Clam Garden Eco-cultural Restoration in the southern Gulf Islands

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Photo: Iain Robert Reid
Did you know…

- 1,000’s of years ago, First Nations on BC Coast were active shellfish engineers for 1,000’s of years?
  - Kilometers of rock walls created, many tonnes of rocks moved
  - Increase production by as much as 400%
  - In front of traditional settlements
- No longer in production
  - Virtually unknown to western science until recently. Lived in the memory of First Nations
- Now imagine...
  - A living landscape once again
  - Presents opportunity to combine ATK + science to benefit people, culture, and ecosystem
Southern Gulf Islands

- Highly productive area
  - Protected coastline
  - Fraser River input
  - Upwelling from Pacific Ocean
- Significant Indigenous Population
  - 5 language groups
  - 10’s of thousands of people
- Managed ecological landscapes
  - “Dropped out of heaven”
Still a dynamic area...

- 6 million people in greater area
- Resurgence of Aboriginal culture
- Gulf Islands National Park Reserve
  - 32km² land, 36km² marine
  - Established in 2003
  - Protect Strait of Georgia Lowlands
- 19 different FN with cultural & historical relations to GINPR
- As Park Reserve, can continue “traditional renewable resource harvesting”
The importance of clams

• Still an important staple
• Many barriers to harvesting
• Gaps in knowledge
  • Less contemporary harvest
• Little stock assessment

Photo: Iain Robert Reid

Figure 2. Desire vs. Inadequacy for Seafood

A time of learning together

Pilot project: gather knowledge to inform sustainable & safe harvest

• Scientific data collection:
  • On populations (part of EI monitoring)
  • On pollutants and other concerns

• Traditional knowledge collection:
  • Minimize government barriers
  • Holistic knowledge

• Use together to tell understand the rise and fall of shellfish
What did we learn?

Unhealthy population

**Average bivalve abundance (harvestable clams) by site, 2008-2013**

- **Beaumont**
- **Clam Garden**
- **Pender Canal**
- **South Beach**
- **Winter Cove**

Cultural Landscapes managed by First Nations

- Unhealthy landscape
- “Clam gardens”
What is a clam garden?

Rock wall

Photo: Iain Robert Reid

(Groesbeck et al., 2014)

(Source: A.S Groesbeck, K. Rowell, D. Lepofsky, and A. Salomon. 2014. Ancient clam gardens increased shellfish production: adaptive strategies from the past can inform food security today. PLOS One. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0091235)
Clam garden restoration project

• **Question:** What impact do clam gardens have on intertidal ecosystem?

• **Experiment:** Rebuild 2 clam gardens with Coast Salish and manage them for 5-6 years

• Examine impact of **wall & management actions**

• **Guided** by traditional knowledge and community

• **Monitor** using science and TK

• **In the end:** Did conditions improve or not?

• **Provide recommendations** to Parks Canada and other resource managers
  - Traditional management in the modern day

Photo: Iain Robert Reid
Where are we now?

- Two TK working groups
  - Community-driven
  - Identified experts – language, culture, harvesters
  - Guide restoration activities – traditional guidelines
- Rebuilding with community
  - Elders and Youth culture & science camps
  - School and community group restoration trips
  - Develop traditional teaching tools
- Research partnerships
- 200+ community volunteers
- Outreach BC Ferries, Vancouver Aquarium
• Shellfish TK Project
  • Put control in hands of Nation
  • TOR – agreed-to goals
  • Field visits, Ind interviews, group workshops

• Clam Garden Restoration Project
  • Control in hands of Nation
  • Expert working groups
  • Field visits
  • Cultural guidance
  • Knowledge holder workshops to confirm
Successes

• Relationship-based
  • Create trust
  • Learn how to gather knowledge
• Equals from the outset
• Community-driven
  • Years of saying “yes”
• Acknowledge barriers to overcome them
• Respect, IP
• Turn over control

Challenges

- 

Photo: Nicole Smith
Successes

Challenges

- Discerning meaning
- Community timelines vs. research timelines
- A lack of knowledge
- Competing traditional knowledge
- Trust
- Leading vs. co-opting
- Overlapping territories

Photo: Nicole Smith
Thank You

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Photo: Karen Fediuk