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REBUILDING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH WATER

**Research to support innovative approaches to
intercultural climate engagement through an
Indigenous lens**

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Disclaimer

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organizations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability across the region. Specifically, this work was produced as part of UBC's Fraser River Estuary Collaborative (FREC) - a partnership between UBC and various NGOs and local / regional governments / groups supporting reciprocal relationships between graduate students and groups working to advance the health and sustainability of the Fraser River Estuary region.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of Sierra Club BC staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report and any errors are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Sierra Club BC or the University of British Columbia.

Acknowledgements, Gratitude & Relational Accountability

Work for this project took place on the unceded ancestral lands of the x^wməθk^wə́yəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Specifically, the University of British Columbia's Point Grey campus occupies traditional, ancestral, and unceded x^wməθk^wə́yəm territory, and as an uninvited guest and occupier on this land, I have an important responsibility to acknowledge the grounds on which we are privileged to gather in the pursuit of higher education.

Additionally, I recognize that the stalə́w (Fraser River), which serves as a central focus of this work, flows through the territories of several First Nations, including the Dakelh, Wet'suwet'en, T̓silhqot'in, Sekani, St'át'imc, Secwépemc, Nlaka'pamux, Syilx, Stó:lō, and x^wməθk^wə́yəm Nations. With humility, mutual understanding, and a commitment to genuine collaboration, we must strive for a future that respects and preserves the sacred relationship these Nations have with the stalə́w and their ancestral lands. It is also essential to recognize that the land in British Columbia is primarily unceded, meaning there had been no treaty agreements, and according to the 2019 British Columbia Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), free, prior, and informed consent needs to be prioritized when undertaking any environmental efforts on Indigenous territories. [1]

In this moment, let us embark on a journey to shape a more just and equitable future that respects Indigenous sovereignty and land stewardship. With deep gratitude, I acknowledge my responsibility to learn from the voices of Indigenous scholars, knowledge keepers, elders, and communities, with the utmost respect for their protocols and permission. Guided by their wisdom, I pledge to actively engage in meaningful dialogue and discussions surrounding Indigenous narratives within the ongoing discourse of environmental stewardship.

I am also deeply grateful to the Sierra Club BC team for their unwavering support, which has been instrumental in bringing this endeavor to fruition. Lastly, I extend heartfelt thanks to my mentor, Hannah Askew, whose invaluable insights and guidance have enriched these teachings with new perspectives. Her role in weaving together knowledge and fostering opportunities has been immeasurable and greatly cherished.



Positionality & Limitations

My identity is rooted in being Jessica Groat, a proud member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, carrying ancestral ties maternally to the Red River Métis and paternally to the Mountain Métis of Jasper House. My formative years were spent on the traditional land of my community in Treaty 6 and 8 territory near Jasper, Alberta. More recently, I am an uninvited guest and occupier of the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliwətał Nations, a space colonially referred to as Vancouver. The knowledge and insights I've acquired have been generously gifted, and are viewed through my identity as a Métis woman. However, I am aware that my presence stands as an uninvited guest on Coast Salish territory. So with this understanding, it is my obligation to walk gently in this space, and to honor, preserve, and protect the wisdom shared by these Nations, ensuring that their voices and perspectives remain central to this discourse.

As I progress on this path, the initial steps in my journey of self-decolonization have only just commenced, guided by the teachings of the land, waters, and all my relations. In this vein, being a part of a team at Sierra Club BC that approaches this work fervently with an open-heart and open-mind fills me with immense gratitude. It is with this understanding that I emphasize the importance of anchoring this endeavor within our own connections to the land and the Indigenous Nations who have historically stewarded it.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

This section of the document encompasses a comprehensive project overview, highlighting key components that underpin the journey towards fostering a deeper connection with water.

This section includes:

1. Overview
2. Intentions
3. Methodology

Overview

This project was initiated to advance environmental goals while prioritizing Indigenous perspectives within mainstream ENGOs with a particular focus on Sierra Club BC (SCBC). By enhancing inclusivity and diversity, the project sought to foster a deeper understanding of social and environmental justice as integral components of environmental initiatives. Recognizing the role of colonialism in contributing to the ecological crisis, SCBC has directed its efforts toward fostering relationships of reciprocity with the land, water, and non-human relatives. In alignment with this commitment, SCBC introduced a range of initiatives, among them the notable Mother Tree Local Leaders Program (MTLLP).

At its heart, MTLLP aims to empower local leaders to catalyze their community networks in creating tangible, positive change and stepping into healthier relationships with the lands and waters. Over the span of several months, participants grow their relationship with the more-than-human world and started planning community-based solutions that are grounded in their traditions and wisdom. These plans aimed to mobilize and deepen their networks' involvement in environmental stewardship by catalyzing their respective community members to cultivate improved relationships themselves.

Building on the successes of the MTLLP, this project aims to enhance the curriculum by focusing on relationship building with water. My role encompassed the creation of a learning guide and workshop designed to nurture a deeper connection with water and leverage local connections to the *stal'əw* (Fraser River) and its estuary as a model. By aggregating wisdom and resources from provincial and national organizations, as well as communities, regarding their bond with water, water sovereignty, and initiatives for its protection, I aspired to understand how these subject matter experts put their knowledge into action. Through this project, I hope to contribute to a meaningful and lasting shift in how we engage with the environment, grounded in a commitment to reciprocity, intercultural understanding, and a profound respect for Indigenous knowledges.

Intentions

One of the key driving forces behind this endeavor is the recognition of the paramount importance of relationship building. This work is fundamentally driven by the goal of guiding individuals in cultivating a deeper, more meaningful connection with water, regardless of whether they're at in their journey. The principle of relationality stands as a core foundation for engagement. In this work, I urge all individuals to aspire to this principle.

Please approach this endeavor with an open heart and an open mind, as we jointly undertake the continuous voyage of learning, unlearning, and the vital process of decolonizing both body and mind. Through these shared efforts, this work not only seeks to initiate change but also to lay the foundation for an ongoing journey of growth and transformation.



Methodology

To achieve the project goals, I embraced a multifaceted methodology. My approach centered on addressing the gap in the MTLLP curriculum by deepening the exploration of water-environment relationships. Personally, my connection with the *stałəw* profoundly transformed from distant to emblematic, shaping my understanding and fostering a deeper bond with these new territories. Recognizing the personal nature of this journey, I strived not to adopt a pan-Indigenous view, recognizing that while unique teachings exist, certain values are shared across many Indigenous traditions.

Information Gathering: The initial phase involved conducting thorough research to glean insights into diverse ways of knowing about water, water sovereignty, and environmental relationships. This encompassed a review of existing literature, documents, and resources from provincial and national organizations, as well as engagement with grey literature sources. These efforts aimed to comprehend how various entities conceptualize and engage with water within their cultural and environmental contexts. I especially emphasized hearing from Indigenous people and communities in the effort.

Community Engagement: Ensuring project authenticity, I actively connected with environmental organizations and experts. Conducting informal interviews with representatives provided firsthand perspectives on water's significance and conservation approaches. Additionally, I had the privilege of participating in other initiatives associated with the MTLLP, where interactions with Indigenous knowledge keepers, Elders, and professionals further enriched my understanding.

Learning Guide Development: I curated an immersive workshop experience, melding informational materials, case studies, interactive exercises, and engagement strategies. This finely crafted workshop aligns with the goals and context of the MTLLP, emphasizing practical and culturally sensitive approaches for cultivating these crucial connections.

Throughout the entire process, I embraced an iterative approach, drawing from the ongoing MTLLP workshops for invaluable insights. Active involvement in various SCBC initiatives also significantly influenced the project's trajectory. Listening to Indigenous knowledge keepers, elders, and dedicated individuals fostering (un)learning was invaluable in steering the direction of this work.

Guided by a profound awareness of my own limited knowledge and a commitment to continuous learning from my elders, I've been deeply moved by the teachings of a select group of Indigenous scholars. However, I remain attuned to the fact that my perspective is a mere fragment in the mosaic of diverse Indigenous viewpoints. In the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding, I actively seek additional resources, embracing a holistic approach. This method has allowed me to cultivate a multifaceted appreciation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives on water, informing the creation of a supplementary learning guide for the MTLLP curriculum. Regular (un)learning experiences and interactions with the land and its stewards ensured the learning guide's ongoing relevance and effectiveness in enriching participants' connections with water and the environment.

Formatting and Special Considerations:

The paper intentionally avoids aligning with practices rooted in white supremacy culture, such as the conventional colonial structure of the written word. [2] It purposefully diverges from the typical academic format to adopt a more personal and meaningful approach. In this spirit, it takes the form of a narrative designed to offer guidance and inspiration to individuals on their distinct paths. As companions to the narrative, intertwined throughout are photographs that are a testament to my own journey along the stal'əw'. All non-hyperlinked photos are my personal captures and offer glimpses of the landscapes that shaped my exploration.

Furthermore, the underlined text in the document not only acts as a hyperlink for readers to access relevant sources but also functions as an uncategorized citation. This allows easy access to learning resources without relying solely on the references section.

Additionally, a significant emphasis is placed on respecting and honoring Indigenous Nations presented throughout the paper. In alignment with this personal commitment, I will be utilizing the traditional spellings of Indigenous Nations and place names. This practice is rooted in the spirit of (un)learning and decolonization of the mind, reflecting a conscious effort to engage with these subjects respectfully and inclusively.

By incorporating these formatting considerations and maintaining a stance of cultural sensitivity and awareness, the paper aims to offer a comprehensive and enlightening exploration of the interconnected themes presented.

LEARNING GUIDE

This document is intended to facilitate engagements focused on relationality with water, using the *stal'əw* as a model, within the context of what is colonially known as Vancouver. The upcoming section will introduce the developed learning guide, which features versatile activities that can be customized to suit any chosen body of water.

This section includes:

1. Building a Knowledge Base
 - a. Indigenous Voices
 - b. Weaving Our Truths
2. Hosting the Workshop
 - a. Leading a Land Acknowledgment
 - b. Activity 1: Opening Sharing Circle
 - c. Activity 2: Contextualize the Waterbody
 - d. Activity 3: Voices of the Host Nations
 - e. Activity 4: Sense of Place Maps
 - f. Activity 5: Introducing Your Spirit
 - g. Activity 6: Closing Circle
 - h. Post-Session Reflection

BUILDING A KNOWLEDGE BASE

Within the context of introducing this workshop to others, two fundamental considerations emerge:

a. Acknowledging and Amplifying Indigenous Voices:

It's imperative to acknowledge and proactively seek out the voices of Indigenous Nations with permission and proper citation. Here, the opportunity arises to share insightful videos, compelling stories, or engaging narratives that authentically represent these voices and their enduring commitment.

b. Individual and Organizational Journey:

Furthermore, on both an individual and organizational level, the commitment to self-evolution holds immense significance. Continuously embarking on the path of self-reflection, learning, and unlearning is essential. For myself, this ongoing introspective journey enables me to genuinely acknowledge and support Indigenous truths with both humility and strength. I encourage others to commit to their own (un)learning journey as well.

Through these multifaceted endeavors, the workshop not only becomes a platform for knowledge dissemination but also an embodiment of respect, collaboration, and the ongoing quest for self-improvement and cultural sensitivity.



staləw, East of Vancouver, running through the traditional, unceded territories of the Ntə?kepmxcin First Nations.

Indigenous Voices

I was instilled with the belief that when an elder or knowledge keeper gives you permission to share their voice, this is a great honor and responsibility. So to begin this section, I wish to share how my journey with SCBC allowed me to engage in the enlightening workshops of the MTLLP, including the fortunate time I sat down and listened alongside Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Elder Siamshun. It was within this gathering that Siamshun shared words that, in my opinion, beautifully capture the essence of the value of listening to our elders. With permission and gratitude, his teaching shares: "Thank what you can see. Thank what you can protect." [3] This teaching sits with me now, resonating as a profound reminder of our responsibility to protect my relations and to do so with gratitude.

These teachings are of utmost importance as we engage in genuine conversations with Indigenous leaders, knowledge keepers, elders, scholars, and storytellers, highlighting the critical need to listen to and respect these voices as we safeguard our natural world.

With permission, I'd like encourage you to learn from the Host Nation, x̓w̓məθk̓w̓əy̓əm, and explore their [Teaching Toolkit](#). [4]



Weaving Our Truths

Indigenous peoples have diverse relationships with the land and waters. I am firmly committed to avoiding a pan-Indigenous perspective on this topic. Instead, I aim to highly value the diverse knowledge and teachings contributed by distinct individuals, communities, and Nations, enriching our discourse on these relationships. For transparency and accountability to my community, it's essential to share that the insights and worldview that have enriched my personal understanding have been generously shared with me, and I view them through the lens of my identity as a Métis woman.

Nurtured by the rhythms of the Athabasca River in Treaty 8 territory, a constant presence throughout my upbringing, I've witnessed its annual dance of rising and receding with each new season. In the company of my family and relatives, I've savored moments where we're enveloped by its embrace, sharing stories that flow through generations. And during challenging times, the river becomes a quiet confidant, to whom I offer my gratitude. These experiences have woven a profound relationship between water and my life's journey, a connection that I know many others also share. Given this personal bond with water, I approach this conversation with a deep appreciation for the significance of these relationships in shaping our perspectives and identities. Recognizing my own journey alongside the river's flow, I am reminded of the depth of meaning that water holds for different individuals and communities. However, I must acknowledge my position as an uninvited guest on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples and all Indigenous Nations across British Columbia. Given this context, upholding their narratives with the utmost respect is imperative.

Invitation to engage with
the Siwłk^w Water
Declaration [5]

These words from the Siw̓k̓w Water Declaration illuminate the Siw̓k̓w Nation's commitment to serving as stewards of the lands and waters, with reciprocity at the core. As you read through, how do you relate with these words? What might your role be?

While a reciprocal relationship with water is contained in their legal order, it's crucial to avoid projecting this relationship onto all Indigenous people or romanticizing and simplifying the complexities of this obligation. Often, the 'ecological Indian' stereotype is imagined, perpetuating the idea that Indigenous law and culture solely revolve around the principle of harmonious coexistence with the environment. Further, there is a risk of romanticizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as the sole essence of Indigenous wisdom, which can, in turn, limit its practical application. [6] TEK's academic study sometimes involves extracting knowledge from its cultural and experiential context to adapt it for broader use, a process largely driven by non-Indigenous interests. [7] However, this approach raises ethical, moral, and legal concerns, oversimplifies intricate legal foundations, and fails to capture the holistic essence of Indigenous knowledge and relationships, often not prioritizing the best interests of Indigenous communities. [6]

To truly appreciate Indigenous knowledge systems, it is crucial to acknowledge the depth and diversity of their complexities. As Anishinaabe lawyer and scholar, John Borrows, emphasizes, these systems are multi-dimensional, intricately intertwined with unique aspects of each community's social, historical, political, biological, economic, and spiritual circumstances. [8] This understanding is key to embracing the nuances of Indigenous knowledge and steering clear of oversimplification.

With this in mind, I would like to introduce an idea shared by Cree Scholar, Willie Ermine, which holds significance in the ongoing discourse surrounding Indigenous law, particularly at the delicate juncture where Indigenous legal orders and the Canadian legal system meet. Willie Ermine shares the idea of "ethical space," which is a concept that revolves around fostering transformative collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and the natural world. [9] Ethical space emerges as a bridge between Indigenous and Western thought. It stems from a purposeful emphasis on distinct histories, knowledge, and viewpoints. [9] Danika Billie Littlechild, Cree lawyer from Ermineskin Cree Nation, expands on this topic, highlighting how culturally divergent Indigenous and Western entities converge within this space. [7] Notably, the notion of ethical space provides a powerful lens for scrutinizing the intricate dynamics between different legal systems, engaging with Indigenous legal concerns, and exploring the complexities of the environment. [7]

Having laid this groundwork, we can now explore Danika Billie Littlechild's outlook on water, shared in her paper, 'Transformation and Re-Formation: First Nations and Water in Canada.' [7] In this paper, she explores the concept of water's abstraction and manipulation that occurs within frameworks that fail to acknowledge its interdependent nature. Although historically deemed communal, "modern water," influenced by colonial Western ideals, is now seen as a mere commodity, disregarding its social and ecological ties. This separation has absolved both individuals and groups from their responsibilities toward water. [7]

Danika Billie Littlechild explains how this separation causes deep harm:

"When First Nations lose access to a sacred or traditional water source, they also lose access to the beings and spirits that inhabit that water source. This loss ripples out. Stories, songs, dances, and even Indigenous words related to or based in that water source are also lost. The foundational elements of Indigenous legal traditions and knowledge systems are therefore at risk." [7]

We cannot safeguard ecological health and cultural heritage without Indigenous governance and law. Integration of pieces of Indigenous law is not the solution as assimilating diverse Indigenous knowledge into a singular colonial framework can often do more harm. The colonial system has many limitations which do not allow it to fully encompass Indigenous legal orders.

Experts, scholars, and academics increasingly turn to Indigenous knowledge as a potential solution, and while this may hold promise, reiterating our previous conversation, Danika raises caution. She notes that there is a significant oversight in recognizing that this knowledge is deeply interwoven within Indigenous legal orders, and it shouldn't serve solely as supplemental to scientific approaches. [7] Indigenous knowledge is often restricted to being a tool for scientific pursuits, downplaying its value as an authentic form of understanding. When Indigenous participation in environmental governance and law is primarily framed as a contribution to scientific endeavors, it relegates Indigenous ways of knowing to a secondary role, necessitating integration into the prevailing dominant system. [7]

To end this portion of the narrative, another voice that inspired my (un)learning journey is Aimee Craft, an Anishinaabe-Métis lawyer and scholar, Bringing valuable

insights to the discourse in water governance, Craft shares thoughts around relationality with water and this being embedded in many Indigenous legal orders. For example, Craft explains that in Anishinaabe law, *nibi* (water) is regarded as a being with which a reciprocal relationship is maintained. [10]

“We do not control it, although in some cases we try. Water is an independent legal actor. When we alter water, for example by adding chemicals, this changes our relationship to water and makes many Elders feel unsafe. We also know that we cannot stop water’s flow without consequences. This is a breach of sacred and natural law. When we alter the flow of water, we must have good reasons and be prepared to make reparations to the water and other beings including animals and plants. We do that through healing ceremonies and our everyday actions.” [11]

Craft emphasizes a perspective that is grounded in long-term understanding; she acknowledges the intrinsic connection between people and their environments, which contrasts with the relatively recent emergence of colonial viewpoints. [10]

Indigenous communities are increasingly thrust into water conflicts due to intensified resource extraction and global environmental shifts within their territories. [12] To better understand these conflicts, it is necessary to go beyond the surface issues and delve into differing ontological perspectives. Many Indigenous communities maintain profound ties with the natural world through a continuum of reciprocal, sustainable interactions, spanning not only human relationships but also connections with lands, waters, ecosystems, atmospheres, and diverse plant and animal communities. [11] Within certain worldviews, water plays an intrinsic and pivotal role. [11-13] Often symbolized as the “blood of life” according to Elder Mary Louie of the Syilx Nation, water’s centrality resonates as the foremost concern of some Elders when assessing environmental health. [13]

So while some Indigenous Nations view water as a sentient entity, colonial views tend to reduce it to a resource open for exploitation. [12] The tension between these perspectives is deeply rooted in history, stemming from the suppression of Indigenous

ontologies and epistemologies, a legacy that extends into present-day water governance practices.

If you don't make offerings [to the water], sometimes it can take you. It wants to be respected. ... But the water, it's a gift of life. It bothers me because our water is . . . disappearing because it's not being respected. People won't offer gifts to the water anymore, you know; they don't take food to it, or tobacco . . . or even coins . . . Because the water, they have feelings too, huh? They are always there to provide for you; what do you give back . . . ?"

- Syilx Elder Mary Louie [13]



"Water is the most life sustaining gift on Mother Earth and is the interconnection among all living beings. Water sustains us, flows between us, within us, and replenishes us. Water is the blood of Mother Earth and, as such, cleanses not only herself, but all living things. Water comes in many forms and all are needed for the health of Mother Earth and for our health. The sacred water element teaches us that we can have great strength to transform even the tallest mountain while being soft, pliable, and flexible. Water gives us the spiritual teaching that we too flow into the Great Ocean at the end of our life journey. Water shapes the land and gives us the great gifts of the rivers, lakes, ice, and oceans. Water is the home of many living things that contribute to the health and wellbeing of everything not in the water."

- Assembly of First Nations, World Water Day 2018 [14]

The teachings of these chosen Indigenous scholars struck a chord with me, yet countless more Indigenous peoples and Nations hold similar perspectives. Simply reiterating those same insights would be a disservice, so instead, I extend the invitation to independently explore additional resources for deeper understanding.

Begin with key documents like the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#), the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#), the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan \(DRIPA\)](#), and learn about [Free, Prior, and Informed Consent \(FPIC\)](#). [15-18] These instruments illuminate the significance of Indigenous rights, including water governance and defense, and how individuals can actively contribute to supporting and upholding these rights. Similarly, the [Indigenous Peoples Kyoto Water Declaration](#) from 2003 signifies the global recognition of Indigenous voices in water-related matters. [19]

And to explore the conceptual framework of ethical space, an exemplary initiative is the [RELAW](#) program (Revitalizing Indigenous Law for Land, Air and Water), launched by West Coast Environmental Law in collaboration with the Indigenous Law Research Unit at the University of Victoria, Faculty of Law (ILRU). [20] Grounded in the understanding that Indigenous legal orders are living, the RELAW program gathers insights from stories to help revitalize legal orders. This groundbreaking initiative works with Indigenous law as a vibrant, living entity, interwoven with community values and traditions and applied to modern challenges.

To witness and champion these transformative initiatives, consider engaging with the [Decolonizing Water Project](#), co-led by Indigenous scholars, Aimée Craft and Deborah McGregor. [21] Decolonizing Water is an Indigenous-led partnership committed to community-led research on water, encompassing ecological, socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, to enhance water protection and Indigenous water governance.

Personally guided by these invaluable resources, I encourage you to explore them as well so you can fully engage in this discourse.

HOSTING THE WORKSHOP

My personal journey has illuminated the significance of positionality, instilling in me the understanding that introducing myself, my family, and my territory from a young age is essential for cultivating meaningful relationships. This guiding principle resonates as we prepare to host the workshop, emphasizing the significance of acknowledging the complexity of our relationships with and in Coast Salish territory.

So, as we embark on this endeavor, I invite you—whether you're facilitating this workshop or participating—to contemplate your own positionality and the distinct connections you share with the land, waters, and Host Nations. This introspective exploration not only lays the groundwork for genuine engagement and profound dialogues that honor the wisdom and teachings of Indigenous peoples but also serves as the cornerstone for cultivating genuine connections and deepening our understanding of all our relations.

*This can be adapted to other bodies of water and will be subject to the Host Nations' truths, protocols, and relationships.

Outline for the Workshop:

Preparations

Welcome & Land Acknowledgement

Opening Sharing Circle - Reflecting on Your Water Moment

Contextualizing Your Body of Water

Voices of the Host Nation(s)

Land-Based Learning to Build Your Own Relationship

- Sense of Place Maps
- Introducing Your Spirit

Closing Sharing Circle - What can you do?

Post-Session Reflection & Moving Forward

Setting:

To truly embrace and benefit from the invaluable teachings of land-based education, it is crucial to carefully choose a body of water as the host for this workshop. By doing so, we create an environment where the land and water can collaboratively bestow their wisdom upon us, enhancing the learning experience and enabling us to whole-heartedly engage with our relations.

Using the *stal'əw* as a model, this workshop can be hosted by the *stal'əw* at the Fraser River Park, on unceded *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* territory.

Approximate time: 1.5-2.5 hours

Preparing for the Session:

Before the workshop, distribute an attachment explaining the pre-session reflection exercise (found on page 25) and a document contextualizing the history of the body of water (a Case Study of the *stal'əw* can be found in the appendix) to allow individuals to prepare for the session.





Land Acknowledgement

When I delved into Suzanne Keptwo's novel, 'We All Go Back to the Land,' her exploration of this subject encapsulated a meaning of a land acknowledgment that resonated for me as a Métis artist and educator. Keptwo beautifully emphasizes their role in raising awareness, fostering relationships, and contributing to the healing and sustainability of the land for present and future generations. [22] Keptwo reminds us that reconciliation should involve a deep connection and harmonization with the land itself. It's not just about reconciling between humans; it's also about reconnecting with Earth and its profound significance in our lives.

So in the spirit of real reconciliation, land acknowledgments, which have often been associated with formality and rigidity, need genuine authenticity. These acknowledgments need to be deeply personal, reflecting our individual relationships with the land and waters that surround us.

Today, I encourage each of you to reflect on how you can personally contribute to reconciliation and acknowledge the significance of the places we inhabit. Below, I offer my own personal land acknowledgment as an uninvited guest along the stal'əw.

(I offer this as an example to be adapted, as it is dependent on who is delivering the workshop, and the body of water and Nation(s) who are hosting you.)

Tan'si. I am Jessica Groat, a mixed settler with Red River Métis and Cree heritage, affiliated with the Mountain Métis of Jasper House in Treaty 6 and 8 territory. I would like to acknowledge that I am an uninvited guest and occupier of traditional, unceded x^wməθk^wəyəm territory on the banks of the stal'əw, the Fraser River in the həh'qəmińəh language. Acknowledging my positionality, I have a responsibility to foster relationships with the Host Nations and to honor the lands and waters I stand with today. As an uninvited guest, I commit to approaching this territory with gentleness, endeavoring to walk softly, and striving to be a good relative. With an open heart and open mind, I will continue to grow in my journey of respect, reconciliation, and reciprocity with the land and waters as my relations, guided by x^wməθk^wəyəm, the gracious Host Nation today.

All my relations.



Activity 1: Opening Sharing Circle

During the reflection exercise (on page 25) done prior to the workshop, individuals were asked to engage in some critical thinking about their current relationship with water.

Instructions:

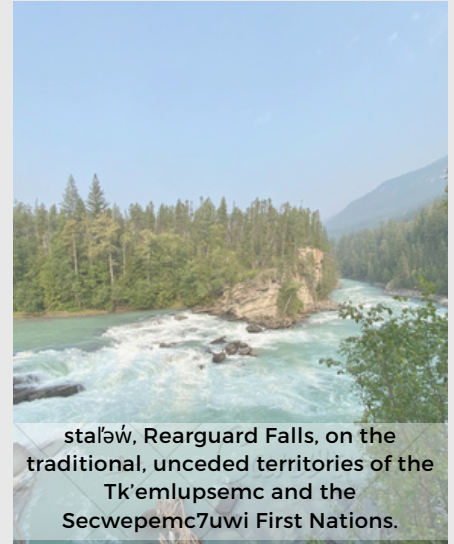
1. Gather in a circle, and explain the purpose of the sharing circle. The sharing circle embodies principles of equality, respect, and interconnectedness as it provides a safe space for open dialogue, intergenerational wisdom transmission, and fostering community well-being through inclusive and empathetic storytelling. Emphasize that it is a space for respectful communication and active listening.

2. Give a quick reminder as to what the reflection exercise was: "You were asked to think of your water story - a time in your life when you connected to a body of water and why that moment is important to you." Begin the sharing circle by sharing your own water story.

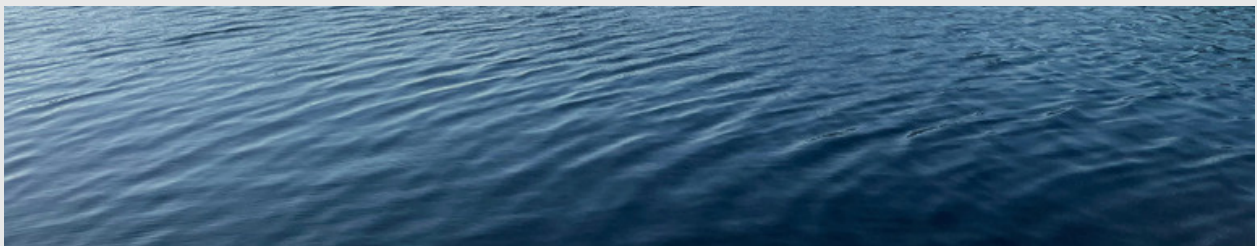
3. Invite participants to take turns sharing their stories, thoughts, or reflections on the exercise.

4. After everyone has had an opportunity to share, facilitate a group discussion where participants can respond to each other's ideas.

5. Express appreciation to the learners for their active participation in the sharing circle, fostering a supportive learning environment. Reinforce that sharing circles will be a regular part of the learning experience, promoting meaningful interactions and enriching the learning journey.



stałəw, Rearguard Falls, on the traditional, unceded territories of the Tk'emlupsemc and the Secwepemc7uwi First Nations.



REFLECTION

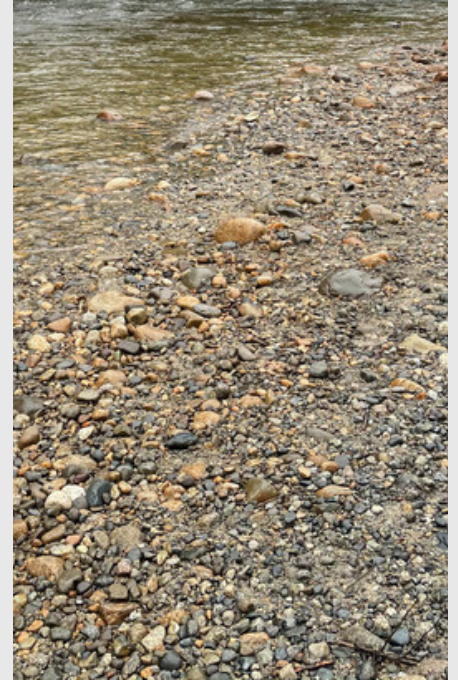
To better situate yourself and your current relationship with water and the natural world, take a moment of reflection to think of a time involving you and a body of water. This story can be a memory, experience, or moment about a time you connected with a body of water.

It should include:

- A person
- A waterbody
- A specific time
- A location where it took place
- A narrative of how this waterbody impacted or became significant to you. How it made you feel?

Recognizing the significance of water in our lives is the first step towards building a better and more sustainable relationship, ensuring that it continues to nourish and enrich our lives for generations to come.

If you are comfortable, we encourage you to come prepared to share your story during the next session.



An Ongoing Initiative

This concept was borrowed with permission from the WaterMark Project [23], an initiative of Swim Drink Fish that began in 2015. Their aim was to collect one story from every Canadian household, to weave a tapestry of human experiences with water; highlighting its immense influence on our lives and communities.

Contributing your story not only registers the waterbody in a national database but also documents its value to our communities. Moreover, this collective effort aids researchers in identifying vital water sources that support activities like swimming, drinking, or fishing, enabling us to safeguard these essential uses for years to come. The evidence provided by these stories also plays a crucial role in reinforcing environmental (albeit colonial) laws aimed at preserving our waters for future generations.

If you're inspired to contribute your own water story to this meaningful project, you can visit watermarkproject.ca and become a part of this vital effort to protect and cherish our waterbodies.



Activity 2: Contextualize the Waterbody

Preparation: Enhance participants' connection by providing a brief history of the selected water body ahead of the workshop, facilitating better contextualization. Complementing this, a reflection activity encourages exploration of the cultural distinctions of water values.

Reflecting on my own experiences, the journey of the stal'əw—a relative of many Indigenous Nations that has sadly been placed on the endangered list—deeply resonated, inspiring the inclusion of a comprehensive case study in the appendix to underscore the importance of thorough exploration.

Required Materials:

- Case Study & Reflection Activity (found in the appendix)

Duration: 10 minutes

Instructions:

1. Activate prior knowledge and contextualize the setting. Read the following excerpt aloud. (Alter for the selected body of water.)

The stal'əw, flowing from the base of Mount Robson in BC's Rocky Mountains, has been a relative of many Indigenous Nations since time immemorial, holding a significant position as the fifth largest drainage basin in Canada. [24] Not only does it sustain rich habitats for a diverse array of plant and animal life, but it also stands as a home for various fish species, including seven types of salmon. Furthermore, its historical significance as a crucial trade and transportation route for Indigenous peoples and early European settlers has profoundly shaped the region's identity and development.

The Fraser Basin is also home to 2.6 million British Columbians and accommodates all of their social, economic, environmental, and institutional needs. [24] As you can guess, due to this, the stal'əw has made the endangered rivers list every year since 1993, and the Heart of the Fraser (between Hope and Mission) is even considered BC's most endangered river. It is considered to be under "severe" threat from urban encroachment, agricultural expansion, gravel removal, logging, and commercial fishing, among other extractive industries. [25]

2. An open discussion can now be encouraged, providing an opportunity for individuals to share their insights and thoughts on the material and the reflection activity.



Activity 3 : Voices of the Host Nations

After learning about the significance of this water body and recognizing relationships that many Nations may have with it, we must be mindful not to impose a pan-Indigenous perspective on this crucial conversation. Instead, we should wholeheartedly appreciate and respect the diverse knowledge and teachings that each individual, community, and Nation bring to the table concerning these relationships.

To set the tone for this meaningful journey, we will listen to the words of an individual who intimately knows and continues to be a devoted guardian of these precious lands and waters. By doing so, we honor the wisdom and experiences of the Host Nation(s), prioritizing their voice over mine, and paving the way for a more inclusive and respectful dialogue.

The activity below should be modified for the chosen body of water and the Host Nations who care for and protect it.

As we explore the significance of the *stałəw*, we must be mindful that it traverses a vast portion of British Columbia, cared for by numerous Nations along its path, eventually reaching Coast Salish territory, where we are today. It is crucial to acknowledge that I, like many of you, am an uninvited guest on this territory. Therefore, we must center our focus on the stories and truths of these Nations, acknowledging and respecting their rightful place as stewards of these lands and waters. Centering their voices and wisdom will lead us to a more profound appreciation of the significance these lands hold.

Required Materials:

- Speaker from the Host Nation. However, please be mindful that this opportunity is dependent on the existing relationship with the Host Nation, their capacity, available compensation, and timing.
- Alternatively, you could utilize an appropriate story from the Host Nation that has granted you permission to openly share it (and/or is an open-source story). Bring a device and speaker if it is a video/ audio recording.

Duration: 15-20 minutes



Instructions:

1. Begin by sharing an appropriate story from the Host Nation (from the speaker or from a secondary source).

Secondary Source: Stories of the stal'əw

Explore x^wməθk^wəyəm's website and read their story, which devles into their relationships with the waters and territories, including the stal'əw.

Source: [*Musqueam A Living Culture*](#) [26]

There are several open-source narratives of the stal'əw and Interior Salish Nations that can be explored within the compilations of James Teit as well.

Source: [*Traditions of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia*](#) [27]



2. Have individuals reflect on their own cultures and creation stories around water.

- Can you share a creation story related to water from your culture or heritage
 - How has this story influenced your understanding and connection to water?
- How does the creation story you've heard today compare to or contrast with the creation stories from your own culture or background?
- Does water play a role in the formation of the world, humanity, or life itself
- How does this shape your perception of water as a life-giving element?

LAND-BASED LEARNING

Land-based learning is a fundamental component of this workshop as it serves as the groundwork for a holistic and meaningful process in rebuilding our relationship with the water.



Grounded in the insights and ethos of Black-Indigenous scholar, Fikile Nxumalo, we reflect on the paramount significance of pedagogical practices that embody reciprocity, relationality, humility, and witnessing. [29] This transformative pedagogical approach offers a transformative avenue to disrupt and deconstruct colonial structures, offering a learning trajectory intricately woven with the land and its inhabitants. [30] This approach aims to nurture resilient relationships, fosters community and individual well-being, and re-Indigenize lands. Simultaneously, it initiates a challenging and metamorphic learning journey that deeply intertwines individuals with the intricate landscapes they inhabit, echoing the multiplicities of place. [30]

By actively engaging and supporting pedagogies aligned with context-dependent positioning, learners or participants can play a crucial role in halting the ongoing exploitation and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. [31] The objective extends beyond sustainably reconnecting with the lands to revitalizing intricate relationships strained over time. [31] Rooting ourselves in this connection then becomes a potent counterforce against the perpetuation of extractivism—a pivotal mindset shift required for active involvement in the climate justice movement. For myself, engaging in this (un)learning has further cultivated an understanding of interconnectedness with the environment—a crucial part of my ongoing journey of self-decolonization, guided by the profound teachings of the land, waters, and all my relations. I hope participants can also experience this transformative connection.

Illustrating the application of land-based pedagogy, I wish to share an example that has been shared with me by Anishnabe Midekway and Nehiy/naw Cree scholar and Medicine holder, Alannah Young Leon. Alannah introduced the Cedar pedagogy which she understands as 'All My Relations,' being deeply rooted in places and genealogies, and transmitted through stories and cultural ceremonies. This pedagogical framework was born of Indigenous conversation and identifies five pedagogical learning pathways: culture, land, orality, community, and ethics. [31] This pedagogy is rooted in learning with and from the land and waters, emphasizing the importance of building reciprocal relationships that foster a deep connection. By immersing learners in the teachings of Indigenous Elders and the Gee-zhee-kan'-dug Cedar, this approach enriches individual learning and underscores the vital connection between understanding, respecting, and preserving the environment. [31]



Invitation to explore: Alannah Young Leon's Indigenous Elders' Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs: Gee-zhee-kan'-dug Cedar Pedagogical Pathways. [31]



Activity 4: Sense of Place Maps

Before delving into your relationship with this body of water (whether it be new, well-developed, or shifting), a good beginning point is to recognize your sense of place. We will be doing that with sense of place maps.

In Western academic literature, sense of place (SOP) has been introduced as a promising approach that helps us understand the relationships between people and the places they inhabit. Involving the meanings and attachments that individuals or groups attribute to a particular place, SOP emphasizes emotional connections to a place, including place identity and dependence. [32] The perception of a meaningful place and the meanings assigned to it are shaped by numerous factors, including personal values and attributes, environmental attitudes, social relations, sociocultural settings, local knowledge, and the attributes of the place itself. [32]

But for many Indigenous peoples, this concept is not new, as place is viewed as more than just a physical location; it holds deeper significance as a repository for cultural knowledge. [33] This knowledge goes beyond the conventional senses to encompass more abstract "senses" connected to the interconnection of intuition, place, and time. [33] These abstract senses intertwine Indigenous cultural knowledge with the landscape, which is visible in place names and stories that convey meanings, connections, and interrelationships.

The concept of SOP allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the connections between people and their environments, enabling us to approach conservation and environmental work from a more holistic and inclusive perspective.

Remember that sense of place mapping is a subjective and personal activity. It aims to explore and express individual connections to the land while fostering a collective understanding of the shared environment.

Required materials:

- Drawing utensils (markers/pencil crayons)
- Paper
- Something to draw on

Duration: 30 minutes - 1 hour

**Instructions:**

1. Start by drawing the body of water we are here with today. This should be a physical representation of this non-human actor, however, it does not need to be spatially/geographically correct.
2. Now draw yourself in relation to it. This is where you spend the most time, where you understand your place is. It can include your home, your work, or your school, among other places.
3. Next, take a moment to reflect on the various ways this waterbody influences you and the areas you've marked on the map. Try to visualize and mark these connections on your map. I found using arrows helped to visualize the give-and-take relations you have.

Below are a few prompting questions that can be asked every few minutes to help with this visualization. These questions are specified towards the Fraser River and can be adapted to your chosen body of water.

- a. **Drinking Water:** Consider how the river contributes to your drinking water supply. Is it a direct source of drinking water, or does it indirectly impact the quality of the water you consume?
- b. **Industry and Economy:** Think about the industries or businesses in your area that rely on the river for their operations.
 - Are there factories that use water for production, or agricultural practices that depend on irrigation from the river?
 - Think of how your home is powered?
 - Think about the port and the transportation of goods?
 - What about public transportation - ferries?
 - Think about fisheries?
 - What about the logging industry? (Did you know there are ~50 forest industry facilities along the Lower Fraser River?)
- c. **Food Sources:** The river and its surrounding ecosystems often support diverse flora and fauna, providing food sources for both humans and wildlife. Consider how the river contributes to the availability of fish, crops, or other natural resources that form a part of your diet or the local food system.



- a. **Recreational Activities:** Does the river offer opportunities for recreational activities such as swimming, boating, or hiking along its banks?
- b. **Cultural and Spiritual Significance:** Contemplate the cultural and spiritual connections people have with the river. Are there any ceremonies, traditions, or rituals associated with the waterbody? Do you have any ceremony with water (not necessarily this river) in your practices? These intangible connections are an essential part of our sense of place and should be acknowledged on your map as well.

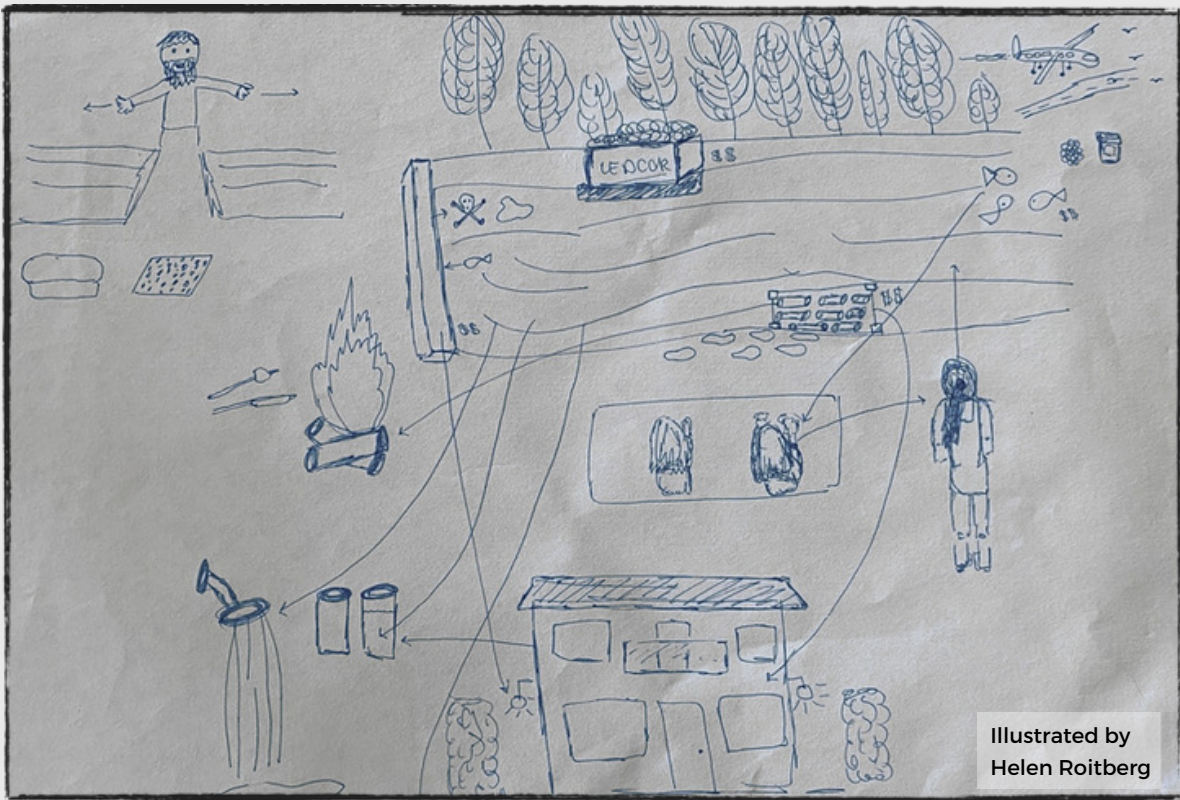
As you complete your sense of place map, you'll begin to notice a comprehensive representation of your relationship with this body of water and how much it provides to you and your larger community. It should make you question if you are adequately reciprocating this relationship in return.

4. Lastly, take a moment to consider the waterbody's health and any environmental challenges it faces. Mark these concerns on your map to visualize the challenges that need addressing to protect this vital relation.

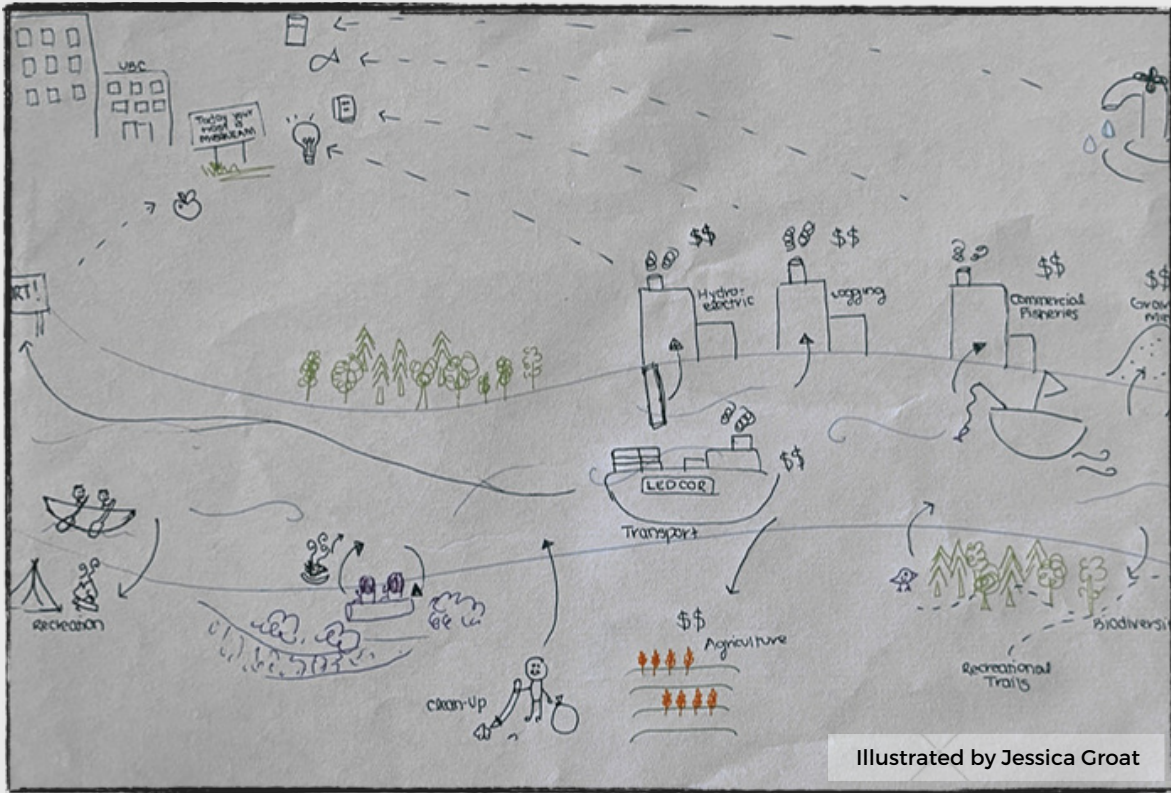
- Are there any pollution sources, habitat destruction, or issues threatening its well-being?
- Have you done any work to combat those?

5. Now, step back and reflect on the map as a whole. Use this visual representation to deepen your understanding of how integral this waterbody is to your life and the lives of those around you. Recognize the interconnectedness between your sense of place and the spiritual significance of water in your daily existence, and acknowledge that these connections will serve as a foundation for building a more profound and sustainable relationship with the water.

Find examples of a sense of place map on the following page. Both were completed at the Fraser River Park, on unceded x^wməθk^wəyəm land; June 2023.



Illustrated by
Helen Roitberg



Illustrated by Jessica Groat



6. Individuals can then be encouraged to share their maps and explain what they drew and why.

You can offer a few prompting questions:

- What did you think?
- Did anything surprise you?
- How did you feel doing this?
- Where did individuals' maps share commonalities?
 - Everyone likely recognized the excessive industries that utilize this water source - do you think this corresponds to how Western extractivist ideals have dominated these lands and waters, as well as our daily perspectives?
- Where did the maps differ?
 - As we all come from different cultural and spiritual backgrounds, our relationship with these waters could be quite new or already developed.
- If individuals chose to visualize with arrows, which way do most of them point? How does that make you feel?

Let individuals think about how they would go about changing this dynamic as they move through the next activity.



I think back to my first introduction to the Mother Tree Local Leaders Program, during which Cedar George-Parker, a member of the sə́lilwə́tał Nation and Tulalip tribes, shared a very memorable teaching with me. In our dialogue, I conveyed my struggle to find my place in Vancouver, grappling with how to respectfully navigate unfamiliar territory, while honoring and walking gently with all of my relations. He offered me a few words that served as a remarkable source of inspiration for the activity below. [34]

80:00-100:00



Activity 5: Introducing Your Spirit

Informed by this profound wisdom of grounding ourselves in our relationship to the land, and guided by the invaluable teachings passed down from my relations, the next activity takes shape. This activity allows individuals to extend their gratitude and respectfully introduce their Spirits to the water in alignment with these teachings.

Required materials:

- An offering. Within many Indigenous cultures, tobacco, as one of the four sacred plants, is offered in gratitude. However this offering can vary depending on the protocol of the Host Nation, and as a facilitator of this workshop, I encourage you to bring medicine from your own culture.

Duration: 20 minutes

Instructions:

1. Verbalize to individuals that now that they have a better understanding of their sense of place, positionality, and commitment to the waterbody, you think it is time they go introduce themselves.
2. Offer individuals the opportunity to make an offering as a gift of reciprocity for teaching us through the water and land today. (Prior to this offering, this tobacco offering was confirmed to follow the Host Nation, x^wməθk^wə́yəm protocols.) Remind them that this introduction and offering of medicine need to come from a good place, and individuals should be approaching this with an open heart and an open mind.



3. Ask individuals to take a moment to find a spot along the waterbody and offer them a few things to think about:

- What do I see?
- What do I hear?
- How do I feel?
- What is the land and water offering me?
- How am I reconciling with the lands and waters?

Individuals should use this time to understand and define their commitment to this new relationship with this body of water.





Activity 6: Closing Circle

To conclude this workshop, have participants end in a similar way to how they began—within the sharing circle. Prompt them with questions, allowing them to build on their prior foundational knowledge, as well as solidify any newly discovered concepts.

Required Materials:

- N/A

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Instructions:

1. Have individuals return to circle seating and prompt with a few questions:
 - Do you think you have a better understanding of your relationship and your reciprocal commitments to the water now?
 - Do you have any lingering thoughts from any of the activities?
2. Shift discussion towards next steps.
 - At an individual level, what are your next steps?
 - Continue reflecting on why this is important work and what values it embodies - are those also your values?
 - Continue to visit the water and give thanks - balance out your arrows!
 - What about at an organizational level? What can you adopt?
 - Learning from outside organizations and other NGOs, several recurring themes arose when it came to this work:
 1. Relationship building.
 2. Listen and support the voices that may be overlooked.
 3. Get out and continue to visit the lands and waters - you need to build the relationship for yourself!

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Appendix

Rebuilding our Relationship with Water

RESEARCH TO SUPPORT INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO
INTERCULTURAL CLIMATE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH AN
INDIGENOUS LENS

sta'łów, Rearguard Falls, on the traditional,
unceded territories of the Tk'emlupsemc and
the Secwepemc7uwi First Nations.

CASE STUDY: THE STAL'ƏW

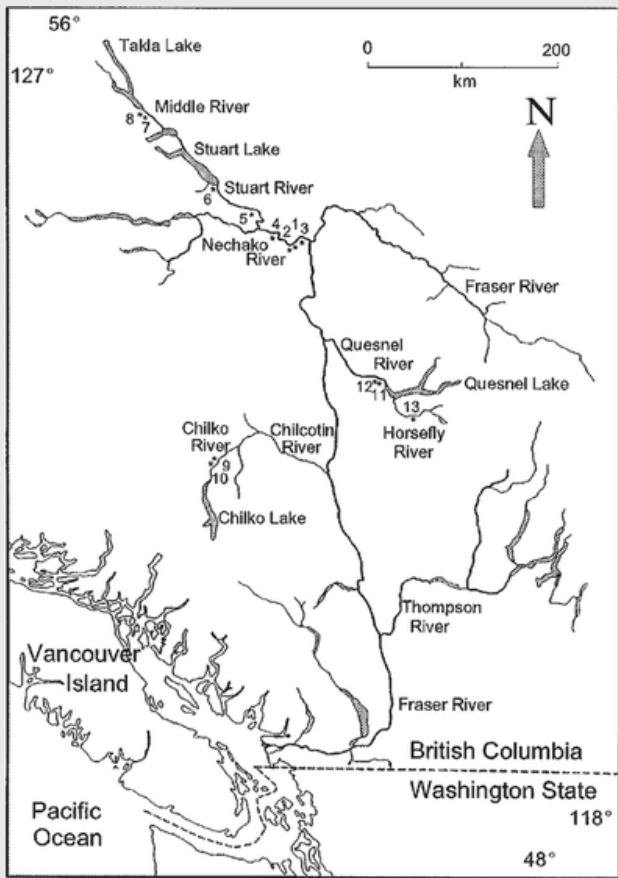


stal'əw, East of Vancouver, on the traditional, unceded territories of the Nteʔkepmxcín First Nations.

The River

The stal'əw holds a remarkable significance to British Columbia and its people, serving as a vital lifeline and supporting diverse ecosystems and industries. Let's explore some fascinating facts about this iconic river [24, 35]:

- The stal'əw stretches 1375 km long, making it one of the longest rivers in Canada. It spans a distance comparable to that between what is colonially known as Vancouver, BC, and Regina, Saskatchewan, encompassing the heart of the province.
- The Fraser Basin covers an astonishing 25% of BC's entire land area, serving as a home for over 60% of the province's population.
- Ecologically, the river is renowned for its significance as one of the largest salmon-spawning rivers globally. It plays a crucial role in supporting various iconic fish species, including Chinook, Coho, and Sockeye salmon. The river is also home to the white sturgeon, North America's largest freshwater fish, which spawn in its waters.
- The stal'əw is not just a natural treasure; it is an economic powerhouse. It produces about 80% of British Columbia's GDP, with much of it derived from natural resources. The river's thriving fisheries, both commercial and recreational, contribute significantly to the economic vitality of the region.
- The fertile soils of the Fraser Valley support a vibrant agricultural sector, contributing substantially to the region's economic output.
- Moreover, the river serves as a critical transportation route, supporting industries such as forest products and construction aggregates.



Despite its significance and contributions, the Fraser River has faced numerous challenges over the years. Colonization and human activities have resulted in habitat destruction, pollution, and a decline in salmon populations, among other environmental issues. In response, various initiatives, led by Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups alike, have emerged to safeguard the river's health and promote sustainable practices.

Figure 1. Map of the Fraser River watershed, British Columbia. [36]

“You have to recognize that the river delta built up over time, so to truly recognize our territory is to look at how the land was formed 9,000 years ago.”
 qiyəplənəxw—Howard E. Grant, x^wməθk^wəyəm, 2014
 x^wməθk^wəyəm Teaching Toolkit [4]

The Estuary

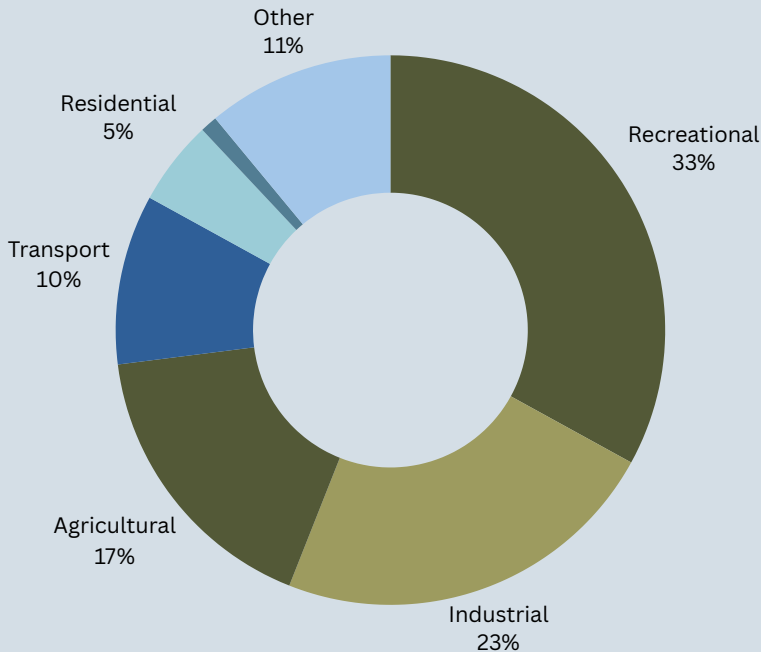
Nestled at the convergence of the *staləw* and the Pacific Ocean lies the ecologically vital Fraser Estuary, a thriving region bursting with life. This estuary plays a pivotal role in the life cycle of the Fraser River's salmon species, providing crucial habitats for breeding, overwintering, and migration. Moreover, it serves as a sanctuary for various bird species, making it an essential waterfowl breeding and overwintering site.

The Fraser River estuary once fostered the world's largest wild salmon runs, and the endangered southern resident killer whale, with less than 75 individuals remaining, found sustenance in these waters. Indigenous Coast Salish First Nation communities have called this estuary home since ancient times, and today, over half of British Columbia's growing population cherishes its significance. However, the ecological health of the estuary is now threatened, with less than 30% of its habitat remaining intact. [25] It faces a myriad of challenges such as pollution, extensive dredging and diking, resource exploitation, intensified agriculture, urban sprawl, climate change, and potential large-scale industrial developments. [25]

Unfortunately, the estuary currently lacks a comprehensive conservation management plan to safeguard its at-risk species. Additionally, there is a need for coordinated governance among the numerous First Nation, municipal, provincial, and federal governments responsible for its resources.

The stałó and Industry & Extraction

Currently, the Lower Fraser River caters to a diverse range of stakeholders and user groups. The chart below illustrates the numerous uses of the river and the distribution of activities among these groups.



Living in BC, the Lower Fraser River:



Powers your home



Delivers food & products



Transports fuel for your use



Heats your work & school



Provides recreation

Figure 2. Fraser River Uses. Adapted from the Fraser River Industrial Center. [24]

[24]

Derived from a public report by the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, we will investigate the following concepts as we take a closer look at a number of crucial extractive industries and their influence on the historical trajectory along the stałó river. [24]



Port Activity

The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (Port Metro Vancouver) is North America's largest port by export tonnage and a vital ocean gateway to the Pacific. While its operations contribute to economic growth, the port's extractive activities can harm the Fraser River's delicate ecosystem. Large-scale industrial activities associated with shipping, loading, and unloading of goods can lead to habitat destruction, introduction of invasive species, pollution, and disturbance to aquatic life.



Fisheries

The historical significance of First Nations' fishing activities continues alongside the fishing efforts of various others, capitalizing on the river's rich resources. Fisheries along the Lower Fraser River are a major extractive industry, contributing significantly to its economic importance. They involve commercial and sport fishing, focusing on various salmon species, including sockeye, pink, coho, Chinook, and chum. White sturgeon also attract sport fishing. Fish processing, which contributes significantly more to the province's gross domestic product than commercial fishing, exemplifies the extensive extraction and value-added processes linked to the Lower Fraser River's fisheries.



Aggregate

Aggregate, consisting of materials like sand, gravel, and crushed stone, is one of the most abundant natural resources on Earth. In the Lower Fraser River, aggregates are crucial cargo, playing a vital role in concrete manufacturing and road construction, supporting the development of Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. The river has seen inbound waterborne shipments of dry bulk minerals, likely predominantly aggregate, reaching 4.1 to 4.3 million tonnes annually.



Logging

The forest products industry plays a significant role in the Lower Fraser River's economic activity. Despite some closures of major timber processing facilities, many others remain operational and contribute substantially to the region's economy. Over 45 forest industry facilities operate along this part of the river, encompassing sawmills, shake and shingle mills, a veneer/plywood mill, a pulp mill, wood chip mills, handling facilities, and more.



Transport

The float plane facility on the Middle Arm at Vancouver International Airport is a crucial link between Greater Vancouver and communities relying on float plane services. It plays a vital role in enabling water-based air services and essential connections to land-based airport services and the larger air services network. Additionally, this activity significantly contributes to the economic importance of the Lower Fraser River by providing direct employment opportunities.



Recreation

Recreational boating is a significant aspect of leisure activities on the Lower Fraser River, catering to sport fishing, travel to recreational properties, and other leisure pursuits. The river hosts 36 marinas or dock clusters for recreational boats and some commercial fishing vessels. Moreover, the Lower Fraser River serves as a hub for outdoor recreation, offering parks, trails, golf courses, and other land and water-based activities.



Agriculture

The fertile soils of the Fraser Valley, among the most productive in Canada, make it an agricultural powerhouse with an extensive frost-free growing season. More than 25 different types of field vegetables are grown throughout the region, with the vast majority of the berry production in B.C. occurring in the Fraser Valley and Metro Vancouver. Dairy and poultry production are also prominent contributors to the agricultural sector. Over the years, farming in the Fraser Valley Regional District has expanded significantly, benefiting from its strategic location near large urban markets and the U.S. border. The region's agricultural production has achieved impressive annual yields, contributing approximately \$1.6 billion to British Columbia's agricultural output. Despite this success, the region faces challenges such as potential impacts from climate change, water availability for irrigation, and threats of flooding and saltwater intrusion that could impact its agricultural capacity.

A Brief Timeline: Colonization of the stal'áw

This timeline offers a comprehensive view of the stal'áw's history, shedding light on significant events that have shaped its development and environmental struggles over the centuries. [38] Notably, these discoveries, expansions, and industries are intertwined with the broader narrative of colonization, leaving a profound impact on the region's trajectory. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are other historical moments and developments not included here that have also played pivotal roles in shaping the stal'áw's rich story.

Pre-Contact:

Indigenous peoples have inhabited the Fraser River basin for thousands of years, relying on its abundant resources for sustenance and cultural practices.

(Many Nations along the stal'áw have publicly shared creation stories that can offer a deeper understanding of their profound relationships with the river.)

1827:

Hudson's Bay Company establishes Fort Langley near the mouth of the stal'áw, becoming an important fur trading post and agricultural center.

1865:

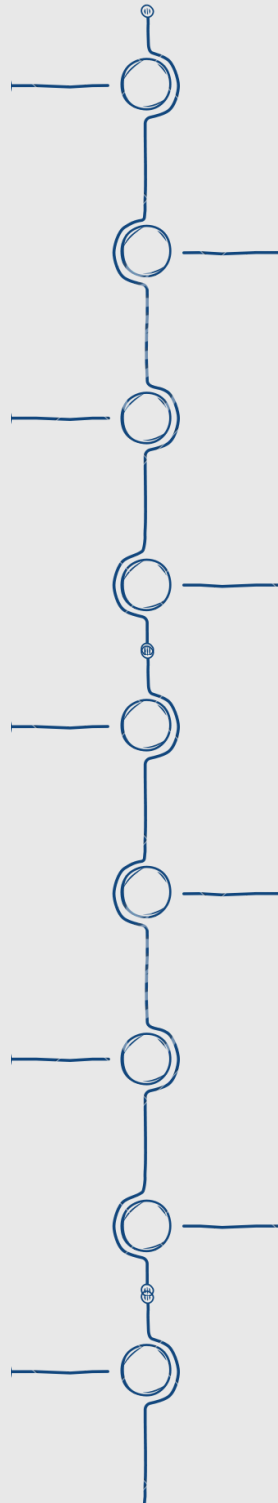
The Cariboo Road completion facilitates inland access, further accelerating settlement and resource extraction.

1885:

Completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, connecting British Columbia to the rest of Canada, further boosts further development, resource extraction, trade, and economic growth through the Fraser River corridor.

1913:

A major landslide occurs at Hells Gate on the stal'áw, significantly altering the river's flow and impacting salmon migration routes, leading to a drastic decline in salmon populations.



1808:

Simon Fraser, a fur trader and explorer, leads an expedition down the stal'áw, mapping significant portions of the river and contributing to European knowledge of the area.

1858:

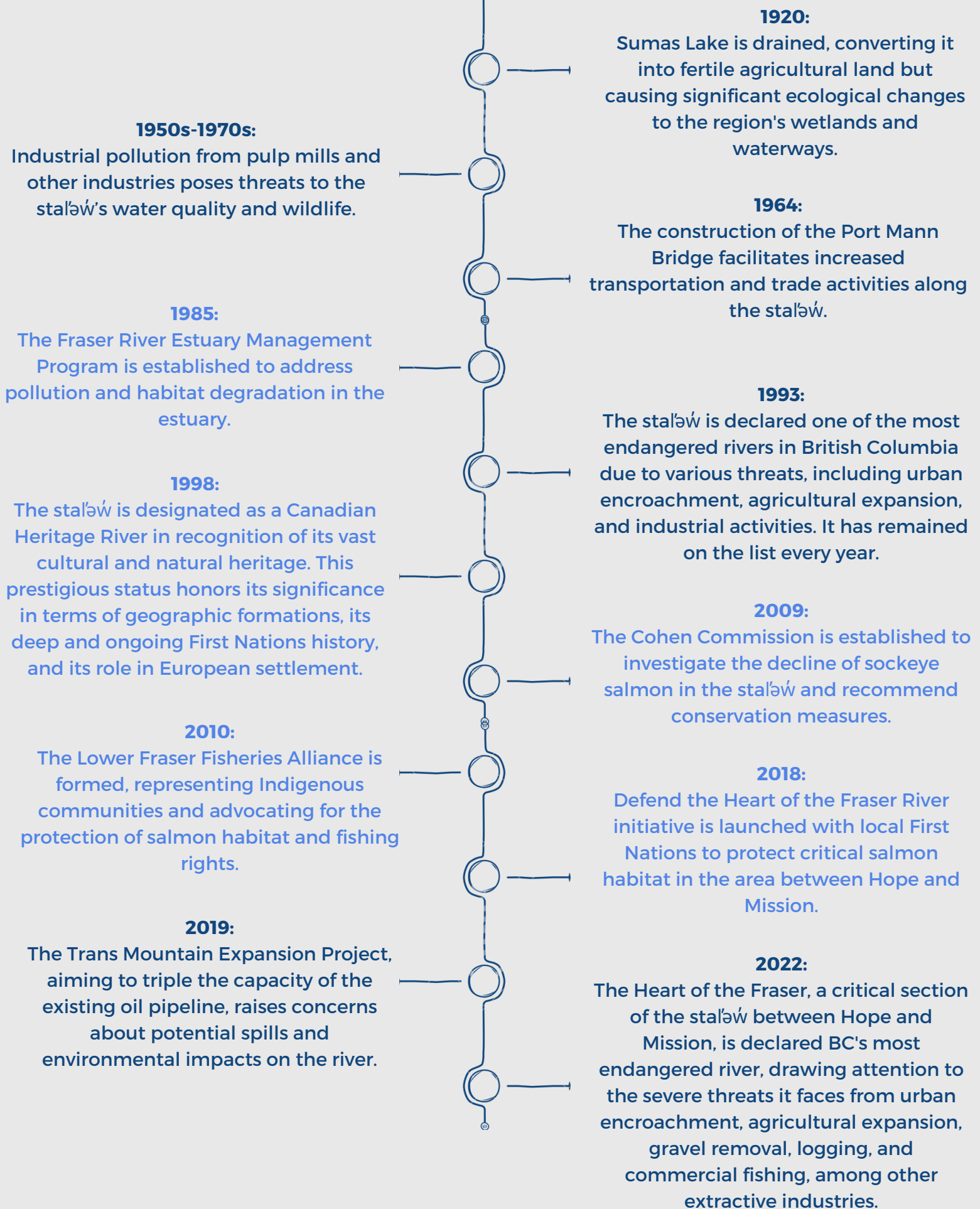
The Fraser River Gold Rush brings a significant influx of prospectors and settlers to the region, transforming the social and economic landscape of British Columbia.

1870:

The first salmon cannery is built, marking the beginning of industrialized fishing in the Fraser River estuary, which would significantly impact salmon populations.

Early 1900s:

Hydraulic mining and logging operations have significant environmental impacts on the stal'áw and its ecosystem.



● Colonizing Impact: Damaging events of colonization.

● Rebalancing Efforts: Initiatives for restoration and preservation.

For an in-depth exploration of the First Nations along the stal'əw' and a comprehensive history of colonization's impacts, consult the Fraser Basin Council's resource, [Bridge Between Nations: A History of First Nations in the Fraser River Basin](#). [38]

And if you're eager to delve deeper into the captivating stories and rich history of the Stó:lō Nation, check out "[Towards a New Ethnohistory: Community-Engaged Scholarship Among the People of the River](#)," edited by Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz, David M. Schaepe, and Naxaxalhts'i (Albert 'Sonny' McHalsie). [40] This book presents a 'New Ethnohistory' approach through community-engaged research, and is a collection of essays, authored by graduate students who participated in the Ethnohistory Field School. By exploring a diverse range of topics, the book provides a distinct window into the Stó:lō Nation's Indigenous perspective on their history, traditions, stories, and their intricate interactions with the encompassing settler world.

Below is one of many examples of an Indigenous-led initiative to protect the stal'əw'.

As one powerful act of resilience and determination, over 100 First Nations came together in December 2010 to sign the historic **Save the Fraser Declaration**, which unequivocally banned tar sands crude oil tankers, pipelines, and infrastructure from their territories. This landmark declaration was a response to the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway project, a 1,172-kilometer-long megaproject that would have threatened the health and well-being of the stal'əw' and its surrounding ecosystems. [41]

- The Save the Fraser Declaration and the Coastal First Nations Declaration reflect First Nations' assertion of their ancestral laws, rights, and responsibilities over the lands, waters, and species within their territories.
- These declare that First Nations hold the right to enact bans on oil pipelines and crude oil tankers within their territories, in alignment with their ancestral laws, Canadian constitutional law, and international law. [41]
- These Declarations empower signatory First Nations to take potential enforcement action, based on their respective laws and customs, against any company involved in facilitating the transportation of tar sands crude oil through their territories.

The Save the Fraser Declaration represents the collective determination of Indigenous Nations to protect their cultural heritage, ecosystems, and the stal'əw'. Individuals and organizations also signed and endorsed these critical declarations, standing in solidarity with the First Nations' efforts to safeguard their ancestral lands and waters for generations to come.

Reflection:

Consider these questions. Feel free to jot down notes to bring back to a group discussion.

- Can you think of ways in which colonialism has impacted the way in which water is used?
- What is your relationship to water?
- What is a 'take-away' that you have read from the case study?
- What is an 'action' that you are interested in learning more about?