RICK BUDHWA

I came up the Skeena in the late '90s to work as an anthropologist for the Wet'suwet'en, looking at how they related to the landscape. More specifically, I studied how paleo-archaeological events (landslides, earthquakes, floods, etc.) are reflected in oral traditions. This work had implications in the Delgamu'uk case—sixteen years of court proceedings that culminated in a landmark Supreme Court of Canada decision, which gave First Nation oral traditions evidentiary weight in a court of law. That was a really big deal; it was precedent setting in its affirmation that these were people who kept history through stories, their stories included a lot of information, and that information is extremely complex. It wasn't about historical accuracy through the perspective of the Canadian legal system or the Western scientific perspective. The decision defied the unfortunate and inaccurate tendency to equate stories with myth, or legend, and discredit them as disconnected from what we consider fact or reality. Our work supported the alignment of oral narratives with the geological and biological interpretation of ancient events. But it also affirmed that those traditions include much more information about the present and the future; they include information about technology, ethics, morality, family histories, and protocols for how to live your life.

Later, I worked as an anthropologist for the Land and Resources department within the Wet'suwet'en. I actually had a mandate to go out in the territories and just be on the land. On these trips, we had no agenda; the only point was to connect to the place. It took me awhile to learn "how" to do this; one of my great memories of this time with the Wet'suwet'en is hopping in a van for a "meeting" with about six other

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people. Most of the ride out to the meeting site was spent laughing at me. The Chiefs particularly liked the spikes on the bottom of my boots, and were curious if I was planning on spending time on the glacier. I was even asked if my field vest doubled as a life preserver. We drove to a place close to a river and pulled over and walked into a cut block—an area that had been harvested for forestry. I remember wondering exactly what we were going to do there. Folks got out of the van and started walking around. I was looking at them and they were looking everywhere else—looking down and looking up, looking all around. They were touching trees. They weren't talking to each other and they weren't following each other. They were just…being there. It was an amazing experience. That day was when I learned the difference between getting ready for the field and being on the land.

As a result, when I was sitting in an office thinking about decisions that might impact that area, I vividly, viscerally felt a connection to that place. Whenever the Wet'suwet'en would have meetings with a developer or forestry company we would go outside—to the places we were making decisions about. Incredible things happened. Those territories are the elders' boardrooms, and the information exchange was totally different than what would have happened in the developer's boardroom. I am surprised it's not more common; we should have more of our negotiations and meetings out on the territories. I think we'd have better relationships among stakeholders, particularly of different cultures, if we did that more often. High-level resource management decision makers would reach different conclusions if they had to spend time on the landscape together, getting and sharing a sense of place.

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Being on the land is critical to understanding the full matrix of physical and spiritual essences it contains. For indigenous people, there is no distinction between natural and cultural resources. This is a very powerful idea—of actual, reciprocal social and spiritual relations between animals, humans, and their shared environment. It is not an idea familiar to many Westerners. Imagine the implications of that concept: even nature has rights, and even people have responsibilities. It's not a relationship based on what you take, or how you "manipulate" or "control" or "manage"—in the same way you don't "control" your relationship with friends or your family based on what you want to take from them. First Nations people take great exception to your impacting or destroying or poisoning the land because it is, literally, family to them.

That's also why, from a First Nation's perspective, "mitigation" of natural and cultural resources is a fallacy. One of the most basic concepts, one we still don't have a sufficient appreciation of, is that cultural resources are non-renewable. It's that simple. Once we impact or destroy a cultural resource—an artifact from the past, a projectile point or something like that —it can't be recreated. We can't glue it back together. It has left us for good. It's gone, because you've changed the relationship to it forever.

And it's the same with landscapes and species. Let's say, for example, a proposed mine on Hudson Bay Mountain will impact a patch of Devil's Club that a First Nation community collects for medicinal purposes. And the mine comes in and says, "We're going to impact that site, but we're going to provide you with access to another site where the plant grows, so you can still get it." That's a standard form of mitigation, that's a way

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that resource management is able to say, "We're minimizing the impact" or "We're controlling the net impact." But the cultural considerations suggest, "Well, great, you are still able to provide access to the plant so these people can still make their medicine, but who is looking at the loss of their connection to the place on the landscape? These people have been going to a place on the landscape for thousands of years. And now they can't go there. And they have a connection to that place regardless of the resource in that place —whether it was a plant, whether it was an animal… whatever it was, it's lost." There simply is no compensation for the loss of "there." You can't offer an alternative plant or an alternative animal or even an alternative site to compensate for the centrality of a First Nation's person's experience with those things.

Western, Euro-American resource management breaks things up spatially and temporally: past, current, and future uses of this place or that place. First Nations people express a continuum. This often means there is a huge disconnect in what we are talking about. In Western natural resource management, everything is neatly compartmentalized: for fisheries issues, there is a fisheries biologist; forest issues, there are forest ecologists; but there is a striking lack of anthropology incorporated into resource management when so much of what needs to be worked out are essentially cultural issues. Who is dealing with the non-tangible side? An appropriate recognition and assessment of diversity and complexity in a situation requires money and time, and it is very difficult for natural resource managers to commit these resources. We lose lots of information in the spaces between the boundaries of these different compartments, and much of that space is best filled by

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the "sense of place" component that is only articulated from an applied anthropological perspective.

Furthermore, in Western land management there is an overemphasis on material aspects—on archaeology. But there's also almost a purposeful under-emphasis on the intangibles because they lack certainty. They don't follow formulas, they don't follow templates, they aren't calculators, they don't spit out numbers at the end and therefore it's impossible to model statistically.

Archaeology is the study of the past through material remains and there are a lot of really good archaeologists in British Columbia, doing excellent work. But true cultural resource management goes much beyond archaeology, much beyond the material remains and starts to recognize the intangibles, the connections, the language, stories, song, dance, art. All of these things are beyond archaeology and we do get into trouble when we say "cultural resource management—that's archaeology, so we just need to do archaeology and we've satisfied our cultural resource management obligations." That's been a very traditional approach to resource management. And it's dangerous because "artifact" becomes both a focus of study and a projection of relevance.

It is important to understand this if we're going to understand and address conflicts over land management. Conflicts over resources have always been part of history, but the modern version of conflict is over different use paradigms, where it was once over access to resources within similar use paradigms. This is very significant. And it is amplified

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by the fact that British Columbia is one of the very few places left in the twenty-first century where the landlord is unknown. "Ownership" was not transferred from First Nations to Euro-Americans, and it was not codified in treaties, the way it was elsewhere in North America. As a result, the indigenous worldviews and use paradigms aren't constrained. They are very robust, very alive, and very relevant. And you can't overstate the implications for what we have to work out, what we get to work out, about how we live in this place together.

Working with the First Nations on these issues has changed everything for me. It has fostered a personally unprecedented connection between my own life's experiences and the landscapes they are a part of. I was born in Kitimat; we moved away when I was young, so it is great coming around full circle for me—both to the place itself and my sense of it. ○