

# **An Overview of the Effects of Privatization on Secwepemc Land, Culture, Spirituality & Future Generations**

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“The land is the living body of our spirituality: it nourishes us in all ways: physical, spiritual, mental and emotional. Under instructions from Tqelt7kukpi (Creator), our people have lived in health from time untold”. *Excerpt from the Confederated Traditional Okanagan Shuswap Nation Declaration*<sup>1</sup>.

## **The Land of the Shuswap**

The Secwepemc (known to the settlers as the Shuswap peoples), refer to themselves as “the people who come from the land where the water flows from the highest mountains, down through the rivers, on its way to the oceans”. Secwepemcul’ecw (Secwepemc traditional territory) is located in the Southern Interior Plateau of British Columbia, and is known as “the land of Shuswap” in the Secwepemc language<sup>2</sup>. Secwepemcul’ecw covers a vast area approximately 180,000 square kilometers in size, and as a result of the great range of elevations, orientation, drainage capacities and weather, is home to a number of diverse ecosystems.

As semi-nomadic indigenous peoples, the Secwepemc traditionally relied upon the diverse ecosystems throughout Secwepemcul’ecw for abundant sources of foods, medicines, clothing, shelter, and tools. Many still hunt, fish and gather traditional foods and medicines, and a large proportion get half or more of their meat and fish from the land. Most households live well under the poverty line, and many households have no earned cash income at all<sup>3</sup>. Many Secwepemc supplement traditional diets through local agriculture and food production, and most if not all, have become somewhat dependent on the commoditized food system in the mainstream economy.

In all cases, the health and integrity of Secwepemc communities is inextricably linked to continued and improved access to the traditional resources that are needed to supply the Secwepemc with the means to practice healthy traditional lifestyles in the modern world<sup>4</sup>. The driving economic force of capitalism in Secwepemcul’ecw has resulted in limited access and has infringed upon the collective nature of Secwepemc traditional resource rights. The

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<sup>1</sup> A council of Shuswap and Okanagan Chiefs was formed under the Confederated Traditional Okanagan Shuswap Nation Declaration between 1875-1877. For more information see Armstrong, J., Derickson, D., Maracle, L., & Young-Ing, G., (Eds.) (1993) p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Visit <http://www.landoftheshuswap.com> to learn more about the Secwepemc.

<sup>3</sup> Information taken from: Adams Lake and Neskonlith Indian Bands (1998) Traditional Use Study, Unpublished final report of phase one, section 4.0, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Traditional resources include all of the tangible and intangible resources such as; land, air, water, plants, animals, cultural, intellectual, genetic and scientific resources.

process of privatization has also been a major contributing factor to the economic marginalization of the Secwepemc, as well as the over-exploitation of the land and collective sources of Secwepemc foods, medicines and technologies.

### **Colonialism in Secwepemcul'ecw**

After first contact with the settlers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, bouts of diseases were introduced by large numbers of miners and settlers migrating into Secwepemcul'ecw from all over the world. Small pox, influenza, and tuberculosis epidemics greatly reduced population numbers, and weakened Secwepemc communities leaving large tracts of land open for exploitation by traders, miners, ranchers and loggers. As it is stated in the Unpublished Preliminary Report of the Land Traditions of the Adams Lake and Neskonlith Shuswap (1999),

“By the time the settlers were carving out their homesteads on Shuswap lands, the region was under colonial administration with a policy of settling the interior as quickly as possible to create markets and a tax base, and to quell American influence”.

Although Secwepemc population numbers have recently been restored to those at the time of contact, colonial policies designed to extinguish Secwepemc title and rights to the land and resources are considered by many of the wisest Elders to be the root cause of the continuing decline in all of the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of Secwepemc health. Some of the most serious symptoms of declining health in Secwepemc communities are: high rate of diabetes, obesity & malnourishment, food and economic insecurity, mental and emotional illnesses such as, depression, low self esteem, alcoholism, and social disharmony in fragmented families and communities. Forced assimilation into the mainstream economy has thereby endangered Secwepemc land, culture, spirituality, and future generations.

### **Privatization and Neocolonialism**

Privatization has taken on many forms in the promotion and wider application of Secwepemc resources in the mainstream economy. All forms of privatization have created an inequitable system of distribution of wealth where just a few individuals or corporations benefit from the transfer of ownership of Secwepemc land, air, water, cultural, intellectual, genetic, and scientific resources. Patents on living organisms as well as on the discoveries of pharmaceutical and genetic research threaten to erode the collective basis of Secwepemc traditional ecological knowledge by granting individuals and corporations the sole rights to apply Secwepemc knowledge, innovations, and biological resources for trade related purposes. Large scale industrial, residential, recreational and commercial developments continue to degrade ecosystems and limit Secwepemc access to traditional harvesting sites, even though the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized Aboriginal peoples collective

inherent rights to the land and resources<sup>5</sup>, and the B.C. Court of Appeal has ruled that governments, corporations and economic institutions have the legal duty to consult and accommodate Aboriginal peoples on matters affecting their traditional territories<sup>6</sup>,

Through developing partnerships with private investors under the prevailing fee simple and tenure holders systems of land distribution, the colonial government is actively promoting privatization of Secwepemc land and resources in many culturally and spiritually significant areas known throughout Secwepemcul'ecw. Although Elders and grassroots community members have expressed concerns over many areas, they are especially concerned about the privatization of the land in one of the last remaining alpine mountain ecosystems in the area known to the Secwepemc as Skwelkwekwelt<sup>7</sup>. Several families would traditionally set up large seasonal base camps at Skwelkwekwelt to pray, hunt, harvest, and prepare traditional foods for winter storage. The abundance of culturally important plant and animal species combined with the heightened spiritual perspective gained through the vision quest ceremony practiced in the high mountain tops make areas like Skwelkwekwelt highly valuable to the Secwepemc.

Despite the fact that in 1998 Secwepemc Elders and grassroots community members said “no” to the expansion of Sun Peaks Ski Resort, investors from the Delta Hotels and Nippon Cable Company Ltd. of Japan have continued to build decadent homes and hotels and to develop ski runs on three of the sensitive alpine mountains at Skwelkwekwelt. Under the auspices of Sun Peaks Ski Resorts, residential lots in the municipality scale subdivision have been sold to amenity migrants from all over the world, and expensive local and international advertising campaigns continue to promote mass tourism development without ever being granted prior informed consent from Secwepemc Elders and grassroots community members.



Secwepemc communities lack the technical, financial, and human resources required to fully respond to Sun Peaks Ski Resort and the hundreds of other developments negatively affecting the health of Secwepemc communities. The Secwepemc are faced with the daunting challenge of upholding the sacred values under which they have lived in health since time untold,

<sup>5</sup> For more information refer to: *Delamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010

<sup>6</sup> For more information refer to: *Haida Nation v. B.C. and Weyerhaeuser*, [2002] BCCA 147

<sup>7</sup> “Skwelkwekwelt” translates to “the highest mountains” in the English language.

while at the same time striving to survive in the “dog eat dog” world of the prevailing capitalist economy. Even though the Secwepemc have never extinguished their sovereignty to any nation, they are forced to enter into expensive legal processes with the B.C. provincial and federal governments of Canada to seek justice in a foreign system that is based on systemically racist neocolonialist policies and a culturally biased scientific paradigm.

Large scale forest based industries are extracting billions of dollars of resources from Secwepemc territory with no economic benefits to Secwepemc communities<sup>8</sup>. The over exploitation of B.C. forests, driven by a one dimensional economic focus of timber harvesting, combined with over grazing by cattle, and a half a century of fire suppression has severely degraded the dry, disturbance-maintained and disturbance-driven forest ecosystems where the Secwepemc have maintained relative stability for thousands of years.



Figure 1. Rolling upland hills on the Shuswap Highlands

Figure 2. Ecological destruction left by clear cut overlooking Neskonlith Lake after catastrophic logging and wildfire. Heading to Skwelkwekwelt on wildfire in the summer of 2003. *MacGillvary Lake Road.*

Many of the most active Secwepemc have also repeatedly expressed concerns about commoditization of traditional foods, medicines, and technologies in the emerging Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP's) sector of the mainstream economy. While many ecologists argue that the development of the NTFP sector has the potential to shift the one dimensional focus of timber harvesting to include the broader



<sup>8</sup> According to the Indigenous Network on Economies and Trade, in 2001 the forest industry extracted \$14.1 billion worth of timber from B.C. Forests, providing 90,600 direct jobs to the B.C. economy.

ecological focus that is required to sustainably manage NTFP's, the Secwepemc remain highly uncertain over the appropriation and low priority historically given to Secwepemc values in contemporary forest management since the time of colonization.

Recognizing that human values are one of the most important factors affecting ecological sustainability in the modern world, Secwepemc Elders and traditional knowledge keepers believe that in order to restore natural harmony in the forest ecosystems of B.C., both the Secwepemc and non-Secwepemc alike must seek a deeper sensitivity and cross cultural understanding of the underlying values guiding our relationship to the land and resources. Therefore, based on an innate sense of place, and a deep spiritual connection with the land and environment, some of the most active Secwepemc remain committed to upholding our sacred values through the guiding values documented in the Yecwiminte r Tmicw - Land Use Principles. The Yecwiminte r Tmicw Land Use Principles provide a proactive basis for guiding decision making on matters affecting Secwepemc land, culture, spirituality and future generations. The principles are based on the facts that: 1) we have never surrendered our land, or our responsibility to take care of it, and 2) we believe that our rights *and* responsibilities were placed on us by the Creator, and it is these inherent rights and responsibilities guiding our sovereign relationship to the Crown of England and her subjects.

### **Yecwiminte r Tmicw - Land Use Principles**

Persistent grassroots community members have demonstrated their outstanding commitment to upholding their rights and responsibilities by attending bi-weekly meetings over the period of 1.5 years, to engage in lengthy discussions about Lakes Secwepemc traditional knowledge, values and principles as they relate to land use planning. In an indirect way, the meetings have facilitated symbolic healing and pride in the sense that they have provided a forum for healthy, constructive debate and attempted reconciliation of differences of opinion that exist within the Secwepemc community, and have increased the level of understanding about the issues and methods used in the provincial government's land use planning process. The following is a list of the Yecwiminte r Tmicw Land Use Principles that communicate in the English language the cultural values that underlie traditional Secwepemc land and resource use and management.

1. Health – The land nourishes us in all ways; physical, spiritual, mental and emotional. The health and security of our people is vitally dependent on continued and improved access and control of the land, resources and sufficient amounts of traditional Secwepemc foods and medicines.
2. Interdependency – We uphold the teachings of our ancestors to respect all of creation. We believe that land use plans must support interdependent ecosystems which are based on nurturing healthy functioning relationships between all of the land, water, air, people, plants, animals and respective neighbouring ecosystems.

3. Responsibility – Translation of the Secwepemc term “Yecwiminte r Tmicw” communicates our inherent responsibility as Secwepemc peoples to nurture and take care of the land and our relationship to it.
4. Sustainability – Our oral histories, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and customary practices have sustained Secwepemc economies through thousands of years of participating in the natural world. We believe our traditional Secwepemc knowledge, values and wisdom combined with an ecological approach to land use planning is critical to sustaining biological diversity in Secwepemcul’ecw.
5. Sharing – The values of giving, sharing and taking care of one another, as opposed to transferring individual ownership continue to be regarded in high social esteem in the Secwepemc culture.
6. Collectivity – We stand as one behind the values that form the foundation of our survival as a distinct peoples. Therefore, our collectively held rights to devise land use plans must be fully addressed in a community based land use planning process.
7. Fairness – A land use plan that recognizes our distinct inherent rights, responsibilities and relationship to the land, must account for fair access to the land and resources, and provide ecologically and culturally sensitive economic, education, and social benefits to the local Secwepemc grassroots community.
8. Acceptance – The all inclusive worldview of the Secwepemc accepts people from varying cultural and religious backgrounds, education levels, genders, and ages. We recognize and respect the diverse needs of all people from varying backgrounds to be considered in land use planning as the foundation for their survival.
9. Social Harmony – It is the ethical responsibility of all individuals, corporations, institutions, and government agencies to find a way to uphold and promote social harmony in the Secwepemc community.
10. Consensus – Social harmony can be achieved by avoiding taking advantage of intra-tribal differences that exist within the community by facilitating constructive debates and a mutually agreed upon consensus based decision making process.
11. Peace – We maintain that *true* peace, harmony and justice can only be achieved by devising land use plans that take into account our inherent rights and responsibilities to uphold and protect our distinct Secwepemc culture and spirituality, and conserve and use Secwepemc land and resources for future generations.
12. Sensitivity – Negotiating land use plans with Non-Secwepemc stakeholders requires applying a cross cultural communication strategy that is sensitive to the values, beliefs, and worldview of the Secwepemc culture, economy and social structure.

13. Locality – A cultural model of land use planning will give priority to the local Secwepemc cultural practices and natural laws, and will benefit the local community by providing realistic and diverse local economic opportunities.
14. Cross cultural understanding – An accurate interpretation of the Yecwiminte r Tmicw “Taking Care of the Land - Land Use Principles” is limited by the process of translating Secwepemc cultural values into the English language and mainstream worldview. Our traditional knowledge, values, wisdom and land uses are more accurately interpreted through Secwepemctsin (Shuswap language) and the oral tradition.
15. Humility – We are one with mother earth and the land is the living body of our spirituality. We are thankful for all that is given to us by Tqelt7kukpi, and must only take what is needed from the land in humble moderation.
16. Cooperation – Humans are a part of natural systems and we must cooperate with them rather than work against them. Therefore, the boundaries of land use plans must be determined according to the naturally occurring boundaries of the related ecosystems as they are defined by their respective watersheds.
17. Precaution – Using the land and resources wisely by minimizing waste will prevent further damage to the land, air, water and Secwepemc cultural, ecological and spiritual integrity.
18. Reciprocity – To demonstrate our humility and gratitude for everything the land provides for us, we must always nurture our reciprocal relationship with the land and offer something back to the earth in return for resources shared.
19. Reconciliation – A cultural model of land use planning will reconcile our traditional customary practices, knowledge, wisdom and uses with ecologically sustainable economies and fee simple interests.
20. Integrity – We will only accept a sustainable model of economic development that is based on an ecological and cultural model of land use planning as distinguished from free corporate access to the resources and the resulting large scale industrial, commercial, residential, or recreational models.
21. Priority – An ecological model of land use planning will consider economics secondary to ecological processes.
22. Change – Due to the natural cycles of changing land use patterns over time and the information intense nature of our TEK, the information contained in the Adams Lake/Neskonlith Traditional Use Study (TUS) does not wholly reflect all of the traditional and contemporary land use practices.

The Yecwiminte r Tmicw Land Use Principles bring Secwepemc values into a modern day context and provide a perspective counter to what are considered by many as the seven

deadly sins<sup>9</sup> that are seducing millions of people from around the world into a cycle of oppression in the contemporary capitalist system, where the wealth and resources are being distributed to only a few private individuals and corporations who are getting richer at the expense of the economically less advantaged indigenous peoples. The principles are considered the soul of the long standing indigenous relationship between the Secwepemc and their land and resources, and express many of the values that have formed the foundation of their survival through thousands of years of interacting in the natural world.

## **Past and Current Community Projects**

The long history of grassroots activism in Secwepemcul'ecw demonstrates the persistent struggle to break free from the cycle of oppression that has been perpetuated through privatization and neocolonialist land and resource policies. Some of the most determined Lakes Secwepemc Elders and grassroots community members are thereby deeply motivated to protect their distinct culture and way of life by reclaiming their indigenous relationship to the forest ecosystems throughout Secwepemcul'ecw<sup>10</sup>. They are especially committed to resolving the conflict over land use in a peaceful, proactive manner, and feel that their values, principles and guidelines must be recognized and included in land use planning before true peace and justice can be restored. The following pages highlight some of their most recent efforts at the local level.

### **Harper Lake Eco-Cultural Restoration Project**

Although Lakes Secwepemc grassroots community members have repeatedly expressed concerns over privatization and ecosystem degradation in *all* areas throughout Secwepemcul'ecw, the areas that have been identified as being of highest concern are: Mumix (Upper Adams Lake), Neskonlith Lake and Harper Lake, and Skelkwelkwelt (aka Sun Peaks Ski Resort). Although they have difficulty giving priority to any one area over the other, it was determined that Harper Lake includes a small enough watershed to allow for success in their first attempt to be included in a community driven land use planning project. Harper Lake was also chosen because it is the most accessible, and there is a direct relationship between the health of the ecosystems at Harper Lake and the health of the people living on Neskonlith Indian Reserve #2

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<sup>9</sup> The seven deadly sins are: anger, envy, gluttony, avarice, lust, pride, and sloth.

<sup>10</sup> The Lakes Secwepemc are the eastern most Secwepemc communities who inhabit the Adams Lake, Harper Lake, Mara Lake, Neskonlith Lake, and Little and Big Shuswap Lakes geographical regions. Their traditional territory spans the area from Kicking horse Pass in the Rocky Mountains to Kamloops in the west, and south from Vavenby to Nakusp.



Figure 3. Secwepemc women discussing Yecwiminte r Tmicw - Land Use Principles at Harper Lake Gathering in spring of 2005.

The project consists of three main stages. Phase one includes the development of the ecosystem based forest management plan and model. Phase two involves applying the plan and model to the pilot community, while phase three involves applying the plan and model to the Interior of B.C. The project has received initial funding from the Vancouver Foundation, which is a philanthropic non-governmental community foundation that focuses on projects that help to build healthier communities. In keeping with the Vancouver Foundation Environment Program funding criteria, the two main goals are to: 1. increase scientific understanding, the need and methodology of which are seen by the affected constituencies to be well founded (in our case especially the Lakes Secwepemc community), and 2. support processes that involve all affected constituencies in the planning, management and implementation of strategies.

### **Lakes Secwepemc Traditional Resource Research & Development Guidelines**

The purpose of the Lakes Secwepemc Traditional Resource Research & Development Guidelines is to support the continued health and integrity of the Lakes Secwepemc by establishing a fair and responsible decision making process that *includes* the Lakes Secwepemc grassroots community members. The overall goal of the guidelines is to promote peaceful coexistence and rational thinking by implementing a community based mechanism that will serve to:

Facilitate “community control” in protecting, maintaining and conserving Lakes Secwepemc traditional resources.

Clarify the responsibilities of the Traditional Resource Rights Community Circle (TRRCC) in making critical decisions as they relate to the promotion and wider application of traditional resources in Secwepemcul’ecw.

Define the responsibilities of outside organizations in their duty to consult *and* accommodate the Lakes Secwepemc in the promotion and wider application of traditional resources in research, education, or economic activities.

### **Lakes Secwepemc Community Garden**

The Lakes Secwepemc Community Garden is overseen by the Lakes Secwepemc Sustainable Community Building Society. The main purpose of the society is to: “support and facilitate the development of projects that improve the health and well being of the Lakes Secwepemc People, the land we have traditionally lived on, and our language and way of life. The society particularly supports projects that incorporate traditional Secwepemc management and modern permaculture concepts”.

The society believes that the cultural values of sharing and taking care of one another in day to day community life is absolutely vital to the survival of the distinct Secwepemc culture and way of life. The society also believes that the negative impact of privatization will be offset by promoting, 1) a decreased reliance on the commoditized food system, and 2) the re-establishment of a “true” and sustainable Secwepemc economy that is based on healthy associations between the people, plants, and animals. Therefore, the Lakes Secwepemc Community Garden contributes to the collective health and food security of the Lakes Secwepemc peoples by promoting self reliance through growing and providing healthy, organic food and seeds free from harmful chemicals, pesticides and preservatives.

### **Conclusion**

Following the instructions of the Creator contained within the oral histories and teachings of Coyote, Secwepemc Elders and grassroots community members believe that the true power and responsibility to offset the negative ecological and cultural impacts of privatization in Secwepemcul’ecw lies with Elders and community members who have demonstrated their long lasting commitment to upholding the sacred values and principles at the grassroots level. With respect to the legacies left by previous political leaders such as the late Grand Chief George Manuel Sr., as well as previous Elders and grassroots activists who have worked hard at influencing policy and building networks at all of the local, provincial, national and international levels, the grassroots people in the Lakes Secwepemc communities provide a model for self determination through their direct action efforts and development of ecologically and culturally sustainable projects.

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