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Prof. Trevor Lantz

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The Cultural Significance of the Esquimalt Lagoon

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INTRODUCTION

Ecological edges are the zones of transition where different ecosystems meet and produce a high level of productivity (Turner, 2003). Since human communities benefit from association with these ecological edges, cultural knowledge and social systems often develop within ecological edges (IBID). This interconnected relationship between biological and cultural diversity has been termed *biocultural diversity* (Loh, 2005), which encompasses the diverse 'senses of place' that can be held both individually and in common by the individuals who utilize the space.

A sense of place represents a reciprocal relationship that exists between people and a landscape. Exploring people's relationship to the land offers an integrated investigation of a culture and the environment; it creates linkages between cultural identity and a sense of place (Davidson-Hunt & Berkes, 2003). A sense of place can serve as a metaphor to explain the relationship people have to the landscape. Places can be associated with narratives from the past, cultural values, social beliefs, identity, as well as practical knowledge (Basso, 1996). It situates cultural experiences and perspectives with a place. Places can also evoke emotional experiences or sensations that are attached to a landscape. The subjective and personal meanings that individuals and cultures derive from their experiences of a place distinguish them from other places on Earth (AAG, 2010). While a sense of place develops naturally, it can be strengthened and extended through cultural and political discourse (Wiens, 2011). Furthermore, focal points and areas of social exchange can be established in meaningful spaces by providing meaningful connections through storytelling devices like public art, which can help to highlight the elements of a place that set it apart.

The Esquimalt Lagoon is an area of both cultural and biological diversity, having both historic and contemporary importance to diverse stakeholder groups in and around the community. The City of Colwood's natural setting, parks and open spaces are considered to be form-makers for creating a sustainable community (City of Colwood, 2008). The amount, proximity, and quality of these places have been identified as key aspects for reinforcing the unique identity and sense of place for the community and its constituents (IBID). Despite this unique sense of place and its associated opportunities,

the community faces significant challenges resulting from population growth, land use, climate change, conflicting uses, and perceptions of place. Ensuring the long term health and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas like the Esquimalt Lagoon will require an expansion of policies to protect and restore the environment, as well as utilizing place-making strategies to ensure continued support, and to reconcile conflicting uses within these spaces.

The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the unique cultural aspects of the Esquimalt Lagoon and identify the relevant tools and tactics that can highlight their place-making capacity. Understanding these tools and aspects of place can help to promote and protect the lagoon through building resilience and addressing the various conceptualizations of place.

SENSE OF PLACE AND CONTEMPORARY PLANNING

Richard Buchan & Ian Kopp

In an effort to understand the various cultural perceptions and values surrounding Esquimalt Lagoon, an interviewee with an understanding of the various stakeholders and community significance of the area was selected. The focus of this interview and research was to determine how a “sense of place”, is interpreted and utilized at a municipal level by the City of Colwood. This included an investigation into the various tools and tactics to strengthen or encourage a sense of place in the community.

The City of Colwood’s Councilor Judith Cullington, who sits on a number of Capital Regional District boards and committees, was asked seven open ended questions were prepared that utilized her expert insight as a city councilor and resident who values the area. Since the interviewee provided her knowledge both as a resident and councillor, some of the responses might not be shared amongst other councillors. Ultimately, Councilor Cullington provided direct information about the initiatives that the City of Colwood is currently undertaking, an understanding from the perspective of somebody deeply involved in the surrounding community, and an understanding of some of the alternative cultural connections associated with the area.

Different Aspects of 'Place'

A sense of place incorporates the cultural connections to a landscape, expressed through symbols, myths and memories (Schama, 1995) and as a result of intense experiences on the land (Tuan, 1977). When asked how she understood the term “sense of place” in a localized sense, Cullington suggested that the concept encompassed “a sense of community, a sense of uniqueness about a particular place, a sense of... home”. It answers the question of “where am I from” by allowing an individual to consider the communities that they live in and use as a collection of meaningful places which makes them unique and stand apart from other regions.

Cullington also touched on the various aspects of the lagoon, hinting at the different scales of place. For instance, the lagoon has international significance as a migratory bird sanctuary, regional and local significance as urban park space and habitat. The area also holds contemporary and historic cultural significance to First Nations as a place to gather traditional food and host ceremonies while hosting a vast array of archaeological sites. Ultimately there are various federal, provincial, regional and local interests surrounding the site that have different impacts on a sense of place depending on its scale.

Different Perceptions and Uses of Space

As previously discussed, the Esquimalt Lagoon hosts a wide range of user groups and activities. As such, different senses of place and different perceived values develop surrounding the lagoon. As the municipal authority, the City of Colwood’s council is challenged with finding a way to facilitate and encourage this diversity while protecting the lagoon’s natural features, and balancing the interests of a variety of different stakeholders. During the interview, Cullington mentioned vehicle-primary users, who stay parked in their car to enjoy the view, and walkers, who tend to have a stronger connection to the beach as an example a conflict between different user groups. Conflict arises as vehicle-users litter, while walkers pick up after them. Other user groups coming into conflict within the lagoon include dog walkers and bird sanctuary proponents, those who want to maintain the bridge and those who want it removed,

those with restorative interests and recreational users, as well as and developers and heritage preservation groups.

Though not confined to the lagoon, the conflict between indigenous uses, ownership, modern uses and historic uses are exacerbated in the area due to the high quantity and quality of artifacts in the area. This is discussed in more detail below in the “*Significance to the Lekwungen People*” segment. These conflicts manifest physically in decisions by the city to avoid digging foundations for signs, instead anchoring them above ground on concrete blocks so as to avoid disturbing artifacts. There have been efforts to incorporate and celebrate indigenous cultural heritage through educational displays, signs and Lekwungen art.

The municipality faces the challenge of balancing the interests of these diverse groups in future decision making. Since a sense of place can be conceptualized differently by cultures or even individuals, the city must make an effort to facilitate a sense of place that does not stifle any user group, but that also promotes the uses that preserve the area. This should be supported by the majority user groups, scientific information and law.

Opportunities and Potential Tools

Cullington identified the opportunity for cultural exchange as a major application that the municipality could facilitate. Her vision included a “work swap” event, where city employees and First Nation Band employees take on each other’s jobs for a period of time. With widespread community involvement and a presence or relationship with all of the involved organized groups, the city potentially has the capability to promote discussion and dissemination of values across otherwise un-connected borders.

On an operational level, the City of Colwood has the capability to pass bylaws dictating specific actions allowed or disallowed in the lagoon. They can and have also worked with community groups, to create low-impact signage that informs viewers of the various uses, present and past, in the lagoon. This extends to art, which Cullington proposed to be a strong cultural bridge between different perspectives. Her suggestions included art from the Coast Collective, First Nations groups, as well as other user groups, such as the outdoor kindergarten that produced artwork that highlights the

cultural and environmental significance of the site, while attempting to facilitate stewardship practises between the site users. Art, both visual and otherwise, could be considered an excellent “place maker” due to the deep cultural connections imbedded within it. As such, utilizing it to promote a strong sense of place within the lagoon could prove to be more effective than other types of signage or written information.

Cullington mentioned the irony of the Esquimalt Lagoon being located in the City of Colwood despite the good reasons for its name. To this extent “place making”, or “branding” in more commercial terms, also has the potential to be a strong tool for the City of Colwood. Naming locations surrounding the lagoon in accordance with cultural values, biodiversity, environmental aspects, regional significance, historical uses, or traditional naming, can create or reinforce a sense of value or a particular sense of place within the area. This tool can be used to replace the name of an existing site, or classify an area in which the Esquimalt Lagoon is located.

Education also has the capability to reinforce a strong sense of place. Through learning about and within the environment, greater value becomes placed in it and connections to the lagoon could become firmer. The outdoor kindergarten which took place on the same day as our site visit is an excellent example of a group becoming more strongly acquainted with the lagoon. Educational initiatives include intensive classes, public outreach or simply providing signage which increases awareness of the social, cultural and natural environment. The majority of educational material in the lagoon can be found on signs throughout the park, but since there is no single access point some users are not exposed to them.

Municipal Relevance and Future Planning

By exploring the different aspects of place and social histories within and surrounding the Esquimalt Lagoon we were able to identify place-making tools which have the potential to strengthen future policies and strategies. The City of Colwood has identified the need to improve its regulatory control over land use to be consistent with the policy directions established in the Official Community Plan (City of Colwood, 2012). It has also identified the need to create a city-wide urban forest strategy for both public and private land. In terms of the lagoon, the city has identified the need to protect the

foreshore for its natural, place-making, and user values (IBID). In order to meet these goals art can be utilized as an educational or story telling devise which improves aesthetics, and 'place-branding' can be used to reinforce values that preserve and protect the environmental and culturally significant areas in and around the lagoon.

These tools can also be used in a broader sense to educate residents and protect the areas surrounding the lagoon. For example, the Esquimalt Lagoon watershed (Appendix A, Figure 1) could be subject to a re-branding initiative which would protect and bring a greater public awareness to the urban forest, watercourses, culturally significant areas and the Esquimalt Lagoon.

ART AND THE ESQUIMALT LAGOON

Erica Isomura and Charlie Gordon

"It is the particularity of each place and the remembered richness of each story that precipitates meaning for both individual and community." (Kellman, 1997) This is particularly true at the Esquimalt Lagoon in Colwood where art, culture, nature, and sense of place are tightly interwoven. For this place-making assignment, we focused on the use of art, both historically and at present, to determine the cultural significance of the lagoon. To gain insight from an active community member, we interviewed Terri Rodstrom, one of the founding directors of the Coast Collective Art Centre, which is located at the Esquimalt Lagoon in the Pendray House.

Historically, the lagoon has been a special place for artists, including Emily Carr, one of Canada's most renowned artists. Upon her first visit to the lagoon in May 1934, Emily described a stirring experience that overpowered her senses: "There are times out here when one just looks and times when one just listens, and others when one just feels or smells, and there are times when one does all of them at once and others when one is just vacant and nothing works." (Carr, 2007, p.169) Emily Carr made three significant trips out to the lagoon to draw, paint, and write (Limbrick, 2012). In her time, the lagoon was a lot quieter than it is today, since the military college was not established until 1942 (Capital Regional District, 2013.). Today, amongst the many groups connected to the lagoon, a prominent cultural aspect of the lagoon is the Coast

Collective, an art collective that is home to over 300 local artists (Rodstrom, personal communication on May 19, 2013). Though the collective was not established at the lagoon because of Carr, Rodstrom now feels the artists of the collective share a bond with Carr due to their shared artistic experience with the Esquimalt Lagoon. Like Carr, the artists at the collective are inspired by the lagoon and draw creativity from its natural beauty.

Art as an Expression of Place

The relationship between place and art runs deeper than natural places as a simple source of artistry worldwide. For instance, the mapping of home and places of belonging is learned and remembered through various forms of art by Indigenous Peoples including the Aboriginals of Australia, the Western Apache in Arizona, and the Maya in Guatemala (Kellman, 1997). Kellman writes that there are "endless other descriptions of aesthetic, narrative and imaginative responses that memorialize and elaborate a familiar important place for people everywhere. [And...] each gives evidence of well-worn memories and intimate narratives grounded in particularities of each location" (1997, p. 38). These memories and narratives particular to a location are an integral part of the connections that enable people to develop a sense of place, and developing these connections "allows people to celebrate a wider sense of belonging to a home-place or life-place that enfolds the [area]. It offers psychological enrichment and encourages sustainable practices, as people develop ties of affection for their life-places" (Newman & Jennings, 2008). As an expression of a culture's values, the arts are an important aspect of every society's culture (Hawkes, 2001), and it is our suggestion that the rich relationship between the Esquimalt Lagoon and its artistic significance – both past and present – is a valuable asset that could be further utilized and celebrated by the region in its aims to restore and reflect the lagoon's sense of place in a sustainable fashion.

The Artistic Community as a Stakeholder Group

During our interview with Rodstrom, it became evident that the artists of the collective greatly value the area's art legacy associated with Emily Carr and are very passionate about the preservation of the natural beauty of the Esquimalt Lagoon.

However, as an organization, the Coast Collective is not in communication with the City of Colwood or other stakeholders who make decisions regarding the lagoon's development (Rodstrom, personal communication on May 19, 2013). The Coast Collective's key role in the local arts community represents a significant opportunity for the lagoon's various stakeholders to strengthen a sense of stewardship for the Esquimalt Lagoon by highlighting the lagoon's unique ecology and natural beauty as well as its importance to the area and its community members through their art. Rodstrom's obvious enthusiasm for the lagoon and its importance as an inspiration to artists (personal communication on May 19, 2013) echoes the sentiments of Newman and Jennings that "the places that we know and love can become the type of space that will nourish our lives at their deepest levels. Further, by reviving a sense of place we may be able to reactivate the care of the environment, which grows out of the sense of the sanctity and worth of particular places" (Newman, 2008).

Following a tour of the lagoon with Jody Watson of the Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative (ELSI) on May 15, 2013 and our interview with Terri Rodstrom on May 19, 2013, it became evident that the underlying goal of protecting the natural beauty and ecology of the Esquimalt Lagoon could be strengthened by the partnering of interested stakeholders, namely ELSI and the Coast Collective. We learned that both organizations independently run various events celebrating the lagoon – ELSI's Emily Carr Community Festival of the Arts and Ecology, and the Coast Collective's Clothesline Festival. If these projects were cooperatively organized, it could dramatically strengthen both organizations' goals: ELSI's goal of strengthening a local sense of stewardship through place-making, and the Coast Collective's goal of strengthening the local arts community based at the lagoon. By incorporating as many of the lagoon's various stakeholders with a vested interest in the lagoon's protection, a festival organized to raise stewardship awareness of the Esquimalt Lagoon would potentially have a dramatically more effective impact.

Art as a Place-Making Aspect of the Esquimalt Lagoon

Every place has a unique profile of human, cultural, historic, and natural characteristics, and through this place-making assignment we have learned many of the

characteristics that make the Esquimalt Lagoon a truly unique place in the Capital Region District. The profile of the Esquimalt Lagoon, illuminated by the class project of Environmental Studies 429, hopefully will “provide insights on pathways to sustainability that are both acceptable to the people and compatible with their values, traditions, institutions, and ecological realities” (Newman & Jennings, p. 144). The historical art legacy of the lagoon and the current community of artists at the Coast Collective presents a valuable asset and opportunity for the various stakeholders of the Esquimalt Lagoon in their goal to enhance a sense of stewardship and a sense of place of a truly special, well-known, and well-loved area of the city.

SIGNIFICANCE TO THE LEKWUNGEN PEOPLE

Sally Gose and Cassie Dusdal

The Lekwungen people were part of the Coast Salish cultural group and what we know today as the Songhees and Esquimalt bands. Their ancestral lands include all of Greater Victoria, from Cordova Bay to Beecher Bay, as well as the west half of San Juan Island (Lutz, 2008). They have inhabited these lands for over 5 millennia (Keddie, 1991). They lived together in groups at twelve village sites between Cordova Bay and Beecher Bay (Boas, 1890).

Historical Occupation by the Lekwungen People

The Lekwungen people were not a homogenous group or ‘tribe’, but were comprised of autonomous households made up of extended families who spoke similar dialects (Duff, 1969). The family names included Kakyakaan, Teechamitsa, Whyomith, Kosampsom, Swenwhung, Chilcowitch and Chekoein (Appendix A, Figure 2).

There were over a dozen Lekwungen villages around the coast line of Greater Victoria. All the villages were strategically placed on the landscape to access the exposed and sheltered waterways. Duff (1969) describes these family groupings as moving from place to place on a seasonal basis. Some resources and house sites were owned and used by specific families, while others were used in common (Duff, 1969).

The Esquimalt Lagoon was the territory of the Teechamitsa people. There is not much information documented about this group of Lekwungen people. We do know that

they had early contact with European explorers. In 1790, the Spanish explorer Manuel Quimper landed at Esquimalt Harbour and Esquimalt Lagoon (Lutz, 2008; Clark *et al.*, 2008). The Teechamitsa were the first to sign a treaty with James Douglas in 1850. The land they “surrendered” would have included Esquimalt Lagoon and was described as the land:

...between Esquimalt Harbour and Point Albert including the latter, on the straits of Juan de Fuca and extending backward from thence to the range of mountains on the Sanitch Arm about ten miles distant. (Duff, 1969, p.9)

The 1856 census notes a population of 51 Teechamitsa (Keddie, 2003). Beyond the census information there is nothing documented and it is likely that they eventually joined the main village on the Victoria Harbour (Duff, 1969).

Duff (1969) reports the place name *Stsangal* has been associated with the area around Esquimalt Lagoon, and that the name “Songhees” is derived from this place name. Suttles (1974) recorded the name *sc’alas’* for an area within the Esquimalt Lagoon, but he did not identify any camps, villages or resource areas for the lagoon.

Archaeological Evidence of Historic Occupation

In 2003, an amazing discovery was made. A construction project at the southwest end of the Esquimalt Lagoon that involved excavating revealed evidence of past activities of people who inhabited the area over 3000 years ago (Mathews, personal communication, May 17, 2013). The construction on this site was halted and for the next 10 months, a group of archaeologists carefully went through layers of sediment, gravel and midden (artifacts that indicate human settlement) that was four meters deep (Clark *et al.*, 2008). This area had been submerged in water (known as a wet site) all these years and had preserved hundreds of household implements and kitchen waste that tell a narrative of how people lived and what they ate (Mathews, personal communication, May 17, 2013).

Some of the artifacts found were fish hooks, baskets, cordage and thermally-altered rock, which were of great cultural significance and presented an accurate indication of activities performed in the area of the wet site (Appendix A, Figure 3)

(Mathews, personal communication, May 17, 2013). The fish hooks were bent and of varying sizes with some up to 40 centimeters in length, most likely used to catch halibut, and smaller ones, approximately 10 centimeters, to catch smaller fish (Clark *et al.*, 2008). At the wet site, a bundle of hooks were found together, and as Darcy Mathews (Personal communication, May 17, 2013) stated, “it’s not hard to imagine that that was a handful of fish hooks that somebody just lost”.

This contributes to cultural significance of the lagoon to the Lekwungen people since it was obviously an area they used very frequently. This theory is also supported by the baskets, thermally-altered rock and cordage, all of which were used for foraging and food processing (Mathews, personal communication, May 17, 2013). The baskets were very durable and often made of split cedar withes coarsely woven for water drainage as they were probably used for collecting shellfish (Mathews, personal communication, May 17, 2013). Cedar withes are secondary branches that grow from the main branch of a cedar tree (Stewart, 1984). The best withes for basketry and cord-making are those that are very long and have no other shoots growing from them (Stewart, 1984). The cordage that was found also varied in size and was used for anything rope would be used for presently (Mathews, personal communication, May 17, 2013). Some was as thin as thread and was probably used as fishing line, but some of the rope found was approximately eight to ten centimetres in diameter. Mathews suggested that these large ropes were probably used to move large stones, such as those seen around burial cairns or possibly for raising house posts. This cordage was generally made out of spruce roots, split cedar withes that were twisted and plated, as well as of stinging nettle. The thermally-altered rock, or fire-cracked rock was an indication of sustained, intense burning and possibly earth ovens. These would have been areas that were used to roast food, such as camas (Mathews, personal communication, May 17, 2013).

First Nations Culture as a Feature of Place-Making

With these artifacts, it is apparent how valued the Esquimalt Lagoon was to the Lekwungen people and how heavily it was being used for everyday life as well as for more spiritual uses, such as burial sites and perhaps feasts. A copy of the interpretive

sign completed by the Esquimalt Nations artist, Darlene Gait, can be seen in Appendix A, Figure 4. It shows her vision of the 11 people whose burials were disturbed during the excavation in 2003. It will soon be installed near that site.

While communication with members of the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations was not possible during the creation of this document, personal communication with Mathews offered a valuable insight into his sense of place in Victoria and Esquimalt that was strongly shaped by the Lekwungen people and the legacy they left behind. Below is a quote from an interview conducted with Mathews that demonstrates how working as an archaeologist on First Nation cultural sites around the Victoria area developed his sense of place:

... I can't help but look at this landscape and look at this place and appreciate their history, and ... acknowledge that I am surrounded by this depth of history and culture and practice and the lives of all of these multiple generations of people who have lived here long before I was here. And so, I'm very aware of that, and that creates my sense of place. That creates my connection. ... All the tangible, material indications of the long term presence of these people. And it's here. (May 17, 2013).

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

A sense of place guided by past and present actions strongly affects the people living in or near a particular geographic region. A sense of place situates cultural experiences with a location. It is “a relationship in which individuals invest themselves in the landscape while incorporating its meaning into their own most fundamental experiences” (Basso, 1998). The Esquimalt Lagoon has a textured sense of place, expressed through narratives, art, politics, and evidence of a people living in a place for thousands of years.

At the local government level, the municipality of Colwood understands ‘place’ on a variety of scales within and beyond the local context, incorporating the land use, relevant policies and stakeholder priorities. While differentiating narratives and

conceptualizations of 'place' are evident and pose decision-making challenges, opportunities exist in potential tools that highlight or facilitate values which benefit the area, as well as the potential for collaboration between the municipality and other stakeholder groups.

Emily Carr had a strong connection to the lagoon and was one of the first of many visual artists to be moved by the beauty and ecology of the area and communicate it through creative expression. Today, the Coast Collective artists not only establish connections and values to this legacy of creating art at the lagoon, but they also strive to become stewards of the land. Due to their underlying goals of preserving the area and potential for highlighting aspects of place through art, the Coast Collective is a significant stakeholder for the areas within the Lagoon.

Evidence of the Lekwungen people at the Esquimalt Lagoon tells us that they inhabited this place over 3000 years ago. They lived in villages, harvesting fish, shellfish, and camas, as many First Peoples did, but most importantly, they shaped their lives around the lagoon. They lived in the area for many generations, performing different cultural ceremonies, burying their loved ones there and learning to adapt to different environmental conditions with movement and new technologies. These events have helped to create a sense of place for the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations as well as any others who take the time to acknowledge the presence of Lekwungen culture there.

These stories, tools, and challenges are all aspects of "place-making" at the Esquimalt Lagoon. The stories weave together into multiple narratives that provide description and meaning, and influence how we experience a place. By understanding the various narratives and potential tools which can be utilized to highlight meaningful places, decision-makers can help to facilitate values and practises that preserve and protect these areas.

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Wiens, Mya, W. (2011). *Imagining Possibilities for Shared Place: Sense of Place Investigations into Local Connections and Visions for the Common Ground Land on Tunnel Island, Kenora, Ontario*.

APPENDIX A

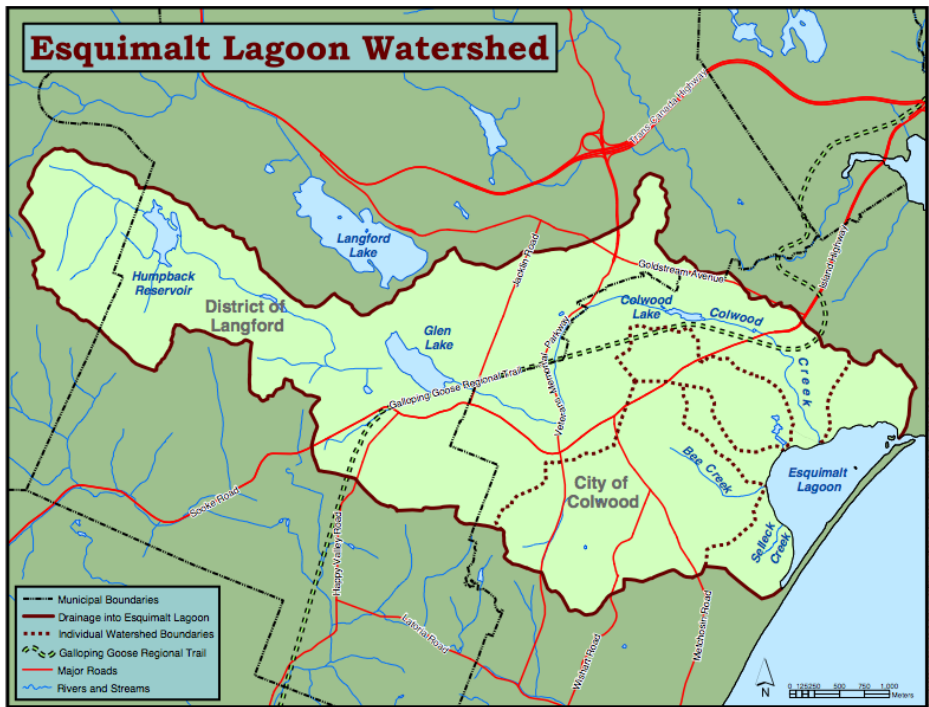


Figure 1 Map of the Esquimalt Lagoon Watershed (ELSI, 2013)

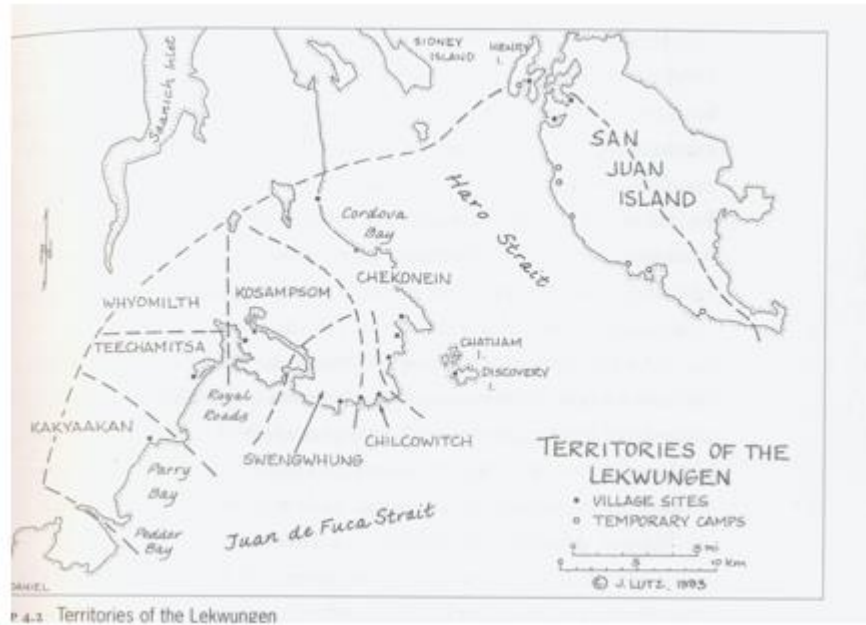


Figure 2 Lekwungen Territories (Lutz, 2008)

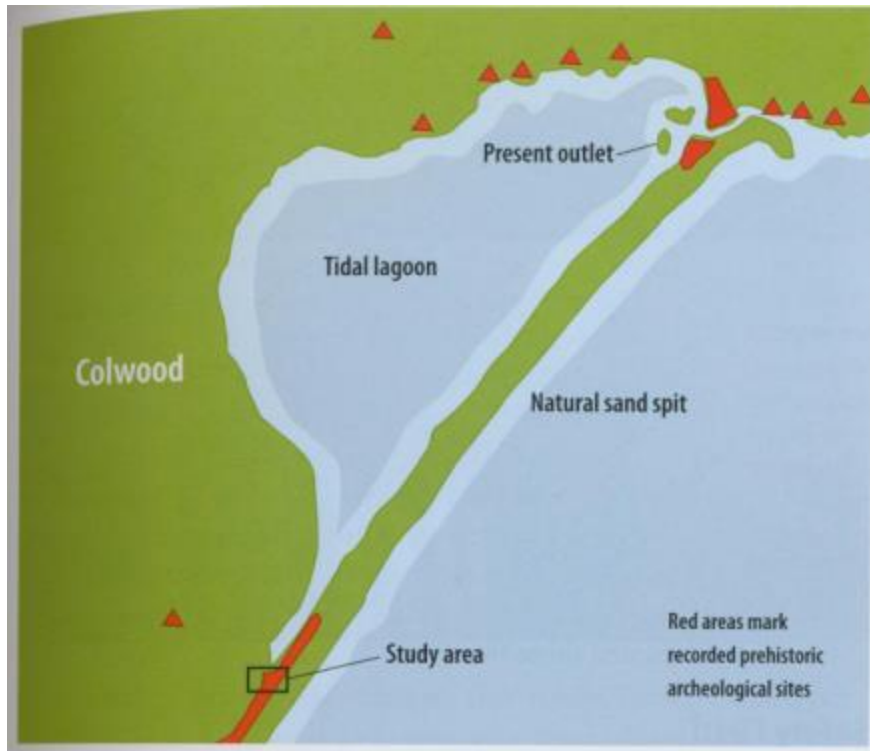


Figure 3 The Archeological wet site at the southwest end of the Esquimalt Lagoon (Clark et al., 2008)



Figure 4 Interpretive Sign by Darlene Gait to indicate the traditional territory of the Esquimalt and Songhees Nation (ELSI, 2011)