Plant Management Systems of British Columbia’s First Peoples

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the diverse plant resource management strategies of First Nations of BC. Contrary to the predominant “hunter-gatherer” designation by anthropologists and others, First Peoples of many parts of the province were actually astute managers of plant and animal resources. Over thousands of years, they developed a wide range of strategies and techniques – from periodic burning of landscapes, to pruning berry bushes, tilling and selective harvesting – to maintain and enhance the quality and quantity of their resources. There are numerous examples of plant species and habitats for which various types of management have been applied. Three case studies are provided here: Culturally Modified western red-cedar trees; estuarine root gardens; and orchard-gardens from an ancient village site in Tsimshian territory. Over generations, as people’s knowledge bases, social systems and technologies mature, plants and environments become embedded into complex belief systems, in which cultural control becomes encoded in stories, taboos, ceremonies, art and ethics. The complexities of this last layer of culturally proscribed management are still little understood, but may be the most significant component of traditional management systems, allowing for the development and maintenance over a long time period of sustainable anthropogenic landscapes. Many aspects of indigenous management systems need further investigation, including ways in which they may be effectively applied in a contemporary world as a way of enhancing and supporting Indigenous peoples’ food security, land rights and continued cultural development.
Figure 1 culturally modified cedar, Gitga’at

Figure 2 Bark stripping events

Figure 3 Kingcome estuary posts

Figure 4 schematic root garden

Figure 5 Clover Bundles

Figure 6 crabapple orchard garden64

Figure 7 ricercot orchard garden70
Today, British Columbia First Nations people are reclaiming their identity by reclaiming public places that showcase their arts. Jade Sculpture by Artist Bill Reid full of Tribal Icons. They are documenting their languages that were always spoken and never written and recording their oral histories. The life came full circle for British Columbia first nations weaving when some women in the 1970s started learning the traditional way of weaving. And the Spindles that were used for weaving can be seen as a symbol at the inner harbor in Victoria. Costumes & Jewelry. Indigenous people certainly had/have such vast knowledge of the land, what plants to use. I also had no idea that totem poles told the story of the family that carved it! Plant Technology of First Peoples in British Columbia (Royal British Columbia Museum Handbook). ISBN. 0772658471 (ISBN13: 9780772658470). She is
interested in the traditional knowledge systems and traditional land and resource management systems of Indigenous Peoples, particularly in western Canada. Books by Nancy J. Turner. More... This excellent field guide to many plants native to British Columbia emphasizes the traditional technological uses of plant materials by the First Peoples of the region. This well-organized, clearly written book contains a wealth of fascinating information for both the ethno-botanist and the interested layperson. (Nikki Tate-Stratton CBRA, 4226). This volume is a culmination of plant knowledge from the fields of ethnobotany, botany, ethnology, and particularly the work of Turner and the multitude of Aboriginal peoples she has worked with in the province. Plant Technology of First People...