

SUBSISTENCE ECONOMIES

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A Program of the Coastal Learning Communities Network

TRADITIONS IN SURVIVAL

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On January 14 and March 25, a network of people from the three corners of Canada met to talk about their common challenges in preserving local subsistence economies.

These “Learning Circle” meetings took place by teleconference, facilitated by Arthur Bull of the Bay of Fundy Marine Resource Centre.

Learning circles are a way for people from across the country to learn from each other about different issues relating to community based management of natural resources. It is not so much bringing in experts as it is sharing our experiences and the lessons we have learned. Meetings are audio recorded and transcribed so that peo-

ple’s discussions can be more broadly used. The articles in this newsletter are adapted from these transcripts.

During the first two meetings, participants talked about what it means to have a subsistence economy in the 21st century. By sharing local stories, people discovered that despite their diverse histories and cultures, their experiences are more similar than they’d expected.

The economies of the maritimes, the pacific coast, and the subarctic face pressures for commercialization of their resources that are more intense than ever.

Despite this, people are finding ways to maintain their traditional harvesting practices.



Inshore fishing boat and lobster traps on the west coast of Newfoundland

SUBSISTENCE AND THE MONEY ECONOMY

OUR FOODS

- Sockeye salmon
- Halibut
- Abalone
- Clams
- Moose
- Caribou

There’s a book by Alistair Macintosh called *Soil and Soul*, it’s about traditional communities up in Scotland. He’s talking about “mutuality” in subsistence economies. People in the community basically say we are all in the same boat and basically it means that if there’s extra of something, they share around. There’s a second practice of exchange. If I have got a bunch of extra eggs and you’ve got some deer meat, I might take the eggs over and at some point maybe I will get some deer meat back. It is not really a trade. The third practice he calls bartering which is more like where you say I have got this amount of scallops and you’ve got that amount of moose meat and do a roughly equivalent trade. These kind of practices without cash are a form of resistance to that dominant way of thinking about the economy. But to have a food fishery even under treaty based fisheries, you still need cash to do that. You need cash to buy gasoline, you need cash to run that. So we need to talk about how you can

EXERCISING ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

HUU-AY-AHT FIRST NATION

The Huu-ay-aht First Nation is a community of fishing people located in Nuu-chah-nulth territory off the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Back in the 1950s, we had approximately sixty-seven commercial licenses, so access back then was not really a problem. As a government, we did not have to try to create such a large or centralized distribution system for members without direct access.

More than half of those sixty-seven licenses were small, mosquito-fleet type vessels. When people like my father and the other men were out fishing commercially, from trolling to long-line, their wives who were at home in the small communities would go out day-fishing while their children were at school. By doing this, they would add to their local economies.

Most of the small fishing communities have been devastated because of corporate conglomeration and federal disruption through the forced buy-back of licenses. This practice severed the lifeline of the small, coastal communities all along the west coast of Canada.

Now, there are only about three or four members of our nation that actually own their own licenses. The band has gone and purchased seven other commercial licenses so we can have continued access in today's competitive fishing industry.

When we had sixty-seven licenses, one could cover all the salmon and ground fish species that we required. But over time, the buy-back regime that the government implemented forced our people out of the industry. All of a sudden, it became much more expensive to get out onto the water and fish since it is often necessary to have more than one license to make a living these days.

Many of our people moved away from our homelands because we were forced out of the industry. Many who live off-reserve, in urban areas, have not had access to our traditional foods. As such, conditions such as diabetes, obesity and the like have come to the fore in the past few decades.

Back in the 1990s, one of our elder ladies stood up and stated that she had no fish. I was a member of our band government at the time, and we took it

seriously. We made the decision to budget more money for fish distribution. So, we increased our budget. The band budgets a certain amount of money every year to go get sockeye salmon so our people are able to can fish, smoke fish and do some of the traditional activities that we always did in the past.

In the old days, all members would have the responsibility to go and harvest and distribute to everyone. Now, the government has to budget money for it.

At the same time, we were involved in negotiations with the provincial and federal governments. In such an environment of negotiation, we were pressured to come down to a number. The Tye Ha'wilth, our head hereditary chief, wanted to substantiate some of our claims so we exercised our aboriginal harvesting rights for probably four or five years while I was a member of Chief and Council.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans offered us 3,500 sockeye a year in a communal license, nowhere near what our hereditary chiefs wanted out of the deal. So, we notified them that the communal license that they were trying to grant us was unacceptable. In fact, we would be resubmitting a work plan and going out and fishing according to our needs. We caught 20,000 fish that year and for the next three years.

We have to correspond with the federal government so people that are working on behalf of my nation catching food fish for us do not get harassed. We create a work plan every year and we submit it to the department. In an up-front and honest manner, we make sure to communicate the fact that this is not a request, but rather notification of what we are planning to do as a nation. We keep a transparent system with them, playing by their rules but implementing our own numbers.

► *Larry Johnson, Economic Development Manager, HUU-AY-AHT First Nation*



Members of the Coastal Learning Communities Network visiting Nuu-chah-nulth territory

“Most of the small fishing communities have been devastated because of corporate conglomeration.”



Huu-ay-aht fishing derby
www.surfingvancouverisland.com

TAKING WHAT WE NEED—GITGA'AT FIRST NATION

The Gitga'at First Nation is a North Coast First Nation located at Hartley Bay, British Columbia. Traditional employment within our community has been commercial salmon fishing, but there has been a big reduction in the fleet. The traditional population in the village has probably averaged around 150 or 180 over the last few years, and the total band membership is 600. But I bet you we had around 100 people in commercial fishing and then more than that working in the canneries. Now we have under 20 commercial fishermen left. So our capacity for catching our annual food harvest has been reduced.

The band council started paying people a couple of years ago to catch stock and bring it into the community. But we also depend a lot on other resources other than salmon, such as halibut. The village does own halibut licenses and the guys that fished with licenses from the community do bring halibut into the village. That will probably still not bring in as much as we need. But we're still able to get access to at least a little bit of it every year. Kyle's family in particular has always gone to traditional camps. They all depend on our grandmother to do the processing of our traditional food.

Shellfish is still big in comparison to the other fisheries because to harvest shellfish versus harvest salmon it's only like \$100 worth of equipment you need for growing out your big

shellfish. You just catch a ride with somebody, especially because the beaches are right close to the village. So everybody who wants to go and get clams every year can. But people who want salmon or halibut don't really have the equipment they need.

When we bring a point to DFO that there's something changing in one of our fisheries, DFO just comes back and says, we have no record of that. They want us to catch like 3,000, less than a third of what our community actually needs. DFO gives us these small quotas, but we still go out and catch whatever we need anyway. So it's not really proper management if they're giving us a number and we're catching what we need anyway.

Abalone has been a traditional food, but it also was a highly lucrative commercial species. We're finding now that the poaching that's going on is quite extensive. Even though there are First Nations who are poaching, their level of poaching is very small scale compared to some of the other poaching that's going on. There's a vanload of abalone that's poached and with the intention of selling it to restaurants or exporting to other countries.

So are they conserving the species for their own long term use or is the resource going to just get used by the commercial sector or other people?

► *Kyle Clifton and Maya Paul*

TOWARD FOOD SECURITY

After the Sparrow decision DFO used to tell the non-native fisherman that the food fishery of First Nations came before commercial fisheries. Since that time, just the opposite has happened. The food fishery is seen as very marginal to the fisheries in Canada. If you look at Bill C-32, the new Fisheries Act, the whole act is about commercial fishing. It is absolutely critical that the First Nation food fishery be given the much higher priority that

it warrants from aboriginal treaty rights and court cases like the Sparrow decision. But there's a much broader imbalance. Everything is oriented towards that one goal of commoditization and commercialization without regard for the long term sustainability of fish populations, the livelihood needs of First Nations, and the food security of Canadians.

► *John Kearney*



Aerial photo of Hartley Bay.
Source: Creative Commons
Flickr user miguelb

"Kyle's family has always gone to traditional camps. They all depend on their grandmother to do the processing of our traditional food."



Source: www.animalaid.org.uk

RESISTING CORPORATISM—*BEAR RIVER FIRST NATION*

The Bear River First Nation is a very small community of about 300 people and we have about 100 that live on reserves in Nova Scotia. We had the Marshall court case here. That quickly got watered down to a commercial right. It's ironic because it's based on a communal approach but in a very individualistic profit making industry, or corporate industry. We've always had a food fishery, we never signed an agreement. So we stick out like a sore thumb.

Clamming here is very important to the Mi'kmaq people and always has been. Now there's very few that do it. It's ironic. Despite the treaty negotiations going on, the provincial government here just went and leased out ten beaches. A lot of the leases are on our traditional clam areas. So we've been working with the few independent clambers that are left to try to protect our food fishery and try to keep some of the open areas as common property.

We only got one crab license this year that will likely be leased. We have 30,000 pounds on a halibut license as well. Some of that is from DFO and some of it is from the community purchasing it themselves.

There was a lot of leg work done here in relationship building. We worked with non-native fishermen, and in partnership with DFO on some experimental projects. The approach we take is we inform everybody. We even inform some of the non-native fishermen organisations about our harvesting plans.

Our inland streams have always been a community priority. We had a successful programme in the late nineties, looking at fish habitat and stream restoration. When you restore the river and take on that responsibility, you should at least be guaranteed some type of access to it.

When we were developing that work plan for the fish habitat food fishery, lobster had to be a part of that work plan because these are food fishers and we had to send them out for

food. In September they go moose hunting, and they have to travel all the way to Cape Breton.

In my community they do keep some of the traditional values. For example when we lose family members, they still take care of people that don't have access to the moose and can't afford to go up there. It's all basically food subsistence. Some of our families in our First Nation really rely on the moose to get them through the winter, just like in the olden days. There are quite a lot of concerns about the management of the moose.

It is difficult for people to buy or to just fish or hunt what they need on a very small scale basis. That's really been rejected by our government. Even non First Nations people, all of the small scale fishery people are getting really pushed out of the industry. We're being forced into big corporatism. There's still this mentality of trying to help us by commercialising us now. That's the old Indian Act mentality—we'll help them by helping them become Canadians and making them into civilised people. It's another assimilation strategy.

This global corporate world is moving at an accelerated rate. But First Nations are still trying to approach things from a traditional space, on a small scale. We're still interested in our food, still interested in barter and trade amongst First Nations. It's really important work we're doing.

It is astounding how seriously some of the fishery organisations around the world take conservation, even when they are obviously living in poverty; these are very poor, poor people. And yet our indigenous rights are limited by conservation. We need to ask, who are we conserving for? We surely don't want to conserve resources just so they can be exploited by the very few at the expense of indigenous people's food fisheries.

► Sherry Pictou, Rob McKewan,
Martha Stiegman



Cleaning moose
at Bear River First Nation

"First Nations
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Bear River and the Annapolis Basin
in Nova Scotia

DENE AND CARIBOU IN THE SAHTU REGION

There are two caribou herds that cross the Sahtu Region of the Northwest Territories, the Bluenose-West and the Bluenose-East herds. Of course they only cross through the territory; the calving grounds are further north in Inuvialuit territory and they go further south as well down into Tāichō territory. Throughout this range, there are people who depend on caribou for their subsistence.

The scientists have been up in their airplanes doing counts and they have documented drastic declines in the population for all the herds of the Northwest Territories. In the Sahtu community of Déline, I attended a presentation about the caribou census by the regional wildlife biologist. It was a very interesting interaction between this primarily Dene community and the biologist that was based within the region, but in the predominantly white community of Norman Wells.

The biologist told the community about this decline in the herds and how they did the count. And then he made recommendations for changing harvesting behaviour. He said that the Dene people should stop harvesting so many females in spring. There was huge resentment and hostility about this. In fact the interpreter was told to stop interpreting. The Dene people started discussing among themselves and talking about why they harvest in the way that they do.

This conflict led me to realise that there needs to be some of way of understanding and validating the Dene relationship with caribou that has endured since time immemorial, and the role Dene might have in decision making about protocols and policies related to caribou management or—in more culturally appropriate terms—caribou stewardship.

Soon after that meeting about a year ago, there was a Caribou Summit in Inuvik where all kinds of communities came together from all the regions of the Northwest Territories and with scientists to discuss to issues. We

launched a caribou traditional knowledge study in relation to that event.

We held a three day focus group meeting in Déline to prepare delegates from the community, to provide them with some tools to take up with them to Inuvik. Right after the Summit, we had another focus group session in Fort Good Hope, another Dene community in the Sahtu Region. This meeting was an opportunity to debrief from the Inuvik meeting and also discuss their own perspective and approach to doing this kind of a project. And now I am in Colville Lake working on a third caribou traditional knowledge project.

The Colville Lake project began with a trip out to a fall community hunt. The idea was to start to get a really lived sense of the importance of peoples' relationship with the caribou at various levels, going far beyond just the economics to community wellbeing, cultural integrity, people's relationships with each other and people's sense of strength in self governance.

That experience gives me something to draw from when working with elders and youth in the community work. We're planning exchanges that will allow them to articulate and develop their stories about harvesting and how their own self-determination can be nurtured and strengthened.

The Sahtu is major focus of the current resource development boom in the Northwest Territories. The process of commodification is going on full steam ahead.

But people are still open to thinking about the need for some affirmative action on supporting and protecting the basis of the traditional economy and talking about what this means. Dene approaches to monitoring and research need to be validated so that they can't be pushed aside in the rush for industrial development.

► *Deborah Simmons*



"There needs to be some of way of understanding and validating the Dene relationship with caribou that has endured since time immemorial."



Alfred Masuzumi
K'asho Got'ine First Nation

HAND-LINING IN DIGBY

Hand-lining was a traditional way of life in our community of Digby County, Nova Scotia. We'd catch then dry it, hang it on a clothes line, or lay it over a large rock. Somehow in the making of regulations they seemed to stay away from that food attachment in our community. They would prefer to call it recreational fishery as opposed to a food fishery. We see being able to go sometimes and catch a trout is a practice to catch food.

I can tell you when there was nothing to eat in the house, and I had to go catch something for my brothers and sisters to eat with a string and a hook. It was not for recreational fishing, it was for my brothers and sisters. And now if you want to go and trout fish you buy a license, you buy this, you pay for this, you pay for that before you get to a pond. Unless you're going without a license and these other things you more or less feel like a criminal if you don't comply with A, B, and C.

With the practice of hand-lining and all this there was an attachment that you didn't need a book or a license or training or research for, it all just happened naturally in our community. Now when an elder person or any member of the community comes to the wharf and asks me for a fish, it's a whole new process. First I've caught the fish, sent it up to the truck had it weighed. Then I had to mark it down on my log book that I gave somebody a fish. That is not the way I remember our community.

So the same goes with the wharf. It was accessed and used by every single person in the community. Just recently I had to leave the Digby Wharf because the cost was so high I could not afford to stay there, I had to move to another wharf away from my home port. I was the only hand-line, long-line boat left in the Digby Fleet, and I had to leave because I couldn't afford the cost.

There's been \$4,000-\$8,000 in added costs downloaded from government restructuring over the past seven years. I only grossed \$33,000 last year but nevertheless we managed to get through, paying all the winter for last year's stuff. You've got costs like the fuel costs went up, the insurance costs went up, the vehicle inspections, went up; \$1,200 last year I think it was to have the truck inspected. So fishing has been with a pain in the butt for cost. We're really just struggling and hanging in there.

So this traditional way of life is being lost. We used to sell a portion of our hand-line fish, we used to store away fish for winter, we used to share with our neighbours and friends. And the fisherman use to trade with fish locally when you couldn't get full dollar value from the fish. They traded fish for potatoes and for meat and these kinds of things.

This kind of sharing is going on at the beginning of the week at the middle of the week; it's ongoing, ongoing, ongoing. Everything is interrelated, everything is connected. Whether it's health care, whether it's fisheries, food, access to services, whatever, when we're talking about traditional practices, it's all included. Sixty percent of the people in Digby County don't have a doctor and there are no doctors taking the patients and this is related to the fact that there is no longer a hand-line fishery in Digby County.

Now the small independent fishermen can't get a decent price for their fish, with all the overhead costs. For example they would only offer 30 cents from the local fish plant for fresh hand-line pollock. And in the fall when my brother in law came home from British Columbia looking for fish for winter he was told he would have to pay five dollars a pound for pollock at the local fish plant.

► *Terry Farnsworth with Hubert Saulnier*

THE COASTAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES NETWORK

The Subsistence Economies Learning Circle is a program of the Coastal Learning Communities Network.

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We're on the web!

<http://clcn.seedwiki.com>

The Coastal Learning Communities Network is working to revitalize Canada's coastal communities by empowering coastal residents through shared learning, collective action, and the embracing of indigenous approaches to natural resource management. Its members live on Canada's three coasts and along the shores of major fresh-water bodies.

The Network has developed four overlapping spheres of activities: story telling, issue analysis, learning circles, and communication technologies. The Network strives to be inclusive, welcoming indigenous and non-indigenous university-based and community-based participants.

People who are interested in community-based management of coastal resources, who believe that the health of our communities and the health of natural resources are closely linked, and who think that management and policy must incorporate a wide range of economic, social, and cultural values are encouraged to join the Coastal Learning Communities Network.



Terry Farnsworth with dogfish