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Cultivating Food Sovereignty

Indigenous Food systems on Vancouver Island

Vancouver Island Community Research Alliance (VICRA) & Office of Community Based Research (OBCR) | Local Food Project

INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

Vancouver Island Local Food Project

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Cover Picture: Camas and wapato photo courtesy of Nancy Turner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cultivating Food Security: Indigenous Food Systems on Vancouver Island outlines the story of food sovereignty for Indigenous People on Vancouver Island, past and present; and presents some hopes for the future. This report, one of four created as part of VICRA's *Local Food Project*, a collaboration involving community and academics, draws on information gathered from First Nations' organizations, and literature from both academic and community sources. The first section highlights how the principle of stewardship rather than ownership of natural resources; trade for purposes of food diversity, learning skills and social relations; combined with abundant resources, created a sustainable lifestyle for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. The second section describes the change from respectful trade between First Nations and Europeans to colonization policies that eroded both food security and food sovereignty for First Nations peoples. The third section, 'What Is', describes the impact colonization is having on the diets and traditional practices of First Nations on Vancouver Island as well as the cultural shift taking place to revive those traditional practices and diet. The third section, 'What Can Be', highlights opportunities for action including increased knowledge and awareness of traditional practices for both Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of Vancouver Island; processes for protecting medicinal plants, and; protection of natural resources, moving towards conceptualizing our relationship with the land and surrounding sea as stewards rather than owners.

PREFACE

In 2006 the Island Good Food Initiative began examining the state of food production on Vancouver Island. Drawing on this work and research produced from a variety of community based projects; the Office for Community-Based Research at the University of Victoria (OBCR-UVic) officially launched a partnership with The Vancouver Island Community Research Alliance (VICRA) in 2007. VICRA is a campus-community alliance, which mobilizes the diverse and collective knowledge between the five post-secondary academic institutions (University of Victoria, Camosun College, Royal Roads University, Vancouver Island University and North Island College) and various Vancouver Island partners including community foundations, local governments, and community agencies.

In 2010, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Vancouver Island Community Research Alliance embarked on a communications and dissemination project named *The Local Food Project,* coordinated by OBCR-UVic. The project aims to explore strategies around issues of food security and sustainability on Vancouver Island. From background dialogues and engagement activities, the project advisory committees identified four key areas where there was both need and opportunity to engage university academics, students and community to join forces and work together. These four areas can be broadly described as Urban Agriculture, Climate Change and Food Security, Institutional Purchasing, and Indigenous Food Systems.

Student interns from each of the post-secondary institutions on Vancouver Island gathered available knowledge on these topics from both academic research and from community experience. Working with an advisory committee made up of community members and academics, the students created reports and digital stories about the issues, current actions, and future actions that would strengthen island food systems.

The following report was produced by Julia Davis and Emma Twidale, undergraduate students at North Island College. The focus of this component of *The Local Food Project* was to outline the relationship between food systems and Indigenous Peoples past, present and future.

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The richness of this internship and the research we were able to conduct could not have been possible without the help and vision of Linda Geggie. We would also like to thank Fay Weller for her assistance with the research, writing, editing and formatting this report.

Thank you to the Office of Community Based Research and the Vancouver Island Community Research Alliance for providing the structural and logistical support for the Local Food Project.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the Social Science Humanities Research Centre of Canada (SSHRC) whose funding support has made this report possible.

To learn more about the Local Food Project, find this report, and each of the Strategy Area Reports, as well as a number of digital stories and other resources created through the Local Food Project on the Vancouver Community Research Alliance website at http://mapping.uvic.ca/vicra/

This project could not have been possible without participation from the following people and organizations.

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Introduction and Research Methods

For thousands of years First Nations had access to an abundance of food, managing the natural resources found in the land and waters of Vancouver Island and adjoining islands, without depleting those resources. Costanza and Patten (1995) advocate using the record of persistent sustainability on the Northwest Coast to judge sustainability. Trosper (2003) recommends that First Nations' societies "be studied carefully for insights that may be useful in today's consideration of the characteristics of resilient social ecological systems" (p. 2) and their applicability today.

In this report we describe some of the current knowledge regarding Vancouver Island First Nation societies and their food systems, gathered through a review of both academic and community based research. We frame the information collected into four historical periods: pre-European contact (what was); early European contact (what was phase 2); post European contact (what is), and; future possibilities (what could be). Two key concepts that we will be using throughout the report are food security and food sovereignty:

> Food security: a situation that exists when "all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (The Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2003).

> Food sovereignty: "The peoples' right to define their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution and consumption of food that guarantee the right to food for the entire population, on the basis of small and medium-sized production, respecting their own cultures and ... diversity" (World Forum on Food Sovereignty, 2001).

Our description of cultural traditions has a primary focus on the K'ómoks First Nation (KFN) comprised of the Pentlatch, Sethloot, Leeksun and Sasilta peoples of east central Vancouver Island; but the types of food production, trading patterns, impact of colonization and future hopes we describe are generally applicable to all First Nations on Vancouver island. We will be exploring how we can apply the knowledge about a previous way of living sustainably, living with full food security and food sovereignty, to our actions today and in the future.

For thousands of years First Nations carefully managed the abundance of natural resources in the sea and on the land by relying on our knowledge of seasonal cycles to harvest a wide variety of resources without harming or depleting them. Many believed the abundance of natural resources on BC's coast would last forever. They were wrong.

(Coastal First Nations, 2010 p. 1)

LEGEND OF THE PENTLATCH PEOPLES

A long, long time ago, two men, Koai' min and Hek ten, descended from the sky and they became the ancestors of the Pentlatch people. The Pentlatch lived in big cedar planked houses in the Comox Valley. The nights then were very quiet except for the sounds of the water, sea birds and the hooting of owls.

At that time the sea bed reached far from the shore which allowed the people to walk out and easily fill their baskets with fish. One night, in a dream, an old Chief was forewarned of the coming of a great flood. He was told by the Creator to prepare four canoes, great lengths of cedar rope and select members of the community. Not long after it began to rain. It rained and rained for days. Soon the waters filled the valley until there was no land in sight.

Eventually they spotted a large white whale. They attached the ropes to the whale to prevent them from being washed away in the resulting flood. When the waters receded, the whale was stranded in a local lake which later froze and became known as the glacier Queneesh or White Whale. The glacier today still presides over the valley of the K'ómoks (Comox Valley).

During the flood, the local villages were destroyed and only those people in the four canoes survived, the descendants of which formed the four honoured houses of the K'ómoks people – the Pentlatch, Sethloot, Leeksun and Sasilta. (K'omoks First Nation, 2011)

WHAT WAS (PRE EUROPEAN CONTACT)

The Kwakwaka'wakw, Coast Salish and Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations People call Vancouver Island Home, and have for thousands of years. The map (Figure 1) shows the territories of these First Nations within these three broad groups, with territory boundaries blurred as there has been sharing of hunting and fishing land, the focus being on stewardship of the land rather than ownership. Indigenous lawyer, John Burrows, quoted by Foot (2010) describes how First Nations had "*clan groups that exercised rights over large territories or prime fishing sites…But this wasn't a system of private property, it was a system of resource and land management*."

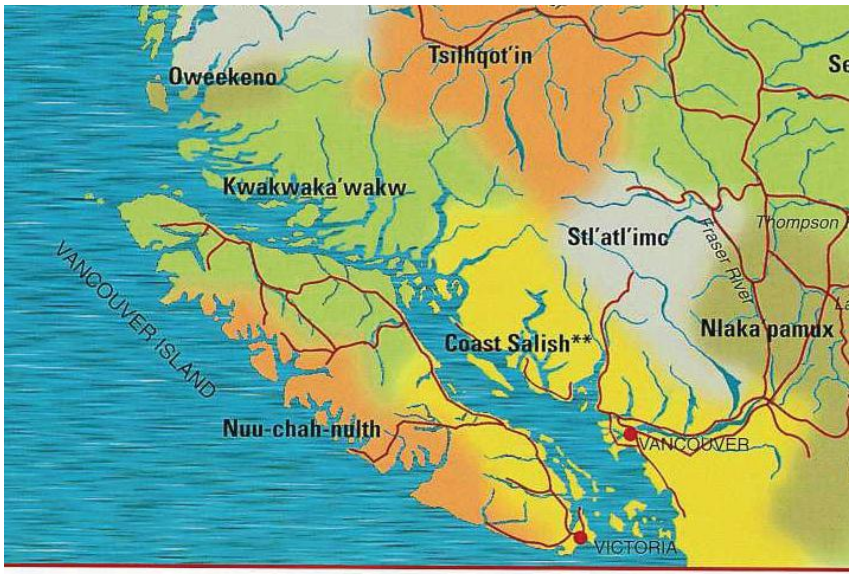


FIGURE 1: FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES ON VANCOUVER ISLAND (SOURCE: BC MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2011)

First Nations on Vancouver Island that are part of the Nuu-chah-nulth (N), Coast Salish (CS) and Kwakwaka'wakw (K):

Tlatlasikwala (K)
Gwa'Sala-Nakwaxda'xw (K)
Kwakiutl (K)
Quatsino (K)
'Namgis (K)
Ka:'yu;'k't'h' (K)
WeiWai Kum (K)
WeiWai Kai (K)
Ehattesaht (N)
Nuchatlaht (N)
Mowachaht/Muchalaht (N)
K'omox (K)
Hesquiaht (N)
Qualicum (CS)
Tseshaht (N)
Hupacasath (N)
Nanoose (CS)
Ahousaht (N)
Tla-o-qui-aht (N)
Snuneymuxw (CS)
Chemainus (CS)
Ucluelet (N)
Lyackson (CS)
Penelakut (CS)
Toquaht (N)
Uchucklesaht (N)
Huu-ay-aht (N)
Lake Cowichan (CS)
Halalt (CS)
Cowichan (CS)
Tseycum (CS)
Malahat (CS)
Pauquachin (CS)
Esquimalt (CS)
Ditidaht (N)
Pacheedaht (N)
Tsawout (CS)
Tsartlip (CS)
Songhees (CS)
T'Sou-ke (CS)
Scia'new (CS)

HISTORY & TRADITION:

Each of the First Nation communities listed above had their own cultural traditions. We will be describing the specific context and traditions of the K'omoks people as an example of traditional culture on Vancouver Island prior to the arrival of Europeans.

The K'ómoks called the land they occupied the *land of plenty* as it provided ample food for their population. Oral history and archaeology describe how salmon, seal, octopus, herring, cod, deer, ducks, shellfish, greens, root vegetables and a multitude of berries fed the K'ómoks people, young and old alike (See Table 1 for categories of food and Appendix A for a detailed list). Care and concern was taken to respect the land, as techniques used in harvest, preparation and cultivation of local resources reflected a reciprocal relationship between the environment and spiritual beliefs. Fish weirs, duck nets, berry picking techniques and clothing design met the needs of the K'ómoks and for generations provided variety, utility and a sense of cultural uniqueness. During the winter season, masked dances and rhythmic songs filled the evenings and brought people together. Property was distributed to guests at potlatches and elaborate naming ceremonies honoured the youth, leaders and elders of the communities (K'ómoks First Nation, 2011).

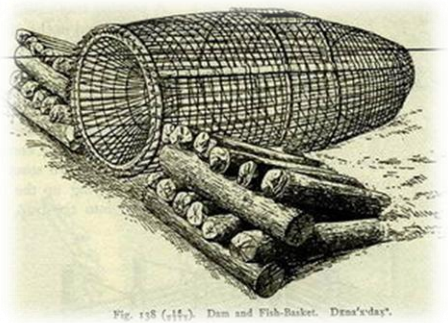


FIGURE 2: DAM AND FISH BASKET (BOAS, 1966)

Fish weirs, duck nets, berry picking techniques and clothing design met the needs of the K'ómoks and for generations provided variety, utility and sense of cultural uniqueness.

TABLE 1: TRADITIONAL FOODS OF VANCOUVER ISLAND (SOURCE: FIRST NATIONS HEALTH, 2009)

Herring	*Berries*
Small Mammals (Rabbit, Beaver)	*Eulachon*
Birds (Ducks, Seagull eggs, Goose eggs)	*Seaweed*
General Seafood (Crab, Scallops, Shrimp, Abalone, Sea Cucumber, Octopus, Prawns)	*Fish (Large variety of fish from lakes, ocean, and ponds – meat and eggs)*
Deer	*Roots*
Salmon	*Bivalves (Clams, Mussels, Oysters)*
Moose	

Food has been a cultural keystone of all First Nations communities. Not only was it a major component of the gifts given and traded among groups at potlatch ceremonies, but also, food producing trees and other plants, and key harvesting sites were also passed down family lines, and cared for, similar to European traditions of inheriting the family farms (Turner and Turner, 2008). Food was also shared between groups during hard times (Bell & Napoleon, 2008).

Oral history tells us of the existence of potlatch ceremonies, art symbols, and other cultural practices, while archeology reveals the history. For the traditional practices of Vancouver Island First Nations there is congruency between the oral history and archeological record (Turner and Loewen, 1998).

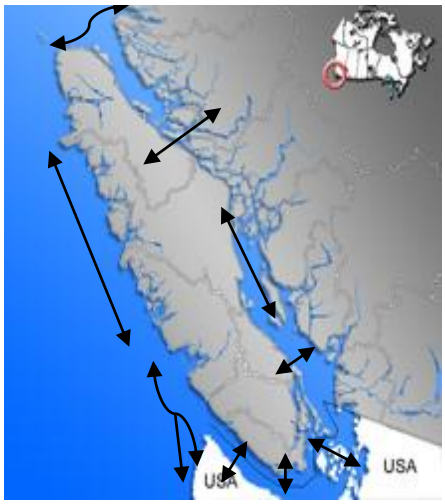
Indigenous Trade Networks

The two sections on trade networks (this one and the following) draws extensively from Nancy Turner and Dawn Loewen's (1998) *The Original "Free Trade": Exchange of Botanical Products and Associated Plant Knowledge in Northwestern North America*. Their definition of trade encompasses both the social relations as well as exchange of products, knowledge and skills. For the purposes of this report the information drawn from their research is that which is specific to Vancouver Island.

Evidence from obsidian, dentalia shells and other mineral materials indicates that "**trade networks are at least 2000-3000 years old, and have extended over distances up to 1000 kilometres**" (Turner and Loewen, 1998, p. 51). Goods were exchanged by sharing, bartering, or trading gifts and included the sharing of land for the purposes of food collection.

Food related trade between villages and between Nations provided variety to the diet, higher quality materials for baskets, bowls, and hunting and fishing tools, and a cultural exchange of skills, techniques, knowledge and songs.

FIGURE 3: TRADE PATTERNS OF FIRST NATIONS PRE-CONTACT (EXTRACTED FROM TURNER & LOEWEN, 1998)

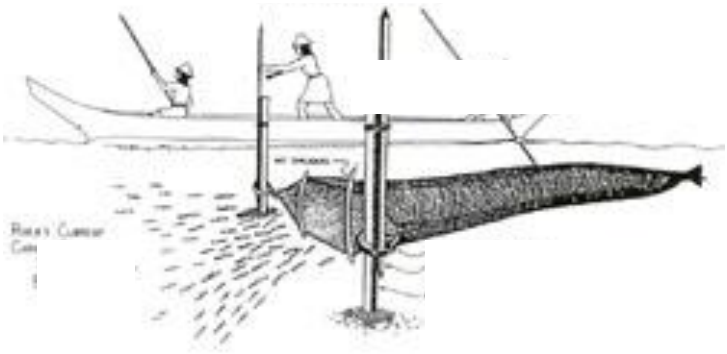


Many food products were commonly traded among communities on Vancouver Island as well as between those of Vancouver Island and the mainland (including the Olympic Penninsula): eulachon oil, dried edible seaweed, blueberries, dried cakes of salal and other berries, edible camas, springbank clover rhizomes, and thimbleberry shoots.

Variety was possible through trading the abundance of meat, berries and other products from the interior with the abundance of seafood on the coast. Yellow cedar wood, western red cedar wood and roots, sweetgrass (Schoenoplectus olneyei), beargrass (Xerophyllum tenax) and Oregon ash were traded for use as tools, bowls, basketry and building material (Turner and Loewen, 1998). According to Decosse (1980, cited by Turner and Loewen) knowledge and skills related to the materials traded, skills were also exchanged together with the vocabulary used to describe both the material and techniques.

In the case of coastal and inland trade, visits by groups of people travelling for trade were, of necessity, lengthy. On these trips songs and ceremonies learned from other nations were as valued as the trade in material goods (Greer, 1995); according to Stewart (1987) the Kwa'kwaka'wakw trading trips involved more time at Nootka Sound than other tribes, specifically to learn new songs (cited by Turner and Loewen, 1998).

FIGURE 5: TRADITIONAL OOLICHAN FISHING (NELSON)



Although there are traditional stories about occasional scarcity, in general there were few concerns about food security. This was due to the richness of resources on Vancouver Island and surrounding ocean, combined with techniques used for hunting and gathering that ensured a renewable harvest and the 'safety net' provided by access to diverse territories. One of the primary reasons for trade was to diversify the diet (Turner and Loewen, 1998). Soapberries to make 'Indian ice cream' (soapberries whipped into froth) and other sweet foods were

particularly popular; another favourite was camas bulbs, which had a sweet flavour when cooked (Turner and Loewen). As noted in Table 2 many of the traded products were dried so that they could travel without spoiling.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF ITEMS TRADED FROM OR TO VANCOUVER ISLAND FIRST NATIONS (EXTRACTED FROM TURNER AND LOEWEN, 1998)

Beargrass	Bundled leaves and finished baskets, traded from Olympic Peninsula to Vancouver Island
Blueberries	Dried berries traded among Coast Salish;
Edible camas	Dried bulbs widely traded from Coast Salish of Vancouver Island to west coast, north coast and mainland
Yellow Cedar	Bark and bark products widely traded along the NW coast and into interior, wood for bows traded from Coast Salish to interior;
Celery, Indian	Seeds traded from southeast Vancouver Island to west coast and northeast coast of Vancouver Island
Clover, springbank	Rhizomes traded from Nuxalk to Oweekeno and Hanaksiala; also within Kwakwaka'wakw communities
Lichen, black tree	Cooked, dried cakes traded from Interior to Coast Salish
Oregon ash	Bowls traded to the Makah from groups to the south and/or east
silverberry	Bark, mats and bags traded from Interior to Coast Salish
Thimbleberry	Sprouts exchanged locally among Nuu-Chah-Nulth
Three-square, sweet-grass	Dried leaves traded among Vancouver Island peoples and to Olympic Peninsula

As the preceding table also highlights, grasses and products from trees were also traded both amongst the First Nations on Vancouver Island or between islanders and either the Olympic Peninsula or mainland east of the island.

> *Indian-hemp* [Apocynum cannabinum]*, a fibre plant, was also widely traded; a good twine made from this fibre is as strong as modern synthetic cordage with 100 kg (200 pounds) or more test weight* (Turner, 1979. p. 53).

Medicinal plants were seldom traded, although some were used for the same medical issues by many of the different First Nations groups (Turner and Loewen, 1998). One exemption was Qexmin, Lomatium nudicaule, whose seeds were, and still are, widely valued for ceremonial and medicinal purposes (Nancy Turner, pers. comm. to FW July, 2011). As mentioned earlier, trade in knowledge and skills were as important as the actual items themselves in increasing both food security and food sovereignty for First Nations people.

Sharing Access to Resources

The underlying philosophy of stewardship rather than ownership is reflected in the sharing of food, or access to food through a sharing of the land. Turner and Loewen (1998, p. 58-59) describe three examples specific to Vancouver Island:

FIGURE 5: CAMAS BULBS AND WAPATO (PHOTO: NANCY TURNER

Camas Bulbs: *[T]he Ditidaht not only traded for camas, but also dug their own bulbs in Salish territory with permission of the Straits and Halq'emeylem people (p. 58)*

Hunting, fishing and gathering in Coast Salish Territory: *[T]he Lower Stl'atl'imx, when trading with the Sechelt, Squamish and Comox* [Tla'amin] *Coast Salish at Jervis Inlet or Howe Sound, "were allowed to pick berries, and to hunt and fish, as much as they liked" (p. 232). (p. 58)*

Cedar Products: [*T]he Makah of north coastal Washington traded for cedar products such as canoes and house planks with their Vancouver Island Nuu-Chah-Nulth relatives, and in turn traded these products further south to other groups of coastal Washington (p. 59).* The Makah rationale for trading was the higher quality of cedar from Vancouver Island as referenced in the following quote from James Swan (1869, cited by Turner and Loewen, p. 59)

> *There is very little cedar about Cape Flattery, and such as is found is small and of inferior quality. . . . The largest and best canoes are made by the Clyoquots and Nitinats [Clayoquots and Ditidahts] on Vancouver Island; the cedar trees being of a quality greatly superior to that found on or near Cape Flattery (pp. 4, 35).*

However, there were also conflicts and raids of one Nation by another, taking food and other goods by force rather than trade. So, in addition to providing access to different food products, skills and higher quality materials, trade visits were also practiced for peace-making purposes (Turner and Loewen).

SUMMARY

Before European contact First Nations people on Vancouver Island had what we are describing today as both food security and food sovereignty. They had access to a range of food within their hunting and fishing territory, with opportunities for increasing the variety of food through trade and seasonal travel; storage through food processing, gathering and hunting skills and knowledge through trade with both nearby villages and longer treks to the mainland. By approaching the resources of the land and sea as stewards rather than owners they were able to live within the earth's carrying capacity for thousands of years.

WHAT WAS (EARLY EUROPEAN CONTACT)

The following section describes a gradual change in the trading relationship between First Nations and Europeans that moved from a focus of shared learning and trading to one in which colonizing policies from Britain created a hierarchy of culture and ownership. This change resulted in the loss of food sovereignty for First Nations peoples.

ARRIVAL OF EUROPEANS AND EARLY TRADE

In the late 1700's a party of Northwest Company men, led by Alexander MacKenzie, set out from Montreal and, after overwintering at Fort Chipewyan, reached the Pacific at Bella Coola on July 22nd, 1793.

FIG

The route they followed from the Fraser River to Bella Coola was an existing Indian route known as the "Grease Trail" (Carrier /tl'ina?eti/). The name comes from the fact that the most important item traded into the interior was the processed oil of the eulachon (or oolican) fish *Thaleichthys pacificus*. Indeed, the Carrier word /tl'ina?e/ (eulachon oil) is a compound of Carrier /xe/ (grease, oil), with form (/?e/), a loan from Heiltsuk or Haisla, North Wakashan languages spoken on the coast and Vancouver Island. You can still hike this route, now known as the Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail, or as the Alexander MacKenzie Heritage Trail (Poser, 2004; Birchwater, 1993). On Vancouver Island early European traders also describe a trail that led from Cowichan territory to Ditidaht territory, the primary purpose being a healthy trade of potatoes from the Cowichan Valley for Halibut and Whale oil from the West Coast of Vancouver Island (Turner and Loewen, 1998).

Trading between Europeans and First Nations, similar to the trade between Indigenous people, involved learning as much as it did a trade in food or material goods. Indigenous people had knowledge of the land, ocean, harvesting techniques, native plant species and climate patterns; information that was crucial to the survival of non-Indigenous traders and settlers. Traditions brought from Europe and China influenced the food and harvesting patterns of First Nations.

As mentioned previously the potato was traded between the Cowichan and Ditidaht prior to Europeans settling the land. According to Suttles (1951) the Spanish and British explorers of the late 1700s described the hunting, fishing and gathering as the source for Coast Salish food,

FIGURE 7: WOMAN HARVESTING CAMAS BULBS

"without cultivation of the soil" (p. 1). Yet fifty years later traders and other visitors to the land described Coast Salish women, from many different communities, planting and digging potatoes successfully. Suttles' analysis indicates that the potatoes may have been introduced at Fort Langley, established in 1827, and the trade between First Nations groups resulted in establishment of potato crops by the Skagit, Makah, Duamish, Cowichan, Nanaimo, Samish, Nuwhaha, and Semiahmoo, in some instances without the First Nation people ever having met a 'white man'.

The addition of potato cultivation to First Nation food collection processes did not have a big impact on their lifestyle according to Suttles (1951, 2005), as food collection processes and tools already included digging and intense management of camas bulbs and clams, and living arrangements were permanent due to the richness of food resources available. Suttles suggests that one of the main reasons why potatoes were grown and harvested by Indigenous people was entrepreneurial; "*potatoes were accepted quickly and readily because in part they had a cash value at the trading posts*" (p. 280).

Other examples of food that was harvested by First Nations for trade purposes, as described by Turner and Loewen (1998) include:

Wild onions, although not a common food of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people, they sold these to Captain Cook's men and other early traders once they realized there was a demand for them due to their association with the onions farmed in Europe.

FIGURE 8: EDIBLE SEAWEED (PHOTO: FAY WELLER)

Edible seaweed, Japanese and Chinese had developed processes for eating edible seaweed, which were replicated by the First Nations who added it to their diet as well as trading it to the Chinese in Victoria.

Knowledge regarding food and food preparation was also provided to non-indigenous settlers by First Nations peoples. Camas bulbs, a favourite food traded amongst First Nations were eaten by Europeans as early as 1805.

> *John Jewitt, who was held captive in the early 1800s at Nootka Sound for several years by Nuu-Chah-Nulth Chief Maquinna, stated in his July 6, 1805 journal entry that dried cakes of salal berries were an important trading item among villages, and that three large baskets of "an excellent fruit... Quawnoose" (actually cooked, dried bulbs of blue camas) were brought by "Kla-iz-arts" (Coast Salish) peoples. (Turner and Loewen, p. 52)*

In 1914 a visitor to Washington State noted that settlers were eating Camas bulbs, in addition to a cake made of black lichen; the preparation and cooking process learned from local Indigenous people (Douglas, 1914, cited by Loewen and Turner).

TRADE PATTERNS CHANGE

Contact with Europeans directly and indirectly affected trade in indigenous foods. Trading patterns changed with the introduction of horses to Interior British Columbia around 1800 (Turner and Loewen, 1998), which allowed substantial increases in the distances that could be travelled (again, mainly in the Interior Plateau). Middlemen and the establishment of trading posts contributed to the intensity and frequency of trade.

FIGURE 9: POTLATCH AT SONGHEES (BC ARCHIVES)

While horses may have increased harvesting ranges and trade distances other effects of European contact had the opposite effect. Britain established a colony on Vancouver Island in 1849 and in 1871 Canada claimed sovereignty over the island. Even though few treaties had been signed on Vancouver Island, the Indian Act of 1873 created the law that would delineate the boundaries and location of 'Indian Reserves' and also identified who would be an 'Indian' under Canadian law. In 1884 an amendment to the Indian Act banned Potlatches, the traditional feasts of Vancouver Island First Nations (BC Archives, 2007). Residential schools were established, in which First Nations children were taught to replace their culture with the European culture; at the same time non-indigenous children were taught the rationalization for colonizing practices:

> *[A]n important body of literature has analyzed the ways in which residential schooling sought to colonize the hearts, bodies, and minds of indigenous children, teaching them that colonialism was natural and inevitable…the textbooks authorized for use in British Columbia's public secondary schools played a vital role in justifying colonialism to non-indigenous students. (Carleton, 2011, p. 5)*

These changes marked the shift away from food security and food sovereignty in First Nations

communities. The resources of the land and sea became things to be bought and sold without consideration for long term sustainability. The responsibility of First Nations leaders to "successfully manage the harvesting of resources within defined territories by controlling access and amounts captures" (McKechnie, 2007, p. 219) was impossible to practice due to legislation being imposed from Britain related to ownership of the land and resources. Even the potato fields became a victim of the new laws:

> *White settlement eventually had a bad effect on native potato-raising. Without clear title to their lands, the Indians could not hold patches of prairie that they visited only for a few weeks or months of the year. Simmons in 1858 mentions the Whites' practice of taking over the good potato prairies. (Suttles, 1951, p. 280)*

John Lutz (2008) describes how the lifestyle and values of First Nations Peoples were devalued by the Europeans due to a belief system regarding labour and status that began in Europe during the 16th century and reflected what has been described as 'the Protestant work ethic'. He outlines how the "*willingness to work long hours, to sacrifice leisure, and to pursue wealth beyond his/her basic needs*" (p. 7) were standards arising from this new belief system and labour was only considered to be such when it involved an interference with nature or a removal of nature from its natural state. Colonizers used these standards to rationalize taking land from First Nations Peoples who valued leisure time and chose to access food primarily through hunting and gathering food. Intensive management of clam beds, and camas bulb sites were not acknowledged in the colonizers definition of labour.

FIGURE 10: EULOCHON HUNG FOR SMOKING (PHOTO: DAVID GORDON)

In the 20th century the combined impact of devaluing and, in many cases, banning of First Nations traditional practices, takeover of traditional territories, overfishing of oceans, and introduced foods led to reduced access to traditional food and traditional practices together with reduced plant and food trade (Turner and Turner, 2008).

However, some elements of trade between First Nations continued, in some cases money was used for the exchange rather than other products. Turner and Loewen (1998) provide the following 20th century examples:

> *Ida Jones recalled that when she was young, Ditidaht people used to trade **dried fish** and other items for **camas** from the Salish people in Victoria (Turner et al., 1983).*
>
> *Elsie Claxton, Straits Salish from Tsawout, noted that West Coast (Nuu-Chah-Nulth) peoples really liked **camas bulbs**, and that, "a long time ago," they would pay five to ten dollars for a 50 pound potato sack of the cooked bulbs (pers. comm. to NT, October*

1996). The same quantity of potatoes would have cost perhaps two dollars at that time.

*Margaret Lester (Stl'atl'imx) remembered that her grandmother used to take her **baskets** to farms in the Pemberton Valley to exchange for clothing, potatoes, fat, beef, or "anything we could get" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 10).*

Baskets and carvings were sold to non-Indigenous people, usually for very low prices relative to the work involved (Turner and Loewen, 1998). For many First Nations peoples, this was a much needed source of income as the potential for subsistence living had been almost completely destroyed.

SUMMARY

Early trade between First Nations and Europeans indicates a respectful sharing between cultures of both products as well as knowledge. What becomes evident is a shift to European culture as the dominance in language, monetary system, medicine, and food; with First Nations products and traditional practices being devalued in the process; the ultimate result being a loss of food sovereignty for First Nations people.

FIGURE 11: ORCA (PHOTO: FAY WELLER)

WHAT IS (POST EUROPEAN CONTACT)

> *Since the coming of the White man, we have put aside many of our ways, and forgotten the teachings of Mother Earth. We no longer eat the natural foods we were meant to- we eat White man's food, full of sugar and chemicals. We no longer drink pure water-we drink black tea and coffee, even alcohol. Many other things have been forgotten. This is why we have become sick and weak.*
>
> -Lesley Malloch, 1989, p 466.

COLONIZATION AND THE IMPACT OF PRIVATIZATION

When colonization came to North America, it brought with it the idea of private land. Not only were fences built to keep the indigenous people off of certain land, but there was mass displacement of people from their homeland in the Indian Acts' residential school and reserve programs. This reduced the size of traditional hunting and fishing grounds and reduced the transfer of traditional food knowledge between generations, making it difficult to access food using traditional practices. The wage economy finally sealed the fate of most people, taking them away from their known areas of food collection, and also taking up all of their time (Turner, 2008).

Privatization changed historical practices. Many gathering sites have been privatized or turned into parkland and access to plant and animal resources denied or made illegal. Often, when these sites have been subsequently disturbed or destroyed, no notice is given to the affected first nation community. Historically, the native peoples' role in resource management has been minor and inadequate (Bell & Napoleon, 2008).

The concept of knowledge as a commodity has also had an impact on traditional practices. Traditional plants and medicinal knowledge are spoken of as a secret to be kept within the community. Elders who have knowledge about the plants and their use believe that if the information about how to use these plants entered the public realm, the plants would lose their power to heal (Bell and McCuaig, 2008). As a result elders will only disclose certain information about a small number of medicinal plants. The dilemma facing First Nation communities is that many plant habitats and ecosystems are being degraded and destroyed on a daily basis by industrialization: "*logging or dams, or whatever, and they don't know about the plants cause the First Nations won't tell them what it looks like, so you have to tell them, but if you do, they'll turn around and exploit it anyways. Exploit it and commercialize it, and make money off it any way they can*."(quote by Ktunaxa elder John Nicholas in Bell and McCuaig, 2008, p. 330). There

are benefits of documentation and at the same time, fear of making information more available and therefore susceptible to exploitation.

TODAY'S DIET

Today many individuals try to maintain their use of the traditional foods, listed in Table 1 (page 5). However, for the majority, the knowledge transfer loss due to the effects and colonization and residential school and the availability of alternative food sources (i.e. grocery stores, fast food outlets, restaurants) have resulted in a shift to a diet based on processed foods, many high in unhealthy fats, preservatives, chemicals and refined carbohydrates.

The changed diet has resulted in high rates of both obesity and diabetes for First Nations people:

- Although B.C. has the lowest rate of obesity in Canada at just 11 per cent, the overall obesity rate for First Nations people in the province is 32 per cent and averages 36 per cent for those living on reserve. (Assembly of First Nations, 2011)
- The rate of diabetes for the Aboriginal population is triple the rate for the general population in BC (BC Provincial Health Officer, 2002).

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A number of studies in First Nation communities have helped us to understand which foods are commonly eaten. The following information is quoted from the First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (FNFNES): Results from British Columbia (2008/2009) (Chan, Receveur, Sharp, Schwartz, Ing and Tikhonov, 2011, p. 2):

Traditional Foods

- *The average amount of traditional food consumed was 98 g/person/day.*
- *Traditional food use consisted mainly of fish, which was harvested by 95% of all respondents; berries (86%); land mammals (84%); beach foods harvested close to shore (60%); root crops and greens (26%); mushrooms (24%); birds/fowl (17%); and foods harvested from trees (9%).*
- *Over 200 different types of foods were harvested, with salmon, moose and berries being the most prevalent.*
- *Traditional foods complemented market foods rather than substituted them.*
- *Dietary quality was much improved on days when traditional foods were consumed, as traditional foods were important contributors of protein, vitamin D, Vitamin A, iron, zinc and several other nutrients.*

The average amount of traditional food consumed was 98 g/person/day. (FNFNES, 2011, p. 2)

Barriers to harvesting traditional foods

- *91% of all participants indicated that they would harvest more food if it were not for a lack of equipment, transportation and time.*
- *47.4% indicated that it was harder to get traditional food (p. 98)*
- *From a list of possible external barriers, government restrictions and forestry were identified by two-thirds of the respondents as inhibiting factors, while one third said hydro installations and mining were a factor.*
- *Seventy-five percent of respondents observed that climate change was affecting the availability of traditional foods for harvest.*
- *Almost half the respondents reported that climate change decreased the availability of traditional foods in their households.*

Nutrients in the diet

- *In terms of overall diet quality, the low intake of milk and other dairy products, as a source of calcium and other important nutrients, is a concern.*
- *Intake of fruits, vegetables and grain products are below the Canadian recommended levels.*
- *The low intakes from three out of the four food groups may lead to low intakes of calcium, vitamin A, vitamin C, folate, vitamin D, magnesium, potassium and fibre.*
- *Dietary intakes of fat, protein and carbohydrates were similar to those of the Canadian general population.*
- *Nutrients associated with meat and fish consumption such as vitamin B12, niacin, thiamine, riboflavin and iron tended to be adequately provided in the diet, similar to the Canadian general population.*
- *At least 50% of the BC First Nations adult population are likely to need increased intakes of dietary fiber, vitamin A (except for older women), vitamin D, calcium, magnesium (for older men), potassium, as well as less sodium in their diet.*

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(FNFNES, 2011, p. 2)

Today's Practices Related to Traditional Foods

Knowledge exchange, community owned enterprises, transplanting of traditional plants, and traditional food exchanges are all part of First Nations food exchange and food practices in today's world.

There is growing interest from ethnobotanists and others in understanding the traditional uses of plants and what plants are native to the landscape. In concert with that interest there is recognition that the knowledge held by elders, the intellectual property rights of First Nations, needs to be adequately recognized and compensated.

Many First Nations peoples have transplanted traditional plants from one place to another in order to have access to the food (Turner and Loewen, 1998). "*For example, Kwakwaka'wakw Hereditary Chief Adam Dick (pers. comm. to NT, 1996) recalled transplanting rooted stems of highbush cranberry from the bog meadows at Kingcome Inlet to his own backyard, to provide a good source of berries for his family's use*" (p. 63).

FIGURE 12: MUSSELS (PENTLATCH SEAFOODS, 2011)

Some First Nations are initiating businesses related to traditional foods; operating within their traditional stewardship framework. One example is Pentlatch Seafoods Ltd., a company wholly owned and operated by the K'ómoks First Nation on Vancouver Island and named in honour of the house of Pentlatch. Underlying the financial success of Pentlatch Seafoods (over 20 full-time people are employed and produces over 2 million oysters per year), is a "robust environmental stewardship program" developed by the K'ómoks First Nation (Pentlatch Seafoods Ltd, 2011).

There has also been a revival of Potlatch ceremonies since the ban was lifted in 1951, which creates opportunities for traditional sharing of food (BC Archives, 2007). A young woman from Namgis described her experiences of potlatches in today's world (Corinna Mahoney, pers. comm. to ET, 2011). In the past year she attended three great big potlatches in Alert Bay; huge events to organize, with traditional gift giving still being practiced, only with updated food gifts such as preserved salmon, and necessities like toilet paper. She herself will be part of the ceremonies at the big house next spring. Her family is busy accumulating gifts for her wedding and she is sewing a new button blanket (1000 plus abalone buttons) for her bridal walk around the fire with the elders. She describes how Potlatches are held to commemorate the lives of elders who have passed, and at the same time members of the community who have died from addiction and illness away from the community; also, for births, rites of passage such as adolescence, name giving and marriages. Because of the great expense, many ceremonies are held at one potlatch; the potlatches going on for 14 to 20 hours at a time, for two or three days.

Re-learning Traditional Practices of Food Use and Stewardship on Vancouver Island

Vancouver Island is part of a cultural revolution in which First Nations people are reviving their traditional food harvesting, history, and culture. The Indigenous Food System Network (IFS) (2011) has identified four principles to guide the present day food security and food sovereignty movements in Indigenous communities:

FOUR KEY PRINCIPLES GUIDING INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENT

- ***Sacred or divine sovereignty*** *– Food is a gift from the Creator; in this respect the right to food is sacred and cannot be constrained or recalled by colonial laws, policies and institutions. Indigenous food sovereignty is fundamentally achieved by upholding our sacred responsibility to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food.*

- ***Participatory*** *– IFS is fundamentally based on "action", or the day to day practice of maintaining cultural harvesting strategies. To maintain Indigenous food sovereignty as a living reality for both present and future generations, continued participation in cultural harvesting strategies at all of the individual, family, community and regional levels is key.*

- ***Self-determination****- The ability to respond to our own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods. The ability to make decisions over the amount and quality of food we hunt, fish, gather, grow and eat. Freedom from dependence on grocery stores or corporately controlled food production, distribution and consumption in industrialized economies.*

- ***Policy*** *- IFS attempts to reconcile Indigenous food and cultural values with colonial laws and policies and mainstream economic activities. IFS thereby provides a restorative framework for policy reform in forestry, fisheries, rangeland, environmental conservation, health, agriculture, and rural and community development.*

Affiliated with the Indigenous Food Network, the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Foods Network was established in 2008. This network "aims to build collaborative approaches in addressing issues of traditional food access and security" (IFS, 2011). Activities

have included:

- ✓ A **rotating regional meeting** approach across Vancouver Island. On a quarterly basis gatherings are hosted in each of the four island regions.
- ✓ The annual **Vancouver Island Traditional Food Conference** is collaboratively hosted at alternating locations across Vancouver Island. At these events there are opportunities to share teachings, highlight key issues pertaining to traditional foods (VICCIFN, 2011).

The Feasting for Change project is another example of the growing interest in sharing knowledge about traditional food between First Nations. This initiative evolved from a feast held in May 2007. Representatives from each First Nation were invited to a feast at the T'Sou-ke First Nation. They shared crab, halibut and other traditional foods as they came together to discuss what could be done to inspire people to take charge of their food, health, culture, and community. The T'Sou-ke hall was packed with families and the energy was palpable—people were excited and hopeful for a healthier, more vibrant future.

FIGURE 13: PUTTING THE PIT TOGETHER (FEASTING FOR CHANGE, 2011)

Elders and young-ones alike shared their stories and ideas about what it would take to "bring people together" and "get back to the basics" by utilizing traditional knowledge and expertise within the community. As the ideas percolated it was clear that the knowledge to accomplish this already exists. What emerged from this gathering was the innovative idea of having these feasts in each community and inviting select people from other communities (Victoria Community, IFSN, 2011).

Other initiatives and activities on Vancouver Island include:

- ✓ Annual conferences, meant to complement other land, culture, ecology, and health initiatives, aimed at protecting, conserving, and restoring Indigenous food systems in BC (Morrison, 2006).
- ✓ In British Columbia, people and the government are working in concert to "support and facilitate the development of regional networks, community based action plans, and

culturally relevant learning events to ensure...continued and improved access to culturally important food systems at the grassroots level" (Morrison, 2006, p. 5).

We have replicated a diagram (Figure 12) created by Turner and Turner (2008, p.112) that depicts the cumulative effects and dietary change amongst First Nations people from the late 1790's to early 2000's.

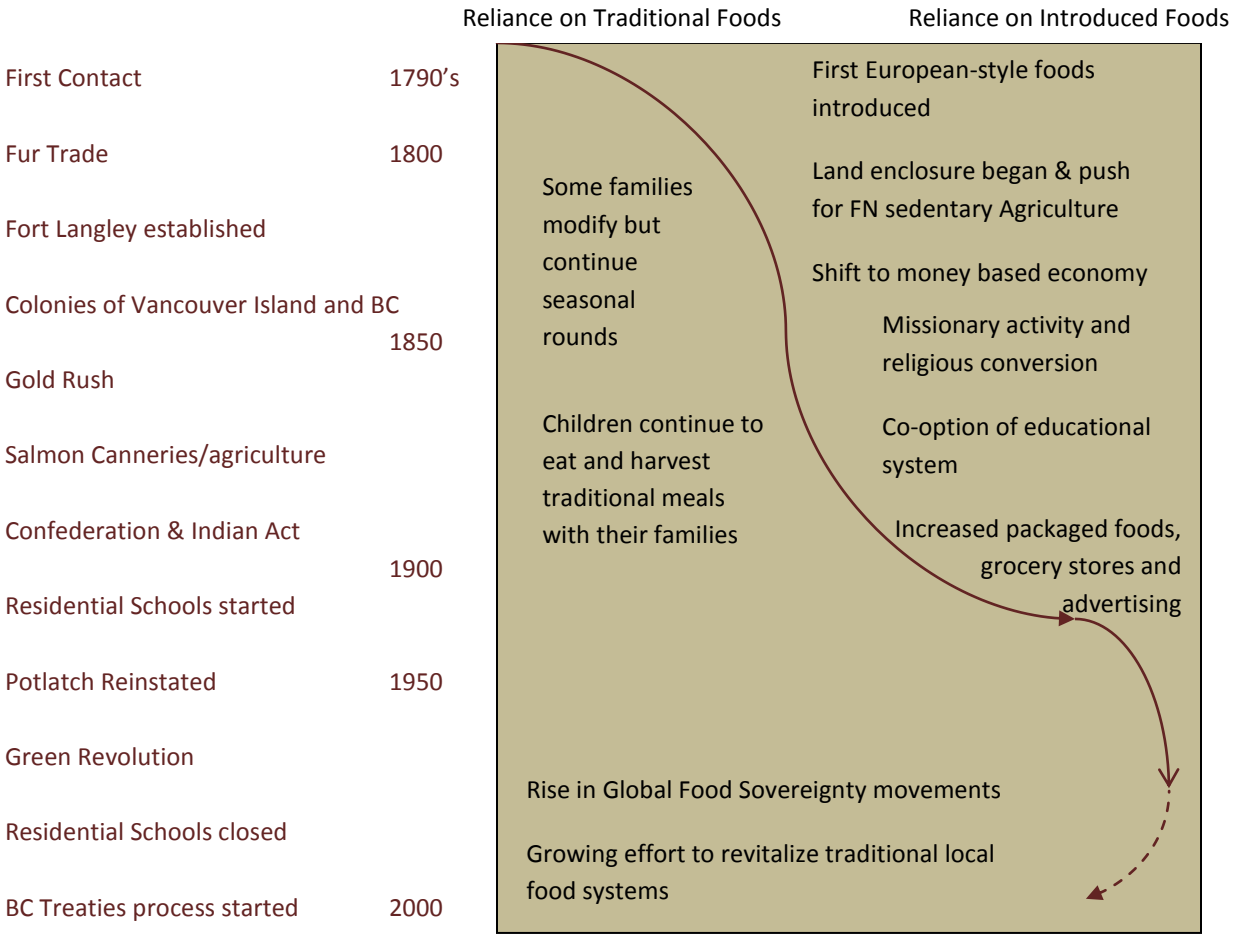

FIGURE 14: CUMULATIVE EFFECTS AND DIETARY CHANGE AMONGST FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE

SUMMARY

The current context for First Nation's peoples on Vancouver Island is a combination of historical impact of colonization together with a revival of interest in traditional practices and knowledge. The reduction of both food security and food sovereignty has resulted from an economic system that has displaced traditional ownership and management practices and focused on private ownership and profit instead of the impact on the environment, cultural practices and

long term sustainability of food systems for both Indigenous and non-indigenous people of Vancouver Island. However, there are opportunities to learn from First Nations traditional practices, bringing the concept of stewardship of resources, and the resulting food sovereignty, into the twenty-first century. Food sovereignty, in this context, becomes "the act of counterbalancing the negative impact of contemporary land use that excludes Indigenous food values and systems and gives priorities to industrial economic development" (Morrison, 2006). Reform includes the "recognition of [indigenous peoples'] laws, traditions, customs, tenure systems, and institutions; as well as the recognition of territorial and cultural borders of peoples" (ICARRD, 2006).

What Could Be

British Columbia is at the forefront of a cultural shift in which this land's peoples' traditional food harvesting, history, and culture are being brought back from the edge of extinction and pushed into the light again. Several themes in the literature on indigenous food sources and what is being done to revitalize traditional practices stand out. The right to food security and sovereignty, efforts at raising awareness, and education about traditional food practices of First Nations people. Many opportunities have been identified to further strengthen food security and food sovereignty, some of these include:

Increase knowledge and application of traditional food practices for First Nations people:

Continued support for current initiatives underway through VICCIFN to increase knowledge and practice in First Nation communities about traditional foods, practices, health benefits, medicinal plants and uses together with activities supported by the Island Campuses working with partners in First Nation communities.

Initiatives being carried out by the Ktunaxa Nation (Bell & McCuaig, 2008) applied to Vancouver Island context:

- Ethnobotany studies program that focus on land management, resource protection, education, economic development and other uses consistent with maintaining cultural practices.
- Creation of a herbarium for research, comparative work, and education in schools.
- Gathering knowledge of plants from elders and other specialists, the publication of a book on traditional plant uses, and the opening of an indigenous plant nursery.

Increase knowledge of traditional First Nations practices in non-Indigenous communities:

Information about Indigenous food systems and current applicability to food security on Vancouver Island: taught in schools; available in museums; included in sustainability events, and; incorporated into strategies to increase local food production and access.

Increase promotion of traditional foods and medicines by health professionals

Provide information to health practitioners regarding the importance of traditional practices and foods/medicines for both prevention and treatment purposes. Knowledge and awareness raises the chances that health professionals will encourage their use and, at the same time, increases the chance for conservation and protection of the food and medicine.

Protect traditional hunting and fishing territory of Vancouver Island First Nations:

Increase protection of traditional foods through protection of traditional hunting and fishing territory of Vancouver Island First Nations; implementing the type of stewardship of land that First Nations communities practiced before Europeans and the concept of private land ownership arrived. This involves re-looking at land and resource management approaches, rights and responsibilities.

Establish process for protection of medicinal plants:

To address concerns regarding medicinal plants being destroyed due to site development, weighed against the potential that providing information may lead to exploitation through commercialization of the knowledge, it has been suggested that a designated group of people of knowledge could come into the development site to see if there is anything of value there, and if it is possible to save or move it (Bell & McCuaig, 2008).

There are many ways to reverse what has happened, but it is going to take time, initiative, motivation, and co-operation from all sectors in society. Governments need to become willing to make changes, or adapt policies, so that they may better serve everyone (Morrison, 2006). To move forward in a spirit of co-operation, it will be of utmost importance to protect the land and its resources, particularly forests and seas, as they are a source traditional foods and medicines.

There is still hope. A growing movement and awareness of the territorial rights, the growing concern over the rights to food security and sovereignty, improving individual and community health, and a mass interest and movement of the people to reconnect with knowledge, practices and relationship with their food has the potential to reverse the damaging policies and practices of the last two centuries.

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APPENDIX A

Coastal BC Food and Food Sub Groups

Seafood

General
Crab – King and mixed species
Scallop
Octopus
Shrimp
Abalone
Sea Cucumber
Prawns
Black Sea Prune
Barnacles

Bivalves
Blue Mussels
Mixed Species Clams
Pacific Oysters

Large Mammals

Deer
Moose

Small Mammals

Rabbit/Hare
Ground Squirrel
Beaver

Fish (meat, eggs, head, and skin)

Salmon
Chinook
Pink
Steelhead
Coho
Sockeye
Chum

Groundfish
Pacific Cod
Black Cod
Ling Cod
Rockfish

Smallfish
Eulachon
Herring (and roe)

Flatfish
Sole
Flounder
Halibut

Trout
Dolly Varden
Lake
Rainbow
Steelhead
Cutthroat
Kokanee Whitefish
Northern Pike

Walleye
Burbot
Arctic Grayling Bass
Chub

Birds (and their eggs)

Ducks
Goldeneye
Stellar's Elder Duck/ Old Duck
Canvas back
Ruddy
Wood
American Widgeon
Northern Pintail
Mallard
Teal
Northern Shoveler
Grebe
Murre

Grouse
Ptarmigan
Quail

Eggs
Seagull
Goose

Seaweed

Red Laver (and related spp. Rhodophyta)
Giant Kelp
Dulse

Roots

Springbank Clover
Northern Riceroot
Silverweed
Camas
Wapato
Bracken Fern
Nodding Onion
Wild Sweet Potato
Yellow Avalanche/Glacier Lily
Spring Beauty or Mountain Potato
Balsamroot Chocolate Lily
Bearroot
Sweet Vetch
Eel-Grass
Desert Parsley
Bitterroot
Wild Carrot
Spiny Wood Fern

Berries

North & South Coast
Bunchberry
Blueberry
Cloudberry /Bakeapples
Cranberry
Crowberry(Mooseberry)
Currant
Gooseberry
Blue Elderberry
Red Huckleberry
Salmonberry
Thimbleberry
Black Hawthorn (jam/jelly)
Crabapple (jam/jelly)
Oregon Grape (jam/jelly)
Soapberries
Strawberry
Cherries
Blackberries
Trailing Black Raspberry
Red Currant
Rosehips

North & South Interior
Blueberry
Cranberry
Currant
Blue Huckleberry
Blue Elderberry
Soapberries
Bilberry
Black Raspberry
Strawberry
Rosehips
Saskatoon

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