

Ethnohistory Field School Report

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“We Have to Take Care of What We Have”: Skowkale, Hatcheries, and the Processes of Grappling with the Future Among the Stó:lō

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This, ultimately, is a story of hope. The mighty Fraser River was once a wellspring of seemingly endless salmon populations. For centuries countless spawning fish made the arduous journey from the ocean, into the mouth of the muddy aquatic highway, up into the canyon and repopulated the next generation of sockeye, chinook, and other salmon species. Over the past two hundred years the number of salmon in British Columbia rivers has drastically declined, and the blame game is a frequent pastime of those affected by this reality. This paper aims to move beyond mere fault-finding to examine one community's effort to restore both the salmon to the river and re-inscribe the knowledge of the salmon and their need for care for both settler and Indigenous youth alike. The Skowkale Hatchery, located within the urban confines of Chilliwack, British Columbia on the banks of the Little Chilliwack stream operates as an Indigenous component of the federal Salmonid Enhancement Program (SEP) which has remained afloat for forty-one years on the efforts of volunteers, a tight-knit community, and an unwavering determination to "take care of what we have."¹ The hatchery goes far beyond the realm of restocking fish into the rivers and instead employs long-standing Stó:lō interpretations of identity and responsibility. Through concepts such as *Tomiyeqw* (accounting for the interests of seven generations past and seven generations forward for the Stó:lō), education, and history, the operations at Skowkale transcend a mere scientific facility like other hatcheries in the lower mainland. Through the turbulence of the past four decades, Skowkale has come to represent the spirit of the Stó:lō its founders have too much humility to admit.

In May, 2019, I was fortunate to be welcomed into the Stó:lō world for an intensive month of knowledge building, hospitality, and incredible experiences. As a full-fledged

¹ Interview with Harold Archie at the Skowkale Hatchery by Harris Ford and Allison Eccleston, May 16, 2019.

Xwelitem (“hungry person” in Halkomelem, the Stó:lō language) for knowledge, experiences, and a myriad of ways of preparing salmon, I was amazed at the simultaneous complexity and simplicity of this beautiful place. Throughout the month I was gifted with knowledge not only of salmon hatcheries and Stó:lō culture, but a more general realization of life as well. What follows is a product of this remarkable month, and is a reflection of the generous and infectious drive encountered far from home. Centered around the methodology referred to as the ‘New Ethnohistory’, this paper builds off of the remarkable people who shared knowledge for this project, and who illuminated a fascinating story to me. It will utilize the concept of Stó:lō identity as described by Keith Carlson as well as the framework of Tomiyeqw, a central teaching of the Stó:lō Elders, to showcase how the hatchery transcends a mere action of placing fish into a little creek and instead enters the heart of an Indigenous ideology and an important Indigenous identity.

Historical Salmon Depletion

Depleted salmon populations are a relatively new phenomenon when considering the status of Stó:lō time along the Fraser River. Alexander Mackenzie was one of the first Europeans to comment on the state of salmon in the Fraser in 1793 by stating the salmon were swimming in schools large enough that it was a wonder the water was not solely comprised of fish fins.² Yet, a mere hundred years after Mackenzie’s comments of abundance, “fish science” had vacated the realm of experimentation and instead entered into the annals of expectation.³

² John Francis Roos, *Restoring Fraser River Salmon: A History of the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission, 1937-1985* (Vancouver: Pacific Salmon Commission, 1991): 5.

³ Joseph E. Taylor III, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001): 83.

British Columbia, and the wider world more generally, had entered into a known, problematic reality where a once endless resource was now on the precipice of being unintentionally eradicated. Writing in 1982, the large-scale Pearse Report for the Canadian government notes how the population of salmon in the Fraser has been cut in half from the 1894-1913 period, with a myriad of environmental changes cited as the cause, both human-caused and natural.⁴ With fish biologists cynically “looking for scapegoats at the hour of disenchantment,” the rhetoric surrounding the future of salmon in the Fraser and its side rivers has been bleak for a number of years and in desperate need of rejuvenation.⁵

One of these natural-cum-synthetic scientific salmon laboratories would be the hatchery; this human aided process of nurturing salmon from egg to fry and releasing the young fish into the water to mitigate the tide of turmoil. Begun in the 1874, hatcheries have been a staple of scientific conservation efforts since 1950.⁶ By 1885 there were fishery guardians on the Fraser ensuring salmon were being caught respectfully and also doubling as agents for the prosperity of early incarnations of enhancement facilities.⁷ These guardians were instructed to police non-Indigenous fishing as well as corral the weirs and river fishing of the Stó:lō as well.⁸ The peak of hatcheries would be in 1988, where 420 million smolts, fry, and fingerling-stage salmon were released around the world, which was a 700% increase in forty

⁴ Peter H. Pearse, *Turning the Tide: A New Policy for Canada's Pacific Fisheries*, *The Commission on Pacific Fisheries Policy Final Report* (Vancouver: Government of Canada, 1982): 13-14

⁵ Matthew E. Evenden, *Fish Versus Power* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2004): 231.

⁶ Conrad Mahnken et al, “A Historical Perspective on Salmonid Production from Pacific Rim Hatcheries,” *NPAFC Bulletin* No. 1 (1998): 38, and Dianne Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993): 52.

⁷ Douglas C. Harris, *Fish, Law, and Colonialism: The Legal Capture of Salmon in British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001): 61.

⁸ Ibid..

years.⁹ Hatcheries then have a history, both in British Columbia and in other coastal regions around the world. This is not merely a Stó:lō story. It is within the Stó:lō context that the narrative of hatcheries comes into full focus given the necessity of salmon in identity for Skowkale and Stó:lō.

The Stó:lō story regarding salmon is entangled in a problematic yet predictable story of colonialism. What began as a resource that, for the Sto:lo “was our civilization,” soon became a mere economic resource for the insatiable appetite of settler society.¹⁰ From shipments of salmon to Hawaii by the Hudson’s Bay Company, ecological damage from the 1885 and 1913 construction of national railways, overharvesting at the introduction of canneries, and various laws policing the rights of Stó:lō fishers access to fish, there has been an intentional wedge driven between the Stó:lō and the resource of the ancestors.¹¹ Despite all these factors, the Stó:lō are hardly the principle contributors to the demise of salmon populations. Today, over ninety percent of the salmon caught in the Pacific and connected waters are taken by commercial vessels, both domestic and international.¹² While the history of broader fisheries policies is an important aspect in the state of salmon along the British Columbia coast, this essay will not be muddled in the game of blaming various parties deserving of criticism. Instead, the efforts of the Stó:lō, primarily the Skowkale band, will be shown in an attempt to understand the motivation behind a homegrown resistance to a perceived inevitability. This

⁹ Mahnken et al, 41.

¹⁰ Ernie Crey, “Address to the Lower Fraser Aboriginal Fisheries,” (November 7, 1993): 2. Stó:lō Nation Archives.

¹¹ Crey, 2-4.

¹² Paul Sproat, “Management Issues and Quotas in the Salmon Fishery of British Columbia,” *Fraser Institute* (1997): 18.

essay will also serve as a glimpse into a remarkable story of unfettered hope and a desire to see future generations thrive under the same conditions as their ancestors had.

Skowkale and the Hatchery

Sq'ewqéyl (anglicized as Skowkale) is an urban Stó:lō band located within the city of Chilliwack, British Columbia. Translated from Halkomelem as “going around a turn,” there is a linguistic link between river life and the location of the Skowkale band.¹³ The original Skowkale band was set to receive over 2,500 acres of land in 1864 from the Crown negotiations, yet crown surveyor Joseph Trutch would retract this promise without community consultation or any Indigenous input to give Skowkale less than a quarter section of land (156 acres in total) along the Little Chilliwack River, a tributary of the Fraser.¹⁴ This reduction in 1867 was fuelled largely by racism, yet the ethical argument made by the colonial forces was due to the Stó:lō being a fishing people.¹⁵ As the Little Chilliwack dried up following the colonial government’s diversion of the river into the Vedder and the fish gradually declined in the 1950s, it “changed the way our life was,” in the words of former Chief of Skowkale and later Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia Steven Point.¹⁶ The colonial residue clings to this story with a particular potency, and the motives for the hatchery’s beginnings stem from a rekindling of what had been lost.

The recollections of the Elders, these deeply entrenched narratives of history, are important beyond the tales of fish. These *Sqwelqwels* (oral histories or ‘true news’), are the

¹³ “Skowkale Reserve Profile,” Unknown Author or Publication Date. Stó:lō Nation Archives.

¹⁴ “Stó:lō Reserve Profile: Skowkale,” *Stó:lō Nation News* (April-May, 1987): 10. Stó:lō Nation Archives.

¹⁵ “Skowkale Profile: ‘A New, Younger Generation...New Hope and a New Start,’ *Stó:lō Nation News* Vol. 14. No. 135 (June, 1989): 6. Stó:lō Nation Archives.

¹⁶ Interview with Steven Point at Coqualeetza by Harris Ford and Jenna Casey, May 24, 2019.

basis of motivation to keep salmon populations at the levels the ancestors benefitted from. This would not only be motivation for the present, but also well into the future. Harold Archie, a long-time volunteer and brother to one of the hatchery's founders, Sam Archie, stated how it was the "vision of the Elders to see the fish return to the system again."¹⁷ Steven Point also remembered how "there were lots of fish in there [the Little Chilliwack] when I was growing up...and we kept looking at it like what happened?"¹⁸ Salmon in the Little Chilliwack then were a remnant of the halcyon days, a memory rather than a reality.

The desire to see a change would come to fruition in 1978. The Salmonid Enhancement Program (SEP) was created in 1977 to, as its name indicates, restock BC's salmon population in a natural way.¹⁹ Local and grassroots projects were a key component of this program, which had seen predecessors of transplanted professionals flounder and fail to be the sole answer.²⁰ It was through this funding that Skowkale saw its hatchery begin. A collaborative effort of the Skowkale Band, the Rod and Gun Club, the City of Chilliwack, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the desire to clean up the creek that had become an unfortunate hub for silt and debris was enacted.²¹ Once this was completed to a satisfactory degree, there was little doubt as to where the remaining funds from the SEP were to be allocated. The band was adamant on bringing a hatchery to Skowkale, as both Elders and Chief and Council voiced

¹⁷ Interview with Harold Archie.

¹⁸ Interview with Steven Point.

¹⁹ Don D. MacKinley et al, "Pacific Salmon Hatcheries in British Columbia," *American Fisheries Society Symposium No. 44* (2004): 58.

²⁰ Ray Hilborn and John Winton, "Learning to Enhance Salmon Production: Lessons from the Salmonid Enhancement Program," *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* Vol. 50 (1993): 2044.

²¹ Interview with Steven Point.

strong support for the venture.²² From the perch of a dilapidated river, there was little to lose for Skowkale.

This is not to say the hatchery enjoyed a free ride into today. There were a host of individuals and groups who did not want the hatchery to succeed, seeing it as an unneeded form of Indigenous autonomy or a venture only for scientifically-trained professionals.²³ At its genesis the hatchery personnel underwent training at DFO-run hatcheries in Chilliwack, and returned with the knowledge of intricacies of taking an egg to the fry stage and ultimately to its release.²⁴ Despite the initial funding provided by the SEP, there was not an abundance of money floating around for those who devoted themselves to the hatcheries. “It seems to me we didn’t pay anybody,” Steven Point said with a laugh, a nod to the volunteerism which got the hatchery off the ground and continues to see the venture succeed.²⁵ Harold Archie, who has been at the center of the hatchery and has singlehandedly kept it from going belly up (though his humility would scoff at such a claim), cites the Elder’s message to him of the hatchery operating a key component of Skowkale’s identity and future as the motivation to continue working as tirelessly as he has.²⁶ This has been needed, as even with funding and local support for starting the hatchery and later for building new facilities, the hatchery has been anything but a guarantee in the forty-one years of its existence.

Annually, there will be seventy or eighty fish returning to the hatchery to spawn. This may seem to be a small number, but within the context is quite an incredible feat.²⁷ Fish have

²² Interview with Harold Archie.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Interview with Steven Point.

²⁵ Interview with Steven Point.

²⁶ Interview with Harold Archie.

²⁷ Interview with Steven Point.

always been at the front of the concern for Skowkale, but the enhancement facility has cast a much wider net into the world of conservation and of ensuring a habitable stream for these seventy or eighty salmon to return to. According to Harold Archie, “we cannot change the climate, but we can change our practices.”²⁸ Skowkale does not have a motto so far as I could tell, but this would succinctly describe what the overarching goals and mindset of the enhancement process. There is no hiding the realities, and no naivety towards the world and the trends shown. It is about shifting paradigms, reengaging with important knowledge of the ancestors, and creating a world for the future that people today can be proud to have contributed to.

Happenings at Hatcheries

Popular perceptions of a hatchery may trend towards a clinical, scientific laboratory in which fish are artificially created in an attempt to enhance a water body’s population. While there is truth to this, there is much more at play here, at Skowkale and beyond. It is a balance between anglers, environmentalists, biologists, nature, and Indigenous identities, not to mention the remembering and misremembering of histories.²⁹ Furthermore, the term “hatchery” is a catch-all term utilized for any effort resembling a restocking process, when a myriad of motivations and actions can take place under the auspices of such nomenclature.³⁰ Even with this, the knowledge of what does not work in salmon rearing is much more common than knowing what does indeed bring success.³¹ What is known is the process in which salmon

²⁸ Interview with Harold Archie.

²⁹ Taylor III, 4.

³⁰ Kerry A. Naish et al, “An Evaluation of the Effects of Conservation and Fishery Enhancement Hatcheries on Wild Populations of Salmon,” *Advanced Marine Biology* Vol . 53 (2007): 68.

³¹ Jeffrey J. Hard et al, “Pacific Salmon and Artificial Propagation Under the Endangered Species Act,” *NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-NWFSC-2* (October, 1992): 19.

reach adulthood. An egg is laid, which when fertilized goes through, in sequential order, the stages of alevin, fry, and smolts, and afterwards, with a little luck, into mature adult salmon.³² A hatchery then serves as a guided tour of this natural occurrence, adding the human hand with the hopes of elevating the number of fish reaching adulthood so they can have the opportunity to spawn themselves.

Naturally however, hatcheries are not natural. Anytime humans interject themselves into the natural realm, regardless of genuine intentions, there will be objections. The threat of the “technological fix syndrome” is something which must be considered now and moving forward as a warning of what meddling in nature can do to the psyche of humans with wonderful intentions.³³ Former Grand Chief for the Stó:lō Clarence Pennier was quick to caution that too many hatcheries dotting the landscape could be “used against us” by the government in an attempt to reject Stó:lō rights to fish.³⁴ Too many fish released into the waters could be misconstrued as a stacking of the deck, and lead to the notion of a non-existent abundance.³⁵ Pennier is still in favour of hatcheries, yet was sure to note how they could be as a weapon against Stó:lō claims to fish today and beyond.³⁶ Steven Point also voiced a slight hesitancy about hatcheries, despite his role in bringing it to Skowkale, musing how there is a notion of leaving things alone however tempting it may be to intervene.³⁷ From the outset Skowkale had much broader sights than releasing salmon into the river though. While production is sought after and coveted, the hatchery has been an educational and conservational project from the

³² Interview with Harold Archie.

³³ Ray Hilborn, “Hatcheries and the Future of Salmon in the Northwest,” *Fisheries* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1992): 7.

³⁴ Interview with Clarence Pennier at Coqualeetza by Harris Ford and Allison Eccleston, May 24, 2019.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Interview with Steven Point.

outset.³⁸ Remember the initial foray for this project was the cleaning of the river. This has continued to today, with stream cleaning, tree planting and insect analysis occupying volunteer time alongside the husbandry of brood stock.³⁹ It is a much more holistic enterprise, and should not be limited to a tunnel vision treatment.

I was also able to join in on a number of conversations with former members of the Lower Fraser Fishing Authority (LFFA), Stó:lō members who were enforcement officers on the Fraser in the 1990s. While certainly all had a vested interest in salmon and the protection of the species, not all had strong opinions on hatcheries. Shannon Adams, one of only two female LFFA officers, remembered working with hatcheries and moving salmon for them, commenting on how a partnership could be forged between enforcement and enhancement.⁴⁰ Wayne Kelly Jr, despite not being able to stand the smell or taste of fish, believes that hatcheries have a place into the future stating how the wild salmon and the hatchery salmon are all the same, still needing to go through the same life cycle.⁴¹ Both Shannon and Wayne were quick to differentiate between hatcheries and fish farms, with both vehemently against anything to do with salmon raised on the farms.⁴² Shannon and Wayne are both Stó:lō, and both have fish identities beyond their former careers. Shannon's work as an educator has brought her into a deeper realization of the need to inform the younger generations of Stó:lō on the importance of salmon.⁴³ Wayne also noted how education has to be a component of hatcheries, adding

³⁸ Interview with Harold Archie.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Interview with Shannon Adams at her home in Maple Ridge, British Columbia by Allison Eccleston and Harris Ford, May 27, 2019.

⁴¹ Interview with Wayne Kelly Jr. at Coqualeetza by Allison Eccleston and Harris Ford, May 23, 2019.

⁴² Ibid., and Interview with Shannon Adams.

⁴³ Interview with Shannon Adams.

soon after how the Sonar forecasts used to predict fish at Mission, BC are as accurate as the meteorological ones, stating “how often are the weather forecasts right?”⁴⁴ There is skepticism, and there is hope. The common emotional partnership the Stó:lō seem to have embraced for the future of fish.

There has been a fair bit of debate concerning the success of hatcheries and the place of the facilities moving forward. Rather than halting the decline, some claim the enhancement procedures have accelerated the demise of fish populations by introducing non-native species to the mix.⁴⁵ The Cohen Report, published in 2009 by the Canadian Government to comment on the state of Canadian salmon tables various pros and cons for human-run enhancement without settling on any concrete conclusions.⁴⁶ Hatcheries can also be seen as a way of further criticizing Indigenous populations, as European sciences are needed to make up for the recklessness shown by greedy Stó:lō fishers (a preposterous claim in every regard even if the timeline of decline is the only documentation cited).⁴⁷ Just as the decline of the salmon must be viewed as a process rather than an event, so too must the role of hatcheries in the reversal.⁴⁸ It has been noted that community-based projects generally function at a higher success rate than government or state-run ones.⁴⁹ The action of these enterprises is proactive rather than reactive.⁵⁰ Regardless of the community or state-based hatcheries, it was estimated early on in

⁴⁴ Interview with Wayne Kelly.

⁴⁵ Naish et al, 64.

⁴⁶ The Honorable Bruce I. Cohen, “Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River, Volume 1,” *Government Services Canada* (October, 2012): 328.

⁴⁷ Harris, 61.

⁴⁸ Taylor III, 4.

⁴⁹ Evelyn W. Pinkerton, “Local Fisheries Co-Management: A Review of International Experiences and Their Implications for Salmon Management in British Columbia,” *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* Vol. 51 (1994): 2366.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2367.

the SEP timeline in 1979 that 6% of the commercial fish catch were from enhancement facilities.⁵¹ This is not a paper arguing for or against hatcheries, yet it is important to understand the political climate Skowkale operates under as well as the environment. It does not reside in a vacuum, and as such has a slew of detractors within the broader picture of salmon populations and the role of enhancement in reinstating a once prosperous population.

The majority of enhancement facilities in the lower mainland of British Columbia are run by DFO, or have a settler, non-Stó:lō hand in management. While Skowkale could not exist without the funding from various settler sources, it is the only Indigenous-run hatchery in the lower mainland, a point of pride for Skowkale band members.⁵² Steven Point fondly recalled workers having jackets that said “Skowkale Hatchery” at one point, and how they could walk around Chilliwack as a kind of human advertisement of what was happening on the reserve.⁵³ Harold Archie stated with a grin that “we are a small band, but we are very resourceful at getting things done.”⁵⁴ While speaking with those directly involved with Skowkale I got the impression of a reverberating stubbornness keeping the facility on the map. As the years continued and the practices at Skowkale were enhanced, the band gained a reputation in Stó:lō territory as a determined player in the game of salmon politics. From the outset this little swathe of territory has latched onto an identity centered around the little unassuming building off Knight Road.

⁵¹ Hilborn and Wilton, 2047.

⁵² Interview with Harold Archie.

⁵³ Interview with Steven Point.

⁵⁴ Interview with Harold Archie.

Identity and Conservation

For the Stó:lō, both personal and community worth is inseparable from historical knowledge. A worthless person is someone who has lost their history and cannot relate to the ancestors.⁵⁵ While this is commonly utilized in a genealogical context, history more broadly holds an irreplaceable spot within the Stó:lō paradigm. As both Harold Archie and Steven Point stated, the drive for Skowkale rested and continues to rest with the words of the Elders and memories of a time when salmon were plentiful. A worthless person in the Stó:lō paradigm would be content with the state of the river and continuing a life growing ever-distant from the predecessors. Skowkale then is at the vanguard of protecting the history and ways of the Elders so valuable for wider Stó:lō perceptions of identity. This conservational exercise is not something begrudgingly undertaken for the sake of keeping hands busy; instead, it is further problematizing the non-binary greyness colonialism has sculpted and taking affirmative action to not go gently into that good night.⁵⁶ Identities are a complex network of varying elements harmoniously combined into a cohesive form presented not as a combination of separates but as a collection of togethers. As this section will show, hatcheries serve as a manifestation of not only a desire to see salmon return to tributaries of the Fraser, but also as a restocking of an identity deeply connected to the places called home.

There are three sets of identity at play here. The first and likely more easily comprehended from a western lens is the identity of a hatchery. For Skowkale specifically, this

⁵⁵ Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, The Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010): 136.

⁵⁶ Carlson, 189.

is the notion of “doing our bit,” of not being satisfied with seeing a continuation of decline.⁵⁷ In the late 1970s, the Elders of Skowkale stood up to the difficulties surrounding the building and maintenance of the hatchery stating “we’ll do anything to keep it here.”⁵⁸ This may seem to be a statement in hindsight, a prediction that would be lost to the annals of misremembrance had the facility met a more unfortunate fate. Yet such hypotheses fall short of the Skowkale Band’s determination. Identity is not static in any regard, let alone in its enactment. There have been many times when the enhancement facility could have closed the garage doors for the last time and no one with a shred of sanity would have questioned the decision.⁵⁹ With relatively small funding, scarce returns, and pure voluntarily employment, Skowkale has had no business in staying afloat for forty-one years. Yet it has. As Harold Archie told me with a wide smile “I love it here, otherwise you wouldn’t be here asking me questions.”⁶⁰ Steven Point echoed this by stating “he [Harold] loves it, and God bless him.”⁶¹ The determination of the founders—people such as Sam Archie, Dave Sepass, and Steven Point—all show an undeniable link between Skowkale and the dilapidated stream that was present in the late 1970s. Many aspects drove the founders of the hatchery into action, and the identity of Skowkale cannot be omitted from this list.

This is not an accident, or something stumbled upon merely by waking up and raising baby fish. It is something woven into the essence of this small band tucked into the southwest corner of Canada, something handed down through countless generations of history and

⁵⁷ Interview with Steven Point.

⁵⁸ Interview with Harold Archie.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Interview with Steven Point.

ancestors who have lived off the river. Stó:lō means river. Fish are a part of the Stó:lō lexicon and contribute a crucial facet of the Skowkale identity. As Keith Carlson's book title indicates, there is power in the places people call home.⁶² The Fraser is a "river of rivers," and the Stó:lō are a "tribe of tribes."⁶³ This points to John Lutz's assertion that identity is malleable and is scattered with contradictions wherever one looks.⁶⁴ Stó:lō identity within the broader Coast Salish and Indigenous identity is complex, ever-changing, and can form different shapes for different contexts. What is important is to not be bogged down by what may appear to outsider eyes as confusion, but rather relish in the opportunity it presents to expand understandings of what identity can consist of. Hatcheries may seem a long way away from this abstract discussion of identities and the human mind, but enhancement facilities are just one expression of this matryoshka. This is an identity rooted in the river because that is the place where the Stó:lō call home, the geographic center these ideas reside in. People are transient, moving from the living to the eternal, yet the land remains. For the Stó:lō, this land is the precious gift received from the ancestors, and will be the remnants of this generation for millennia to come. Suddenly, tying identity to the land is not so absurd.

Finally, Stó:lō identity can and must be viewed through the wider lens of Indigeneity. Often this is misconstrued as the effects of colonialism, but by shifting the rhetoric European settlers dwindle in agency while the Indigenous fill the vacuum history is so hesitant to create. Skowkale is the only Indigenous-run hatchery by the Stó:lō. This is quite the source of pride for

⁶² Carlson, Title.

⁶³ Carlson, 40.

⁶⁴ John Sutton Lutz, *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009): 26.

those who have devoted time and effort into the project.⁶⁵ It is not a gloating endeavour, a look-at-us venture, but rather a testament to the abilities of the Stó:lō, to the determination of Skowkale to do what other Indigenous groups have not been able to for various reasons. Not every band has access to funds for a hatchery, nor are salmon the top priority if finances become available. It is important to place Skowkale within the broader landscape of Indigeneity, panning out from the Stó:lō and the Coast Salish, even transcending the constructed borders of Canada. These are a people who care, who have taken on a role with hope in the heart. It is the work in their minds. As the game of finger pointing reached a fever pitch, Skowkale represented a small counter. Unsurprisingly there was an abundance of bad press coming the way of the Stó:lō for the fish crisis as images of dip nets and full dry racks up in the canyon painted a monolithic picture in the minds of those who wished to find a simple solution. The hatchery served as an opposition to this dialogue. Even if the papers aren't overflowing with mentions (*The Chilliwack Progress* has up to this point mentioned the hatchery seven times), it was good press.⁶⁶ It was a way to publicly announce a deep caring to the wider world already well known within Stó:lō circles. It is from this position that Skowkale continues to operate; part enhancement facility, part conversation site, part educational facility, and identity demarcation. Hard to fathom all that being bound by a single building, but it resides in the souls of people and communities long before it is ever manifested in physical form. Hope is as powerful as place.

⁶⁵ Interview with Harold Archie.

⁶⁶ Interview with Steven Point.

Tomiyeqw and Education

Earlier in this paper I stated how the Stó:lō position in regards to salmon was a balance of skepticism and hope. This is the portion of the narrative where the former gives way to the latter, and I suspect is the closest thing to an elixir there could ever be in this situation. Kat Pennier casually mentioned the concept of Tomiyeqw, the Halkomelem word for seven generations in the past and seven generations in the future, as a way to view the importance of salmon for the Stó:lō identity and culture.⁶⁷ In my ignorance of Halkomelem and specific Stó:lō ideologies I had yet to encounter such a concept, but after conversing with him I buried my nose into a series of books and suddenly had this paper unfold before me. The simplistic beauty of the concept is unfortunately unheard-of in the Western paradigm, but is a governing principle for the Stó:lō, a “touchstone” of conduct in terms of conservation and preservation.⁶⁸

Tomiyeqw functions as a kind of symbiosis of generational gaps, eroding the temporal realm for one of greater connection. From great grandparents and great grandchildren (*Sts'o:mqw*) to great, great, great, great grandparents *and* great, great, great, great grandchildren (Tomiyeqw) and every generational set in between, the words for both ends of the genealogical spectrum are identical.⁶⁹ Alternatively known as seven generations forward, seven generations back, Tomiyeqw is as much of a philosophical piece as it is a use of nomenclature. The connection forged by these identical terms is not an accident; it is a way of thinking that grounds what would otherwise be distant ancestors and future humans in the actions of the present. This connection is the responsibility of the present generation, of those

⁶⁷ Interview with Cat Pennier.

⁶⁸ Interview with Steven Point.

⁶⁹ Keith Carlson et al, ed., *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001): 29.

who are living off the gift the ancestors generously gave and creating the lands to be passed along to the generations down the line.⁷⁰ It is a tremendous responsibility with the both sides of the temporal realm weighing down on the decisions made now. A responsibility, and a wonderful opportunity.

Coupled with this concept of Tomiyeqw is education, of informing young Stó:lō and settlers of why people should care about the salmon situation in the Fraser and its tributaries. It is through education that emotional investment in the cause can be fostered, and a connection with the ancestors can be realized as multiple facets of life work to draw young Stó:lō women and men away from the ways of the Elders. Education and Tomiyeqw are a formidable tandem in the quest to enhance the salmon population in the past, the present, and most certainly into the future.

To understand Tomiyeqw in the context of Skowkale, one must look towards the intensive commitment to education the hatchery participates in. Through a partnership with School District #33 in Chilliwack there is a steady stream of students who come to the hatchery once a week to participate in various tasks such as checking the eggs, planting eggs, cleaning the Little Chilliwack, busting beaver dams, or any other jobs in and around the hatchery for its prosperity.⁷¹ It is a way for students to not only get outside and participate in active learning, but also to grow an appreciation and understanding of the importance and complexity of salmon rearing.⁷²

⁷⁰ Dillon Consulting Limited, “Sema:th Land Use Plan,” (October 31, 2013): 1.

⁷¹ Interview with Harold Archie.

⁷² Ibid.

One of the teachers instrumental with bringing students to Skowkale is Rob MacVicar, who teaches at the Ed Center in Chilliwack. Rob stated how he and the students do an array of activities while at the hatchery, from participating in the egg take through the stages of salmon husbandry, feeding the fish, stream walks to patrol the health of the waterway, plant plantings, and many more.⁷³ As Rob spoke I couldn't help but notice the ease at which he explained the processes at the hatchery. I met him while dropping into Skowkale to speak with Harold, and Rob had to put down his shovel from digging holes for trees to speak with me. He cares about this hatchery and fully understands the educational potential it holds. If his students can soak up a percentage of his drive and admiration for the site then there will be a whole host of young women and men with greater ecological wisdom. Rob's work started in 2007 and he has been going to the hatchery almost every week for those twelve years.⁷⁴ As a non-Stó:lō educator, the hatchery for him is a microcosm of the kinds of efforts that should be prevalent around the province and the country.

A second key educator in Skowkale's longevity is Brenda Point, the Aboriginal Contact and District Vice Principal for Chilliwack School District #33, along with being a Skowkale resident. Brenda commented on the logistics of getting students out to the hatchery from various locations around Chilliwack and how it would be easy to cast the opportunity aside due to a myriad of roadblocks.⁷⁵ No sooner had she mentioned the difficulties did Brenda illuminate the creative ways funding can be used and the determination of the school district to get

⁷³ Interview with Rob MacVicar at the Ed Center in Chilliwack, British Columbia by Harris Ford and Allison Eccleston, May 28, 2019.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Interview with Brenda Point at the Chilliwack School District #33 Office in Chilliwack, British Columbia by Harris Ford and Karen Wagner, May 29, 2019.

students out for the outdoor learning opportunity.⁷⁶ Buses can be arranged, routes altered to stop at a number of schools, and applications for grants to continue this work as just a few examples of this determination.⁷⁷ This is a sentiment echoed in the overall determination of Skowkale, this notion of “no, we’re going to get it done.”⁷⁸ The hatchery could have folded up numerous times and no one with a sane eye for business would have been surprised. Yet here it is, still releasing salmon into the Little Chilliwack, still keeping the surrounding environment as healthy and prosperous as possible, still serving as an extended classroom for students to learn outside of the conventional means.

What is important to remember is the holistic nature of the student’s activities at Skowkale. *The Chilliwack Progress*, the city’s main paper, claimed in 2007 how the hatchery provided “numerous opportunities” for students beyond work with fish.⁷⁹ Standing for the Skowkale Hatchery Revitalization and Education Project, SHREP would gift the enhancement facility more time in the news and in the public eye in 2007 as a new facility was being built. From the outset, the plan for this new building (the one currently standing) was to enhance not only the capacity for the salmon, but also to include educational spaces and making Skowkale hatchery a more educationally-focused facility.⁸⁰ There are also plans on the table for a number of years to have an interpretive center on site which has yet to be realized.⁸¹ While Skowkale has a long list of people to thank for its survival, educators such as Brenda and Rob, among many others, are an invaluable component of what makes the hatchery more than a place

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “SHREP: A ‘Tail’ Worth Telling,” *The Chilliwack Progress*, Tuesday September 25, 2007. Page 15.

⁸⁰ Jennifer Feinburg, “Hatchery About to get a Facelift,” *The Chilliwack Progress*, Tuesday April 24, 2007. Page 3.

⁸¹ Interview with Harold Archie.

where eggs are watched over and small fish released; it is also a place for intergenerational knowledge to be passed down, for students to benefit from a unique and varied learning technique, and for the Stó:lō to educate Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike on the subtle beauties and deep importance of this facet of culture.

The culminating moment of Skowkale's yearly fish season occurs on Earth Day, April 22nd. It is on this day that the year's salmon stock is released into the Little Chilliwack and is celebrated on the global day of environmental awareness. This is no accident. The brainchild of this was Joe Kambeitz, who at the time was the Fisheries Advisor for Skowkale.⁸² Since 1991, the hatchery has invited the public to come and send the young salmon off on the arduous journey of life. People have come to the hatchery ever since to see the fish being released into the stream, primarily by the youngsters at the Chilliwack Landing Preschool.⁸³ The *Sqwelqwels Ye Stó:lō* publications note on numerous occasions how the Earth Day proceedings transpired, showcasing photos and a brief write up on the importance of salmon to the Earth Day agenda as well as promoting the hatchery and its work in the field.⁸⁴ Harold is honest that only one to three percent of the released fish will ever return to respawn from the over ten thousand released on a given year.⁸⁵ He tells the preschoolers, students, and guests throughout the year and on Earth Day of the natural dangers salmon face in the wild, how the environment is not kind to the fish, and how the hatchery is merely a small portion of enhancement for this vital

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Skowkale First Nation Hatchery 25th Anniversary," *Sqwelqwels Ye Stó:lō* (June, 2003): Page 17. Stó:lō Nation Archives.

⁸⁴ "Celebrating Earth Day at Skowkale Hatchery," *Sqwelqwels Ye Stó:lō* (May, 2005): Page 17. Stó:lō Nation Archives.

⁸⁵ Interview with Harold Archie.

resource.⁸⁶ Seventy or eighty fish will return in a year to a tributary that did not have any fish in it forty years ago when the hatchery began.⁸⁷ People who care deserve to hear the realities, even if it is not something particularly pleasant to hear. If one looks to the big picture and the continued bleakness of the salmon population in British Columbia and around the world, then the efforts seem to be a paltry effort. But when one takes Skowkale for what it is—a dedicated band with volunteers' hearts bigger than anyone can imagine, doing a part in the daunting task of restocking the Fraser River and its tributaries with a crucial resource—then the hatchery has been a resounding success. And this is the case; otherwise this would not be a narrative of hope.

Earth Day celebrations at Skowkale are also the ultimate realization of Tomiyeqw in the context of salmon enhancement. It is an opportunity for the younger generation to become acquainted with the realities facing the salmon population and the problems that will govern the lives they live. It is also an opportunity to learn about the importance of salmon for the Stó:lō and to build up the passion to continue the cause Skowkale has worked towards for nearly half a century. Both Rob MacVicar and Brenda Point spoke of the April 22nd celebrations and how important a day it is to raise public awareness for the hatchery and the broader work it does in the Stó:lō community.⁸⁸ Steven Point stated how even the knowledge of the hatchery will change the attitudes of future generations and show that people care about the future, a future they will not see but will contribute to through Tomiyeqw.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Interview with Steven Point.

⁸⁸ Interview with Brenda Point; and Interview with Rob MacVicar.

⁸⁹ Interview with Steven Point.

Throughout the conversation I had with Harold Archie his eyes lit up anytime he talked about the students; the future of not only Skowkale but the future of the Stó:lō, of British Columbia, and the world.⁹⁰ It is this optimism that is so infectious, and its pervasiveness among the folks who are closest to the hatchery bodes well for its future. As the hatchery simultaneously looks back for advice and forward for motivation, it is the actions of the present moving Tomiyeqw along to the next generation, and the generation after that. There will always be learning, and always the opportunity to take the work higher. It is a laudable aspiration, and one that the Skowkale hatchery performs admirably.

The Future of Skowkale Hatchery

I was tasked with writing a history of Skowkale's hatchery, yet not touching upon the future of the facility would be a glaring omission to the narrative. From the outset the two have been linked with an undeniable intensity. If the future was not a consideration, then the hatchery would not have survived as long as it has. Instead, with a gaze firmly fixed on the future and guided by the past, the present serves as a place where the two harmoniously meet; a place where the disappointment in the lack of natural resources is met with the hope of a return not for today, but in the years to come. Seven generations ahead in fact.

There are questions as to the future of the hatchery and who in the next generation will undertake the multitude of tasks associated with Skowkale. Brenda Point said there was no succession plan in place for when Harold Archie retires from his intensive volunteer work.⁹¹ Harold himself lamented the day when he would have to leave his current role, reminiscing

⁹⁰ Interview with Harold Archie.

⁹¹ Interview with Brenda Point.

fondly of the late night alarms which beckoned him to save the fish and the time spent teaching students about the specifics of salmon raising along with the overall care and respect for the natural surroundings.⁹² When asked if he had any advice for his successor, Harold said without a moment's hesitation "I hope you love it as much as I do."⁹³ That is a tall order, but if Skowkale is able to find someone with the same passion, the same drive, and the same hope as Mr. Archie, then the next forty-one years look as promising as the previous ones.

At the beginning I said this was a story of hope. What the preceding words ought to have communicated is a complicated problem no individual, no band, no province, and no generation will be able to rectify. This reality should not stop the proceedings though. Skowkale hatchery stands not as the light at the end of a metaphoric tunnel, but a dot on an endless timeline of intergenerational efforts to engage with a culture threatened by a myriad of convoluted obstacles. Beyond that, it is a place where people can gather to care, to show an appreciation for what remains and what can be brought back. That is special. Skowkale hatchery has reminded me of how incredible people can be when there is unity in a fight, when there is a cause fueled by passion, when the action itself is just as valuable if not more valuable than the outcome. From 1978 to 2019, the Skowkale Hatchery has unassumingly stood in the middle of Chilliwack providing opportunities for band members to reclaim an Indigenous right, for salmon to return to the stream they once spawned in, for students to work hands-on with nature, for the public to become aware of the issues surrounding Indigeneity in Canada, and for the natural realm to enter people's minds in all its complexity and beauty. No one at Skowkale

⁹² Interview with Harold Archie.

⁹³ Ibid.

expects to see salmon return at the rates once enjoyed anytime soon. But that is not the point. The point is for people to gather with work in mind, with Tomiyeqw as a guiding principle, and with hope firmly fixed in the minds of those who care most about what the hatchery has given, currently gives, and what it will continue to give into the future.

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