

## **Report reveals 56 missing Native American women across state, 5 from Whatcom County**

By Denver Pratt, June 05, 2019, Bellingham Herald

<https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article231171868.html>

A new report by the Washington State Patrol finds there are 56 missing Native American women in the state of Washington, with 20 of those from Yakima County and 12 from King County.

The 36-page report to the Legislature was compiled by State Patrol Capt. Monica Alexander and released late last week.

The Yakima Herald-Republic reported that the state listed 1,802 missing persons with the National Crime Information Center in May. Of those, 56 were Native American women, the report found.

Whatcom County had the third-highest number of missing women, with five. Pierce County also had five, according to the report.

The new report found Native women face challenges with regard to safety, and it's important for authorities to build relationships and establish trust.

Nooksack Tribal Police Chief Mike Ashby said that none of the five cases from Whatcom County involved Nooksack tribal members. Lummi Nation has not yet responded to a request for information.

Ashby said the issue as a whole is indicative of a larger communication problem between Native American tribes and the state.

"There's a lack of communication between tribes and the state of Washington, and that has continued. The issue is simply that we do not share information as well as we possibly could have," Ashby said.

Every police agency in the state of Washington has access to a state computer system that is managed by the Washington State Patrol, which can then be used to access FBI databases or to run nationwide and statewide criminal background checks, Ashby said. He said tribal agencies are excluded from having access to this computer system.

He said many "tribes do not have or have encountered issues acquiring the same technology."

There is a computer station that can be installed in police departments that has a system called TAP, or the tribal access portal, which allows tribal agencies to connect to the federal databases. Ashby said there are still problems with the system, though. Sometimes warrants from tribal agencies aren't entered, so if a non-tribal law enforcement officer stops someone, they may not realize or be able to see there's a warrant out for their arrest from a tribal jurisdiction, he said.

"It becomes an issue for the officer making that contact and for us not being able to hold persons accountable for crimes in our jurisdictions," Ashby said. "That's just one of the many issues we run into."

Ashby said tribal officers are trained as well as city or state officers and have the ability to attend both the state law enforcement training academy or the federal training academy. He said problems arise because of the breakdown in communications.

“It’s very confusing and frustrating to not have complete and unfettered communication at the state level to do our jobs,” Ashby said.