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# Living Lab Program for Climate Change and Conservation - Final Report



## Project title: Secwépemc Perspectives of Climate Change and Resiliency in Tsútswecw Provincial Park

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## Research findings

### 1. Secwépemc peoples' perceptions of environmental change:

The Secwépemc recognize that species abundance (salmon species in particular) is declining in Tsútswecw Provincial Park, resulting in cultural, spiritual, economic, and environmental loss. The decline in salmon abundance in Tsútswecw Provincial Park is the result of many interrelated factors across salmon life cycles: climate change, habitat degradation, overfishing in the ocean and rivers, and effects of development up/down-stream on salmon populations, including pollution from agricultural runoff, sedimentation from logging, housing and commercial development on shorelines, and recreational activities, disrupting salmon spawning habitats.

- *I watched Adams River, itself, it changed because of the impacts that we had, people have on logging...(Kukpi7 (Chief) Tomma, Skw'lax)*
- *Historically, the South Channel held more fish, when we grew up, there was logjams and pools that were constant in this river that we could depend on. (Kukpi7 (Chief) Tomma, Skw'lax)*
- *Our land is being logged off. Farther up Turtle Valley, there's a bigger section that's going to be logged off there that's going to impact the water runoff that's going to come down that Chase Creek and again pollute the water and again impact salmon. It's happening all up and down Shuswap Lakes. You hear the mudslides, you hear of the huge building developments going on, on the lakes. All that pollution has got to go somewhere, and I live on South Thompson River, and all that stuff goes right by our house. (Cliff Arnouse, Adams Lake Indian Band Elder, former Kukpi7 (Chief))*
- *It is the chemicals and the other kinds of poison, those big mills or industries pour into the water. The majority of the fish coming this way are all gone. Never, ever reached their growing up area in the ocean. Four years from now you will never see that fish come back up this river. And another thing is to that we witness a lot of times those speedboats coming up and down those*

*rivers. They come too close to the bank. You see millions of those fish get washed up along the bank.* (Wilfred Tomma, Skw'lax Elder)

## 2. Species loss equates to cultural loss:

Salmon were a main food source, and all aspects of salmon harvest and spawning were integrated with cultural and stewardship practices and language. Reduced access to and availability of salmon and other food species has led to losses of culture, health and wellbeing, language, and education, among others (Morrison, 2011).

- *Historically, we could always depend on the sockeye here... We always used to be able to depend on it, now we can't.* (Kukpi7 (Chief) Tomma, Skw'lax)
- *(You) could just about walk across on the salmon backs, then. Now today, you can't even see that many. Walk a quarter of a mile to see one. But a long time ago there were thousands of salmon... I would say, if we are going to do anything, let's get our salmon back...* (Gerry Thomas, Neskonlith Elder)

## 3. Secwépemc stewardship practices are integral to salmon health:

Secwépemc peoples acknowledge their role as caretakers of the Tmicw (everything over, under and on the land) within Tsútswecw Provincial Park and emphasize the importance of revitalizing ceremony and traditional practices to call the salmon home and protect them. The Secwépemc are integrated with salmon health through reciprocal, kin-based relationships, and feel a responsibility to help the salmon as they have always done in the past through ceremony and working together.

- *We used to live off of the healthier stock of the upper Adams early run. All that is gone you know, just like many other species, they are (becoming) extinct... We need one action. Let's rebuild it, let's work together because that's what salmon (did) for us, they brought us together, they fed us together. They've had ceremonies together, we celebrated together with the salmon. We look at the salmon as our family* (Cliff Arnouse, Adams Lake Indian Band Elder, former Kukpi7 (Chief))
- *We all need to unite, not just with humans but with all lifeforms and plants and everything. Because that's our job. Our grassroots people are given that job for caretaking and caretaking is a must...* (Anonymous, Splatsin Elder)
- *This is one of the reasons why we are losing part of what we had...because we are forgetting to do what is needed. Having these ceremonies to welcome the fish back. The only way to do that is to welcome everyone.* (Anonymous, Skw'lax Elder)

## 4. Secwépemc peoples have developed adaptive, sustainable harvest strategies and stewardship practices in the face of great social, political, and environmental change:

Secwépemc peoples traditionally used sustainable harvest methods: taking only what they needed, sharing with those who did not have access or opportunity to fish, fishing in the river instead of

spawning beds. They employed different techniques in different areas of the river based on species availability and life cycle timing.

- *And our parents...they knew, they didn't take more than they should have. They knew how much we needed. For the winter and that's all they took. And if they had any more than they needed, then they shared it. (Lucy Tomma, Skw'lax Elder)*
- *If we didn't have it in Splatsin... we'd come here. And if they didn't have any here, we'd go elsewhere. And other areas that nobody's mentioned or knows. (Anonymous, Splatsin Elder)*

**5. Secwépemc peoples show resiliency to cultural and environmental change by continuing to assert their presence and responsibilities to the Tmicw through diverse adaptive strategies:**

The Secwépemc peoples have been dispossessed from Tsútswecw Provincial Park. However, they continue to employ adaptive strategies to maintain access to resources and assert their stewardship role within the park. Recent strategies to assert stewardship include fishing for food, social, and ceremonial purposes; involvement with hosting the Shuswap Salmon Symposium and leading the Salute to the Sockeye; working with BC Parks and other groups to install Secwépemc art and signage within Tsútswecw Provincial Park; conducting salmon habitat restoration in Tsútswecw Provincial Park.

- *(speaking of watching the river from a viewing platform in the Park)...here comes the Arnouse boys on a raft and they are spearing salmon as they are coming. And they (tourists) are like looking, is this part of the show? or what is going on? They (Arnouse boys) didn't care. That was their right and that was what they did (Brad Arnouse, Neskonlith Councillor)*
- *Bill and Mary Arnouse were always, we have pictures of them in our Little Shuswap band office area. They'd be dressed up in regalia, I guess welcome everybody, all the tourist here to the Adams River salmon run. But since all of us as families lived along the Little River, we fished and smoked our salmon there, on the Little River. (Dianne Francois Skw'lax Elder)*
- *We just did a salmon drop, 15,000 up and Invermere. About three weeks ago. I still say we should do some more. Get more of that salmon that our territories and spread more, get more coming back. That's one of the things I would say, if we are going to do anything, let's get our salmon back. Share our culture with the people. The more we share the less our culture will be gone (Gerry Thomas, Neskonlith Elder)*

**6. Secwépemc cultural and environmental health are intricately connected, and the resiliency to climate change for each are tied to Secwépemc relationships to land and land-based practices:**

The resiliency of Secwépemc peoples is reflected in their diverse processes of working together to assert their presence in Tsútswecw, and collectively enact adaptation strategies, revitalize language, and engage in reconciliatory processes with government agencies. While no Secwépemc participants

explicitly described their actions as embodying resiliency, they align with other scholars' descriptions of Indigenous resiliency:

- Gaudet (2021): grounded in relationships to land, family, community, history, language and identity; commonly associated with the term land-based; "It is, in fact, the land that makes one resilient, and it is connection that makes the land resilient" (p. 188)
- Kirmayer et al. (2011): grounded in cultural values; includes the importance of a shared history, distinct concepts of the person, language, and individual and collective activism and agency
- Ford et al. (2020): tied to place and imperative to climate change mitigation, "closeness and intimacy to place promotes resilience to environmental change" (p.533)
- *I guess that's why we are trying to save our salmon because you know what, salmon is (a) brain, keeps our memory and everything* (Anonymous, Splatsin Elder)
- *it is the only thing that's going to give us a future. It is to protect what we were meant to protect as guardians of the lands. Without this land, we have no food, no shelter. No security.* (Bart Thomas, Neskonlith Elder)
- *And it's so sad because we don't have anything on the land, we don't have our trees, we don't have any of our resources. There is the flooding, everything that's happening. And it's devastation. But if you really look, there's also light at the end of the tunnel. Because we have our children...There's so many things you know, so many changes from then and now, but the most important thing is our children. We have to show our children their culture, their language, their history. And where they come from, so they know their identity* (Anonymous, Splatsin Elder)

## Methods summary

- Methodology: The project was guided by Indigenous Methodologies (IM) which emphasize trust, reciprocity, respect, and inclusion. IM highlight the historical power imbalances between researchers and Indigenous peoples and strategies to empower communities (Kovach, 2021).
- Method:
  - Elders sharing circles on the land
  - Participants: 32 Secwépemc Elders from four Secwepemc communities (Skw'lax, Adams Lake Indian Band, Neskonlith, Splatsin)
  - Location: Tsútswecw Provincial Park, Chase, BC
  - 2 sessions: summer/fall 2022 during Salute to the Sockeye
- Data analysis:
  - Sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim
  - Researchers then coded transcripts for analysis of common or divergent themes
  - Data was verified with participants

## Key outcomes for BC Parks

- The histories of parks and the impacts of conservation policies that displaced Indigenous peoples from their territories are still relevant to these communities today.

- Many Indigenous communities maintain ancestral ties and responsibilities to their territories that have been turned into parks, and are using adaptive strategies to assert their stewardship roles in protected areas.
- Protected areas offer important opportunities to bring together government agencies, local organizations, and Indigenous communities to work towards interrelated conservation, recreation, and cultural goals (such as the Salute to the Sockeye).

## **Relevance to BC Parks management**

- Build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities whose territory each protected area is within through co-management or co-development techniques and projects within Provincial Parks.
- Enhance existing opportunities that facilitate Indigenous connection to their lands within BC's parks and protected areas.
- Support Indigenous-led land stewardship as a means of effective conservation through mechanisms such as Guardian/Ranger programs.
- Create opportunities within BC Parks' structures that facilitate meaningful and ongoing involvement of Indigenous peoples in the creation, management, and implementation of protected area and conservation policies.
- Learn each protected area's history and what impacts the creation and management of the park had for local communities and co-create interpretive signage and programming.
- Support Indigenous-led tourism opportunities within parks where applicable.

## **Project's challenges/opportunities**

### Challenges:

- Bringing together Elders and knowledge keepers in sharing circles is sometimes logistically difficult. For example, finding time and accessible spaces to accommodate as many voices as possible, building trust and recruiting a culturally knowledgeable circle leader can be a challenge.
- Many protected areas in BC are located in overlapping territories and it is critical for all communities to be represented.
- Building relationships takes time and energy, but it is integral to working with Elders and Indigenous communities.

### Opportunities:

- Secwépemc leadership support for the project contributed to successful participation in the process.
- Having existing relationships (through previous work by our research team) allowed the research team to efficiently and effectively deliver the project within available timelines, ensure a high level of community engagement, and enable this project to reach all the communities with territorial interests.

- The Salute to the Sockeye event offered an appropriate physical and cultural place to hold the sharing circles. The festival was embedded in Secwépemctsin, host communities were able to easily participate in the sharing circles as they were already present on the land, and cultural activities created a mindfulness around salmon and species conservation. The Salute was supported by BC Parks and aligned with the themes of this project.

## Conclusions/next steps

If reconciliation and climate adaptation goals are to be met, government protected area agencies and local communities must recognize the creation and management of protected areas has displaced Indigenous peoples, making it more difficult for them to practice the adaptive strategies that have allowed them to live sustainably amid great environmental and cultural change since time immemorial. Reasserting an Indigenous presence in Tsútswecw Provincial Park, through leading the Salute to the Sockeye and involvement in the Tsútswecw Park Guardian/Ranger program, are examples of adaptation techniques that demonstrates Secwépemc resiliency. These and other techniques enable Secwépemc guardianship and involvement in climate change adaptations should be supported by BC Parks and other government agencies. BC Parks must recognize its role in the displacement of Indigenous peoples from traditional lands and their traditional stewardship management roles, and work with communities to mitigate the past and sustain legacies of protected area establishment.

## Resource Allocation

### Funding directly to Little Shuswap Lake Band (LSLB):

\$10,650 directly to LSLB, to cover the following project expenses:

Elder honorariums - \$5,800

Elder meeting expenses - \$500

Elder travel expenses - \$1,250

Research assistant - \$1,850

Transcription costs - \$1,200

Total: \$10,650

### TRU Expenses:

Student research assistant - \$5,165

Student lead researcher - \$ 7,607

1 BC Parks conference registration cost - \$266

TRU administration overhead - \$1,312

Total: \$14,350

**Project Total: \$25,000**

## References

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<https://www.shuswaptourism.ca/festivals-and-events/adams-river-sockeye-salmon-run/>