



**1st Annual Interior of B.C.
Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference**

Final Report

**Prepared for: Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty
Conference (ISFC) Planning Committee
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Introduction

Background Information

Since the time of contact with non Indigenous settlers in the southern interior of B.C. many traditional Indigenous harvesters including hunters, fishermen, and gatherers from the Ktunaxa, Nlaka'pamux, Secwepemc, St'at'imc, Syilx, and Ts'ilqotin nations have repeatedly expressed concern about the declining health and abundance of culturally important foods in our respective traditional territories. Therefore, the Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference (IFSC) Planning Committee is dedicated to organizing the time and space for traditional Indigenous harvesters to come together and articulate and debate Indigenous food sovereignty issues and find solutions to the consequent insecurity of Indigenous food systems in the southern interior of B.C.

As one of the partners in the project, the En'owkin Centre offered to host and take a leading role in the administration of the Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference which was the 1st regional conference on this subject. The conference took place at En'owkin Centre in Syilx (Okanagan) territory on Penticton Indian Reserve from August 28-31st. The En'owkin Centre is an Indigenous cultural, educational and creative arts institution which is governed by the Okanagan Indian Educational Resources Society. En'owkin Centre is in good standing under the province of B.C. Society Act and has registered charitable status under Revenue Canada Taxation.

The generous hospitality of the Syilx people began with the lighting of a sacred fire and offerings and prayers that asked for the safe arrival and departure of guests as well as positive energy and thoughts for the important discussions that took place at the conference. Accommodation included traditional outdoor camp sites free of charge and dinners were provided by the Syilx and Secwepemc participants. Traditional harvesters from the various nations were also asked to contribute food from their 2006 hunting, gathering and fishing activities to ensure that the meals at the conference appropriately consisted of Indigenous foods making the meals more relevant to the discussions.

Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference Planning Committee (IFSC)

In March 2006 the Community Action for Health Mini Grant Program administered by the Interior Health Authority approved the proposal which called for the preliminary planning of the Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference. As an outcome, the IFSC Planning Committee was formed to provide advice and direction to the Conference Coordinator on all phases of conference planning, hosting and follow-up activities.

The IFSC Planning Committee is a volunteer committee that consists of cultural teachers, traditional harvesters, nutritionists and activists concerned with Indigenous food sovereignty issues. IFSC is a partnership between the En'owkin Centre, Penticton Indian Band Health Department, the Lakes Secwepemc Sustainable Community Building Society, Secwepemc Survival School, as well a representative from the B.C. Food Systems Network with particular expertise and long history of lobbying, action and advocacy on issues related to food sovereignty and agriculture.

Representation

- Jeanette Armstrong is the Executive Director of the En'owkin Centre which is a “dynamic institution which puts forth into practice the principles of self-determination and the validation of indigenous cultural aspirations and identity. En'owkin Centre is taking a lead role in the development and implementation of Indigenous knowledge systems, both at the community and international levels”¹.
- Janice Billy is Director on the Board for the Lakes Secwepemc Sustainable Community Building Society and the Secwepemc Survival School. The purpose of the society is to: “support and facilitate the development of projects that improve the health and well being of the Lakes Secwepemc People, the land we have traditionally lived on, and our language and way of life.
- Suzanne Johnson works on community health and nutrition at Penticton Indian Band and is an advisory to Health Canada. Suzanne is currently working on developing a companion piece for the Native Food Guide with the FN Inuit Health Branch and focuses on creating opportunities to learn about traditional food harvesting and processing as well as healthy cooking through the community kitchen project.
- Cathleen Kneen is the Founder and Executive Director for the B.C. Food Systems Network. Cathleen has been working since 1995 to develop local food security coalitions and linking people together through the BCFSN. Cathleen would like to make sure that the approach of the network is culturally appropriate and respectful towards Indigenous peoples.

Previous accomplishments

1. B.C. Food Systems Network designation of a provincial Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty that can serve to link the various Indigenous nations throughout the province, and monitor and influence policy development specifically as it relates to Indigenous Food Sovereignty.
2. Participation with the International Planning Committee (IPC) on Food Sovereignty “Forum on Land, Territory and Dignity” to prepare and present a declaration to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Conference on Agrarian, Forestry, Fisheries and Rangeland Reform in Porto Alegre, Brazil (March, 2006).

Purpose

The main purpose of the Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference is to: “support and facilitate the development of regional networks, community based action plans, and culturally relevant learning events that will help to ensure that traditional indigenous hunters, fishermen and gatherers, in the interior of B.C. have continued and improved access to culturally important foods in our respective traditional territories. The conference is intended to complement other land, culture, ecology, and health related projects already being implemented in the respective traditional territories, and is structured to promote the protection, conservation and restoration of Indigenous food systems at the grassroots level. IFSC is committed to building on the previous accomplishments of the Conference Coordinator and various committee members”.

Goal

The original goal was to organize the time and space for 200 Indigenous participants within the interior region to come together to articulate and debate the issues as they relate to Indigenous food sovereignty. Due to a lack of financial resources, the number of participants that we were able to plan for was reduced from 200 participants to 60. (Refer to heading “Participant Profiles for total numbers).

¹ For more information visit website: <http://enowkincentre.com/>

In order to ensure grassroots peoples' voices are carried from a strong and balanced representation of traditional harvesters, the main focus of the IFSC planning committee was to recruit participants according to the following nations and communities. The intention was to have participation that was representative of the various nations and communities, and not based on who can afford to pay. The following is a list of the various nations and quotas that were invited to participate in the conference.

Nations

Ktunaxa

Syilx

Nlaka'pamux

Secwepemc

Sta'at'imc

Ts'ilqotin

Traditional harvesting communities

Traditional hunters and gatherers: 40%

Fishermen/women: 25%

Grassroots community members: 20%

Non-government organizations: 10%

Political leaders: 5%

According to Gender:

Women: 50%

Men: 50%

Objectives

The main objectives of the conference are to:

- Promote the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous food related knowledge especially between children, youth and Elders.
- Provide opportunities to observe and experience practical hands on activities related to gathering, preparing, and preserving Indigenous foods.
- Provide opportunities to enhance or establish traditional food exchange or trade networks within the interior region
- Give an expression to the real struggles of Indigenous peoples of the interior of B.C. asserting our inherent responsibility to nurture and take care of our relationship to indigenous food systems on the land, and in the water and forests.
- Presenting our proposals from the perspective of food sovereignty on issues related to agrarian, forestry, fisheries, rangeland, land, and water reform and rural development.

Format of Conference Activities

Participants worked with a methodology based in panel presentations and workshop discussions to prepare for active participation in working groups on the central themes. After receiving information in panel presentations and workshop discussions, working groups were formed following five central themes.

Central Themes of the Conference

1. Concepts of food, land and culture.

2. Health and nutritional values of Indigenous foods.

3. Gender, generations and youth perspectives in the struggle to protect, conserve and restore Indigenous food systems.

4. Strategies for protection, conservation and restoration of Indigenous food systems.

5. Indigenous Food Economies and Trade

Working groups were facilitated by moderators of the panels with corresponding themes. Questions and considerations were developed for the purpose of guiding discussion and maintaining focus in the working groups. (See Appendix B for questions and considerations). Based on the information received in the panel presentations and the questions and considerations discussed, each working group produced a summary report of the current situation and concerns and a proposed plan of community action items. Each working group provided a presentation of their summary reports back to the conference where the main concepts, concerns and issues were captured and conveyed in this final report. Based on the conclusions of the workings groups this report was drafted for the purpose of influencing policy and raising awareness about the unique aspects of Indigenous food sovereignty in the interior of B.C. The report will be distributed and presented to conference participants at the B.C. Food Systems Network Annual Sorrento Gathering in September, 2006 and the Bridging Borders Towards Food Security Conference in October, 2006 in Vancouver.

Summary Reports of Presentations and Working Group Discussions

Theme #1 – Concepts of Food, Land and Culture

I. Introduction: Eco-cultural Restoration - Current Situations and Concerns

The traditional territories of the Ktunaxa, Nlak'pamux, St'ati'imc, Secwepemc and Syilx nations span the southern portion of the interior plateau physiographic region of B.C. Each nation has developed a distinct culture and way of life based on maintaining an intimate relationship with the land in each of the respective traditional territories. As Indigenous peoples, we share similar environments and cultures and therefore rely on similar food systems that are based on hunting, fishing and gathering culturally important plant and animal species in the many diverse ecosystems throughout the region. The cultural teachings of Coyote have played an important role in shaping the cultures and worldviews of interior plateau peoples' since time immemorial. Through the teachings of Coyote, instructions are given to us by the Creator and are based on values that nurture healthy relationships with the land, plants, animals and people. We have been taught that culture is the main link between the land, the food and the people and we therefore think of the land as one in the same as our cultures.

Our languages, land, foods and people exist as one in an interconnected web of life in the same way that all human beings were created as one. The traditional ecological knowledge, wisdom and values of sharing and taking care of one another have successfully sustained present and future generations of Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. Even though our cultures have undergone drastic changes since the time of contact with non-Indigenous settlers, the core values embedded in the teachings of Coyote continue to form the foundation of our survival in the modern world. While it may be unrealistic to think that people of different cultures will adopt all of our cultural values, we believe it is necessary that the cultural values of giving, sharing and avoiding over-consumption can be integrated into the lifestyles of all people. We believe that the different races were created and brought together to test how we deal with our actions and enact our teachings around sharing and taking care of the land and one another in the current ecological and cultural crises we are faced with.

The underlying eco-philosophy and worldview embedded in our Interior Salishan languages and tribal social structures emphasize good relationships between all of creation. Therefore, our relationship with the land, plants, and animals that make up our food systems, embodies a deep and profound gratitude and spiritual understanding of the sacredness of the gift of food. Appreciation of the healing power of Indigenous foods, water and medicines is demonstrated through ceremonies, rituals, offerings and prayers. The prayers, offerings, rituals and ceremonies keep foods alive spiritually, and make gathering and preparing food more than just a "job". The offerings demonstrate reciprocity and reverence for the plants and animals that have sacrificed their lives, as well as a deep understanding of the cyclical nature and interconnected aspects of life.

Since the time of contact with non-Indigenous settlers, the disruption of the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous food related knowledge in our families and communities, combined with the appropriation and destruction of our land, forests, water, and air has eroded indigenous food systems and ways of life. Transmission of cultural knowledge through the generations has been severely disrupted due to forced assimilation into the residential school system and mainstream culture. While fewer and fewer of the younger generations are learning to speak Salishan languages in their homes and communities, some of the spiritual teachings have been maintained through research and practice. In an ecological context of life and death, observing mourning procedures and food restrictions are an example of how some of the spiritual teachings related to the delicate exchange of energy between humans and food have survived the process of colonization.

There is a serious concern over what will happen to Indigenous cultures and ways of life if our relationship to the land, plants, animals, and one another continues to be degraded. Our semi-nomadic lifestyles have been severely impacted by the unjust allotment of small plots of land on Indian reserves. Displacement from the land and the centralization of food production in the mainstream culture has resulted in a sedentary lifestyle and decreased access to Indigenous hunting, fishing and gathering sites throughout our traditional territories. Parents working full time in both urban and rural areas are forced to compete in the fast paced capitalist economy and lack the support of the extended family which is characteristic of our tribal social structures. Therefore, parents have less time to participate in hunting, fishing and gathering activities and spend less time teaching their children Indigenous food related knowledge. In turn, the decrease in the cultivation of culturally important food and medicine plants has resulted in an absence of the cultural management strategies, practices and techniques that contributed to the relative stability that was existed in Indigenous food systems prior to contact.

The absence of harvesting and tilling the soils in important root digging areas combined with the suppression of fire in maintaining forage for ungulate species, are only two examples how the absence of our cultural strategies and practices has resulted in the declining populations of culturally important plants and animals. The social and economic values underlying the principles driving the government and economic institutions who are asserting full jurisdiction and control in land use management and planning (LUMP) are fundamentally rooted in a conflicting worldview that believes that humans are separate from and dominant over nature. The consequent disregard for Indigenous food values, principles and worldview in LUMP challenges people from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures to learn to communicate across cultures about how to protect, conserve and restore Indigenous ecosystems for the benefit of all. Each section of this report includes a list that identifies some suggested community action items that will require Indigenous people to make a commitment to upholding the sacred trusts of land, culture, spirituality and future generations in the protection, conservation and restoration of Indigenous food systems. Although the primary responsibilities of achieving Indigenous food sovereignty is riding on the direct actions taken by grassroots Indigenous people, additional financial, technical and political support from non-Indigenous allies is critical.

II. Eco-cultural Restoration - Community Action Items

- Hunt, fish and gather Indigenous food more often. Sovereignty is a responsibility and action. “Just do it”. The actual “doing” is what strengthens the movement. Don’t just wait for it to happen or for the government to come up with a “plan”.
- Organize group hunting, fishing and gathering activities to increase participation and learning opportunities, and support those that have never received the teachings.
- Deliver family and community based workshops to make people aware of cultural issues related to Indigenous foods.
- Use the language and announce babies to the land. They will then grow up and set goals to berry pick, hunt, fish and gather.
- Teach the babies about community and continue to pay attention to grandchildren in urban areas.
- Keep in contact with home communities to strengthen our culture and stop the disconnection between on-reserve and off-reserve friends and relatives.
- Teach cultural values and principles to non-Indigenous people with kindness, compassion and an open heart free from anger, harshness or hate.

Theme #2 – Health and Nutritional Values of Indigenous Foods

III. Holistic approach to restoring the health of Indigenous food systems

“The land nourishes us in all ways; physical, spiritual, mental and emotional. The health and security of our people is vitally dependent on continued and improved access to sufficient amounts of healthy Indigenous foods and medicines on the land and in the forests and waterways”.

The cultural concept of “food as medicine” promotes a holistic approach to maintaining and restoring the health of our bodies and the ecosystems that provide us with our food. In a proactive approach to health care, we believe it is necessary to make healthy food choices and provide adequate amounts of clean, fresh culturally adapted foods, and water for our children and families. We assert that the basis of Indigenous food sovereignty rests with the ability of people to respond to their individual and family needs for adequate food and nutrition by making informed culturally appropriate choices that include Indigenous foods, medicines and values. Making healthy choices based on Indigenous knowledge and wisdom involves learning and applying cultural concepts and protocols that set out guidelines for the most appropriate way of learning, sharing, gathering, and eating Indigenous foods and medicines. We assert that it is vital that relevant messages about the health and nutritional values of Indigenous foods are communicated to children through cultural practice, as well as through education materials and the media to encourage them to make healthy, culturally relevant food choices.

As Indigenous peoples, our bodies are best adapted to using energy most efficiently by practicing a semi-nomadic lifestyle and eating traditional diets that consist of foods high in protein, and complex carbohydrates high in fibre and rich in vitamins and minerals. The traditional diet of the interior tribes consists of fat and protein from animal sources, as well as complex carbohydrates found in plants. The traditional diet is considered low in carbohydrates because it consists of little or no refined starches or sugars. Roots and berries provide complex carbohydrates and animal species including fish, deer, moose, and elk are important sources of protein. Traditional foods are available in seasonal cycles and provide the nutrients that are needed at the time of year they are available and are prepared using methods that help to retain and enhance the nutritional value. The cooking of foods in underground pits enhances the taste and nutrient value of meats through the transfer of nutrients from the wild greens used to layer the pits. Pit cooking also helps to avoid the loss of water soluble vitamins and enzymes through the contemporary method of boiling. Some indigestible carbohydrates found in Indigenous root vegetables require pit cooking methods to convert the carbohydrates to a more digestible form.

IV. Food related illnesses

Since the time of contact, many Elders and traditional harvesters have witnessed in their lifetimes drastic changes in the diets and lifestyles of our peoples which has in turn, lead to the declining physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health of our families and communities. The diet introduced by colonial settlers consists of: foods that are grown outside of the seasonal cycles and natural rhythms of our local environment and include store bought meats and dairy products; as well as various saturated fats from introduced plant sources; and carbohydrates from fruits, vegetables and grains that are highly processed. Much of the daily calories in a colonial diet consist of highly processed foods, saturated fats, and simple sugars. Our bodies are not adapted to efficiently using energy from highly processed introduced foods such as lactose, sugar, or corn syrup found in fast food, pop, chips, bubble gum, white flour, white rice and pasta. Furthermore, many contemporary food processing methods result in nutrient or enzyme loss, or the toxic buildup of preservatives, pesticides, heavy metals in the body. Nutrients are broken down in the boiling or deep frying process and concentrated amounts of known carcinogens are ingested from foods that are prepared or stored in kitchen utensils containing Teflon, aluminum, lead or plastic.

There is an increasing amount of western scientific information becoming available in reaction to the food related illnesses in our communities. While it is necessary to increase our level of knowledge and

understanding of our unique dietary and lifestyle needs, it is also important to critically analyze research conducted in the western scientific community. Canada's Food Guide for Healthy Eating is an example of how until recently, the scientific community lacked understanding about our unique dietary needs. The recommendation that "a diet should provide 55% of energy as carbohydrates from a variety of sources"² promotes a high carbohydrate diet that is not well suited to Indigenous people due to the high rate of type 2 diabetes in our communities.

Recent research conducted in various Indigenous communities in Canada, U.S. (Pima Indians of Arizona) and Australia support the personal accounts of Indigenous people in our communities who have experienced or witnessed high rates of diabetes and obesity resulting from a drastic change in diet and lifestyle. Research concludes that the epidemic proportion of diabetes and obesity can be attributed to several factors including:³

- Change from a traditional diet to a high carbohydrate diet consisting of highly processed introduced foods
- Genetic disposition to store energy from food
- Tendency towards a sedentary lifestyle and reduced physical activity from that of our nomadic ancestors

In addition to the epidemic proportion of diabetes and obesity in our communities, our bodies are reacting negatively to the cumulative effects of toxic contamination that has made its way through the food system via the large scale industrial approach to agriculture and "development". We have seen an increase in cancer which raises concerns about the risk of future generations inheriting a genetic disposition for illness and disease. Furthermore, our families and communities are experiencing high rates of several other illnesses or conditions that can be attributed to poor eating habits, malnutrition, vitamin or mineral deficiencies, or food sensitivities. Some of the food related illnesses or conditions that are most prevalent in our families and communities are listed below.

- Heart disease
- Asthma
- Allergies
- Thyroid problems
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Anemia due to iron deficiency, anemia due to vitamin B12/folate deficiency,
- Osteoporosis
- Poor teeth
- Sleep disorders resulting from caffeine intake and/or too much or too little food
- Anorexia/bolemia
- Patterns of overeating that result from long term food insufficiency or deprivation

The delicate balance between nutrition, emotional health and social contact reinforces the need to evaluate the complex interactions between people, food and brain chemistry. Research concludes that a healthy balanced diet can help to maintain a proper balance of neurotransmitters sending messages to the brain that make us feel happy, sad, sleepy, awake. As social creatures, our ability to function in healthy interdependent relationships is directly influenced by our our ability to maintain balance and harmony within our own bodies. In turn, our ability to maintain healthy bodies is directly influenced by the emotions we experience in positive social interactions. Working with family and community to hunt, fish, gather or prepare Indigenous foods can increase mental and emotional health through bonding and creating

² Refer to Health Canada website for more information: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/res/fg_background-reseignements_ga-5_e.html

³ "Prevalence of Type 2 Diabetes in Indigenous communities is atleast three times that of the population in Canada and is expected to increase". Information taken from the Public Health Agency of Canada website: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/dic-dac2/english/49chap6_e.html

memories that help to rebuild or enhance our relationships. We believe that many of the food related illnesses can be attributed to social factors such as high levels of stress, trauma, depression and low self esteem that is characteristic of poor mental and emotional health. The leading social factors identified as key determinants in poor mental and emotional health in our families and communities are:

- loneliness and isolation experienced by people who are disconnected from the land and their families and communities,
- internalization of the cycle of oppression and food deprivation experienced in residential school and poverty stricken homes
- substance abuse (addictions to food, drugs, alcohol, sugar, caffeine and tobacco)

IV. Individual and Community Action Items

- Take responsibility to respond to your individual and families food needs in a healthy way.
- Go out and hunt, fish and gather Indigenous foods with family and friends – enjoy the fresh air, exercise, laughter and companionship.
- Follow the natural rhythms of the seasons and eat local organic foods that are in season. Avoid imported foods.
- Feed babies and children meat and berries from the land at an early age to acquire a taste and get them conditioned to eating it.
- Establish a “baby food” distribution network of Indigenous and organic foods for welfare Moms and Elders so it is convenient for them. Always make sure that children, babies and expectant mothers always have enough Indigenous foods.
- Incorporate Indigenous food gathering activities into daycare and school programs.
- Control diabetes by limiting intake of carbohydrates and increasing protein. (If you are diabetic be sure to work with you Doctor to check your blood sugar frequently and regulate insulin intake).
- Replace foods containing sugar and starches with Indigenous foods.
- Establish a clinic that works from a base of holistic health and Indigenous healing.
- Build working kitchens in community health centers where people can prepare daily meals, especially for school lunches and Elders.

Theme #3 - Generations and Youth Perspectives in the Struggle to Protect, Conserve and Restore Indigenous Food Systems

V. Intergenerational Transmission of Indigenous Food Related Knowledge – Barriers

The philosophy that “we don’t inherit the land from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children” speaks of the importance of maintaining healthy intergenerational relationships between children, youth, adults and Elders. To ensure there are plenty of Indigenous foods left for future generations, it is vital that we encourage youth and children to be a positive influence for change and be disciplined in our responsibility to take care of the land and all of its inhabitants. The belief that “our DNA is encoded with the memory of the land, food and cultural values” speaks of the importance of knowing who we are and where we come from.

The medicine wheel is a tool adopted by many Indigenous peoples that teaches about the generational phases of life and the aspects of our health and human development that are related to each phase. The first phase begins at birth and is related to our emotional development. Many children were placed in residential school in this phase of development. The forced assimilation into the residential schools disrupted the emotional development in the earliest phase of life. The emotional development of many generations was disrupted because those who were in residential schools were taught a punitive form of discipline and the effects of this were passed on to younger generations. The second phase of development relates to the physical aspects of our health up until the age of 25 years old. Many important puberty rituals were discontinued in this phase of life after the residential school experience, thereby hindering the healthy sexual development of youth. The phase from 25-50 years old is the phase where the

youth have developed into adults and are now developing the mental aspects of health. The age of 50 years and older is most related to spiritual development and transition into the phase of life where one acquires wisdom and becomes an Elder.

Prior to colonization, Indigenous food related knowledge was passed along from generation to generation through the parents, family and community. Social and political control over Indigenous peoples by governments and economic institutions over the last 150 years has been largely reinforced through the education system. Provincial government legislation made it mandatory for parents to enroll all children in public schools and this has seriously disrupted the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous food related knowledge and continues to erode the breakdown of the traditional family and social structure. The cultural values and methods of sharing Indigenous food related knowledge between the generations is excluded from the goals of education in the public schools. The curriculum is designed to assimilate children into the mainstream culture and economy, and learning is evaluated based on normative standards that reflect the values of mainstream society. Due to the major impact that the mainstream culture has had on our food systems and ways of life, we are challenged to find ways to maintain Indigenous teachings in a “microwave” society where people have forgotten that there are no quick lessons related to traditional teachings and human development. Acquiring traditional values and teachings requires time, patience, dedication and hard work to understand where we are on the wheel of life and how we relate to other beings.

VI. Practical ways to acquire or pass on Indigenous food related knowledge – Solutions

Teaching methods applied in the mainstream education system fail to accommodate the integrated manner in which Indigenous knowledge is traditionally passed on in the family unit and social. Therefore, the process of restoring Indigenous food systems will involve a process of decolonization in education. We believe that to achieve Indigenous food sovereignty we must undo the negative effects of colonization and take responsibility for maintaining healthy intergenerational relationships within the family and community. To encourage children and youth to get back out on the land, families must come together and take responsibility to ensure that children are maintaining healthy relationships with Elders who are willing to share their knowledge. A participatory education approach integrates food and survival skills into day to day family and community activities and rewards children and youth to nurture good relationship between the land and one another, as well as participate in hunting, gathering and fishing activities. This will require a change in the way our children are currently being educated.

- Take children out to demonstrate the actual practice of food gathering, preserving and cooking. Teach by example. Use singing and drumming, rather than lecturing to help young people re-connect with the land.
- Teach children survival skills.
- Teach the youth by encouraging them to work with Elders’ one on one – Create an Adopt an Elder program
- Be sure to begin teaching children cultural ways when they are born and they will have a better chance of adopting the cultural teachings.
- Grandparents, aunts and uncles must help the parents bring up the children.
- Encourage young people in their 20’s to take the younger ones out hunting, fishing, or gathering, and there will be a double intergenerational outcome.

Theme #4 – Strategies for Protection, Conservation and Restoration of Indigenous Food Systems

VII. Current situations and concerns – Political

While Indigenous food sovereignty issues shares a similar social and environmental context with the food sovereignty movement in the mainstream society, it is unique in the sense that, it relies upon advocating for more active participation of Indigenous peoples in decision making matters affecting our Indigenous food systems on the broader landscape level. On a political level, Indigenous food sovereignty can be described as the act of counterbalancing the negative impact of contemporary land use that exclude Indigenous food values and economies and give priority to industrial economic activities. Policies that promote privatization and “wilderness preservation” are two examples of how our ability to nurture our longstanding relationship with the plants and animals that provide us with our food has been limited⁴. Extinguishment policies fail to recognize the communal and participatory aspects of our relationship to the land and have made it illegal for us to harvest Indigenous foods in many areas without permission from the government.

Governments and corporations are granted exclusive control over culturally important hunting, fishing and harvesting sites, and an ever increasing amount of land is being allocated to fee simple interests, national and provincial parks, Forest and Range Agreements and “Working Forests”⁵. Existing governance structures and processes applied by various government agencies related to LUPM are based on a centralized form of power and authority and does not accommodate or reward a community-based decision-making process. Consequently, the failure to reconcile the highly complex socio-economic and political conflicts that exist within Indigenous communities has resulted in an imbalance of power and social disharmony.

VIII. Current situations and concerns – Ecological

Many industrial economic activities involve large scale exploitation of resources and are responsible for endangering the ecosystems on which culturally important plants and animals are dependent. Therefore, Indigenous food sovereignty is undermined by the reduction of species diversity due to factors such as: chemical (pesticides and heavy metals) and biological contamination (bacteria, viruses and genetic engineering), water use and demand, climate change and loss of habitat and encroachment. Given that salmon are the most important source of protein for our people, the endangerment of the various salmon species is of highest concern and priority. Salmon stocks have been contaminated and the stocks are either depleted or extinct and in some communities, the only way to access salmon is to trade with neighbouring nations.

In recent decades we have observed an increase in the average temperature of the earth’s atmosphere and the ocean. The changes in climate brought on by global warming have been described by scientists as the most pressing environmental challenge that we are faced with. While the effects of global warming experienced by the many diverse Indigenous nations throughout Canada will vary from region to region, it is predicted that Indigenous food systems in the interior of B.C. will experience radical change brought on by weather features such as temperature, precipitation, wind patterns, and storms. As Indigenous peoples, our longstanding relationship with the land and environment demonstrates our ability to adapt to the many changes that have occurred in natural history in the last 10,000 years or so. The challenges of protecting, conserving and restoring Indigenous food systems in the face of climate change relates most directly to our

⁴ The underlying philosophy of wilderness preservation fails to recognize humans as an integral part of nature and therefore does not account for Indigenous values in land and resource management.

⁵ Refer to the Western Canada Wilderness Committee website for more information:

http://www.wildernesscommittee.org/campaigns/policy/forestry/working_forest/reports/Vol22No06

understanding of the movement of plant and animal species further north. The movement of native species into or out of the area may be either detrimental or beneficial, but in all cases will require specific actions.

Land Use Activities of Special concern in the interior region are:

- Mining – uranium, copper and other heavy metal contamination
- Conventional forestry practices- clear cut logging
- Mountain Pine Beetle infestations
- Forest and Range Management Act
- Industrial air and water pollution
- Global warming
- Fish farming
- Habitat loss and alterations
- Invasion by non-native species
- Hydro-electric dams and diversions
- Water use and diversion
- Amenity migration, tourism & large scale ski resort developments
- Urban encroachment and development
- Impact of railway, roads and highways - transportation accidents and spills of dangerous goods, fragmentation of ecosystems
- Large scale technological approach to agriculture – i.e. release of genetically engineered seeds into the wild, pesticides used, monoculture crops, desertification of soil, etc...
- Cattle grazing
- Commercial harvesting and over-exploitation of Indigenous food and medicine plants

IX. Community Strategies and Action Items

The sophisticated knowledge, wisdom and values that informs decision making in Indigenous food systems was built up by many generations of Indigenous people whose survival was/is dependent upon sustaining abundant populations of culturally important plants and animals in the forest and water ecosystems. The potential is vast for Indigenous knowledge, wisdom and values to help us better understand our environment and prepare to be resilient in the face of climate change. Integration of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom into contemporary resource management, conservation, restoration, development planning, and environmental assessments can increase the ability of all Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous peoples to make better informed decisions over matters affecting hunting and gathering as well as agricultural food systems. The following is a list of strategies and action items that can assist Indigenous people striving to have Indigenous food and economic values included in contemporary land use planning and management.

Protection

- Be prepared to defend the land and foods. Establish a full time permanent working group.
- Establish a protection organization or entity that can house a central repository for research and documentation - provide comprehensive access to critical land information and cultural research.
- Determine what needs protection the most. Identify priorities and areas of concern i.e. important hunting, fishing and harvesting sites. Do an assessment and/or inventory of what is happening out there on the land in your territories.
- Demarcate and secure a land base in your territory that you can protect, conserve and restore to ensure survival of your foods and medicines under conditions you can monitor and control.
- Develop a project where youth can research and map out the activities in the territory for credit in high school or university program – create a database that will identify risks of contamination in Indigenous food systems.
- Hold public meetings and general forums.
- Need to separate internal politics in a manner that transcends inter-tribal differences.
- Share experiences and acknowledge our responsibilities. Support one another and involve non-Indigenous allies that share similar ecological values and principles.

- Create an ecosystem and community based land use plan that will include Indigenous food values and economies and provide an alternative to heavy cattle grazing and clear cut logging.
- Advocate against copyrights of Indigenous knowledge.
- Oppose all patents on plants, animals and humans, as well as patents on their genes.
- Discourage the use of genetically modified seeds. Advocate against the release of GMOs into the environment.
- Stop harmful developments and activities.
- Do not underestimate how spiritual and emotional fortitude can positively contribute to the struggle to protect, conserve and restore.

Conservation

- Start with working towards a small enough conservation project that is realistic and doable.
- Save and share heritage seeds: and start a seed bank or establish an Indigenous network in the Interior to keep our own seeds growing.
- Organize people in a co-operative team structure. Teams are something that produce good benefit if everyone has a role and the work is balanced. Indigenous food co-ops and farming collectives bring people together.
- Continue to harvest traditional foods in designated park lands.
- Adapt hunting, harvesting and fishing practices to account for the changes in stocks and ecosystems
- Advocate for immediate interim measures such as labeling of GE ingredients, and the segregation of genetically engineered crops and seeds from heritage seeds.
- Use the best available science and management tools that focus on results. i.e. tools and techniques for assessing and managing habitats for plant and animal species. i.e. satellite, computer simulators
- Conduct community based research that will link TEK and western science
- Engage the most dedicated and active hunters, fishermen and gatherers in the community in the process of developing land use principles and research and development guidelines.
- Strengthen existing entities i.e. Traditional Okanagan Shuswap Confederacy. Re-affirm the historical declaration of the Indian Chiefs of the Southern Interior Tribes of British Columbia.
- Create additional allies with all Indigenous peoples. Find ways to work together.

Restoration

- Organize our families and communities around Indigenous food activities so the work is more focused and productive and not so random
- Develop communication plan.
- Develop plans & influence policy – participate in transboundary cooperation
- Re-introduce culture back into education in the home and schools
- Increase understanding and skills related to western scientific methodologies in contemporary land use planning and management
- Increase technical capabilities
- Educate governments and corporations about the traditional food values of the forest.
- Salmon stock restoration – reintroduction of species
- Habitat restoration – fresh water
- Engage citizens in mapping important features of Indigenous food systems. Document these important features with a view of restoring sustainable working landscapes that result in clean water, wildlife corridors and eco-friendly farming practices.
- Allocate adequate financial resources that will allow cultural resource people/Elders to be valued in a way that allows them to maintain a livelihood.
- Identify the most dedicated Indigenous knowledge keepers in the community and involve them in resource management, conservation, eco-cultural restoration, development planning and environmental assessments.
- Decolonization – reclaim and rediscover responsibilities to Indigenous food systems.

Theme #5 – Indigenous Food Economies and Trade

X. Introduction: The history and values of Indigenous economies

Indigenous economies in the interior of B.C. have a long history that pre-dates contact with non-Indigenous settlers by several thousands of years. Indigenous economies are distinct from the economy in the mainstream culture as they are based on an ecological model as opposed to an industrial model. Indigenous economies are adapted to the diverse ecosystems of the bio-region, and are primarily driven by local food and survival related activities such as: hunting, fishing, gathering, sharing, giving and trading Indigenous foods and technologies. The distinct cultural values underlying Indigenous economies have co-evolved through an interdependent relationship with the natural world and are integrated into a tribal social structure that rewards giving, sharing, humility and reciprocity. Based on a moral responsibility to nurture our relationships in nature, food is framed less as a resource to be exploited and more as a component of both an ecological and cosmological relationship with nature. This is distinct from the industrial economy which separates components of nature into resources available for large-scale exploitation. As we have seen, contemporary health and environmental feedback problems have emerged from the industrial approach.

In a contemporary economic context, many Indigenous peoples residing on-reserve rely on hunting, fishing and gathering as well as local agriculture. While those residing off reserve in urban areas have become more dependent on the commoditized food system in the mainstream economy, most of the people living both on and off-reserve buy a portion of their food from the grocery stores. Most households live well under the poverty line, and many households have no earned cash income at all. The ownership and control of food production technologies asserted by corporations in the mainstream culture, decreases Indigenous self reliance and increases dependency on the commoditized food system. Purchasing products at the grocery stores, which either in whole or in part, consist of foods that have been grown and imported from another region or country is unsustainable in the long term due to the relationship between the burning of fossil fuels, climate change and the declining health of the ecosystems that provide us with our foods. Food additives such as corn syrup and other forms of simple sugars that are added to many store bought foods, not only contribute to the obesity and high rates of diabetes in our communities, but also support an industry that exploits Indigenous peoples working in sugar cane fields in “developing” countries⁶ and contributes to the genetic contamination of Indigenous varieties of corn grown around the world⁷.

XI. Contemporary Indigenous food economies: Practices in the community and territory

- Historically, in times of food shortage, communities would barter amongst themselves for the foods that they lacked.
- Indigenous groups in the interior region of B.C. engage in trading, bartering, giving, and selling of Indigenous foods.
- To ensure that populations of plant and animals remain abundant, trading of Indigenous foods must take place only when there is a surplus and the ecosystems are healthy and functioning.
- Families and communities form work parties or task groups to pool the labour required for harvesting, processing and preparing foods. The labour is/was paid for “in kind” or with food.
- The values of greed and the denigration of traditional Indigenous values in the process of assimilation has worked to marginalize Indigenous economies and cultures.

The following items are traded within the interior nations of B.C.:

⁶ Information taken from the CBC Newsworld website: <http://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/big-sugar/sugar.html>

⁷ Information taken from the Organic Consumer’s Association website: <http://www.organicconsumers.org/gefood/ecocorn011105.cfm> and

- 1) sage;
- 2) salmon;
- 3) dried salmon;
- 4) salmon jerky;
- 5) mushrooms;
- 6) bitterroot;
- 7) corn;
- 8) beans;
- 9) squash;
- 10) Red Oakley;
- 11) huckleberries;
- 12) Saskatoon berries (????);
- 13) cattails;
- 14) buckskins;
- 15) smudges;
- 16) medicines;
- 17) feathers;
- 18) beads; and,
- 19) arts and crafts

Items that are imported from other nations:

- 1) pine nuts;
- 2) silver;
- 3) turquoise;
- 4) wild rice; and,
- 5) blankets

XII. Contemporary Indigenous food economies: Regional trade networks of Indigenous food economies.

The flow of goods in Indigenous economies traditionally extended far beyond the territories of Indigenous nations within the interior of B.C. Based upon our inherent rights as Indigenous peoples to hunt, fish, gather and trade, we continue to practice the art of trade along the historic trade routes. Trading relationships with nations outside of the interior region extend to various regions throughout B.C. and turtle Island (North America). Smoked and dried salmon, salmon jerky, and buck skins from BC are exchanged for pine nuts, silver, turquoise, and beads in the United States. According to Guy Dunstan, Nlaka'pamux, Indigenous trading trails extend out from Nlaka'pamux territory along the Columbia River, and as far south as New Mexico; as well as eastern United States and Canada. Oral accounts of Elders in Nlaka'pamux territory provide testimony of a time prior to contact when Indigenous people would use horses to "go amongst the Flatheads and Nez Perce to kill buffalo"⁸. When the buffalo herds dwindled, salmon from BC became an increasingly important trade item for Indigenous people who had relied on this source of food.

Inter-cultural trade relationships also exist through trading salmon for blankets with Chinese-Canadians; mushrooms are sold to the Japanese and Europe; and fish is traded to Americans and Albertans. Indigenous traders face challenges on both sides of the U.S. border when dealing with customs officers who are unfamiliar with the modern forms of the expression of our Aboriginal right to trade, and are thereby impose unjust fishing quotas and restrictions on trade. Indigenous harvesters, hunters, and fisher people are also concerned that Indigenous knowledge, wisdom or values is being eroded through patents and copyrights that grant corporations the right to to commoditize and capitalize on our knowledge system.

⁸ Refer to First Nations Perspectives on Grasslands of the Interior of British Columbia in the Journal of Ecological Anthropology, by Blackstock, M & McAllister, R. (2004). Vol. 8. p. 30.

XIII. Encouraging the expansion of Indigenous food values and economies

Talking about the issues: One of the challenges to Indigenous food sovereignty is the prevalence and popularity of industrially-produced foods in the food system including processed and starchy foods that are not part of the traditional Indigenous diet. Like many Canadians, Indigenous people are attracted to these products for their convenience, flavour, and alluring advertising. Since many Indigenous people find themselves economically marginalized in Canada or simply chose not to integrate their economic activities with the main economy, the enduring popularity of these foods draws Indigenous people further into the market and compounds financial hardship. At the level of developing a mind-set which would incline Indigenous people to re-establish their traditional food values and economies, this context must be acknowledged and discussed against the potential for increased self-reliance and nutrition that flows from Indigenous food systems. Indigenous people are therefore forced to strike a balance between restoring and maintaining Indigenous food values and the market economy which many believe is a necessary part of living in the modern world.

Responsibility: Thus, at the level of the *individual*, the expansion of Indigenous food economies is something that Indigenous people must enact in their own lives. From this perspective, Indigenous food sovereignty is not a right or entitlement that flows from the state (e.g. Department of Indian Affairs), but the responsibility of Indigenous people. At the same time, the responsibility is also a *community* concern in so far as Indigenous knowledge is shared across the community the re-establishment of Indigenous food values and economies requires a community effort.

Revitalization of language: The displacement of Indigenous languages by English has not merely involved a change in linguistic practice. The use of English has also served to render it difficult to express certain Indigenous values, notably those concerned with the ecological knowledge that informs Indigenous economies. In other words, language is the medium and the message. The revitalization of Indigenous languages is therefore critical to the re-establishment of Indigenous food values and economies.

Encouraging traditional food values in the home: Parents and Elders should promote the nutritive, historical, and spiritual importance of traditional Indigenous foods to children at a young age. Parents need to lead their children to appreciate Indigenous food values by enacting traditional Indigenous food practices in their daily lives: again, the responsibility for Indigenous food values and economies is in the hands of the individual. Children should engage in the practice of TEKW with Elders.

Encouraging trade and bartering in the home: Knowledge of practices of trade and bartering has traditionally been handed down through the generations in the family.

Encouraging traditional food values and food in the community:

Encourage the sale of Indigenous foods in businesses located on reservations;
Develop Indigenous foods that could compete on the shelf against convenience foods;
Develop co-op markets that showcase Indigenous foods (e.g. the farmer's market model);
Community gardens are means of providing Indigenous foods and they may alleviate the challenges posed by access issues (see **Access to land**, below).
Secure funding for traditional hunting, fishing and gathering and community garden projects— wherever possible access funding from foundations or philanthropic organizations.
Support grassroots and community groups and individuals who act more in the interests of community goals and less in the interests of personal advancement through the bureaucracy.

Management of Indigenous food economies: The re-establishment of Indigenous food economies begins with the acknowledgement that nature is not a source of “resources” to be extracted solely according to the dictates of profit to the benefit of the individual or corporation. Instead, Indigenous economies are informed by an ecological and conservationist approach which situates Indigenous knowledge at its heart and is governed by community decision-making.

Trade Networks: If the trade items are in surplus re-claim economies of traditional items for trade with Indigenous people throughout B.C., Canada and the United States. Establishment of a true Indigenous economy will also include community organization and development of a moderate number of fair trade relationships with Indigenous peoples in other countries who are growing imported crops such as coffee.

Indigenous Citizenship: Indigenous people could form their own form of identification under international law to allow them to re-invigorate cross-border Indigenous trading networks with fewer bureaucratic hurdles. Broad political support is sought in order to bring about legislative change that would encourage and protect Indigenous trading and knowledge

Access to land: Due to increased settlement, resource-extraction industries, commercial harvesting of Indigenous foods in the newly emerging Non-Timber Forest Products sector, and tourism (e.g. heli-skiing and alpine ski resorts) traditional foods are depleted and/or located much farther afield. Access to traditional foods has become a significant issue since the re-establishment of Indigenous food economies depends on the relative proximity of hunting, fishing and gathering grounds. The lack of proximity to traditional hunting, fishing and gathering grounds forms a vicious circle whereby the onerous effort and money required to travel to the hunting, fishing or gathering grounds actually discourages cultural practices and the teaching Indigenous food related knowledge. In turn, Indigenous people are forced to turn to the mainstream economy for our food needs. Distance is even more of an obstacle in light of the fact that the holders of a vast amount of Indigenous knowledge are Elders and the knowledge can only be transferred as it is practiced in traditional hunting, fishing and gathering grounds. Privatization of land limits access to traditional hunting, fishing and gathering sites and deregulation and give greater control to corporations who are restricting access to hunting, harvesting and fishing sites.

Outcomes

Participation

To ensure that cost was not a barrier to participation, registration was by donation and travel subsidies were provided to participants who were unable to otherwise obtain sponsorship. A total of 103 participants attended the 1st Annual Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference. The high level of interest expressed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people outside of the interior region, made it necessary to limit participation to the regional structure and traditional harvesting communities as they are outlined above. The decision to limit participation was guided by the limited time and resources available for the planning, hosting and following up on conference activities, and the need to ensure Indigenous perspectives are at the forefront of the discussions. Furthermore, as a model project for the development a larger Indigenous food sovereignty network in the province of B.C. and beyond, IFSC believes that according to the principle of bioregionalism, it is most sustainable both ecologically and socially to work on strengthening the local food systems before extending to the provincial and international levels. (See next page for participant profiles).

Figure 1.0 Participants Profile According to Nation

Ktunaxa	1
Nlaka'pamux	8
Secwepemc	39
St'at'imc	3
Syilx	29
Tx'ilqotin	0
Colville	4
Metis	2
Mohawk	1
Cree	1
Cayuse – Nex Perce	1
Kwakwaka'wakw	1
Lakota Sioux	1
Tewa - Seattle	1
Anishnabe - Ojibway	1
Non Indigenous	10
Total	103

Policy Recommendations

- ✦ Set aside adequate tracts of land for the exclusive purpose of protecting, conserving and restoring Indigenous food systems.
- ✦ Allocate adequate financial and technical resources for Indigenous communities at the grassroots level to prepare ecosystem based land use plans that include Indigenous food and economic values.
- ✦ Give priority to Indigenous foods and economies (as they are defined by ecological values) over large scale commoditization in the newly emerging Non-Timber Forest Products industry.
- ✦ Solidify courts decisions on Aboriginal Title and Rights at the cabinet level. i.e. Delgamuukw and Haida vs. B.C. and Weyerhauser.
- ✦ Create national legislation that supports the implementation of international laws that promote and support Indigenous self determination and our ability to make important decisions over matters affecting Indigenous food systems. i.e. Convention on Biological Diversity Article 8(j).

Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the discussions at the 1st Annual Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference. While some may feel that further discussion is required in order to reach consensus on some of the more controversial action items suggested in this report, it provides the knowledge base and starting point for further healing and dialogue and debate in Indigenous communities and subsequent conferences. The report will provide an educational tool that will encourage Indigenous peoples in the Southern Interior of B.C. (and beyond) to take responsibility to nurture and take care of our interconnected relationship to Indigenous food systems on the land and in the water and forests. In the contexts of culture, ecology, health and policy, the report will also provide a tool for making links to related forums and policy discussions and will help to raise awareness in the mainstream society about the issues that are of highest concern to traditional Indigenous harvesters at the grassroots community level. Therefore, the policy recommendations presented in this report represent the diverse perspectives of the IFSC Planning Committee and participants at the conference as they relate to agrarian, forestry, fisheries, rangeland and water reform and rural development. Due to the changing nature of Indigenous food systems and issues, it is important to note that the recommendations are not exhaustive and require further input and continuous monitoring and analysis by the traditional Indigenous harvesters and IFSC Planning Committee.