things are hard to measure and capture, but they are definitely happening.

**AS:** Why is it important to you to highlight the kind of work that is featured in the festival, especially right now?

**IG:** Two reasons, both to do with time. One is immediate: we need to answer urgent questions about how to get failing institutions [in the bioregion and beyond] to take climate change as seriously as they need to.

For now at least, we are stuck in systems and we need to disrupt them enough to get proper attention paid to what a friend of ours calls the fierce urgency of now.

Longer-term, as in several generations out, humanity will need a very different relationship between people and the planet. So we need to lay the foundations for that right away, to give those who come after us something to build on and to leave a legacy of recognition that current generations got a lot of things wrong, and had the courage to do their part to start on a different path.

**AS:** If people could walk away from the festival with one single understanding, what would that ideally be?

**IG:** That a nature state is not only possible, it already exists. People just need to stop attacking the planet and to allow the planet to provide for their needs.

**KM:** That each one of us has the ability to make a positive contribution to the place we love. And the impact of each person’s contributions, when looked at as a whole, is greater than the sum of its parts.

**AS:** What are Salmon Nation’s future plans, goals and main objectives for projects going into 2022 and beyond?

**IG:** The festival is a production of the Magic Canoe, which is our storytelling vehicle at Salmon Nation. We want more paddlers in the Magic Canoe, more people inspired to do the work to leave our part of the world better than we found it.

So we need to share a lot more stories from the edge, and inspire a movement toward the creation of nature states here and around the world. Practically, we want to tell more stories, get capital to edge entrepreneurs and commercial expressions of regenerative practices that provide essential human services that can be accessed by everyone in Salmon Nation. And, if the pandemic truly loosens its grip, we want to get out there again, to have lots of festivals in lots of places where we can celebrate what’s good out there.

**AS:** Anything else you’d like to share about the festival, Salmon Nation or otherwise?

**KM:** We worked with an incredible planning committee of people from across the bioregion to source these ideas. These are not just our ideas, they are ideas from people out there doing the actual work. Although it would be nearly impossible for our program to be a comprehensive look at the bioregion, we challenged ourselves to select a diverse representation of ideas, people and methods to show what it looks like to live well in-place.