The Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Mapping Resource Use in the Pacific Northwest

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Proposal Title: Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Mapping Resource Use in the Pacific Northwest

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Project Summary: In 1974, following a First Nations’ protest of forestry companies’ incursions onto disputed lands surrounding their reservations, the government of British Columbia placed a moratorium on development in Central B.C. and commissioned a report to study the impacts of logging on “resource and human development.” A forestry and an anthropology professor were tasked with studying community land use and reporting their findings. The 54 page document they produced was circulated to Band members and the cattle ranchers who shared the vast valley in question. It is a document, which foregrounds participants’ voices and experiences while describing socio-historic, geographic, and communal land use practices. But further, in terms of visual (hand drawn maps) and narrative (quotes from interviews of Band members), this document illustrates First Nations’ spatial knowledge, what cultural geographer Soren Larsen calls the “spatiality of memory” and exemplifies that the technical knowledge of indigenous communities located outside of the documentation that has been used to define them.

Figure 1: Current forest cover in British Columbia (image courtesy Canadian Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development, www.for.gov.bc.ca)

Using the historic data set offered by the hand drawn maps, you will investigate the land use practices and territories of the Nasko and Kluskus First Nations and
produce digitized and geographically referenced maps to reflect the complex ways
mobility and geographic knowledge are embedded in First Nations culture.

**Student Prerequisites:** All majors are welcome to apply and preference will be
given to students who have interests in learning both applied data science in writing
studies and geographic information systems for spatial data analysis, in other words
a desire to pursue interdisciplinary studies. Minimum GPA is 3.0 but GPA will be one
of the criteria used to evaluate applicants and the applicant must be considered in
good academic standing. There are no citizen status restrictions for the proposed
project.

**Student Duties:** To ensure that the student has the appropriate background to
conduct the research, the 12-week summer term will be divided into two parallel
efforts, (1) scaling up from basic review of contemporary issues related to
indigenous knowledge of resources in the Pacific northwest region, and (2) learning
and practicing GIS and satellite remote sensing skills. This phased technique has
worked tremendously for students in all past RCEU projects.

**Benefits to the Student:** The student will have the opportunity to work on a
cross-disciplinary effort to apply a data science technique (geographic information
analysis) to an historical land use and indigenous mapping dataset. This experience
will examine data but also how concepts are communicated by First Nations
peoples. This experience will take the student beyond learning in the classroom,
asking them to get involved in the formulation of research questions related to
historic datasets. Moreover, the approach taken here is one focused on
cross-disciplinary analysis and involves faculty supervision from two departments,
representing two colleges. The student will also be trained in GIS and basic
principles in satellite remote sensing, in addressing logging and forest removal
patterns in the region.

**Student Contribution:** The student will help contribute to key deliverables by the end
of the summer. These include digitized and geographically referenced maps and a
final report to RCEU, which will serve as the basis for presentation and publication
of the results.

**Mentor Supervision & Interaction:** The student will be supervised throughout the
duration of the project by Drs. Alanna Frost and Robert Griffin. Dr. Frost has a PhD
in rhetoric and composition and has firsthand experience in the region working with
First Nations. She is also in possession of historic maps of resource use in the
region. Dr. Griffin has a PhD in environmental anthropology and has worked in the
field of applied GIS and remote sensing in the Earth sciences for over a decade. The
student will be assigned a fully-equipped computer in Dr. Griffin’s geospatial
analysis lab with which to conduct his/her research. Supervision by Dr. Frost will
take place in Morton Hall and with Dr. Griffin will take place in the NSSTC/Cramer
Hall facility. Interactions will include set weekly meetings and regular additional
meetings with both faculty members. The student will also have the benefit of Dr.
Griffin’s graduate assistants located in the NSSTC’s Human Dimensions, Discovery,
and Decision-making (HD3) lab, who will be present throughout the summer and
will be available to assist the student as he/she moves through the phases of the
proposed analysis.