



Laird and Glade Cultural Land Assessment

Prepared by Taress Alexis Smum iem Representative for the Autonomous Sinixt, and elder David Alexis, cultural knowledge keeper and Archaeological consultant

Over a two day period David Alexis and myself travelled to Laird and Glade water sheds. I was asked to conduct a cultural land assessment of both watersheds to assess and observe whether the areas would have been utilized by Sinixt people both today and in years past. I was also asked to see if I thought there might be any cultural sights on both watersheds. While ground truthing both sites we did not observe any pithouse depressions or other obvious historical cultural use sites. It is important to note that the evidence of Sinixt peoples who utilized this landscape has changed dramatically since colonization, contact with settlers, and the damming of the Kootenay river and its tributaries. We did observe heavy settlement and land disturbances and were not expecting to find cultural sites. If such sites do exist, in any areas with less ground disturbances, to field study those areas would require permission from property owners. We do have accounts of elder settlers, Sinixt elders, and historical testimonies that there were and still are Sinixt people who were known to have occupied these sites in recent historical times. We are planning on conducting further interviews to document any knowledge held by long time settler family stories that might still be held and shared.

Sinixt people would have traditionally utilized the landscape where historical trails and passageways leading to food sources and for other cultural practices would have been done with ease or convenience. These cultural use practices would have required large, usually flowing, bodies of water. From studies we know that most Sinixt people would have constructed villages near or at the mouths of alternative water sources to the larger body of water to ensure survival. This holds true for the Sinixt peoples settlements as well. When we look at the Sinixt people we know that they usually erected winter village sites near or by a river way. And would have utilized temporary summer structures on the land while conducting cultural harvesting roots, berries, and medicines from the landscape.

Water was very important to the Sinixt people in their spiritual practices, it was observed by early settlers that there were sweat lodges on every point of land the early settlers observed that the Sinixt would sweat and pray as a daily practice. Sinixt, however, believed through oral tradition that they were put here by coyote to worship a scorned lover of his, Rain. Sinixt people practiced prayer daily, not only to their creator, but to the

water, the water held special abilities to wash away sorrows, fears, hurt, and anger. Sinixt people also honoured water in many of their ceremonies acknowledging it as a life source and powerful healer.

David and I looked at both watersheds and determined that if there were culturally significant sites that they were most likely under the water due to damming. Glade was heavily developed by early Doukhobor settlers who were certainly not mandated to report any materials found while excavating the land for their new homestead. Glade would most likely have been utilized, but we also figured that due to better sun exposure for winter there would have been (on a diagonal line south and to the west of Glade) a main village site. We concluded this as we know that there was a large village where Castlegar now sits. A boat ride, by sturgeon nose canoe, wouldn't have taken long at all if coming from the Glade area. I did observe that there were a few varieties of plants that were utilized by Sinixt people, but due to the time of year we conducted our field study many plants were already in their winter sleep cycles. We did note that this year was an exceptional mushroom year with many varieties that we could not identify.

We know, both historically, and through oral tradition that both Glade and Laird were used by the Sinixt people. Both locations are located where the river narrows naturally which creates good fishing spots. Both Laird and Glade are fed by higher up lake systems. These lakes would have been utilized in summer months when travelling was easier and foods and medicines were available through spring and summer gathering times.

Most plants that would have been utilized for medicines and foods by the Sinixt would still be available today unless they were made to go dormant by the rising waters or an invasive plant species.

Because of the time of year that we culturally assessed these watersheds we could only identify a few plant species known to be used currently by the Sinixt. Both David and I feel an important next step would be to create an inventory of local plants that are utilized by Sinixt and settlers that wildcraft and gather locally on their landscapes for herbology purposes. We would like to consult with local Sinixt elder Marilyn James and

two or three other herbalists and wild-crafters on both the Laird and Glade watersheds to document what they gather and use currently in their craft. This will allow us the ability to cross reference and identify plant species that may need management and protection. If the eco society has any materials relating to plants that have been identified on these watersheds, a willingness to share such a document would most definitely be welcomed. It would allow us to cross reference known plants that have recently been observed in these watersheds.