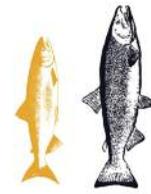




# OUR FOOD

## FINAL REPORT

### 2010



a celebration of traditional foods  
**THIRD ANNUAL**  
**CONFERENCE**  
**APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup>-17<sup>TH</sup>**



*FOOD SECURITY*

Seminar

*SUSTAINABILITY*

Digital Harvest

*COMMUNITY*

Fear Factor

*HEALTH*

Feasting

*WEALTH*

Pit Cooking

*WISDOM*

Networking

*SHARING*

Old Foods

*RESPECT*

Songs

*KNOWLEDGE*

## Day 1 Agenda

- Opening Prayer Elders Skip Dick, Vic and Joyce Underwood
- Welcome Our Elders Voices Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi, UVic Office of Indigenous Affairs
- Welcome - Hamisinulth Tom Child, Kwakiutl
- Introduction John Rampanen, Nuuchah-nulth
- Keynote Dr. Nancy Turner Bringing the Food Home
- Digital Story Latitia Titian, youth digital story – Conversations with Vancouver Island Youth”
- Dr. Peter Ross, research scientist, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- John Alexis, Masters student, SFU
- Delores Baynes, Hesquiaht; and
- Cheryl Bryce, Songhees – Community Gardens and Root Gardens
- Lunch served – First Peoples House
- Xumthoult Nick Claxton, Tsawout – Traditional Reefnet Fishing
- Cliff Atleo, Ahousaht; Jeff Thomas, Snuneymuxw; First Nations Fisheries Council – Supporting stewardship of fisheries resources current and future generations”
- Glenn Jim, Tseycum – Hunting
- Drumming – Nanoose Youth Group
- Nitanis Desjarlais VICCIFN: Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Foods Network
- Traditional Foods Feast at First Peoples House
- Jowi Taylor – Six String Nation

## Day 2 Agenda

- Pit-cook preparation
- Opening prayer by Tsawout Elders Vic and Joyce Underwood
- Welcome – John Wilson, Tsawout
- Introduction – Tom Child and John Rampanen
- Pit opening, lunch blessing by Elder and feast songs
- Earl Claxton Jr. and Lewis Williams, Tsawout; Fiona Devereaux and Erin Rowsell, Aboriginal Health, VIHA – Feasting for Change
- Youth Event John Rampanen & Tom Child – Traditional Foods Fear Factor
- Closing – Tsawout Elders Vic and Joyce Underwood

# Filling minds... filling bellies

**Most conferences involve sitting around tables, often with strangers, hearing speakers talk about their PowerPoint presentations. It can feel like sitting in a schoolroom on a warm day,**



But the third annual Traditional Foods of Vancouver Island First Nations conference was learning with a difference. In the first place, the subject of the conference was familiar to all of us – food. And the message about traditional foods that once sustained us was accompanied by the tastes and smells of salmon baking or root vegetables and other delicacies cooking in a pit covered by salal and lined with kelp.

The subtext of the conference was ‘Celebrating Indigenous Foods in a Changing World.’ The celebration was evident in the two days of networking, listening and, of course, eating great food. All the while, the conference’s four pillars – nutrition,

healing, safety and community – were at the forefront.

The first two annual conferences were held at Snuneymuxw First Nation and Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo. In 2010, we moved south to the Saanich Peninsula.

The first day (April 16) was at First Peoples House at the University of Victoria where opening and closing ceremonies were held. Conference



First Peoples House made us all feel at home

‘business’ was taken care of at the nearby David Lam auditorium.

The next day we began gathering in the early morning at Tsawout to prepare the pits that would cook the day’s feast in the new gym.



Knowledge shared around two pits at Tsawout

This year, the knowledgeable conference presenters were mostly First Nations experts. They included: Nick Claxton of Tsawout who spoke about traditional reef-net fishing; Cliff Atleo Sr. of Ahousaht (his work and his past experiences with food); and Cheryl Bryce of Songhees who spoke about the joys of camas.

Many First Nations youth were involved in the conference even before it began as part of the Digital Harvestiers’ project. About 25 digital storytellers began to put together presentations about food, family and other subjects using state-of-the-art technology available at Their stories came to life during the conference.



# Bringing the foods home

Everyone's favourite ethnobotanist, Dr. Nancy Turner of UVic, offered an inspiring keynote address entitled Celebrating Traditional Food in a Changing World.



Dr. Nancy Turner

She said that there were many reasons to recover and renew ecosystems. But perhaps the most important is to renew Salmon Nation's food systems with things like pit-cooking and the First Salmon ceremony.

There are lots of different things that need to be done:

- Language revitalization;
- Using local economy;
- Reconnecting with the Elders;
- Finding ways for children to spend time with the Elders;
- Use the schools! Use the computers! Use the camera!
- Use whatever technology is available. That's always been the way.

All those things together is a way of bring the foods home.

It has already begun and so many of you are involved in this process.

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"We didn't have money long ago, but it's nice. Lots of food, lots of clams, lots of wild berries all over. Five dollars buys you sugar, coffee, tea and flour. That's all anybody needed [to buy]. Everything else they got from the land.... Those were good times."

Elsie Claxton as told to Dr. Nancy Turner in 1996.

## EXPERTS SHARING KNOWLEDGE



Cliff Atleo of Ahousaht

### Traditional knowledge is real

Cliff Atleo Sr. from Ahousaht gave a presentation on behalf of the First Nation Fisheries Council. But his wide-ranging talk also touched upon a subject that was at the heart of the conference.

"I grew up in a period of time where we had no dependency on anything or anyone. Every family was an independent sustainable unit. Every family had whatever it took in order to sustain itself.

"Traditional knowledge... what is that? Is that knowledge real and can we learn from it? I say 'yes' it is real and we can learn from that."

### The worldview of the Saanich Reef Net Fishery

The Saanich reef-net fishery required the cooperative efforts of entire families and communities. Reef netting was quite complex in comparison to other fishing techniques often used by Indigenous peoples such as weirs and dipnets.

The fishery was founded on the principle of respect for the salmon. This respect built a relationship to the resource that allowed the Saanich peoples to thrive as a nation for millennia. It is this respect for the land and its resources that was, and still is, integral the Saanich peoples' worldview.

Everything that they have and everything around them was a gift from XÁLS. One of the many gifts that had been given to them is the salmon runs that migrate past Saanich shores on their way to their home rivers to spawn. The Saanich live in an area where there are no major rivers... The sacred sockeye returned to only major rivers like the Fraser and only pass through the ocean straits.

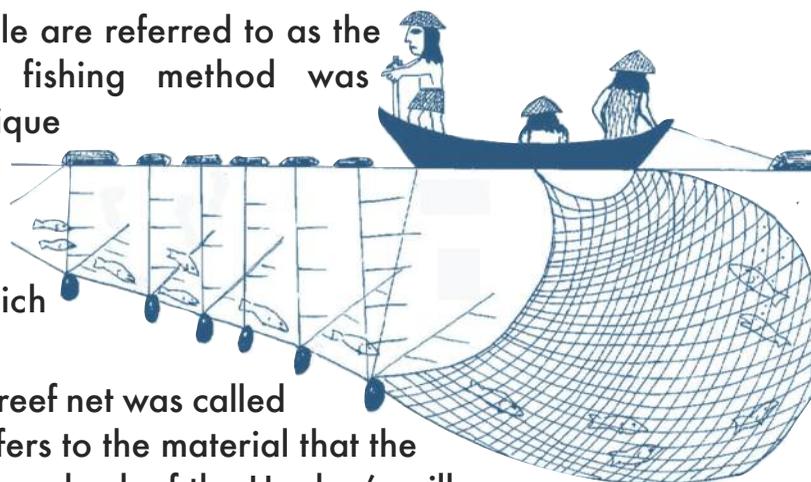
Sometimes the Saanich people are referred to as the saltwater people. reef-net fishing method was specially adapted for their unique location. It was specialized to intercept the large runs of salmon that annually migrated past through Saanich territory.

In the Saanich language, the reef net was called the SXOLE. This word also refers to the material that the net was constructed of, the inner bark of the Hooker's willow.

The SXOLE was an incredibly sophisticated technique, which required in-depth knowledge of the salmon, their habits and travel routes, the tides and currents, and of plants among other things. This fishing technique could not be successful without the Saanich Peoples' deep respect for the salmon, the earth and each other.



Nick Claxton of Tsawout Nation



# There's nothing like an old food!



## K LOEL... Blue Camas... Camassia quamash...

Whatever you call it, the Blue camas was once a staple food of Tsawout and other Coast Salish peoples as well as an important and valuable resource in the trading economy.

Prime camas meadow beds were the property of certain families and passed through generations. Other fields were considered to be for public harvests. The beds were carefully cultivated and tended. Every year they were weeded and cleared of stones and death-camas bulbs. A controlled annual burn was often held to help manage brush and weeds.

The bulbs were pit-cooked along with other foods and often dried into cakes as the main source of carbohydrates through the year.

Many visitors to the second day of the Traditional Foods conference at Tsawout got their first chance to taste pit-cooked camas.

There are many recipes for cooking camas in a pit with cooking times ranging from 12 hours to three days.



## The Providers

Our community is on a good path towards careers and developing healthy lifestyles. But all the (recent) grads were women.

The young men were starting families, getting to be at the age when they should be in the workforce or being in school. But they were not and that was the question: What can we do?

One day I was in my back yard skinning a deer. Two girls and two boys - 16 or 17 years old - were curious at what I was doing, skinning and quartering this animal. They were kind of squeamish, it's not something they'd been around. But they stayed.

It's not about just hunting and killing and animal. This animal is providing us with food to carry on living. We give thanks to this animal. This animal gave its life to us.

As I was explaining these teachings to the young fellows, they became more interested. I talked about becoming a provider to their family and community.

My wife came out and invited these young people into the house and asked if they wanted to learn how to prepare the meat. They were excited.

## Understanding how to be healthy in a new generation



Delores Baines of Hesquiaht

When I speak my language, it gets so quiet in here. This is what I long for, for the new generation to hear, to understand; so that they can understand how to be healthy and how to eat the foods that our Elders passed along.

The new generation... We put up smoked fish, fried fish, boiled fish, fish soup, clams. My grandchildren say: "I don't like this, I don't like that."



Glenn Jim of Tseycum

They spent the next two hours cutting steaks and cutting roasts, wrapping them, labelling and everything else. Both couples went home with 20-25 pounds that day. They became very prideful of what they had learned that day.

We started becoming popular in the community. Steaks and roasts talk very loud. So we planned a hunt... we went out and got elk.

Hunting is again a communal affair. It reconnects the young and the older hunters and it embodies many traditional and spiritual values... it's all there.

We have to start saying 'These are the healthy foods'.

A lot of people around the world are saying what is happening to the Indians. They've come down with arthritis, heart, stroke, aneurysm, diabetes... all kinds of other things that we are dying from.

Look at me. There are times that I cry because of how I look and how I feel. I've got arthritis, fibromyalgia, high blood pressure, hearing problems... because I am not eating the foods my grandmother once cooked for me. I am overweight.

I'm unhappy. I can add years on to my life, if I start eating properly.

I plan to start big time gardening for my community. Fruit trees of every kind and berries. Vegetables to help our community. This will be good for those who say they have nothing to do.

But we have to remember to keep teaching our language in every community.

## IMPORTANT TO WHO WE ARE AND TO THE LAND



Cheryl Bryce of Songhees

Cheryl Bryce asked the question “What is our role in managing these ecosystems” as she looked at camas meadows and other important areas in her Songhees home.

She began a community root garden project that has involved many young people in rediscovering once-plentiful camas meadows.

“All these laws and treaties are keeping us from interacting with our ecosystems,” she said as she spoke of a cultural-keystone food species and trade item – the bulbs from the blue camas.

“People up and down the Island came to trade with us. There were many different areas around Victoria that were managed.

“The way camas was managed, you could almost call it a garden. That kind of interaction is so vital – managing these systems. It is important to who we are and important to the land.

“Our ecosystem is heavily impacted, but it is vital to be out harvesting and that these roles are passed down. It is very crucial to our survival and to our identity.

“Our main role is to be managing these ecosystems and passing down that knowledge to our children.

“But it is also important for our health. Camas, I feel, is a preventative to diabetes. Because it is a complex carbohydrate, it is far easier on our systems than imported carbohydrate foods.

“Some people might not like taste of it at first. I didn’t. It takes awhile, but it is really good.”

## Traditional and modern sciences working together

The Traditional Foods conference is a direct result of a basic question and the attempt to answer: “What is in the food we eat and is it safe to continue to eat?”

That question resulted in a major study to examine the level of contaminants in selected seafoods from around Vancouver Island. Dietary surveys revealed the importance of these and other foods to community members. The report of this study was presented at the first Traditional Foods conference, and research has expanded ever since.

“It was a team effort, an opportunity and an obligation,” said Dr. Peter Ross of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

“Ultimately, this is a partnership between two ways of life. There are the scientists like me over here. On the other side we have the traditional ecological knowledge.

“Neither is better. Both work hand in hand to deliver some really important things in support of what we need to do. If I as a scientist don’t know what foods are important in the communities, how am I supposed to do my lab work.”

Peter used as an example the story of PCBs, the chemical that was banned in 1977 and shared both hopeful and gloomy news about the challenges faced by chemicals in the environment and in the foods we eat.



Dr Peter Ross of Fisheries and Oceans

“It’s all about sharing and learning and being excited about what we’re eating, how we’re preparing it and where it’s coming from.”

People don’t have to wait for more information before they take action, he said.

“We can make sure we don’t flush stuff down the toilet and buy the right products.

“Canada has to be, and is, a leader on the world stage in dealing with these chemicals and all of us have to act as responsible citizens. Everybody can and should do something.”

**THE GOOD NEWS:** PCB levels in traditional foods have declined dramatically since 1976. Traditional seafoods are important: they contain many essential nutrients and benefits largely outweigh the risks. Continued partnerships between science and traditional knowledge will empower improved stewardship and environmental protection.

**THE BAD NEWS:** PCBs have been banned, but they are persistent and are a continuing environmental concern.

## FACES at the CONFERENCE





**The Pit**  
 The art of pit-cooking was on display for the early risers on the second day of the conference. Experts and volunteers worked together to dig and prepare the pits. A variety of plant material was gathered from around Tsawout including salal, salmonberry and bull kelp to aid in the long cooking process. Stones were gathered to line the pits and wood was chopped for the fires. Root vegetables, including camas bulbs, were prepared. A pit-cook is a great community event to learn about food... and the food tastes great.



# DIGITAL HARVESTERS

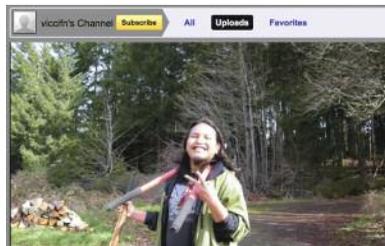


Days before the conference began, several groups of youth got together in a high-tech computer lab at UVic. Over three days, they worked with video, audio and still photos and learned how to put them together into a

movie using a computer program. The results were very powerful. The stories were 'told' during the both days and were the high point of the conference. View many of the stories on YouTube at the address below.



**DIGITAL STORIES**  
[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)  
 Search for "viccifn"



## VOLUNTEERS MADE THE DAY



## THE CHAMPIONS

The 'movers and shakers' in community work are the Food Champions of 2010. Kwaxsistala Chief Adam Dick was named for sharing his extensive food knowledge; Anna Spahan for her wide medicinal knowledge and support of youth; and



Chief Adam Dick

Fiona Devereaux for being an inspiration and role model and support of many communities' events and activities.

Other community champions included:

- Cheryl Bryce ● Joan Morris
- Leigh Joseph ● Geraldine Trimble
- Carrie Pollard ● Abe Lloyd
- Jamie Hunt ● Christine Wata Joseph
- Randy Bell ● Colette Child
- Barb Whyte ● Melody Charlie

- Nashuk Youth Council ● Tom Watts
- Annie Watts ● Letitia Rampanen
- Anne Robinson (FN Wildcrafters)
- Dan Claxton ● Vanessa Bob
- Ellen White ● Keith Hunter and the BCHLA Dream Team:
- Tanis Dagert
- Jessica Chenery ● John Rampanen
- Sharon Gordon, ● Nitanis Desjarlais
- Della Rice Sylvester ● Norman Scow
- Jean Smith ● Stella Underwood
- Donna and Norman Stauffer



## CONFERENCE SPONSORS



First Nations Fisheries Council



University of Victoria



Songhees First Nation



Office of Community-Based Research



VANCOUVER ISLAND health authority



Office of Indigenous Affairs



Snaw-naw-as First Nation



Canadian Cancer Society



Health Canada



Fisheries and Oceans Canada

An initiative of the BC Healthy Living Alliance, led by the Canadian Cancer Society



BC Healthy Living Alliance  
working together to promote wellness and prevent chronic disease



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PHABC



Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network

## 2010 ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

- Sarah Cormode, Conference Coordinator, UVic Office of Indigenous Affairs
- Jocelyn Sam, UVic Office of Indigenous Affairs
- Peter Ross, Department of Fisheries & Oceans
- Joan Morris, Songhees First Nation
- Fiona Deveraux, Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Tom Child, UVic Office of Community-Based Research
- Erin Rowsell, VIHA
- Veronica Lefebvre, UVic Office of Indigenous Affairs
- Gary Ardron, Shelterwood Forest Management Ltd.
- Nitanis Desjarlais and John Rampanen, Shape Shyphtr Studios
- Lou-Ann Neel, Camosun College
- Deb George, UVic Office of Indigenous Affairs

## We raise our hands in thanks

We gratefully acknowledge the support we received, in so many ways, from the Tsawout community including: Chief Allan Claxton and the Tsawout Council; Cllr. John Wilson for opening on Day 2; and Alec Sam from Tsartlip for his cultural guidance and contributions; and Elders and youth.



Many thanks also to: cook Rose Jimmy and her crew for the fine feast; Aaron Sam, who came through bigtime with urchins and crab; Dan Claxton who helped get fresh

coho at the last minute; Irvine Jimmy who got the firewood and organized the pit help; and, of course, Roberta Pelky and others who showed us how to do the pit cook.

The many volunteers were instrumental in making the two-day gathering and conference a success. Key among them were Abe Lloyd and Jen McMullen.

To all those not mentioned here, your work to make this conference a success is appreciated by all who attended.



A VICCIFN work party erected a greenhouse at Halalt Nation earlier this year

## Indigenous Food Network carries on

On an early Saturday morning, April 5, 2008, people travelled from five collaborating communities – Ahousaht, Pacheedaht, Quatsino, Snuneymuxw and Weiwaikum – and from other First Nations to join a range of experts for a wide-ranging discussion about seafood, nutrition, and the environment.

The presentations, conversations and celebrations capped off a project entitled Traditional Seafoods of Vancouver Island First Nations: Balancing Health Benefits with Pollution Risks.

After that first conference at Snuneymuxw and Nanaimo, an ad hoc group was formed in order to continue to share resources and knowledge of traditional foods. This group is now formally called the Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities Indigenous Food Network (VICCIFN).

The network's mandate is to create a bridge between traditional knowledge and modern research and health science.

One of VICCIFN's main aims is to build collaborative approaches in addressing issues of traditional food access and security. We intend to research, document and share this deeply-rooted knowledge for future generations.

Another goal of the VICCIFN is to meaningfully engage with First Nations Elders and youth in order to transfer traditional knowledge to the next generations.

If you would like to participate in the network and help identify food-related issues in your community, contact us at the links listed below.

If you can't attend meetings in person, you can contribute by joining our ever-growing email listserve.

Email – [viccifn@gmail.com](mailto:viccifn@gmail.com)

Digital Harvesters – [www.youtube.com/user/viccifn](http://www.youtube.com/user/viccifn)

Web site – [www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/category/community/vancouver-island-and-coastal-communities](http://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/category/community/vancouver-island-and-coastal-communities)

CONFERENCE PHOTOS – [www.flickr.com/photos/mkiemele](http://www.flickr.com/photos/mkiemele)