



Islands Trust Conservancy's Species at Risk Speaker Series

“P’hwulhp (Garry Oak) Meadows: Understanding a Living Cultural Landscape” with Maiya Modeste

Coastal Oak Meadow Gulf Islands
Photo: Shanna Baker © Hakai Magazine



Western Screech-Owl © R. Ferguson



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Little Brown Myotis © J.N.Stuart



Rigid Apple Moss © T. McIntosh

Species At Risk Program



SCAN ME

<https://islandstrust.bc.ca/conservancy/species-at-risk/>



Yellow Montane Violet © L. Matthias



Zerene Fritillary © L. Matthias



Sharp-tailed Snake © L. Matthias

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Environment and
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Today's Speaker is...

Maiya Modeste
P'hwulhp (Garry Oak)
Restoration Coordinator



Maiya tending P'hwulhp (Garry Oak) habitat
© Stqeeeye' Learning Society



Stqeeeye'
Learning Society



A photograph of a lush meadow with large, moss-covered trees. In the foreground, a person wearing a red shirt and a traditional woven hat is crouching in the grass, seemingly foraging. Another person is partially visible in the background near the base of a tree. The scene is bathed in natural light, with dappled shadows on the ground.

P'hwulhp Meadows

Understanding a living cultural landscape

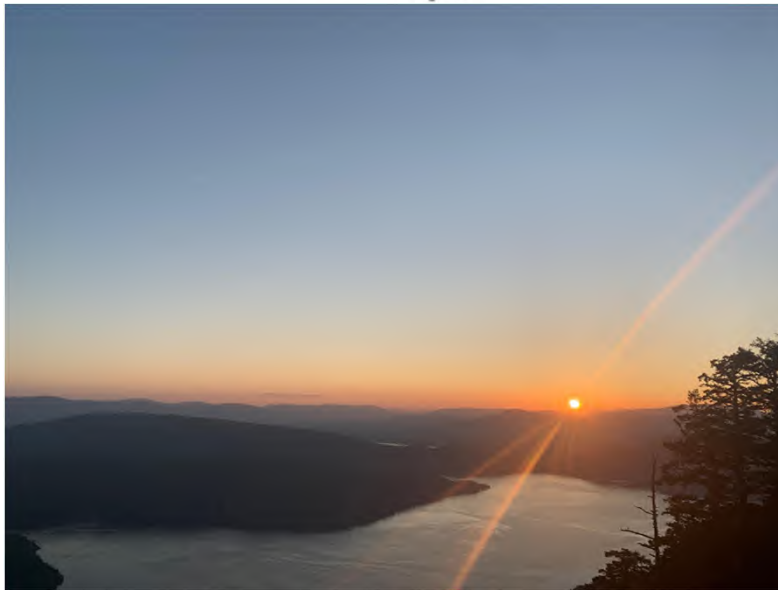


Stqeeye' Learning Society

PO Box 407, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2W1

www.xwaaqwum.com or www.stqeeye.ca

778-901-2302



Introduction

Cultural significance of Garry Oak and associated ecosystems to Quw'utsun Mustimuhw

01

FOOD
SOVREIGNTY:
-HUNTING
-HARVESTING



02

POLITICS:
-WHOSE LAND
IS IT ANYWAY?



03

ECONOMY:
-CAMAS AS
CURRENCY



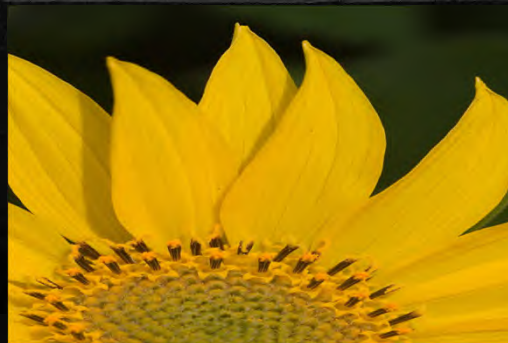
P'hwulhp meadows: Food sovereignty

Deltoid Balsamroot



- ◆ Garry Oak ecosystems have provided Quw'utsun peoples and neighbouring communities food and medicine for thousands of years
- ◆ These meadows have been harvesting and hunting sites for many generations and the reason for this being: Garry Oak ecosystems are the most biodiverse in all of Canada. A variety of food sources were available to the Quw'utsun peoples through these ecosystems
- ◆ A few examples of this include: Deltoid Balsamroot, Chocolate Lily, Acorns, Hookers onion, Nodding onion, and most importantly Camas

Staple foods of Quw'utsun



Food Sovereignty continued

- ◆ Hunting in Garry Oak ecosystems meant a guaranteed meal for you and your family
- ◆ Due to the practice of traditionally burning the meadow to promote regrowth, the canopy of Garry Oak Meadows remained open, and this is ideal for hunting deer
- ◆ The young, fit hunters would travel far up the mountains to places the more elderly, less fit hunters could not go. This was the practice of the day to ensure the whole communities needs were met and everyone got what they needed
- ◆ Today, the lack of hunting and predation has created a hyperabundant deer population that is negatively affecting species at risk, so much so that there are species that choose to dwarf themselves to not be browsed by deer
- ◆ On Salt Spring Island we have 10 times the deer population we should





Camas Meadows are a product of first nations agriculture

- ◆ Many people believe that First nations people did not have agricultural practice, that we were strictly hunters and gathers that we did not cultivate our land.
- ◆ This is simply not true we have highly developed practices of agriculture that worked with the land instead of against it
- ◆ For example:
 - ◆ Low intensity burns to maintain the open canopy
 - ◆ Soil remediation
 - ◆ Mutualistic relationship with skwelx's
 - ◆ Knowledge of companion plants
 - ◆ Spirituality
 - ◆ Specialized tools for digging and harvesting

Painting by Briony Penn



Can Camas be political?

- ◆ Yes, the ownership and caretaking of specific camas fields were the responsibility of certain families, not all camas meadows had open access for community members to harvest from
- ◆ Camas fields were primarily taken care of by women, this was their livelihood. It was the responsibility of women to take care of the camas fields and the responsibility of men to cook.
- ◆ According to Nancy Turner, the estimation of camas consumption was approximately 1.0-2.3 million pounds per 1000 people. According to oral history, at one time, there was approximately 10,000-15,000 Cowichan peoples so you can imagine the extent of camas and Garry oak ecosystems in our territory prior to contact.

The politics of camas cont'd

- ◆ In Quw'utsun history and teachings, women have been highly regarded and were given many decision-making roles in our society and we were seen as equals, unlike the patriarchal world we live in today.
- ◆ That-being-said, as women's camas fields were being destroyed, along with their livelihoods, and their rights, Quw'utsun women were given no option but to rely on the western world.
- ◆ The destruction of camas and Garry Oak meadows disabled women from making a living for themselves, no camas for trade, no camas for food so what would you do?



The politics of Camas Continued

Camas bulbs



- ◆ In Quw'utsun teachings it is known that you are not rich by how much you can accumulate but how much you can give away
- ◆ Certain families and chiefs would prepare, harvest and store foods for community members in need- it was known that a person or family in need could take what they require from the food storage
- ◆ These families are known as Siem meaning highly respected and regarded or stsi'elth meaning both arms come from chiefs and as such can provide for the village
- ◆ That to say, if your family had a large camas meadow and could feed people outside of your family, you were highly regarded in the community and were seen as "rich"

Camas as a trade commodity

- ◆ Camas blooms occur in mid May, in fact, the month of May in hul'q'umi'num is Punhwe'num which translates to "when the camas blooms"
- ◆ Following the camas harvest, the women would use vats across two canoes to transport vast quantities of camas to the Fraser river trade corridor and there the camas would be traded for obsidian, mountain goat wool and other trade commodities that were not available in our territory
- ◆ Camas was not only an important food source for Quw'utsun women but speenhw meadows were integral for trading and survival



The importance of understanding Species at risk while also honouring indigenous ecological knowledge

- ◆ Garry Oak ecosystems are full of species at risk and most of these species happen to be staple foods for many nations.
- ◆ To me, this is no coincidence, the degradation of Garry Oak ecosystems and all indigenous food systems have played a big role in the assimilation and genocide of First Nations people.
- ◆ Not only has the loss of Garry Oak meadows contributed to assimilation, presently the loss of staple foods is contributing to many diseases associated with food that is in the western diet such as diabetes, cancer, gout, heart disease etc.
- ◆ This is why restoration and indigenous-led conservation of these beautiful ecosystems are of high importance

Questions & Demo

Please place your questions in the chat!

kwetlal (Camas) & KEXMIN (Bare-
stem Desert Parsley)
© Wendy Tyrrell



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Please complete our survey
when you leave!

More Questions? Contact – Wendy Tyrrell
sar@islandstrust.bc.ca

Thank you!!

Fawn Lily © W. Tyrrell