**Chapter 6: Mobilizing Indigenous Heritage in Cultural Keystone Places**

**for Climate Change Action**

**By Tanja Hoffmann, Natasha Lyons, and Roma Leon**

**ABSTRACT:** Here we engage directly with the role of heritage in the “future making potential of ontological pluralism” where “different forms of heritage practices enact different realities and hence work to assemble different futures” (Harrison 2015, 24). Specifically, the authors recount how efforts to re-establish Indigenous decision-making control over territorial lands and waters through enactment of Indigenous law provides opportunity to manifest different futures in direct service of meaningful climate change action. We focus specifically on the ongoing experience of the q̓ic̓əy̓ (Katzie First Nation) and their work to regain decision-making authority over a cultural keystone place by negotiating with state regulatory agencies. We also argue however, despite cause for optimism given the emerging willingness on the part of state agents to embrace their commitments to Indigenous peoples, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous law, several political and policy barriers remain, many of which reinforce colonial power structures and the nature:culture dualism foundational to western ontologies.

**KEYWORDS:** Biodiversity, Canada, climate change, cultural keystone place, heritage, Indigenous, Indigenous law, Katzie First Nation, policy, reconciliation, sovereignty, UNDRIP

**Introduction**

This chapter is an outcome of many conversations between the authors over a decade-long collaboration aimed at finding ways to reinstate Katzie First Nation decision-making authority in Katzie territory, and most recently a focus on θéθqəł (Widgeon Valley)—a Katzie cultural keystone place. Cultural keystone places occur within Indigenous cultural landscapes where there is particularly high biodiversity, cultural importance, and intensive use (Cuerrier et al. 2015, 428). For Roma Leon, a Katzie knowledge holder, the importance of the Widgeon Valley to the past, present and future of her people cannot be overstated. The Widgeon Valley, lauded by western conservationists and recreational users for its biodiversity and natural beauty, is the last remnant of an expansive wetland ecosystem that once existed at the heart of Katzie territory and Katzie lifeways. Roma has worked for over two decades to reacquaint herself and her community with the ongoing legacies of Ancestral presences in the Widgeon Valley. Roma and other Katzie people actively mobilize Katzie sovereignty by accessing, harvesting, and managing their relationships with Widgeon and all who dwell within it according to protocols and teachings foundational to Katzie law. In doing so they enact their own lifeworld—one that exists beyond, and often in spite of, the boundaries of municipal, provincial, and federal jurisdiction layered upon the Valley. Tanja Hoffmann and Natasha Lyons are accomplice scholars (Powell and Kelly 2017) working to wield the tools of western science in support of Katzie sovereignty efforts. Natasha is a palaeoethnobotanist keen to understand how past and ongoing Katzie/plant partnerships speak to the deep-time relationship that exists between Katzie people and Katzie territory. Tanja works in heritage and resource management policy negotiation looking for ways to leverage state commitments to Indigenous peoples to manifest the future that Katzie envisions.

Through the lens offered by Katzie in their fight to regain decision-making authority over the Widgeon Valley we gaze at a much broader landscape. We join a growing number of Indigenous and accomplice scholars who argue that Indigenous sovereignty, specifically reestablishment of Indigenous law, advances twin social and environmental justice initiatives foundational to effective climate-change action. Simultaneously, the re-instatement of Indigenous Law opens avenues for ontological plurality, where protocols and teachings emerging from deeply-relational ways of being can provide the wider non-Indigenous populace an opportunity to make different choices and in doing so, enliven different futures. This declaration hinges on two key points. The first concerns the nature of many Indigenous ontologies, one hallmark of which is the notion that human beings exist “as relationship” rather than “in relationship with” the places in which we dwell (Wilson 2020). Moreover, many of these deeply-relational Indigenous ontologies presume pervasive non-human agency and focus on “working out specific performative and ethical implications of agent ontologies on their own terms” (Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt 2020, 336). At the heart of the presumption of non-human agency lies a commitment to reciprocal relations which run counterpoint to the nature:culture dualism foundational to western ontologies, among whose latest manifestation looks to define what ‘services’ the ‘ecosystem’ might offer the human species. The second key point is that the performative and ethical aspects of sustaining oneself or ones community *as* *relationship* are often relayed through Indigenous law, known among the peoples who practice it as ‘caring for country’ (Woodward et al. 2020; Rose 2016), Naaknigewin (Anishinabek Nation 2023), Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit  (Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik 2017), tikanga Māori (Mead 2016), among myriad other terms. Indigenous laws are enacted through protocols and teachings that instruct one in how to live *as relationship*. A growing body of scholarship shows how Indigenous ontologies and the laws and practices that flow from them have a vital role to play in climate change response (Etchart 2017). Indeed, having enacted these laws over millennia within deeply relational ontologies that promote living *as relationship,* it follows that Indigenous peoples have developed a more suitable theoretical and practical basis upon which to base innovative global climate change response. It is our argument here that as Katzie works to reinstate Indigenous law in their territory, they are among those Indigenous peoples that invigorate worlds that can manifest a markedly different future for us all.

Despite growing consensus around the lasting legacy and future potential of Indigenous peoples’ contributions to climate action, including vital biodiversity preservation, nation states have been slow to return meaningful control over lands and waters to Indigenous peoples. In this chapter we draw a through-line linking Indigenous sovereignty, Indigenous law, and broad social justice initiatives (as expressed in international, national, and regional policy, including those aimed at ‘reconciliation’) with cultural keystone places thinking in a Canadian context. Canada is oft cited as a world leader in Indigenous reconciliation, yet barriers forestall what many Indigenous leaders consider movement toward true reconciliation—namely the return of control over lands and waters to Indigenous peoples (S. Lightfoot 2016). We suggest that in an era where the Canadian government cites truth and reconciliation as a national priority (CBC 2022), the re-establishment of Indigenous law in cultural keystone places constitutes meaningful reconciliation at a local scale, and bold climate-change action at a global one.

In contemplating how Katzie works with state agents to re-establish Indigenous law as the primary driver of decision making *as relationship* with the Widgeon Valley, our emphasis on negotiating with state actors who claim jurisdiction in Katzie territory should not be construed as acquiescence to the worldviews reinforced through state resource management planning. Unlike western resource management practices that enact and enforce a nature:culture dualism that sees humans as able to stand apart from and ‘manage’ environmental ‘resources’, Katzie worldviews do not entertain a hierarchy that imbues humans with decision-making authority over the territory. Rather, Katzie are guardians working to regain their right to exercise their responsibilities to their territory through re-instatement of Indigenous law. Nor should the emphasis on preserving cultural keystone places be mistaken as Katzie ‘giving up’ on regaining a territory-wide sovereignty. Rather, Katzie’s efforts to have western resource managers follow protocols stemming from Indigenous law to guide human activity in Katzie territory, beginning with a part of the territory that is under direct threat, should be taken for what it is—as one vital step toward a future of Katzie’s making.

This chapter proceeds as follows. We begin by introducing the reader to Katzie, Katzie territory, and θéθqəł (the Widgeon Valley), including the justification Katzie use to identify the θéθqəł as a Katzie cultural keystone place. Discussion of the role of Indigenous peoples in climate-change response provides the context necessary to explore the global implications of local cultural keystone place designations. Next we provide a brief summary of the jurisdictional overlap that exists on the ground in θéθqəł, tying these jurisdictions and their management priorities to broader national and global policy and political commitments to climate change and social justice. We reveal how, in the case of cultural keystone place designation and other Indigenous-led sovereignty initiatives, the on-the-ground actions of regulatory agents indicates the degree to which subaltern efforts to enact meaningful sovereignty are meeting resistance or finding purchase at a range of policy scales. Finally, we discuss the evidentiary basis (which includes many forms and expressions of heritage) and moral imperatives used by Indigenous peoples to entreat, provoke, and in some instances force, change in state policy and policy-makers actions. We argue that Indigenous sovereignty efforts that mobilize Indigenous law can be understood as one example of heritage’s role in the “future-making potential of ontological pluralism”. We conclude with some thoughts on the future of ‘future making’ revealing how our research plans involve exploring how ontological shifts demanded by the application of Indigenous law in Indigenous cultural keystone places like the θéθqəł can enact different realities to inform broad-based behavioural change necessary for effective climate change action.

**Katzie: A People of Place**

In earlier times this Fraser River resembled an enormous dish that stored up food for all mankind; for the Indians flocked here from every quarter to catch the fish that abounded in its water. What I shall now relate to you about this land is not a mere fairy-tale, but a true history of my people, as it was taught me in my childhood by three old men whom my mother hired to instruct me (Jenness 1955, 10).

Thus begins q̓ic̓əy̓ (Katzie) Elder Peter (’Old’) Pierre’s account of the origins of the peoples of the Fraser River. His stories, legends, and traditions describe, in most eloquent terms, the genesis and significance of the interconnections between people and place. They detail how Katzie are descendants of a *θe’łəctən* (“clothed with power”), a powerful leader that *ci’cəł sie’m* (“the Lord Who Dwells Above”) placed at Pitt Lake (Suttles 1955, 10). They tell how the special leader, *swa’n´əsət* (Swaneset) the “Supernatural Benefactor,” and later *χe’els* (Khaals) “a being of marvellous power,” shaped the physical and mythical landscape of the Fraser River, most particularly Pitt Lake and the Pitt Valley wetlands which lie at the centre of Katzie territory (Jenness 1955, 12) (Figure 1). The founding accounts of Katzie do not differentiate between the people and the natural world but rather relay the performative and ethical behaviours that sustain Katzie as people of place.

A journey through Katzie territory takes one through a beautiful and diverse landscape. The territory begins at the headwaters of sq̓ʷá∙nƛ̓íləɬ stáʔləw (“River of Katzie”), whose glacial-fed upper reaches support valuable salmon spawning habitat and whose forests are home to grizzly bear, dear, and elk. At the centre of the territory are sq̓ə́yc̓əyaʔɬ x̌acaʔ (“Lake of the Katzie” or Pitt Lake), and sq̓ə́yc̓əyaʔɬ státləw. The sq̓ʷá∙nƛ̓íləɬ stáʔləw (Fraser River) flows through the centre of Katzie territory and its banks are home to ancestral winter village sites where Katzie families have resided for millennia. The southernmost extent of Katzie territory includes the Nickomekl and Serpentine Rivers, along which Katzie travelled to trade with their saltwater neighbours (Suttles, 1955, p. 11). Katzie are hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ (downriver dialect) speakers and count among their upstream and downstream neighbours other halkomelem-speaking peoples of the Salish Sea and the sq̓ʷá∙nƛ̓íləɬ stáʔləw (Fraser River).

The non-Katzie reader will be most familiar with Katzie territory’s placement in the colonial settler geography of Canada. Katzie’s homelands are located in the lower Fraser River Valley, in the south east of the Province of British Columbia. Katzie territory encompasses portions of the municipalities of Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge on the north side of the Fraser River, and Delta, Langley, and Surrey on the south side of the River. All are part of the 21 municipalities that make up the rapidly expanding metropolis of Metro Vancouver. Much of the northern part of Katzie territory is included within the boundaries of the Garibaldi, Golden Ears, and Pinecone Burke Provincial Parks. Today, Katzie residential communities are located on three of their 5 Indian Reserves, whose total area measures less than 1 percent of their traditional territory.

Insert Figure 1 about here: Map of Katzie First Nation Territory reproduced with permission of Katzie First Nation (www.katzie.ca)

**θéθqəł (Widgeon Valley) as a Katzie Cultural Keystone Place**

Katzie territory is renowned for the Pitt Valley wetlands located at the south end of Pitt Lake, one of the largest fresh-water tidally influenced lakes in the world. A patchwork of freshwater marsh, bog, and fen systems, the “Pitt Valley wetlands were one of the largest inland estuarine habitats in coastal British Columbia” (WSP 2010, 13) and were home to a diverse and abundant array of culturally significant animal, bird, fish, and plant resources (Spurgeon 2001). An extensive land reclamation and dyking program, initiated by Dutch farmers in 1891 and continuing through the 1950s, dramatically reduced the size and overall productivity of the wetlands (Collins 1975). Today θéθqəł (Widgeon Valley), is the last intact remnant of the much larger Pitt Polder wetland and currently constitutes the largest concentration (55.8 %) of highly protected wetland in the whole of the Fraser Lowland (McPhee and Ward 1992). Possessing exceptionally high species richness and density, the wetland is home to several federally and provincially recognized endangered faunal and floral species (Gebauer and Albert 2020).

θéθqəł exhibits the levels of biodiversity, cultural significance, and intensive use that qualify it as a cultural keystone place. Through it flow the last of the unaltered course of slow-moving waters of the tidally influenced sloughs gifted to Katzie by Swaneset. In these sloughs spawn now endangered populations of sturgeon, θe’łəctən’schildren, and salmon relatives, who transform from their human to salmon form in order to visit and sustain their Katzie family through the spring, summer, and fall. Now endangered Sandhill cranes, descendants of the Sandhill crane sisters, make their nests and rear their young in Widgeon Slough, reminders of a time when the cranes were so plentiful Katzie marked time according to their seasonal arrival. Bog cranberry and wapato (Photo 1), two foods for which Katzie territory is renowned, and which once were so plentiful they were traded widely amongst Katzie’s neighbours, still grow in small patches in θéθqəł, as does tule or hard stem bulrush, a prized resource that was used extensively in weaving mats for summer shelters. A prominent rock outcrop at the edge of the slough is an ancient village site that was an important location for the winter dance season, during which time Katzie acted as hosts to delegates from neighbouring relatives and distant communities. From this same vantage point Katzie practiced being ‘good hosts’ through traditional governance protocols that included inviting people to access cranberry bogs and wapato patches, the remnants of which still grow along the slough (Suttles 1955). Cultural keystone places are often marked by the presence of rock art (Turner 2020), and the pictographs found along Pitt Lake, several near an ancient village at the mouth of Widgeon Creek, adhere to this pattern. Lands and waters in the watershed are still known by their ancient place names.



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Insert Photo 1 about here

Photo 1: The distictive, arrow-shaped leaf of the semi-aquatic wapato (Sagittaria latifolia) plant.

Photo: T. Hoffmann

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Katzie world views are built upon interrelationships, where expectation of, and respect for, the agency, or as Katzie call it ‘vitality’, of other-than-human beings informs one’s own beliefs and behaviours. In contrast to colonial and settler perceptions of wetlands as dangerous places or wasted lands only useful if drained and therefore “reclaimed” (Collins 1975; Lyons et al. 2021), the wetland’s foods, waters, and other-than-human relatives literally flow through Katzie—they *are* Katzie. Katzie heritage mobilization in contemporary contexts works to revitalize, in some cases reconstitute, and reapply the connections foundational to deeply relational ways of being now and for the future. As one of the remaining remnants of the world as Katzie know it, θéθqəł is critical to this future-making enterprise.

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Insert Figure 2 about here: Boundaries of θéθqəł (Widgeon Creek) Katzie Cultural Keystone Place

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**Enacting Worlds: Implications of Non-Katzie Jurisdiction in the Widgeon Valley**

In Canada, the driver of federal and provincial commitments to seek reconciliation rests in part on constitutionally entrenched fiduciary responsibilities. The extent and application of fiduciary commitments have been informed by outcomes of landmark court decisions (Haddock and McNeil 2022), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Dussault and Erasmus 1996), and more recently the results of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC and Canada 2015) and the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report (2019). Canada’s efforts to reconcile with First Nations, Inuit and Métis, also reflects global recognition of Indigenous rights, including those expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In the province of British Columbia, municipal governments do not have fiduciary responsibility, though increasing calls from the voting public for meaningful reconciliation are motivating local governments to take more proactive stances when it comes to Indigenous peoples’ role in municipal planning and decision-making.

Actions taken by all levels of Canadian government reflect, on the surface at least, considerable advances by a liberal democracy toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. However Canada, Lightfoot (2010, 84) argues, exhibits a form of counter-intuitive behaviour in international relations called ‘over-compliance’ which occurs when “a state’s legal or policy *behaviour* exceeds its treaty or international normative *commitments.”* Over-compliance in state-centred reconciliation efforts actually represent a resistance to Indigenous reconciliation as opposed to progress toward it (S.R. Lightfoot 2010). For Katzie and many other First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, meaningful enactment of even the most basic principles of the outwardly laudable federal, provincial, and municipal commitments to reconciliation has proven to be a slow, arduous and often seemingly impossible task (Wilson-Raybould 2019). Katzie’s latest effort at sovereignty in the form of a bid to manage the θéθqəł as a cultural keystone place is the latest in a long list of attempts to move all levels of government beyond rhetoric toward meaningful reconciliation action.

θéθqəł is a jurisdictional microcosm, representative of the overlapping multi-scale Indigenous rights and state governance discourses transpiring in many regions of Canada and indeed in post-colonial nations around the world. Currently divided into parcels of private and state-owned land of varying size, parts of the θéθqəł are managed respectively as a: Federal National Wildlife Area; Provincial Protected Area; Provincial Crown Land; Class A Provincial Park (Pinecone Burke Provincial Park); and a municipal park. Directives for state engagement with Indigenous interests in θéθqəł range from those imparted by international-level policies of UNDRIP and IUCN, to fiduciary obligations on the part of the Crown, legislated Provincial commitments to UNDRIP, and finally municipal-level commitments to reconciliation. Regulatory agencies with presence in the Widgeon Creek valley include the Canadian Wildlife Service, who are the federal agency responsible for the selection and management of Canada’s National Wildlife Areas and are members of the IUCN; the Department of Fisheries and Oceans who are mandated to protect oceans, freshwater and aquatic species from negative impacts of humans and invasive species (DFO 2023); and British Columbia Parks, who is responsible for managing the Class A Pinecone Burke Provincial Park that encompasses the inland reaches of the θéθqəł (British Columbia 2021). Most of the fee simple properties in the θéθqəł are owned by the Nature Trust of British Columbia and Ducks Unlimited Canada, both of whom are charities that maintain their own conservation ethic and commitments to Indigenous peoples.

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Insert Figure 3 Jurisdictional Overlap in θéθqəł (Widgeon Valley), Katzie Cultural Keystone Place) about here

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Among the most complicating factors slowing the re-establishment of Katzie decision-making authority over the θéθqəł are western policy manifestations of nature:culture dualism. In θéθqəł this dualism manifests in the priorities of various regulatory agencies. Some regulatory bodies prioritize conservation, others attempt to balance ecological protection with public demands for nature-based recreation. Their respective policies and management plans reflect dimensions of broader debates where, at its most extreme, competing ideologies of “nature-tourism” are pitted against those of “fortress conservation.” Recent manifestations of the former views wilderness as the essential backdrop for meaningful human/nature interaction promoting human mental and physical wellbeing, while the latter regards complete removal of human involvement as fundamental to wilderness conservation and ‘rewilding’ (Domínguez and Luoma 2020; Hoffmann et al. 2021). All of these initiatives take as their central assumption the enlightenment spectator/subject where humans stand apart from, and to some extent can assert control over, the natural world.

Lands and waters set aside as parks or protected areas are often the centre stage upon which the nature:culture dualism performs, and the Widgeon Valley is no exception. Historically, park designation almost always spelled the marginalization, and in some cases wholesale removal, of Indigenous peoples from all or part of their traditional lands and waters. In a Canadian provincial and territorial parks context, Indigenous sovereignty initiatives and the concurrent ontological shifts such initiatives demand, are reconfiguring both the existence and purpose of parks and protected areas (Youdelis et al. 2020). Interestingly, for reasons manifestly different than those that motivate fortress conservationists, Indigenous authorities increasingly demand that parks allow Indigenous access whilst simultaneously restricting public entry to areas of high eco-cultural value (T. Smith and Bulkan 2023). These restrictions create tensions for parks planners who are mandated to ensure public access to wilderness areas. Yet it is this very access that is of considerable concern to Indigenous peoples who view the one-way relationship that typifies the transactional nature of non-Indigenous interactions with nature as an extension of western dualisms. Here, the natural world is commodified as “wilderness” lauded for the “services” it provides to humans (Youdelis et al. 2020). Before discussing how Katzie challenges to western conservation and recreation demands influence the actions of regulatory bodies, we first detail the extent and implications of specific state policy commitments in θéθqəł. In describing the extent and tenor of regulatory body commitments to state priorities in each area, we emphasise how those policies reenforce western ontologies, but also highlight instances where management goals could possibly enable Katzie priorities.

**Federal interests in θéθqəł** / **the Widgeon Creek valley**

In 1973 Environment and Climate Change Canada signed a 99-year lease with The Nature Trust of British Columbia establishing 125 hectares of Widgeon Valley as a National Wildlife Area to be managed under the *Canada Wildlife Act* (Canada 2021). The Widgeon Valley National Wildlife Area is the largest undyked freshwater marsh in southwestern British Columbia. The area was set aside for the specific purpose of maintaining a wetland for the benefit of migratory birds and other wildlife, and the WVNWA management plan cites the fact that the area may harbour no fewer than 54 species of conservation concern, 21 of which are considered species at risk. The area is also designated under the IUCN management category 1a “Strict Nature Reserve” whose primary objective is to:

To conserve regionally, nationally or globally outstanding ecosystems, species (occurrences or aggregations) and/or geodiversity features: these attributes will have been formed mostly or entirely by non-human forces and will be degraded or destroyed when subjected to all but very light human impact (IUCN 2021).

The IUCN sets out some exceptions to human use of Category 1a areas, including ceremonial activities that are in keeping with the biodiversity conservation priorities of the designated area.

The 2019 Widgeon Creek Management Plan sets out two primary management goals. The first is to conserve or enhance high quality habitat for waterbirds, and the second to do the same for *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) listed species (Canada 2019). These goals are accomplished through a joint scheme of baseline information gathering, active intervention (e.g. removal of invasive species, active control of shrubland succession), and monitoring. Several of these management objectives align with ancient Katzie management practice that sustained wetland habitats throughout Katzie territory for millennia. The Canada Wildlife Service lists the major threats and challenges to the Wildlife Area as those related to “excessive recreational access”, citing casual picnicking or camping by canoers and kayakers as among those activities most potentially destructive to sensitive Widgeon Valley habitats. Excessive recreational access is also of paramount concern to many Katzie who see that individuals unschooled in Indigenous law, specifically the protocols and teachings about how to be a ‘good guest’ in Katzie territory, often mistreat and disrespect Widgeon and all who live there.

**Provincial interests in θéθqəł** / **Widgeon Valley**

The majority of the upland portions of the Widgeon Valley fall within the boundaries of the Pinecone Burke Provincial Park. Pinecone Burke Park is designated as a Class A Park. According the British Columbia Parks Service a Class A parks are areas of Crown land set aside for the “inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public”. Development is limited to that required to sustain recreational use of the park. Activities with historic connection to the park are permitted, but commercial resource extraction is prohibited (British Columbia 2021).

In a contemporary manifestation of Indigenous territorial marginalization, in the early 1990s the Provincial Government of British Columbia announced their intention to designate a significant portion of Katzie territory (then held as Crown lands) as a Class A Provincial Park. Once designated, the lands would no longer be available as Treaty settlement lands. Unable to reverse the Province’s decision and in an attempt to protect the future interests of Katzie people, in 1995 Katzie First Nation and the Province of British Columbia negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the newly designated Pinecone Burke Provincial Park (KFN BC Parks 1995). The MOU dictates how “the Province and Katzie agreed to work cooperatively together with respect to the planning and management of the park, including how the aboriginal rights and interests of Katzie may be exercised within the park.” The BC Parks website notes the following with regard to cultural heritage “Pinecone Burke Park includes part of the traditional territory of the Katzie First Nation, and borders a Katzie Indian Reserve. The area within the park was used extensively for its plant, fish and wildlife resources.” With regard to conservation, BC Parks (British Columbia 2021) notes:

Pinecone Burke Park protects the western shore of Pitt Lake, the largest fresh water tidal lake in North America. It is a wilderness area protecting old-growth forests, numerous alpine lakes, rugged terrain and remnant icefields. Widgeon Slough is the largest freshwater marsh in southwestern BC and Widgeon Lake is largest hanging lake in Greater Vancouver’s north shore mountains. All five species of Pacific salmon, cutthroat trout, steelhead trout, and migratory Dolly Varden char can be found in the park. Pinecone Burke Park provides habitat for black-tailed deer, mountain goats, black bears and grizzly bears. Six sensitive or vulnerable species occur in the park, including the tailed frog, great blue heron, Vaux’s swift, Huttons’ vireo, shrew mole, and the Pacific jumping mouse. The park also contains nationally recognized wetlands in the Widgeon Valley.

Katzie are actively participating in the latest round of park management planning in hopes of increasing levels of cooperation and to address Katzie needs and interests within the Park. At the time of writing, BC Parks had yet to release the draft management plan for public comment.

**Municipal Interests in θéθqəł /** **Widgeon Valley**

Metro Vancouver which maintains property and interests in the Widgeon Valley is a federation of 21 municipalities, a single Treaty nation (Tsawwassen First Nation), and an electoral area working collaboratively to provide regional solutions in key areas including air quality, climate change response, solid waste management, and regional parks access (MetroVancouver 2021). The fiduciary duty held by the Federal and Provincial governments of Canada does not transfer directly to municipal governments, and only impacts them when municipal plans trigger one or more provincial or federal legislated process such as an environmental impact assessment. Thus, the degree of commitment toward Indigenous reconciliation expressed by municipalities is often tied to the demands of their respective constituencies, or more often, by Indigenous peoples’ deliberate triggering of provincial and federal approval process that work to ensure Indigenous rights are considered and accommodated within municipal planning—no matter how cumbersome those processes may be.

Metro Vancouver has planning authority over 621 hectares currently designated as the Widgeon Marsh Regional Park, two thirds of which is classified as critical wetland habitat. In 1992 Metro Vancouver entered into partnership with landowners the Nature Trust of BC and Ducks Unlimited to manage the regional park. According to the Widgeon Marsh Regional Park Planning document, the park aims to protect and enhance park habitat while providing opportunities for the public to experience the park’s ecology and landscape. The park management plan notes that, in addition to conservation and public access and education objectives, it also aims to “protect traditional and cultural resources…in collaboration with First Nations” (MetroVancouver 2019, 14), acknowledging that the park has one of the few wild patches of wapato, a plant critical to Katzie culture and foodways, remaining in the region (MetroVancouver 2019, 17). Section 6.3 (MetroVancouver 2019, 34) of the current plan suggests Metro Vancouver will “work with First Nations to protect and enhance wapato (*Sagittaria latifolia*) within the park”. Finally, the plan suggests Metro Vancouver explore “opportunities for Cultural Planning and Co-operation Agreements with First Nations” (MetroVancouver 2019, 17). Metro Vancouver’s original plans including provision of facilities to support up to 150,000 park visitors annually.

**Barriers to Managing θéθqəł as an Eco-Cultural Landscape**

These varying scales of policy content and applications through management planning reflects how state decision makers both conceive of and operationalise their understanding of mandated priorities. From an Indigenous Katzie perspective the policy-driven decision-making in the Widgeon Creek valley exemplify the assumptions that inform a western nature:culture dualism. In the Widgeon Valley, western ontologies are reflected in policy approaches in two fundamental ways. First, governing bodies assume that their individual resource management priorities can be enacted successfully within their respective, arbitrarily defined properties. This view is often not shared by on-the-ground managers who having been to Widgeon understand it to be a vitally interconnected whole. Nonetheless, institutionally mandated boundaries and their attendant management regimes create artificial divisions in what in actuality are highly integrated eco-cultural landscapes. Second, it is clear that policy reflects a growing acknowledgement of Indigenous rights at varying scales of governance, but it is equally clear that barriers to meaningful reconciliation remain. These include a prioritization of scientific data gathering, and restrictions on the range and type of activities permitted in protected areas, such as the restrictions on human activities imposed by IUCN management category 1a, or Metro Vancouver’s suggestion that traditional plant gathering is acceptable within their parks, but hunting is not. Such constraints continue to privilege western conservation and recreational priorities over those of Indigenous peoples. First Nations including the Katzie First Nation, are looking to push beyond discourses of acknowledgement to insist that governments demonstrate commitments to meaningful acts of reconciliation, which include prioritization of Indigenous access and use. In the case of θéθqəł, this includes ensuring that all actions taken within θéθqəł are done so in accordance with the teachings and protocols that stem from Katzie’s particular form of Indigenous law.

**Indigenous Law as Heritage: Indigenous Ontologies at work.**

Restoration of Indigenous sovereignty over Indigenous territories is a slow, often incremental process. In areas where Indigenous peoples have successfully re-established decision-making authority they use Indigenous law to prioritise management protocols and regimes that foreground Indigenous cultural, social, environmental, and economic values (Finegan 2018). There are examples of successful Indigenous initiatives, variously titled Self-Governance Land Management Regimes, Indigenous Protected Areas, or Park Reserves among others, currently operationalised throughout Canada (Fligg and Robinson 2020) and in other countries including Australia and New Zealand (Artelle et al. 2018). Reflecting the diversity of Indigenous peoples, the exact nature of protocols and teachings reflected in Indigenous law and its applications differ between and among Indigenous peoples (Turner 2020).

The categorization of Indigenous law as globally relevant form of ‘intangible heritage’ is legitimized in the eyes of the western world through international forms of recognition, including the growing list of globally important forms of Intangible cultural heritage associated with the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Expression of Indigenous law currently featured on the UNESCO list include: “Ancestral system of knowledge of the four indigenous peoples, Arhuaco, Kankuamo, Kogui and Wiwa of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta” (Columbia), the “Gada system, an indigenous democratic socio-political system of the Oromo” (Ethiopia), and the “Manden Charter, proclaimed in Kurukan Fuga” (Mali).

Indigenous law is the foundation upon which many other intangible heritages are based and sustained. Indigenous legal scholar John Borrows defines five types of Indigenous Law, these include: customary law, which are “those practices developed through repetitive patterns of social interaction that are accepted as binding on those who participate in them”; sacred law which are those laws that stem from the Creator and include creation stories and ancient teachings; natural law which is based on observations of the physical world that “attempt to develop rules for regulation and conflict resolution from a study of the world’s behaviour”; and deliberative law which stems from processes of deliberation, council, persuasion, and discussion (Borrows 2010, 34). A fifth and final source of Indigenous law is positivistic law which engages with power and ideology, but must be balanced through the application of the other forms of law since overreliance on positivistic law is apt to lead to corruption and misuse of power (Borrows 2010, 59). It stands to reason that many other forms of intangible heritage (whether featured or not on the UNESCO list), including forms of sustainable cultivation and harvest, ceremonies that promote multi-generational knowledge exchange, and artistic traditions that convey deeply relational connection to place, reference foundational aspects of one or more of these categories of Indigenous law.

The (re)application of any or all of these categories of Indigenous law holds considerable potential for the ontological re-working of management priorities for western state regulatory agencies. For example, the Secwepemc of what is now the south-central Interior of British Columbia, Canada used their Indigenous *stsquey* (law) embedded in an epic story of a place called Pipsell to detail “Secwepemc Indigenous law about ‘caretakership’ of the land and the reciprocal accountability of its sentient beings and about the preciousness and interconnectedness of water, land, and air as embodied in the water cycle” to inform an Indigenous designed and led environmental assessment of a proposed mining development (Ignace and Ignace 2020, 133). Importantly, the story of Pipsell relates the consequences should anyone violate the laws of reciprocal accountability. In this case Indigenous law was used to frame an environmental impact assessment, the results of which were used to successfully block the construction of a mine. As importantly, the story and the laws embedded within it were used to introduce to state agencies to new ways of thinking about a different world of relations (Ignace and Ignace 2020).

As in the case of Pipsell, communication and application of Indigenous law reshaped both the research process and the outcomes of government action. More generally there are increasing indications that Indigenous laws, many of which mobilize cultural values of relation, reciprocity, respect, and guardianship, will be important in determining the direction of Indigenous and non-Indigenous futures (Artelle et al. 2018). Examples of Indigenous law applications exist in other countries including Australia, New Zealand, and in South America and Africa (Rist et al. 2019; Murray and Burrows 2017). In these and other areas of the world, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and resource managers have demonstrated that "When Indigenous nations become sovereign partners in environmental management, the power structures and worldviews that underlie decision-making can be productively challenged ... creating new solutions to pressing environmental issues"  (Muller, Hemming, and Rigney 2019, 399).

The application of Indigenous law is equally vital to ensuring that settlers in and visitors to Indigenous territories are afforded the opportunity to reconsider their own relationships with, and demands of, the world around them now and for future generations. Ontological reconfiguration achieved through state and public engagement with Indigenous law could have a profound impact on how non-Indigenous peoples behave in and relate to eco-cultural landscapes in a future defined by climate change (Anker 2021). Opportunities for public exposure to Indigenous law are ripe in an era where increasing numbers of people are seeking mental and physical wellbeing through outdoor pursuits. While designation of θéθqəł as a Katzie Cultural Keystone Place would permanently secure a culturally safe place for Katzie traditions to continue, in the future Katzie forsee providing Katzie-led initiatives that expose the public to Katzie’s world and the protocols for being a ‘good guest’ within it. Such initiatives simultaneously promote innovative means to address western park and resource management priorities that look to balance vital biodiversity conservation with growing demand for public access to natural places. For Katzie nowhere is this potential more apparent than in opportunities to reconcile the competing conservation and recreation priorities of the government stakeholders who claim jurisdictional authority over portions of θéθqəł. Below we consider how the mobilization of Indigenous sovereignty are facilitating resolution of these tensions in other First Nation/government agreements before considering how Katzie law can work to address recreation pressures, while advancing social and environmental justice priorities in θéθqəł.

Indigenous peoples’ efforts to regain sovereignty within the Canadian nation state takes many forms. Recent designations include “Indigenous Protected Areas” (IPAs) and earlier conservation reserves. Both of the examples discussed below can be categorized as forms of co-management. The Haida example shows how long term, step-wise movement toward centring Indigenous law can become a reality for more recently designated areas such as that achieved by the Thaidene Nëné. On Haida Gwaii, whose homeland is the group of islands situated off the Northwest Coast of what is now known as Canada, the “Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site” is the first to provide interconnected ecosystem management planning from “mountain top to sea floor”. The wholistic approach taken in Haida Gwaii confronts western principles of resource management where forests and oceans are typically managed by separate departments whose siloed approaches to their own departmental priorities rarely extend from sea to shore and visa versa. The “Gwaii Haanas Gina ’Waadluxan KilGuhlGa Land-Sea-People Management Plan (hereafter Gwaii Haanas Plan) …provides a blueprint for responsible and respectful stewardship that will ensure the continuity of Haida culture and protect the natural heritage of Gwaii Haanas for future generations” (HaidaNation 2018). The Council of Haida Nation and the Government of Canada “view the Gwaii Haanas as an example of reconciliation in action, offering lessons from more than 25 years of experience.” Of particular relevance is the fact that the management Gwaii Haanas Plan’s guiding principles “are based on ethics and values from Haida law” (2018: 7). The plan acknowledges the impacts of current legal contexts suggesting that the plan will be reviewed when legal issues of rights and title are resolved (2018: 13). The document acknowledges both the commitment required for meaningful government-to-government collaboration, and the tensions that arise when values collide. Nonetheless, the management plan establishes precedent for collaborative management and planning across multiple regulatory jurisdictions.

Recently established Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA), such as Thaidene Nëné near the Dene community of Łutsel K’e in the Northwest Territories, seek to rebalance Parks Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples. Thaidene Nëné, a 26,525 square kilometre area of lakes, old-growth forest and abundant wildlife, is one of the planet’s only remaining intact, unimpeded watersheds. In addition to re-establishing permanent access to traditional lands, the IPA provides for long lasting economic and social opportunity. The community of Łutsel K’e purchased a high end fishing lodge, and the park is further supported by a $30million trust fund (established by a $15 Federal fund matched by Nature United) that will generate dividends of $1million per year to support guardians, training, planning, research partnerships and youth camps. The park is governed collaboratively by the Łutsel K’e, Parks Canada, and the Northwest Territories government. The community likens their co-management relationship to the effort it takes to properly tan a moose hide, comparing the long term goals to the poles or “Denı́ dhë́dh chené” of the tanning frame, and short term objectives to the ropes or “Bet’á ɂenélką ɂetth’é” that hold the hide in place. With the correct tools and respectful approach and an awareness of when to adjust the tension and sharpen the tools, “we will work under a consensus process with the Parties as we move forward to co-govern Thaidene Nëné” (LKDFN 2021). Among the long term goals is the desire to incorporate Dene laws into the management plan by 2025 (LKDFN 2021).

Owing to the fact that θéθqəł is located within close proximity to a densely populated and rapidly expanding urban centre, there is some urgency to the Katzie cultural keystone place designation that sees Katzie law take the lead in informing future management directives. The pressure on θéθqəł and other near-urban wilderness areas is increasing as city dwellers seek consumptive (e.g. hunting, fishing) and non-consumptive (e.g. wildlife viewing, hiking) opportunities in increasing numbers, particularly in parks and protected areas within easy reach of urban centres. Over-tourism in parks and protected areas has resulted in many peri-urban natural areas being “loved to death” (Taff et al. 2019; T. Smith and Bulkan 2023). In response western managers have instituted planning or willingness-to-pay mechanisms designed to restrict or discourage public access to parks. These include the introduction of park permit systems or raising park entrance fees. However, such mechanisms have met with limited success. Restricting access can effectively reduce direct, short-term impacts, but it does little to educate the public about how to be a ‘good guest’ when visiting eco-cultural landscapes. As exhibited in the Haida “Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site” and by future plans for the Thaidene Nëné, if acting in alignment with and in adherence to Indigenous law, humans need not cordon off the natural world (Artelle et al. 2018). By using government policy commitments to reconciliation to leverage co-management, or in some cases exclusive management agreements, Indigenous peoples are mobilizing intangible heritage in the form of Indigenous law to realign management of parks or protected areas to reflect Indigenous ontologies and by extension, Indigenous priorities. We argue that the outcomes of co-management structures guided by Indigenous law will accrue significant cumulative benefits, and it is to these that we now turn.

**θéθqəł: A Cultural Keystone Place for Global Climate Action**

Having established the mechanisms that Indigenous peoples are using to regain sovereignty and decision-making authority in their territories, and the role of Indigenous law in the management of those areas, we turn now to the implications of Indigenous controlled areas for climate change action. There are three compelling arguments linking the designation of Indigenous controlled areas, including cultural keystone places, to effective global climate change action. The first speaks to the critical link connecting Indigenous resource management practices to biodiversity conservation, the second to the broad impact of innovative approaches to localized climate change mitigation and response, and the third to meaningful enactment of social justice imperatives expressed through state commitments to reconciliation.

Climate scientists and policy makers readily acknowledge biodiversity preservation as fundamental to climate change mitigation (Díaz et al. 2019; Mittermeier et al. 2011). Evidence correlating the worlds remaining biodiversity with the presence of Indigenous peoples is mounting (Garnett et al. 2018; Corrigan et al. 2018), as is the evidence suggesting a causal link between Indigenous management and long-term biodiversity enhancement and maintenance (Armstrong 2017; Brondízio et al. 2021; Lepofsky et al. 2017). Recognizing the correlation between biodiversity preservation and Indigenous presence, an emerging climate-change discourse proposes the reconstitution of Indigenous resource management practices as a promising new dimension of climate change response (Artelle et al. 2019; Mittermeier et al. 2011; Schmidt and Peterson 2009; Schuster et al. 2019). Taken cumulatively, localized biodiversity and enhancement practices of Indigenous peoples, including those of the Katzie, has global implications. Evidence suggests that the biodiversity observed in Katzie territory is the direct outcome of the relationship, sustained over millennia, between Katzie and their lands and waters (Hoffmann et al. 2016; Lyons et al. 2018). θéθqəł is the last remaining relatively unencumbered or impacted portion of a cultural landscape defined by what was once one of the Lower Fraser River Valley’s largest wetland mosaic systems. Remnant patches of this larger wetland constitute a portion of the world’s highly valued remaining areas of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity. Indeed, the longterm maintenance and increase of biodiversity in the Widgeon Valley that is of global benefit may very well depend upon the reapplication of Katzie law and the protocols and teachings that stem from it.

While biodiversity preservation can work to forestall and mitigate climate change impacts, Indigenous management of cultural keystone places can also contribute to climate change response. Climate change has been described as the existential crisis of our time (Wagner and Weitzman 2016). Whilst looking to slow the impacts of climate change, global leaders are also looking toward the strategies employed by Indigenous peoples to seek solutions for how human society might adapt to changing environmental baseline conditions that could cause profound shifts in status quo socio-economic conditions (Makondo and Thomas 2018; Shukla et al. 2019; Wuebbles et al. 2017). Cultural practices guided by ancient forms of Indigenous law ground reciprocal interactions between people and place over very long time periods including those characterised by significant social and environmental change (Borrows 2019). Adaptive responses recorded in millennia of oral histories and captured in archaeological sites provide some insight into how wider society might look to respond to environmental change (Rockman and Hritz 2020). With respect to anticipated impact of climate-induced water level rise on the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Figure 3 illustrates land predicted to be below the annual flood conditions by 2050 (Climate Central 2023). Threats to sensitive wetland habitats from rising sea levels include replacement of freshwater species via incursion of brackish or saltwater-adapted species, and subsequent migration of freshwater wetlands into unencumbered inland reaches of waterways (Neubauer and Craft 2009). Temperature rises that correlate with rising water levels are predicted to impact sensitive bog habitats, fundamental changes to which could result in extirpation of eco-culturally significant plant species such as bog cranberry.

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Insert Figure 3 about here (Climate Central Map of Predicted Climate-Induced flooding in Katzie territory by 2050, reproduced with permission www.coastal.climatecentral.org)

Katzie are wetland peoples. Having successfully managed to sustain themselves within wetland environs for millennia, broader society has much to learn from Katzie in the face of anticipated impacts of predicted climate-induced sea-level and temperature rise including those that threaten food security. Katzie resource management knowledge concerning wetland plant foods like wapato for example, could be vital to the reintroduction of sustainable yields of edible plants as one component of a local food security program. Additionally, archaeological evidence suggests that Katzie successfully managed the complex hydrological regimes of one of the world’s only freshwater tidal lakes, having both shaped, and been culturally shaped by living in this particularly dynamic wetland environ (Hoffmann et al. 2016). Ancient practices of landscape engineering could form the basis of practical response to management of water incursion in developed areas (Duncan et al. 2021; Krause et al. 2021).

Canada is among a growing number of countries committed to social justice initiatives that include repairing relations with Indigenous peoples (TRC and Canada 2015). Canada has acknowledged the harm to Indigenous peoples from decades of colonial practice intended to extinguish Indigenous cultures, and to actively destroy the languages, practices, and places upon which those cultures depend (Dussault and Erasmus 1996; TRC and Canada 2015). Canadian national, provincial, and municipal governments have made legal and policy commitments seeking to establish meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Despite the very public and seemingly earnest nature of these commitments, for many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada, these commitments have yet to manifest as meaningful action—most remain as unfulfilled promises (CBC 2022). Reintroduction of Indigenous management regimes requires return of decision-making control over traditional lands to Indigenous peoples. Indeed, the return of traditional lands is frequently cited as a fundamental to decolonization, and by extension, meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Corntassel 2012; Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Tuck and Yang 2012; Claxton and Price 2020).

Owing to the twin pressures of urban expansion and the public’s seemingly insatiable appetite for access to ‘nature’, Katzie are rapidly losing areas of their territory that are suitable for the maintenance of traditional ceremonial and sustenance practices. The designation of θéθqəł as a Katzie cultural keystone place would permanently secure a culturally suitable place for Katzie traditions to continue as guided by the teachings and protocols that flow from Katzie law. As envisioned by Katzie, the establishment of θéθqəł as a Katzie cultural keystone place would provide both a concrete example of Canada’s commitment to reconciliation and a global exemplar for the implementation of the core principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Canada is a signatory and British Columbia has passed into law. It would provide a place for Katzie to re-gain a modicum of real sovereignty, and in doing so reactivate Indigenous laws that underpin Katzie’s deep relationship to place to the benefit of Katzie, but also the residents of Metro Vancouver, and arguably all Canadians.

**The Future of “future making”: Indigenous Law as Heritage for Climate Change Action at θéθqəł**

Having initiated the cultural keystone place designation process, Katzie remain optimistic, hoping that the willingness shown by individual government agents to work together with Katzie for the benefit of θéθqəł will yield institutional change that will provide innovative solutions to what in the past seemed almost insurmountable barriers to creating a future of Katzie’s making. Paramount among these changes is Katzie’s call that management of θéθqəł should adhere first and foremost to Katzie customary protocols and teachings, some of which will, in the short term at least, necessitate restricting plans that facilitate a dramatic increase in public access to the Valley.

The future success of Katzie’s bid to assert decision-making authority over θéθqəł is a litmus test reflecting the degree to which Canadian government promises will manifest as meaningful on-the-ground practice. By many measures, Canada is a global leader in Indigenous relations, but there remains much work to be done to heal past, and some would argue, ongoing state attempts at cultural genocide. Stretching toward a future that embraces ontological pluralism requires the government look to re-configure western management planning in service Indigenous priorities that in turn enliven Indigenous law.

Government willingness for bold action is dependent, at least in part, upon that of the voting citizenry, and here too Indigenous peoples are changing hearts and minds. Katzie are one of hundreds of Indigenous communities in Canada, and thousands around the world, fighting for their inherent rights, title, and recognition. A recent nation-wide survey found that in Canada there is a “growing awareness of the mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples” coupled with a willingness to identify Canadian government policies, and not Indigenous peoples themselves, as the main obstacle to achieving equitable futures (Environics 2021, 1). Reflecting positive precedent for meaningful reconciliation, there are agreements in several Canadian provinces, including British Columbia, that provide for Indigenous-led management or meaningful co-management of National Wildlife Areas, parks, and other Indigenous lands and waters claimed by the state. Some of these agreements have been in place for several years and have met with considerable success. Through these examples, the reinstitution of Indigenous law has been shown to have ongoing and future applications that are of benefit not only Indigenous peoples, but arguably the planet as a whole (Artelle et al. 2019; UNEP 2022). Indeed, on a global scale, the restitution of Indigenous law constitutes one of the most powerful ways to unlock the ‘future-making potential of ontological pluralism’ since it flows from deeply relational ontologies that look to establish the performative and ethical bases of living *as relationship* (H.A. Smith 2016; Artelle et al. 2018). These laws manifest in many ways, and those include the stimulation and maintenance of critical areas of biodiversity that are key to ongoing and future management of climate change impacts. In closing, we argue that re-establishment of Katzie law in the cultural keystone place called θéθqəł has the potential to challenge the public imaginary such that the broader citizenry might embrace protocols and teachings that create a future where we all learn to live *as relationship.*

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