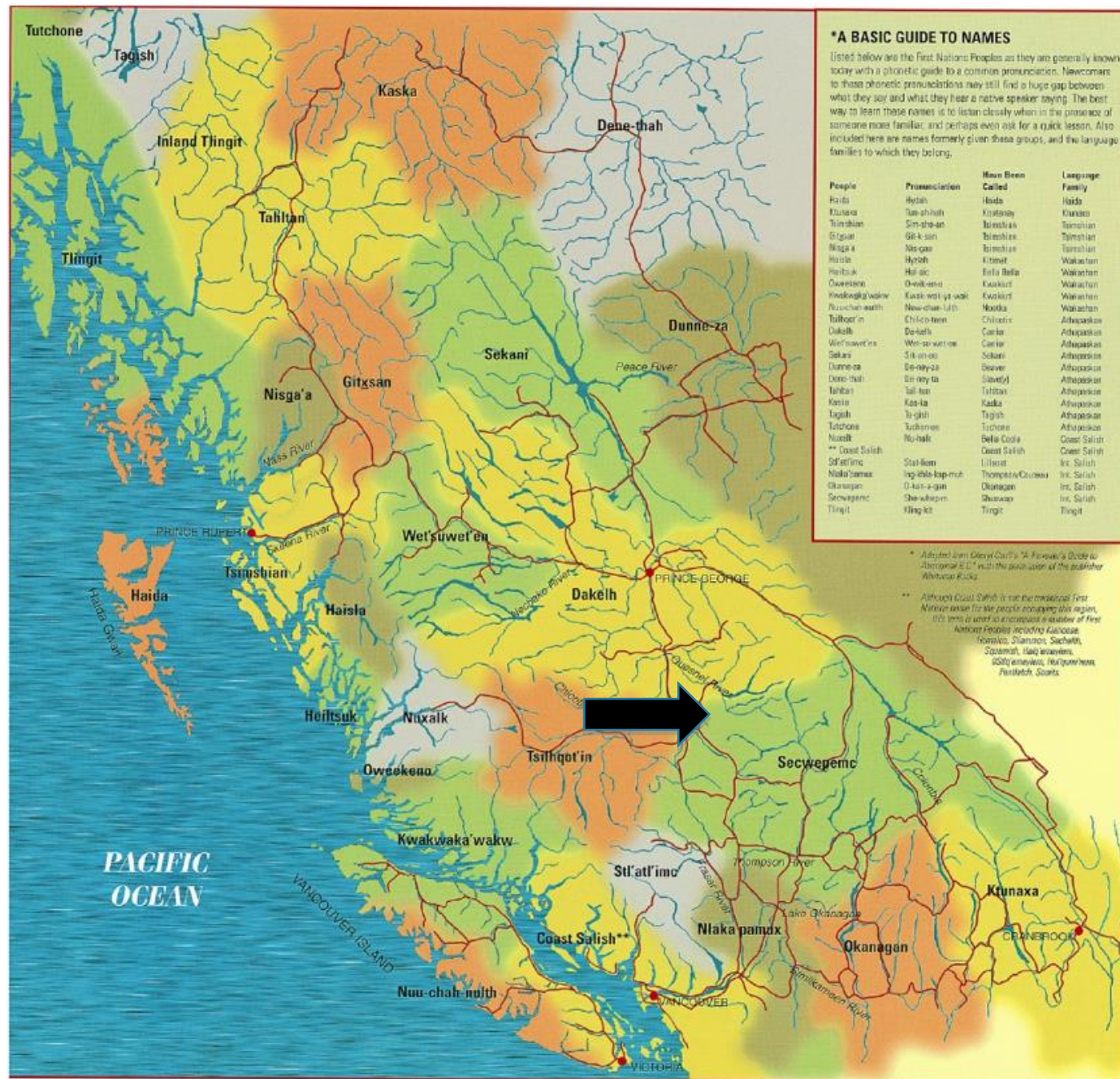


Tapping into all Sources of
Knowledge and Culture:
Secwépemc Indigenous Perspectives
on Language, Land, Laws and
Knowledge

by Ron Ignace and Marianne Ignace, PhD
Simon Fraser University and Skeetchestn Indian
Band, Secwepemc Nation





Xyemstém-kucw xwexwéyt re stétex7ém-kt – honouring all
Secwepemc elders who have taught us

Wellenwi7s-kucw (us):



Ron Ignace – Stsmél'qen
Chief of Skeetchestn Indian
Band
Since 1982
MA Sociology UBC 1980
PhD SFU (Anthropology) 2008



Marianne

- Was raised in Northwest Germany in a Plattdeutsch-speaking community
- PhD at Simon Fraser University- Haida research 1979-89 and continuing – adopted into Yahgw 'laanaas clan – Gulkiihlgad
- Secwepemc collaborative research in and with 17 communities since 1984
- Professor, Dept. of Linguistics and First Nations Studies, SFU, Director of First Nations languages program
- Indigenous language documentation and revitalization research, and Indigenous story work (SSHRC Partnership Grant, 2013-2020)
- Has lived in Skeetchestn, in the Secwepemc community, since 1989

Secwepemcúl'ecw: An ancient and familiar 10,000 year old landscape



Re Stslexméms-kucw ell re stslexemwílcs: Secwepemc Ontology & Epistemology

“Long time ago, Secwépemc people looked after the land, and all the animals and plants, everything in it. That’s why they always had plenty to fish. They had deer to hunt and plants to gather for food and medicine. But they had to practice for it, and learn about everything on the land first for a long time. Then they knew how to look after it. It was also important for the elders to share each others’ knowledge. That was how they learned and built up their understanding. ***What knowlege they shared had to be exact.***” (Nellie Taylor 1994).



PRINCIPLES



gathering knowledge through
experience and observation,
based on prior experience



Sharing through communication
and mutual validation: people,
places, events and deeds



Reciprocal and relational
accountability among all sentient
beings on the land (including
humans)



practising (étsxem)

How we “tslexemwílč” – come to our senses

- The very term “**tslexemwílč**” that we translate as “come to our senses” translation – and of course the Secwepemc word itself – beautifully shows how ‘coming to know’ is tied to our senses
- tslex(em) – clearmindedness as ongoing process
- Tslexemwílč ne tmicws-kucw – “coming to our senses on our land: tslexemwílč is connected to our land, our cumulative experience on our land
- Tmicw = land, world, earth, nature, animal, spirit. everything connected: *“tmicw ... is not about real estate or private property. It is about Secwepemc land in all its dimensions: it is the land our ancestors experienced and marked out for us, and it comprises the living creatures on our land in their relation to humans, as well as the way that this land spoke back to countless generations of our ancestors who passed down their remembrances and the way that it continues to speak back to us”* (Ignace and Ignace 2017: 3)

HOW OUR LANGUAGE GUIDES US:

- Like other Indigenous languages, Secwepemctsin has built-in devices of grammar that help us keep track of how we observe, make sense of and communicate what we know of our social and natural universe and its interactions and interrelations.
- Linguists have pointed to this deep embedding of cognition, worldview and culture in languages, each language expressing the “genius” of a people’s history and of being-in-place, (e.g. Sapir 1921, Evans 2010, Hagege 2001, Harrison 2007, Crystal 2000)
- Loss to humanity if, as is predicted, half of the 7,000 languages on earth become extinct by the end of the 21st century.

EXAMPLES:

- Evidentials: we tell one another what the evidential status of knowledge we report on is: personally experienced? Hearsay? Knowledge concluded from evidence of the senses?
- Personal pronouns: Each time “I” speak to others, I show humility by using the diminutive form of the verb.
- Lexical suffixes: categorize life-forms, inscribe bodily forms into the landscape as geographic features, place-names, and anatomy.

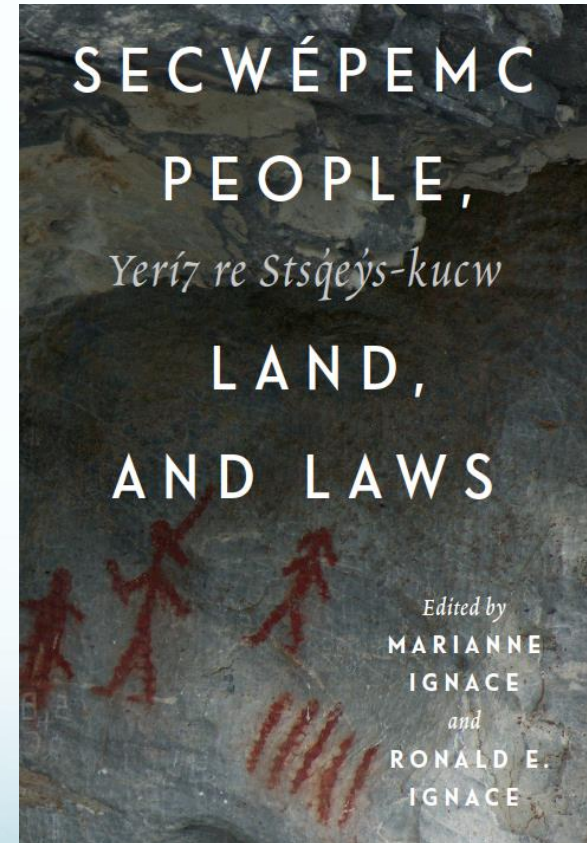
STSQ'EY'



- yeri7 re stsq'eys le q'7es te k'wséltkten-kt – “these are the markings of our ancestors” - pictographs, transformer markings (t'ult), “coyote rocks,” place names and narratives (stspTekwll)
- they speak to the *deeds* (actions, events) that took place
- as *deeds* they give legitimacy to Secwepemc ownership, occupation of Secwepemculecw
- Stsq'eyul'ecw - Secwepemc laws are situated on the land (timcw)
- Stsq'ey' as “markings” expresses “laws” connected to rights, and more recently to “paper.”

Environmental and social law – concepts in Secwepemc **stsq'ey'** - law

- **Laws of ownership and trespass between Nations:** Coyote sitting on a rock when outsiders came in
- **Laws of good social conduct** between groups and individual, humans as connected and mutually responsible to their groups and groups to them.
- **Laws of good conduct with and on the land:** an environmental ethic of reciprocal accountability and responsibility.
- There are **consequences** of reckless behaviour that violates the principle of reciprocal accountability: “the land and sky will turn on you.”
- Humans **cannot turn a blind eye** to recklessness, selfish and irresponsible behavior: “ta7 me7 stmélcmenç.”



Understanding and deploying laws of good conduct
with land and environment

humans are poor or
pitiful – **qwenqwént**
lest plants, animals
and fish offer
themselves -
reciprocity



animals give themselves
to humans -

kecméntsút

Getting skunked,
te7oy'e is not “bad
luck” but derives from
disrespect to the animal
and the land, and
reckless human
behaviour



Kincentric concepts of environmental relations:

K'wsełtktenéws

(“ be relatives to one another”)

**“re sɣlélten ri7 re xetéqs
re stsmémelt-kt”**

The salmon are our first children



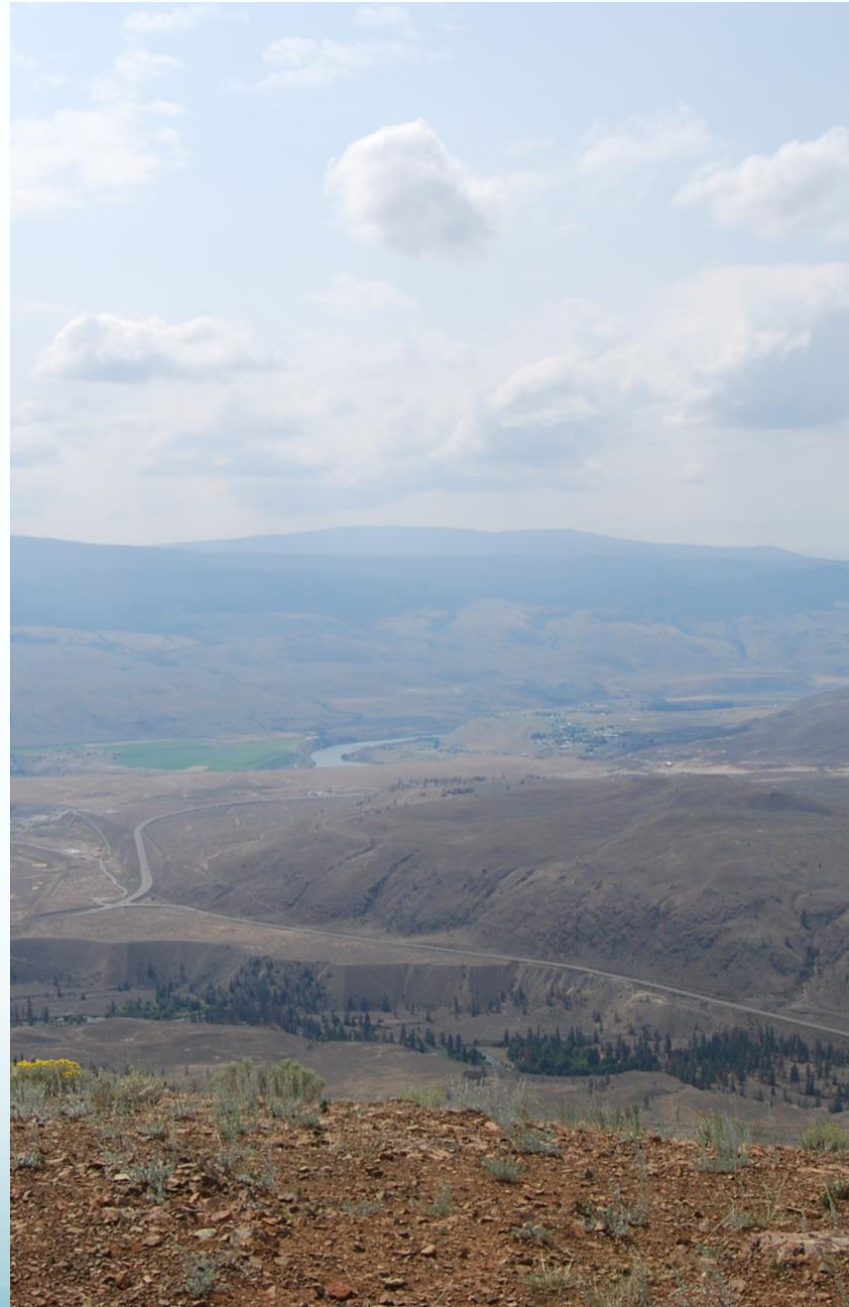
Artwork: Tania Willard



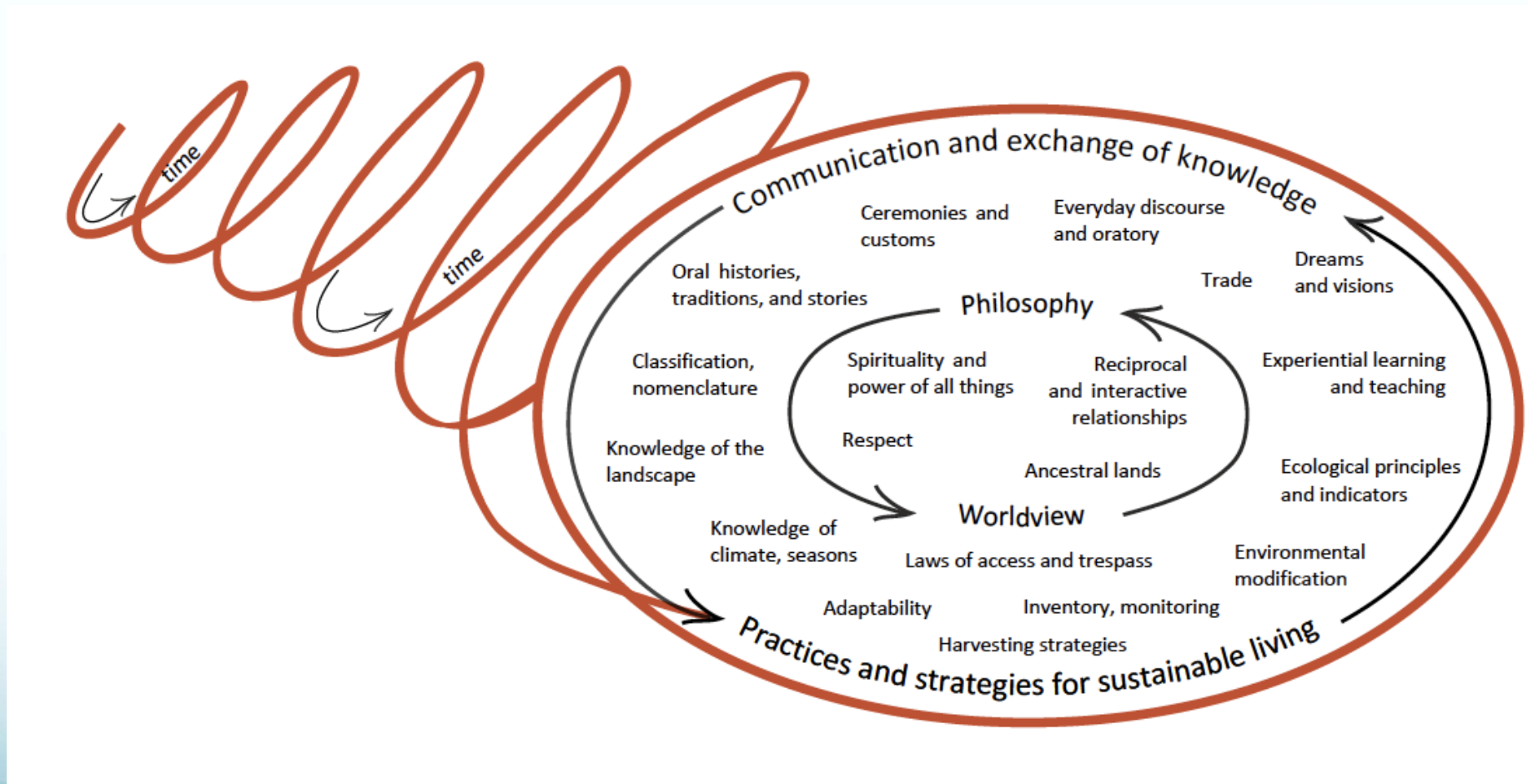
*The land, sky, earth,
water, as sentient being*

“Me7 q’ iyemstéc re
tmicw” - you offend the
land (make it angry)

x7ensq’ t - “the land,
the sky, will turn on
you”



Secwepemc Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Wisdom





Manifestations of
knowledge: art, artifacts
and grave-goods



Pipsell (The Trout Children)



Artwork: Braden Hallett

Manifestations of Knowledge in *Stsptekwll* (oral histories or traditions):

- Grasslands, lake, sky, earth, as nourishing the livelihood of peoples
- The connection between the realms of humans, fish, animals, birds, plants as being reciprocally accountable and mutually transformable
- Specific species of animals and plants – many of them endangered now;
- between generations: grandmother and daughter, her grandchildren, the grandfather giving spirit-power to the grandson and sharing his skills
- Other nations of peoples – water people, sky people
- The water, land, atmosphere, and the water-cycle
- Water people (xqelmecwetkwe) as code for aquifer systems

Manifestations of Knowledge in Ancient Practice: Landscape Burning

- As Indigenous peoples we practiced Landscape Burning for thousands of years to manage forests, grasslands and their intersections. Our landscapes were not “wild”!
- Burning cleaned the forest floor of fuel, kept forests and grasslands open
- Enabled re-seeding and regrowth of tree species (e.g. lodgepole pine)
- Provided nutrients for herbaceous plants, i.e. grasses, berry crops – Turner 1992,



Artwork: Braden Hallett

Practising and re-creating Indigenous landscape Burning

- Practising and Re-creating landscape burning at Skeetchestn: A science of season, moisture, wind direction, oppressed for 75 years
- Indigenous burning was criminalized in the early decades of the twentieth century when the Ministry of Forests managed forests for timber, not water, understory etc.
- Devastating impacts of 2017 wildfires can be addressed by re-creating Indigenous fire regimes and restoring the knowledge associated with burning.



Combining Western Science and Indigenous Knowledge

Collaboration with Prof. Lori Daniels, UBC Faculty of Forestry (photos courtesy of L. Daniels)

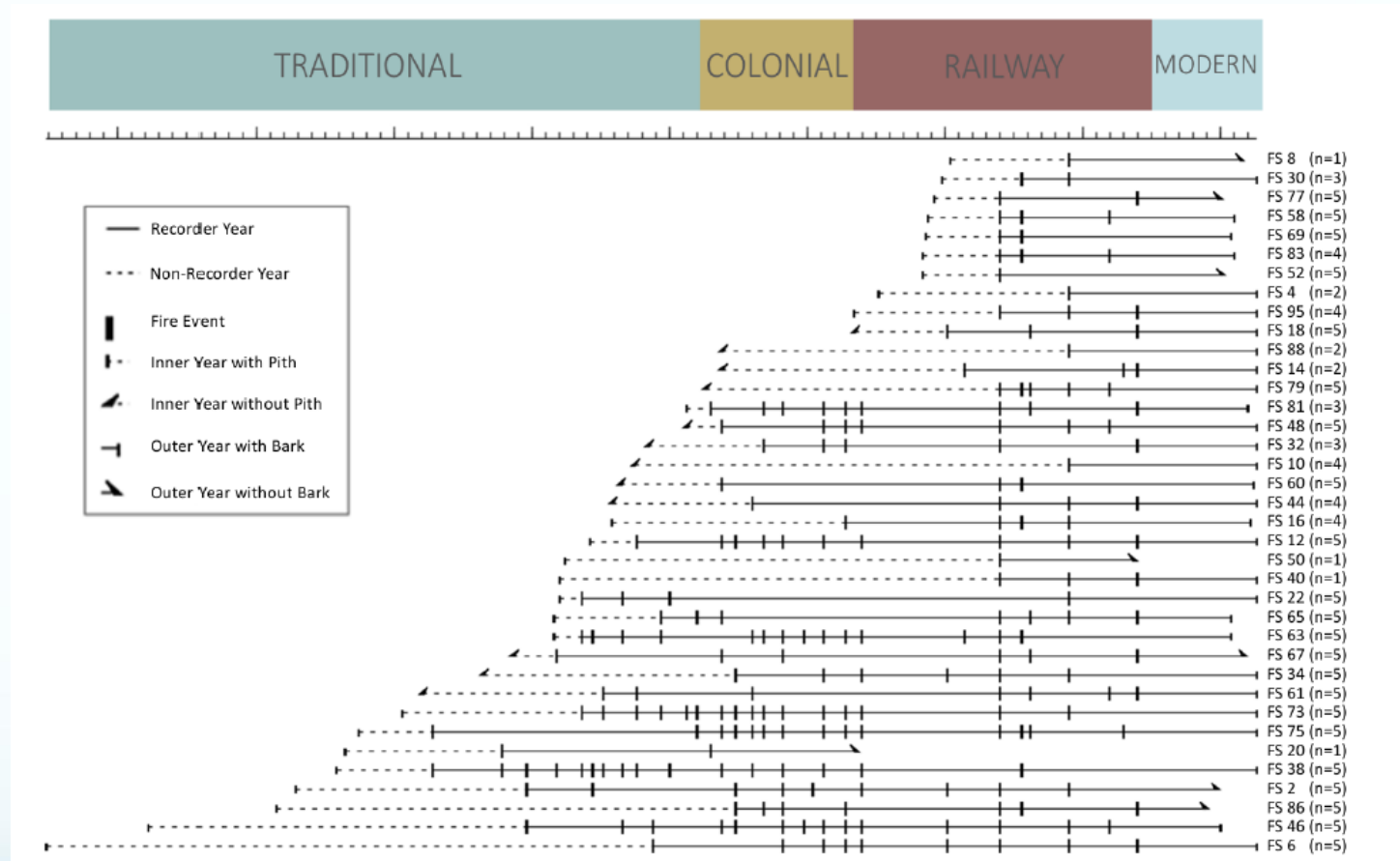
Using fire-scars and forest demography data, our research reconstructed the historical fire regime of the west unit of this dry forest and grass-land protected area, to answer the following questions:

- How frequent, severe, and variable were past fires?
- How did past fires influence forest structure and composition?
- **What was the relative influence of human history, local topography, and climate in driving the historical fire regime?**

Prior Research at Vaseaux Lake, Okanagan (Syilx territory):
We sampled and crossdated 148 fire-scar discs and 430 increment cores from 43 plots, reconstructing fire history from 1714 – 2013.



The impact of Indigenous burning as shown in the science record (Daniels 2019):



Vaseux Lake: A significant number of fires were in the spring and fall season and anthropogenic (historical mixed-severity fire regime); forests were more open.

High severity fire effects after 1862 (smallpox – and end of Indigenous fire regime). *Table above courtesy of Prof. Lori Daniels, UBC*

Conclusions:

- It is important to respect Indigenous knowledge for its complex and detailed ways to communicate with landscape and its sentient beings, and among humans.
- Indigenous knowledge systems were oppressed through 150 years of dispossession from land, language, culture and practices on the land.
- Secwepemc Indigenous “tslexemwilc ne tmicws-kucw” (coming to our senses on the land) does not separate humans from landscape, resources and their mutual impacts but considers them as reciprocally and relationally connected and accountable to one another.
- Indigenous knowledges should not stand in the shadow of western knowledges.

Yeri7 re skukwstép-kucw (thank you all)

Acknowledgements:

- The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC Partnership Grant No 895-2012-1029)
- Shuswap Nation Tribal Council
- Skeetchestn Indian Band
- Department of Canadian Heritage Aboriginal Languages Initiative
- British Columbia Indigenous Languages Initiative
- Simon Fraser University
- Prof. Lori Daniels, Faculty of Forestry, University of BC
- Braden Hallett, artist
- Tania Willard, artist