



Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh Úxwumixw

Squamish Nation

Stsék̓tsek

Forestry Framework



ínexw chexw ti ays

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Context and Purpose



Stsék̓tsek (the forest) has been integral to the history and way of life of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stélmexw (Squamish People) for thousands of years. Spé̓nem (plants), are used for a wide range of purposes and in different ways by individual families. X̓ápaʔay (Western Red Cedar) has a wide range of cultural and practical purposes, including longhouses, dugout canoes, boards, shakes, eating bowls, storage boxes and many other items. K̓'elhmáʔ (Yellow Cedar) is culturally significant as a source of bark and root for wardrobe functions and baskets. K̓'éytl'tanaʔ (medicinal plants) have long been used in meeting the health needs of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh people and non-Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh people. Stsék̓tsek of the territory remain vitally important to the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stélmexw and form a central part of the living and enduring culture of the Nation.

This Framework guides Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw in its overall relationship to stsék̓tsek including:

- How the Nation establishes intergovernmental relationships regarding stsék̓tsek.
- Stewardship approaches to take care of stsék̓tsek.
- Our way of life and cultural relationships with stsék̓tsek.
- How we and others use stsék̓tsek.
- How cultural cedar will be assured for future generations.

Culture



Our culture is strong but has been under significant pressure since the first settlers arrived. Going forward we must ensure that:

- Skwxwú7mesh cultural values are protected and maintained for all time.
- Future cultural opportunities are not limited by availability of land or materials.
- A long-term cedar strategy is developed and implemented.
- Management of plant medicines throughout the territory – harvesting, pruning, prescribed burning should follow our historic laws.
- Firewood for Elders and ceremonies is available.
- Youth are centered in decision-making.
- Our Guardians are present on the land.

Cumulative Effects

The lands, waters and people of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh territory have borne the weight of intense change over the last two centuries.

The largest impacts on our land and forests have resulted from the industrial forest management that has systematically harvested our old and primary forests, without thought to maintaining cultural and ecological values, or to providing a sustainable flow of the diversity of forest values. The ancient and massive forests have now largely disappeared from our low and mid elevation ecosystems, which are today highly degraded, and very far from their natural condition. These forests were traditionally our way of life – our homes, shelter, food source, medicines, and wellbeing. Their current condition results in high risk and significant pressures on ecological health and biodiversity, wildlife habitat, availability of monumental cedar, medicinal plants, trails, and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Members' way of life.

Salmon and other fish stocks have massively declined due to a combination of regional pressures such as over-fishing, and forest pressures such as stream degradation due to early and ongoing forest practices. Today stress on these ecosystems continues as clearcutting exposes streams to the higher temperatures caused by climate change. Salmon, and many other species, are under increasing stress as cold water and cool forests become warm.

Urban and rural settlement based on the settler concept of 'fee simple private land' have alienated us from many of our shorelines and most productive areas within the territory. The proximity to the urban centers of Vancouver and the lower mainland brings intense pressures from urban / rural development, and a diversity of forms of recreation leading to pervasive on- and off-road use and access to the land by many people, disturbing wildlife and degrading habitat effectiveness throughout all seasons.

There are large areas of land that are off-limits to industrial development in our territory, though they are generally in areas of higher elevation and lower resource value. These areas attract a large human footprint, and although the areas are 'protected', the ecosystem health in these areas continues to be at risk. For example, conflicts with sensitive species such as grizzly bear continue as habitat effectiveness for this, and other species, is reduced by ongoing four-season disturbance within and outside of protected areas.

The cumulative impacts of these and many other both point and dispersed developments have had a significant negative impact at many scales on our forests, cultural places, wildlife, natural ecosystems, fish, and our communities' ability to practice their rights on the land with peaceful enjoyment.

Our Declaration



- Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw is the central decision-maker on Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh territory. The land and waters are maintained and restored to low risk, to allow cultural freedom, ecological health, and deep economic prosperity, over many generations.
- Resilient and resistant ecosystems are the foundation for resilient and resistant communities and culture. The long history of forest degradation is acknowledged, and strategies put in place to protect remaining values, and promote recovery.
- Ecosystem and cultural health are co-dependent, and prioritized in all decision-making.
- Species that center Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh culture are recovered, and maintained for our future generations – for example, western red cedar for canoes, bark-stripping, root-collecting, and other cultural use.
- Local, long-term jobs and economy are incentivized. Wood volume is made available locally to ensure jobs are created and retained locally.
- Regenerative forestry replaces the historic forest management paradigm, improving ecosystem health and creating jobs that contribute to human wellbeing. Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw and the territory are resilient to external stressors (economic, climate change, politics).

“Everyone needs to make a living. A lot of our people are in forestry, not only cutting trees but doing silviculture, restoring what we have done. You need to preserve areas though. There has to be a huge amount of ancient forest still standing so that we can still find medicines, etc. It could be a win-win situation if we find the right balance. There could be jobs for us and for the non-natives as well. We’ve been confined on reserves for hundreds of years but now after Delgamuukw we know that we can make a difference in the wider picture. We can affect the land beyond our reserves. We’re learning again to be conservationists. We were the first conservationists.”

- Ts’élkwílem-t siyám̓, late Chief Byron Joseph from the 2001 X̱ay Temíxw

Governance and Responsibilities



The way decisions about the land are made must change. Our people have witnessed historic and ongoing degradation of our territory. Moving forward we require:

- Effective self-determination and decision-making for land use decisions.
- Co-governance.
- Defining the stewardship framework and policy development.
- Setting economic direction to ensure long-term jobs and economic benefits flow to the Nation in perpetuity.

Ecosystem Health and Integrity

The cumulative effects of more than a century of industrial development in our territory are stark. Ecosystems are significantly degraded from their natural conditions, and the values provided by functional natural systems have significantly declined. Under our Skwxwú7mesh Law:

- Ecosystem based management principles must be applied, to ensure the health of the land and waters is maintained and restored. Ecosystem health means maintaining all biodiversity, its processes, and functions at all scales and through time.
- Ecological health and integrity is maintained when adverse effects to ecological values and processes are minimal or unlikely to occur.
- Key elements include:
 - Primary and old forest management that maintains and restores forests towards natural conditions over time.
 - A significant proportion of the territory is managed to low risk.
 - Restoration of older forests and older forest structures in ecosystems that have been degraded.
 - Maintenance and restoration of natural connectivity across landscapes and elevations.
 - Protection and recovery of sensitive and rare ecosystems (for example: wetlands, red and blue-listed, rare old forest).
 - Protection of stand level attributes such as veteran trees, coarse woody debris, wildlife trees, as the basis for restoration.
 - Regenerative harvesting approaches that consider the health and wellbeing of the remaining forest for all its values (for example: biodiversity, carbon, water, cultural values).
- Acknowledging and respecting ecological limits.
- Climate change is already having negative impacts on the lands and waters of our territory. The importance of managing the carbon in our forests in relation to global climate impacts are considered in decision-making, with the goal of reducing our contribution to climate change through carbon storage and sequestration opportunities.

What Can Be Taken?



Industrial land management has typically focused on taking from the land, with little consideration of sustainability, or maintaining values on the land for future generations. A change in approach is required:

- What must be retained or restored to maintain values is determined first.
- For forests: timber supply analysis is undertaken that is forward looking and precautionary and is based on an ecosystem health approach.
- Co-determination of timber supply decisions.

Economic Development



Economics are important to Sḵw̱xwú7mesh Úxwumixw. Our people need reliable jobs that improve economic prosperity and broader social wellbeing. Our territory provides a diversity of economic opportunities, which are sometimes at odds with one another. The long-term goal is for well paid jobs that maintain the health of the land and the health of the workers.

- Value from the trees taken from Sḵw̱xwú7mesh territory is retained within the territory where possible.
- Wood volume is made available to value-added sector to increase jobs for every tree cut.
- Regenerative strategies are developed that create forest jobs that promote recovery and resilience of ecosystems and people.
- Alternate economies such as tourism are explored and promoted to allow transition from traditional forest management to a low-touch forestry that prioritizes ecosystem health and a wider range of job creation.

Future Studies



Further studies will be required to inform S̓kw̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw's decision-making role moving forward, and we call on other co-managers of the Stsék̓tsek̓ to do this work with us in a good way. This work will evolve over time and need to be re-visited often to ensure the Nation's decision-making is adapting to the changing climate in our territory. Some of these studies are already in process, while others must begin soon, and include:

- Cumulative effects assessment.
- Cedar restoration and management.
- Recruitment and restoration study for ecosystems at risk (particularly low elevation).
- Wildlife connectivity.
- Forest carbon sequestration.
- Alternative silviculture opportunities.
- Water, soil, and terrestrial/fungal network information gathering.



**Skwxwú7mesh
Úxwúmixw**

Squamish Nation