

# **Forests for the Future: The View from Gitxaala**

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The history of the relationship between First Nations and outsiders has not always been a happy one. There are many stories of K'mshiwah coming to our community, asking us to share our knowledge, and then leaving without returning anything to us. This presentation is about the way these relationships are changing. As Gitxaala we are no longer interested in sitting back and watching our country being exploited by outsiders. Developing protocols of research, like the one described in this paper, is part of our declaration of sovereignty.

*The Forest for the Future* project is aimed at documenting our, Gitxaala, knowledge and its importance for the management of our natural resources, lands, and sea. The research project involved researchers from the University of British Columbia and our community. My basic role in the project was to contact hereditary leaders and Elders and Gitxaala nation members who might agree to participate in the project. We attempted to arrange interviews with Elders and hereditary leaders and community members from each clan. Our next step was to interview the hereditary leaders, high profile men, and elderly women in the community, who we call the Smgyigyet, Lik'agyet and Sigyidmhana'a of our community. Each person was interviewed on an individual basis or, if they preferred, with their brother, sister, or other family member.

In our interviews we asked for knowledge about how we, as First Nations, traditionally worked our lands in terms of resource sharing and sustainability. We were interested in documenting how First Nations have for thousands of years utilized the land so that the land sustained the people. We know that our resources on the land sustained the people and that our resources of the sea sustained the people. We respect the land and the resources and we sustain those resources. We respect the spiritual component of the land and the resources. The respect again reaches to the lands and waters and to the spiritual aspects of the land and the resources as well. So that was some of the information that we were trying to document.

## *Benefits of Cooperative Research*

We are a people of oral history, but we live in a world of printed words, video tapes, and computers. This project is part of the process of trying to put down on black and white, our oral history. This is a benefit to us and

we believe that we can have a combination of both oral and written history. We can have our oral history and we can have it written down so that it is in the schools, in the community, in the office. This is beneficial for our community and our nation as a whole. We can continue our oral history but we can also have it documented in black and white. We can utilize these two tools to keep our history alive. The curriculum developed from the project is part of that written history for our future generations.

The benefits I see that can come out of this for institutions is that it can create an educational curriculum for all British Columbians, Canadians and the world to see how we as First Nations have utilized our land and resources prior to, and after European contact. Given that prior to European contact, if you look at British Columbia on a whole, there was a larger First Nations population in British Columbia than there may be today. Yet we sustained ourselves through those resources. Today I feel that Canadians and British Columbians need to be more educated in terms of how we as First Nations sustained ourselves for thousands of years.

There was a reciprocal relationship between Gitxaala and our resources. We sustained the resources and the resources sustained us. Since contact there has been interference from European governing structures. Today we are documenting Traditional Ecological Knowledge and the goal is to educate the world that science-based management does not have all the answers. In the last hundred years, Western, science-based management has not been effective. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) has been very effective in sustaining First Nations peoples and their resources over many hundreds of years.

Each clan has always recognized and acknowledged the value of TEK. Each clan has its own laws and traditional knowledge for each of their ecosystems. The clans know their territories and how to sustain them. Resources have always been managed at this level. There is also an overarching set of laws for the Nation as a whole.

I think it is a very, very important educational tool that Canadians and British Columbians can use when they learn how First Nations had utilized the resources on the land, respected the resources on the land, so that the respect then leads to sustainability for us as people on this land.

I also believe that institutions can promote this through their programs in terms of educating British Columbians and Canadians, not only at a university level but at a high school, and intermediate level, junior high, Kindergarten, etc.

It's about teaching the world how to sustain our resources. We can use our territory as an example to the world and show how TEK can sustain the land. The Gitxaala Nation manages its resources sustainably, and the world can learn from us.

In terms of building relationships I think that TEK can be a tool. I strongly believe that Universities can raise the bar in terms of educating

Canadians and British Columbians and continue to do this type of research and documentation, not only for Canada's benefit and British Columbia's benefit, but also for the benefit of First Nations.

The documentation of traditional Gitxaala knowledge is also useful for our Nation's work today. I see the TEK report working for us in two ways. It lets everyone know that we continue today to utilize our lands, waters, and resources, and we continue today to use our TEK to sustain those lands, waters and resources. It is also a tool to demonstrate to the two levels of government (provincial and federal) the continuity of land and resource use, as we negotiate our treaty. This project is part of documenting our traditional governing structures of resource management that will be used to regain control of our territories. Like British Columbia's Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, we have our own way of managing our lands.

*Difficulties in Cooperative Research*

Some of the difficulties that I have seen are that there are certain First Nations protocols that we need to adhere to when foreigners are coming into what we call our country. We continue to call Gitxaala our country. These protocols need to be adhered to and they are very delicate, especially when we approach our hereditary leaders, our high ranking women, and our Nation as a whole. It's a very delicate process. I think that documenting our history can be one of the processes to eliminate any difficulties that may come from building a relationship between researchers and First Nations peoples.

So I think that when we talk about relationship building, that when researchers come, when they come to our community, they go through the proper protocols, in terms of contacting, not directly the hereditary chief, but maybe through the *gulem ailuch*, the chief's spokesperson or the clan spokesperson, communication can be directed to them first. That is part of a protocol. We can also go through the band office; the band office can contact the *gulem ailuch* for each clan in the community.

Other ways are again making sure that the communications are very clear and transparent: who owns what in terms of the property rights, etc the intellectual property rights, that needs to be specifically outlined so that the First Nations always own the information and any copyrights, trademarks, patents derived from that information. There are many examples of First Nations losing control of their own information. When First Nations are being asked to participate in interviews and give up some of their traditional knowledge, any of that information has to stay confidential between the two parties, and go back to the First Nations so that that information stays with that community. I think it needs to be improved upon, and it can be improved upon. When we first entered into discussions about this research we went through the documentation and

the protocol evolved over time. Kitkatla owns all of the intellectual property rights and copy rights that may derive from the interviews.

With respect to the work we did I didn't see a lot of difficulties, but there can always be improvements. For example it is important to create a comfortable environment, especially for the Elders and the chiefs. An environment of comfort can be created by such simple things as having a brother or a sister, or an aunt or other family member in the same room instead of us as researchers and interviewees, on a one-three basis. The interview environment should always be suitable to their needs.

Also presenting gifts is a very good idea and very honourable as well. Making sure that the interview is done on the traditional lands of that First Nations person is a powerful statement for them. It brings a more powerful statement, especially for our Elders, when they can return to their traditional lands. As you know each clan has their own territories and it is important for our chiefs and Elders to return to those specific lands and talk about their stories, their adaawk, their ayaawk the laws of our people. When they talk about those laws when they are on their lands, it becomes a more powerful statement for them and it also ignites memories for them. When they can return to those lands, they can be more specific in their documentation and in their interview.

I can't stress how much of an important thing it is when they are on their land and they see things that ignites their memories and that will further the process because we are a visual people, we learn quite easily from visual things, and that's how we learned in the past and that's pretty well ingrained and entrenched in our memories.

#### *Our Experience of Cooperative Research*

Our experience of cooperative research on this project has much to teach us and other researchers about appropriate research relationships and the protocols for establishing and conducting research. We started with an initial series of meetings between the University's research team and representatives of our community and then, as the project developed, set up meetings with the elected Chief and Council, hereditary leaders, and community Elders.

Along the way we worked out the details of the informed consent form and a letter of commitment from UBC regarding the issue of intellectual property rights, control of the raw data, and issues regarding the publication of papers, reports, and curriculum materials.

These details were incorporated into the informed consent form that each research participant signed and in a letter of commitment that Charles Menzies presented to our Band Council. The key points of these documents are as follows.

*Informed Consent Form:<sup>2</sup>*

*Review of Tape and Transcript:* You will receive a tape and transcript of the conversation. You may review and edit the conversation if you wish.

*Storage and Access to Tape, Transcript and Data:* Original tape recordings and copies of all transcripts and data will be stored in the Kitktala Band Office and copies of tape recordings, transcripts and data will be kept in room 2305 AnSo Building, University of British Columbia. Access to tapes, transcripts, and data is restricted to the project team under the direction of Dr Menzies and Kitkatla members as per Kitkatla protocols. The content of taped interviews and transcripts is the intellectual property of the interviewee.

*Use of Tapes, Transcripts and Data:* This material is being collected in order to produce a report on local ecological knowledge. Additional written articles and educational materials will also be produced from this information. Tape recordings, transcripts, or data collected will not be reproduced or distributed without the prior written consent of Kitkatla. Drafts of all documents produced from this interview will be made available for review and approval by Kitkatla First Nation prior to publication.

*Letter of Commitment:<sup>3</sup>*

The original tape recordings and copies of all transcripts and data will be stored in the Kitktala Band Office and copies of tape recordings, transcripts and data will be kept in my office at UBC (room 2305 AnSo Building) under my direct care. Access to tapes, transcripts, and data is restricted to the project team under my direction and Kitkatla members as per community protocols. I understand that the content of taped interviews and transcripts is the intellectual property of the interviewee and the community of Kitkatla. Tape recordings, transcripts, or data collected will not be reproduced or distributed in any form without the prior written consent of Kitkatla. All copies of tapes, transcripts and data will be returned to Kitkatla at the point at which they are no longer actively being used by myself. Every effort will be made to ensure that no copies of any of these materials will be housed permanently or temporarily in any archive other than at Kitkatla.

The material is being collected in order to produce a report on local ecological knowledge that will be used to create educational materials. Additional written articles will also be produced from this information. Drafts of all documents produced from the interviews will be made available for review and approval by Kitkatla First Nation prior to publication. None of the tapes, transcripts, or data collected for this research project will be patented or trademarked at any time by myself, any member of the research team, or the University of British Columbia. I recognize that the authority for applying for patents and trademarks of any data produced is the sole responsibility and right of Kitkatla.

Copyright of the interviews will be held by the interviewee and Kitkatla

*Recommendations for Cooperative Research*

Part of relationship building is for researchers, when you come out to First Nations communities and extract information, you must continue the relationship through dialogue, other communications, within the council itself, or through the hereditary leaders or through the treaty. Provide support so that First Nations people see that you are there for them, not

only for their information, but you are there to support our people, to basically assist us. That is basically a huge part of relationship building: you don't just come here, interview people, go away say thank you very much. I think continuing the relationship, doing whatever it takes to continue that relationship is a very important trust factor for our people.

Another way to specifically get community approval is to feast with us as First Nations. Feasting and providing a table of food, for not only the community but the researchers as well is important, so that the institution can introduce this concept of research and potential development. What the institution can do is to contact the band office and say that they would like to put on a community gathering, a community feast. The researchers should take care of the expenses for that and an invitation will then go out to all the community members that there will be a feast of traditional food and contemporary food. And in that, the institution can then introduce the concept of research and documentation to the community. This makes the project public knowledge. With our people, everything is done in public.

From there they can also make contact, in order to explain the information to the hereditary and Elders, the ligigieit and sigimenata, who use English as a second language.

The researchers can also potentially hire a translator so that when they explain in English to the community, somebody can translate that into our language to the Elders as well, so that they're on the same page. That opens the door for total communication between researcher and whomever they are interviewing. That's one of the processes of approval that can be done between institution and community.

As far as process, then after the initial consultation with the community, the researchers can go through the process of hiring researchers that are community members and do the same process that we did here, where they hired someone as a translator who can translate information to the interviewee. I think that is a very very important point that needs to be raised.

In addition to building this new kind of relationship, we need to look at the past. In the past, researchers came to our land and learned from us, and never returned any of that knowledge in any form to our people. The universities in Canada and around the world have a lot of documentation about First Nations in the form of research notes and books and articles. We need to extend the idea of repatriation to these kinds of information. Museums and private collectors are repatriating our artifacts and our works of art. Universities need to repatriate information and research. This old documentation - we should breathe new life into it by bringing them back to the communities. Copies of the language notes I think would be really helpful to us right now as we work to strengthen our languages.

Again, trust and keeping things clear and transparent so that everyone is on board is a very critical point for our people. And again, following

proper protocol is a very important aspect for communicating to First Nations. I encourage you and UBC to continue your relationship with this community because I really strongly believe that there can be benefits down the road for both UBC and our community.

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup>This document was developed by John Lewis in collaboration with Charles Menzies and Caroline Butler. The first version was tape recorded in the Gitxaala Nation office. Menzies transcribed the tape. Lewis reviewed the printed version and made editorial changes. Butler and Menzies then produced the final version in accordance with Lewis' instructions. In addition this document was used to provide the narrative structure to the project video, *Forests for the Future: the view from Gitxaala* (see: [www.ecoknow.ca](http://www.ecoknow.ca) for additional information).

<sup>2</sup>Extract from Forests for the Future informed consent form, version December 8, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>Extract from letter by Charles R. Menzies to the Kitkatla Band Council, November 21, 2001.