

“Historically, the colonial mentality has been one of endless extraction from nature. Colonial forces and ways of thinking, have encroached on our home in a way that has been very damaging, not only to us as indigenous people and our culture, but to the living lands and waters.

Tla-o-qui-aht ancestral stewardship practices on the land went beyond just seeking sustainability. We are in relationship with a living landscape and we aim to do things in a way that facilitates future abundance.

The word “resource” is a difficult word for me to use when referring to the entities that give us life, because a resource is an idea from the English language that turns living beings, which we respect, into things that are just taken. This is a consequence of the way that a culture’s worldview can be encoded in its language. Nuuchahnulth languages are verb and relationship-based, as opposed to noun-based, like the English language. So I do my best to explain things using the English language in a way that conveys the care and respect that we have for the things that give us life.

Traditional Tla-o-qui-aht governance dictates which people or families from the nation have the rights to access certain areas within our traditional country for certain goods, and following the proper protocols in accordance with teachings of respect, to gather those goods. Before the interruption to our way of life brought on by colonization and the residential school system, our connection to our country was as much about the care of it as it was about the right to access and be in it. There are different roles to steward the lands and waters in this way. For example, the traditional role of River Keeper is there to say how many salmon can be taken from the river that year, in accordance with how many salmon are returning and how healthy the river is. The River Keeper also did salmon enhancement and salmon egg care if it looked like the eggs weren't going to survive where they were in the river. There were also Forest Watchers and Beach Keepers.

A big teaching for the care of these places is of *lisaak*. It can be translated as “respect” in English. When you break it down more by translating it from what my elders are saying about *lisaak* however, it is about spending time in connection with the land and all that is there by listening and observing with your whole being, and acting accordingly.

When you appreciate a place and know it intimately you are more inclined to make good decisions with it.”

- Tsimka Martin, 2/21/2017

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