

Learning to talk to the land: Online stewardship in Taku River Tlingit territory

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Abstract

Stewardship is a concept that members of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation have long embraced in respect to their territory. Within the community's vision and management documents, responsible stewardship is described as the requirement to "exercise our leadership in all aspects of caring of our lands" (TRTFN, 2003, p. 17). This connection to land is also enshrined in the community's constitution, which states, "Our land looks after us and we look after our land. Anything that happens to Tlingit land affects us and our culture" (TRTFN, 1993). In relation to these principles, this paper describes the development of an online participatory mapping tool that combines Taku River Tlingit ideologies of stewardship with Tlingit language place names and stories. We address the development of the mapping tool as an educational mechanism via four key themes: 1) Place names teach you how to respect the land, 2) Place names give you pride, 3) Place names tell you about the land, and 4) Place names let you leave your mark. We position these themes within a multi-year collaborative research project directed by both community members and university researchers. Finally, we speculate on the role of web-based mapping as an effective medium for communities to articulate the connection between land, language and stewardship.

Keywords: *place names; language revitalization; Tlingit; geolive mapping; stewardship*

Introduction

The territory of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, located mainly in Canada, stretches from the Yukon into British Columbia and down the Taku River to the coast of Alaska. While members of the community still travel throughout the territory as stewards of the land, the government offices of the community are located in the northwest corner of British Columbia in the town of Atlin. The town's English name is the simplification of the Tlingit name for the lake where the town is situated, Áa Tlein (meaning Big Lake). The current town site is located on what was originally a summer camp for the Tlingit people who came to the lake to fish. The Tlingit name for their summer camp lands is Wéinaa, which means alkali or where caribou used to come for salt lick (Nyman and Leer, 1993).

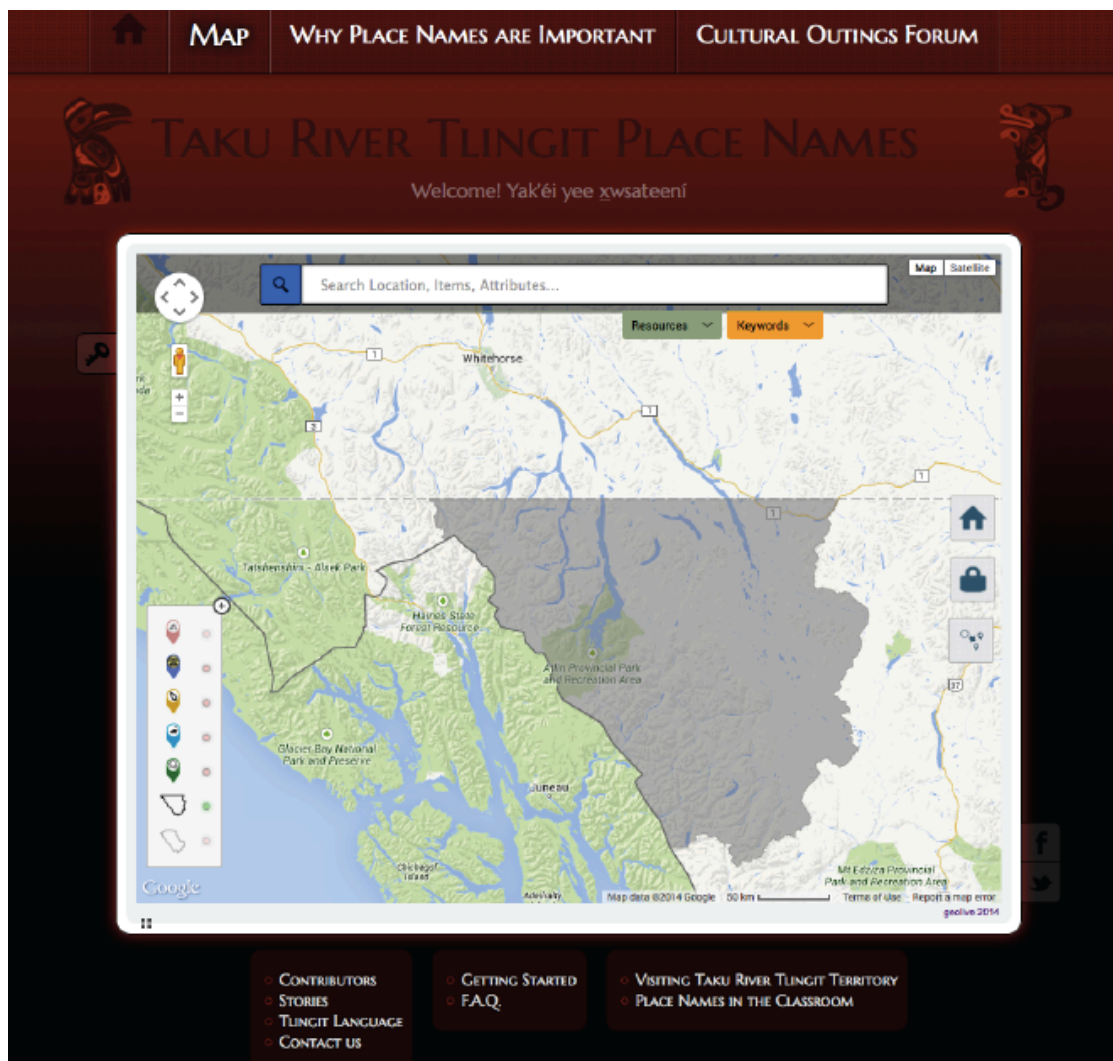


Figure 1: Map of Taku River Tlingit Traditional Territory in British Columbia (<http://trt.geolive.ca>)

As can be seen from this brief description of Taku River Tlingit territory, Tlingit place names provide much information about the land and are key to the stewardship principles that the members of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation have long practiced in their lands. As one film produced by the community stated:

Age-old Tlingit place names, as poetic as they are practical, carry valuable ecological and survival information. Place names represent locations where fish spawn, where moose come to drink, where edible fern roots could be found. Hundreds of names within this area form an indispensable survival map, a legacy passed down through generations of Tlingit. (1997)¹

However, as settlers began to come to Taku River Tlingit Territory, such as the gold miners who arrived in 1898 during the Atlin gold rush, the colonial language of English took over as the language of communication as well as the language used to name the land. As part of the community's struggle to reclaim their Tlingit language, which no child currently learns as their first language, there has been a focus on reclaiming names for the land and its resources since stewardship is a key principle for the community. For example, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation has long been involved in many different political and legal actions that help support their ongoing stewardship of their lands. In particular, in 1996, after the province of British Columbia gave permission to Redfern Resources, a mining company, to build a road through undisturbed Taku River Tlingit territory, the community took the company and the province to court due to lack of consultation on actions that would have disrupted much of their subsistence lands (Staples, 1996). During the court battles, the community partnered with Round River, a conservation group, in order to develop a sustainable land plan, also known as the Conservation Area Design, to further strengthen their argument for stewardship over their lands.

In 2003, the community and Round River published documents together on the beginnings of a land plan for the community; these included a Conservation Area Design and a Vision and Management Document (TRTFN, 2003). The court case went all the way to appeal in the Supreme Court of Canada, which the Taku River Tlingit First Nation eventually lost. However, their case created legal precedence that continues to benefit other First Nations in Canada.² John Ward, spokesperson for the community during the court case, commented afterwards, "We will never be severed from our land and this decision doesn't change that. Taku River Tlingit Nation will continue to be the stewards of our Territory, like we always have been" (cited in Pope, 2005). More recently, in July 2011, the province of British Columbia and the Taku River Tlingit First Nation signed a historic document, the Atlin Taku Land Use Plan, which according to one news source "balances stewardship with development" (ICTMN, 2011). Stewardship, then, is a key concept for the community.

¹ Place names that may match this particular quote are: At-xeegi Tlein (fish go there to spawn), Dzísk'u Áayi (moose lake), Taaltsuxéi (root garden).

² Taku River Tlingit v. British Columbia (Project Assessment Director), 2004 SCC 74

The Taku River Tlingit First Nation's Vision and Management documents (2003) describe their continued role as "responsible stewards of the lands and waters within our territory" (TRTFN, 2003, p. 4). For them responsible stewardship:

...requires us to exercise our leadership in all aspects of caring for our lands. This is very important because our social well-being and sustainable livelihood, as well as those of our neighbours, are inseparable from the health of our lands and waters and from the decisions about how we all live on and use these lands. We would be abandoning our responsibilities: to our ancestors, to our children, and to those who live here now, if we did not actively exercise our responsibility in the area of conservation and land use planning that must include responsible development. (TRTFN, 2003, p. 7)

Language is also a key aspect of stewardship for the community and within the Vision and Management Document, the Taku River Tlingit community members have explicitly written that, "land use planning and management shall be grounded in Tlingit concepts, values, and understandings, and should be infused with Tlingit language" (TRTFN, 2003, p. 16).

With the importance of stewardship and its connection to language revitalization in mind, researchers from the University of British Columbia partnered with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation in order to develop a participatory mapping tool that combines Taku River Tlingit stewardship with Tlingit language place names and stories. In particular, the map is an educational tool that emphasizes four core themes: 1) Place names teach you how to respect the land, 2) Place names give you pride, 3) Place names tell you about the land, and 4) Place names let you leave your mark. These themes developed out of interviews that one of the authors (Schreyer) conducted with Taku River Tlingit community members in 2010 and 2011 as the background work to this project, as well as from interviews that she conducted during her PhD research with the community (2005-2008). Schreyer's early work specifically involved working with the community to develop Tlingit language revitalization tools, including a Tlingit language board game based on traveling through the land. The current project utilizes information from the board game and continues to emphasize Tlingit language and cultural knowledge.

The current project, entitled "Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names," is tied to both Indigenous pedagogy and decolonization as it attends to principles of Indigenous knowledge, including: relationships, respect, community, spirit, and renewal (Antone, 2000; Battiste, 2009; Castellano et al, 2000; Stairs, 1994). In all four of the educational theme areas—respecting the land, giving pride, teaching about the land, and leaving your mark—the website provides opportunities for Taku River Tlingit community members, as well as outsiders, to read about and share their own thoughts about the relationship between Taku River Tlingit people and the land. Respect for the Taku River Tlingit First Nation is demonstrated by honouring the traditional names for the places within Taku River Tlingit traditional territory. As well, community members have expressed the pride that they have in the project which links to spirit – a spirit of renewal of Taku River Tlingit ways. Decolonization is also central to the project for a number of reasons. First, the renaming of places in the traditional

territory of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation with Tlingit names sends a strong message about reclaiming lands that were colonized by various settler groups, such as the early miners from the 1898 Atlin gold rush. The online participatory map also includes lesson plans that model how to decolonize education by including Taku River Tlingit traditional knowledge and ways of knowing within the British Columbia Ministry of Education learning outcomes for children. The background research to the current participatory mapping tool will appear below, as well as more discussion on how Taku River Tlingit community members see the relationship between stewardship over lands and stewardship over language.

Beginning to talk to the land

Schreyer began working with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation community in 2005 as part of her doctoral research, which examined the relationship between land, language and identity (Schreyer, 2009). During this research, she became aware that a well-respected elder, the late Mrs. Elizabeth Nyman, was quoted in a Taku River Tlingit Heritage Department Newsletter from 1995 as wanting to have the Tlingit place names replace the English ones on provincial and federal government maps. One of Schreyer's goals during her doctoral research was to assist in compiling information that might be used for this purpose. However, as this was not the focus of her dissertation, she was unable to dedicate much time to this effort. Therefore, upon completion of her dissertation, Schreyer began a project in the summer of 2010, which focused on community attitudes about reclaiming Tlingit place names. Preliminary interviews indicated that community members felt that Tlingit place names should be put back onto official government maps as this would help them to re-learn their Tlingit language, as well as to illustrate their stewardship over their traditional lands.

During the course of these preliminary interviews a few themes emerged that have impacted the objectives for the "Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names" research project. First, many community members did not separate learning the Tlingit language from learning about the land; for them, the two went hand in hand. For example, when Elder Jackie Williams is asked what a place, such as the Warm Springs south of town, is called he invariably replies, "in *our* language *they* call it Yat'aayi Héen" (Williams, J., interview, 2010). Rather than saying "in Tlingit, it is called", Jackie's response focuses on the language as being part of who he is as a Tlingit person - it's "our language". He also says, "they call it", which shows that the information he is sharing is what he has learned from his ancestors. Others, such as Bryan Jack and Ed Anderson, emphasized that learning their language would be healing for the community. As Bryan said, "I think that healing is something we've got to do. I think that language is very much something we've got to do" (Jack, B., interview, 2010), while Ed commented, "we tried having language classes to turn people back into Tlingit people" (Anderson, E., interview, 2011). Ed Anderson and Susan Carlick both stressed in their interviews that learning "worldview, the abstract stuff" (Anderson, E., interview, 2011) would help people develop more responsibility for the land. For example, when Schreyer asked Susan if she thought

people would learn more of the Tlingit language if they could learn the Tlingit place names, Susan replied, “Absolutely! And, take on more responsibility to do that. I mean, if I would go to a map and I couldn’t say the right name, I would sure learn it quickly to make sure that I did” (Carlick, S., interview, 2011). Knowing the Tlingit language then is intimately tied to responsibilities to the land.

Second, connected to the above points, quite a few community members stressed the importance of respecting the land by using the Tlingit names for the land. Comments included wanting to: “get into a good rhythm with the land” (Gordon, L., interview, 2010); “give the land back its spirit” (Jack, B., interview, 2010); and “learning to talk to the land and call it the right [name]” because “I think that our land would appreciate it” (Carlick, S., interview, 2011). Similar ideas about the ability for the land to listen and to appreciate how people discuss it can be seen in Cruikshank’s work with Tlingit and Tagish women in the southern Yukon (Cruikshank, 2005). Community members then, as evidenced from these comments, saw two goals for their plan to submit applications to the provincial government to have their Tlingit place names put on official government maps. These were: 1) the opportunity to re-learn the Tlingit language and “how to talk to and about their land” (Carlick, S., interview, 2011) and, consequently, 2) “giving the land back its spirit”, which is a form of stewardship. Through discussion with Taku River Tlingit community members during the research process, the idea to create an interactive website that could help “put the names back on the faces of our mountains and onto the surfaces of our lakes” (Carlick S., interview, 2011) developed since this would be another way for the names to be seen and learned by all the members of the community. Schreyer, knowing of Corbett’s experience with geoweb technologies, suggested including Corbett into this research project to utilize his expertise in online and Indigenous participatory mapping (see below for more information on this topic). Schreyer and Corbett applied for funding to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) in February 2012 in order to support this research with their community partners and were, fortunately, successful with their application. Research meetings for the project began in June of 2012.

A student research assistant, David Lacho, was hired to help build up the geoweb application that Corbett’s research lab has developed (called geolive) for this project. To begin, information from Schreyer’s doctoral research process was utilized. As part of her doctoral research, as previously mentioned, Schreyer had worked with Taku River Tlingit community members, particularly Louise Gordon, the Director of Lands and Resources for the First Nation, during this time period to develop a Tlingit language board game called “Haa shagóon ítx̱ yaa ntoo.aat” (Traveling Our Ancestors’ Paths). This game includes information about traditional ecological knowledge, as well as Tlingit place names throughout Taku River Tlingit territory. The game was intended to be a language learning tool for the Taku River Tlingit community and copies were distributed throughout the community in the summer of 2012 when more funding for this project allowed more copies to be printed. The game is important to the current project as the

information collected for the game from the Taku River Tlingit Heritage Department became the first pieces of information to populate the website.³

The website includes a cover-page that shows scrolling images from around Taku River Tlingit territory, as well as the wolf and crow images that are associated with the First Nation's governance. The tabs across the top of the website include: 'Map', 'Why Place Names Are Important', and the 'Cultural Outings Forum' (see Figure 2).

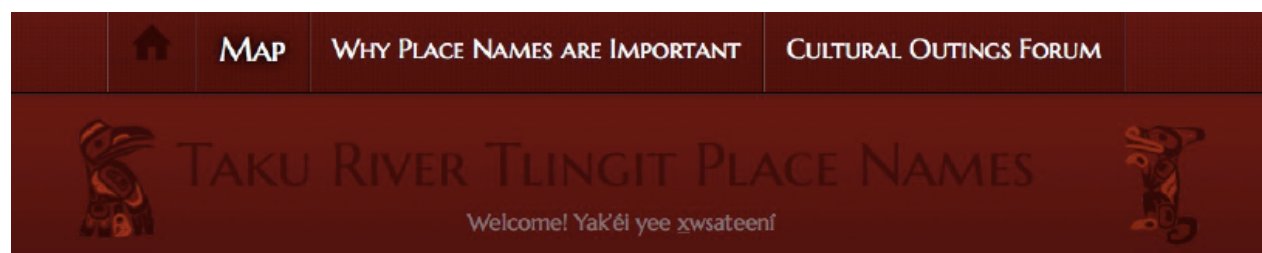


Figure 2: The Learning to Talk to the Land Website Tabs (<http://trt.geolive.ca>)

The 'Why Place Names Are Important' section includes comments from community members on the four different themes (described above) that have been the educational guiding principles for the website. The 'Cultural Outings Forum' is a place to have conversations and share knowledge about trips out on the land. Finally, the 'Map' is the main piece of the website as it holds the most significant amount of information. The map includes a variety of layers that can be turned on and off based on the users' needs and preferences (see Figure 3). These include: Tlingit places layer; the Kwéiyi or carving layer, which indicates contemporary carvings which have recently been used to mark community use of the land; the Lingít Kusteeyí layer, which connects to a particular story about the boundaries between Tlingit and Tahltan peoples as told by Elder, Jackie Williams; the Fish layer, which indicates well-known fishing locations and camps for the community; and the Sharing Places layer, where people can share stories about the land, such as their favourite places out on the land.

³ For more information on the development of the "Haa shagóon itx yaa ntoo.aat" board game see: Schreyer and Gordon, 2007 and Schreyer, 2011.

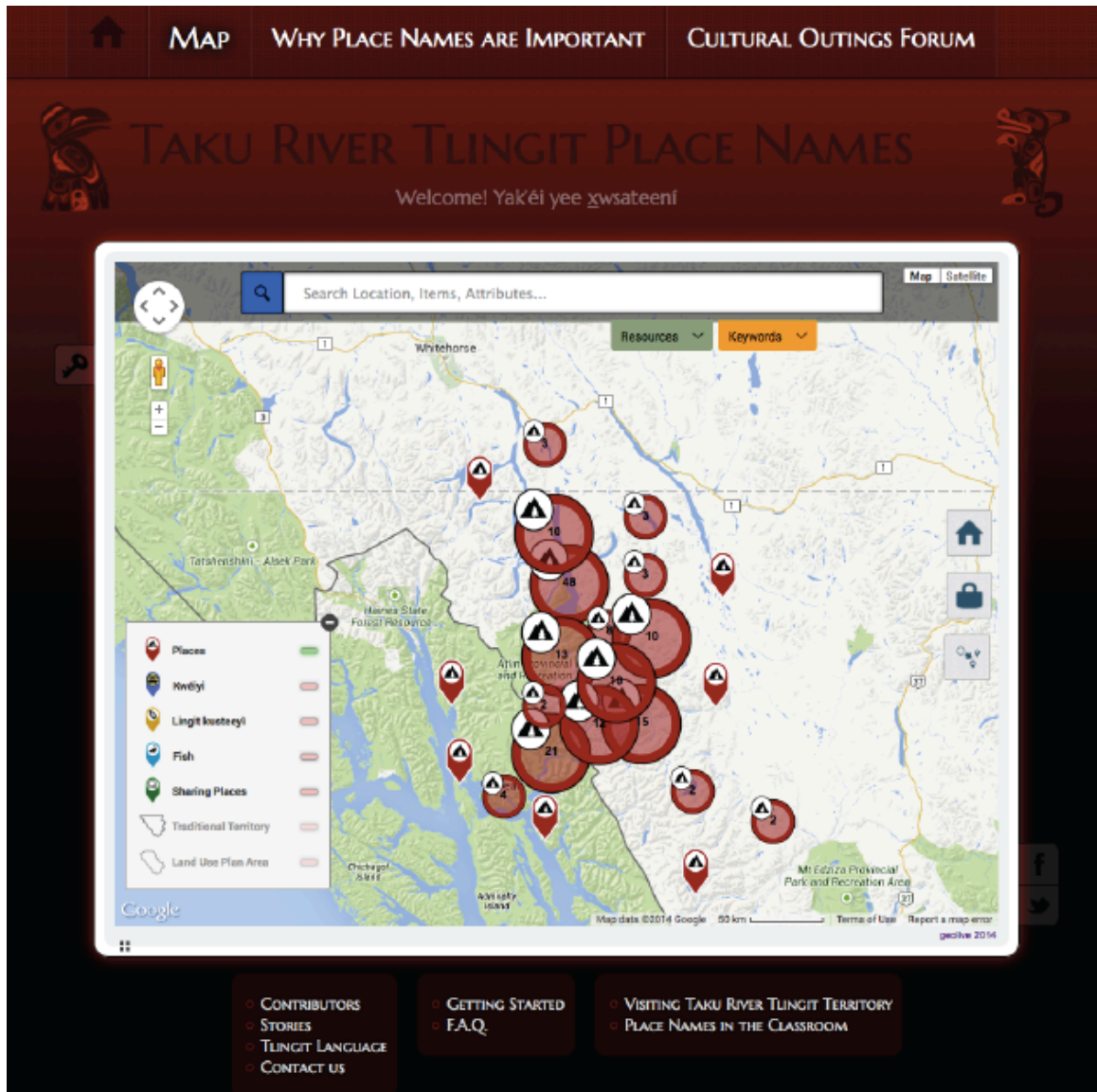


Figure 3: Map home page with clusters of Tlingit Places shown in red.
The various layers shown in the box in bottom left of image. (<http://trt.geolive.ca>)

There are two other layers that can be turned on and off over any of the previously mentioned layers and these are the outlines for the Taku River Tlingit's traditional territory (as defined by their Statement Of Intent with the BC Treaty Commission) (see Figure 1) and the Land Use Plan Area that appears in their Land Use Plan agreement with the BC government (2011). These pieces and their connection to language learning and stewardship will be described in more detailed below.

Development of the website continued throughout the following year and, in August 2013, Corbett and Schreyer, along with other members of the UBC research team, programmer Nick Blackwell, and Colleen Larson, a doctoral graduate student, travelled to Atlin to meet with

the Taku River Tlingit First Nation research team members, Nicole Gordon, the manager of Lands and Resources, as well as other members of the Lands and Resources department. The joint research team discussed the development of the website and also held community meetings in both Atlin, BC and Whitehorse, Yukon to seek feedback on the website from the community at large. In the past year (2013-2014), feedback from community members has been incorporated into the design of the website and the research team has continued to encourage more users to develop profiles on the map to include their own information. The project, which includes information from early interviews Schreyer conducted with community members, has strived to keep the two goals (mentioned above) in mind during the development stage of the website. How can the website help community members to: 1) learn Tlingit language through learning about the land and 2) learn about the land and traditional ecological knowledge? We turn to this discussion of the stewardship of language and land in the following section.

The connection between stewardship of the land and language

Stewardship is an importance aspect of Tlingit culture. In fact, Catherine McClellan noted during her fieldwork with Tlingit communities in the southern Yukon between 1948 and 1951, “[Tlingit] moiety or sib members held their common area in a kind of trusteeship, and developed strong emotional feelings about their stewardship” (McClellan, 1975, p. 483-484). The Taku River Tlingit First Nation’s specific vision of stewardship is articulated in the community’s constitution, which also appears on a sign marking their territory (see Figure 4). Within the constitution, it is stated that, “It is the land from which we come that connects all life. Our land is our lifeblood. Our Land looks after us, and we look after our Land. Anything that happens to Tlingit Land affects us and our culture.” (TRTFN, 1993).



Figure 4: Taku River Tlingit territory marker sign. Photo credit: Schreyer, Summer 2005

As well, in 2003, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation published their Vision and Management Documents, as noted above, and within these documents the importance of being stewards and what stewardship entails is also evident. The summary document begins with the sentence, “We, the Taku River Tlingit, are moving forward as responsible stewards of the lands and waters within our territory” (2003, p. 1). Language, as mentioned earlier, is also a key aspect of stewardship for the community, who has emphasized in their documents that, “land use planning and management ... should be infused with Tlingit language” (TRTFN, 2003, p. 16). Also, in the section dealing with the management of Heritage and Cultural Values, the goals of the community are listed as the following:

- Increase awareness and use of Tlingit language, culture and heritage values
- Ensure that Tlingit names are consistently adopted in all documentation for archaeological and traditional use sites, values, and features of geographical areas within Taku River Tlingit territory.
- Provide education to Tlingit citizens and others on important places within the traditional territory, the significance of Tlingit place names, and appropriate measures to respect and protect these values.
- Use plaques and other forms of communication to educate Taku River Tlingit citizens and others about the cultural importance of special Taku River Tlingit places (where confidentiality is not an issue). (TRTFN, 2003, p.70)

Therefore, the community sees the relationship between language and land as important for maintaining stewardship; one way that stewardship can join the two concepts together is through learning Tlingit place names.

Since 2003, the Lands and Resources department has released other documents that illustrate their stewardship of their lands. These include the Taku River Tlingit First Nation Mining Policy (2007); the map of the Taku River Tlingit Tlatsini or ‘The Lands That Keep Us Strong’ (2009); and Wóoshtin wudidaa - Atlin Taku Land Use Plan (2011). Within this last document, the word *khustiyxh* is a crucial concept that is closely tied to the ideologies of stewardship that the community has been developing in official documents for many years. The definition, as presented in the document, is the following:

Tlingit *khustiyxh*, or way of life, means the preservation, promotion, and protection of Tlingit identity and culture prescribed by ancestral rules and norms. It includes Tlingit rules and responsibilities for stewardship of the Territory, and for the protection and promotion of the continuity of Tlingit culture, language, knowledge, and oral history, through the exercise of Tlingit rights throughout the Territory through traditional use of the lands, waters, animals, fish and plants, and other resources for cultural, spiritual, social and economic purposes. (TRTFN, 2011, p. 91)

Here again the importance of Tlingit “culture, language, knowledge, and oral history” is emphasized. It was within this context that the “Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names” project developed. As part of their numerous land planning documents, the community has been involved in many different participatory mapping projects, but this project is unique because of the emphasis on language learning in connection with learning about Tlingit lands and resources. As well, since the participatory mapping tool we’ve developed uses many different forms of media (such as audio recordings and photographs), individuals who use the tool can more easily find their way when they are out on the land. As Patterson writes, “...the multi-media format [of online learning] fits well with a learning style based on oral tradition” (2010, p. 150). Next, we provide more context for online Indigenous language learning in terms of language revitalization, as well as Indigenous participatory mapping and online mapping, before discussing the educational themes of the website.

Online language learning

As mentioned earlier, within the Taku River Tlingit First Nation community, no children learn Tlingit as their first language. A recent (2014) language-needs assessment conducted by the community indicated that only two individuals are fluent speakers of Tlingit. Seven individuals understand or speak Tlingit somewhat and fifty-four individuals are currently learning Tlingit (TRTFN-ALI, 2014). Due to the extremely limited number of fluent speakers, alternative methods of language teaching that do not rely heavily on a cache of fluent speakers must be found if Tlingit is going to continue within this community. Language revitalization, therefore, is a goal of the community as a whole and has been a focus for varying individuals over the course of the two generations since English overtook Tlingit as the language of dominance in this community. Since there are very few fluent Tlingit speakers within this community, it is necessary to find language revitalization tools that allow for modeling the sounds of Tlingit from their own dialect.⁴ One way that this can occur is through the use of online technologies, particularly as many community members no longer currently live in Atlin. As well, online technologies allow for audio recordings to be included so elderly fluent speakers are not overtaxed with requests to teach Tlingit. Since our website utilizes older recordings from the Heritage Department, the voices of Elders who have passed away can also be included, which community members appreciate so that they can continue to learn from their ancestors.

While we are optimistic about the success of this website, other scholars have written about the challenges of using websites for language learning and, in particular Indigenous

⁴ The Learning to Talk to the Land website also addresses how dialects of Tlingit are different from each other: “The Tlingit spoken in our community is often categorized as part of the inland dialect, but our speech is quite close to the Tlingit spoken in Juneau, which is where the mouth of the Taku River and the heart of our homeland is located. The other Tlingit communities in the Yukon include Teslin Tlingit First Nation, who often use [m] sounds in their speech where Atlin speakers use the [w] sound, and the Carcross-Tagish First Nation” (<http://trt.geolive.ca/tlingit-language>).

language revitalization, and some of these include: lack of context for learning resources, lack of face-to-face communication, a focus on literacy rather than speaking ability, an inability to illustrate dialectical differences, and an inability to showcase in-depth cultural perspectives (Buszard-Welcher, 2000; Corbett and Kulchyski, 2009; Eisenlohr, 2004; Nevins, 2004).

However, still others have written about the benefits and successes and pedagogical value of online language revitalization tools, including the ability to entice different generations, the ability to include specific cultural and dialectical information, particularly in design, and the ability for websites to provide spoken as well as written materials, as well as the “cool” factor of websites and developing social media tools and apps (De Korne et al, 2009; Eisenlohr, 2004; Galla, 2009; Hermes and King, 2013; Horsethief, 2012; Kroskrity and Reynolds, 2000; Mignone and Henley, 2009; Moore and Hennessy, 2006; Noori, 2011; Parker, 2012; and Yeoman, 2000). One critique of other language learning websites (Buszard-Welcher, 2000) and Indigenous language learning in general (Leavitt, 1987) is that names of animals and plants are often provided in long lists when, as Leavitt writes, “...children need to talk about animals in context” (Leavitt, 1987, p. 169). The Taku River Tlingit place names website differs from many of the others described above because the website encourages learning Tlingit language through learning to be responsible stewards of the land via the emphasis on mapping and ecological knowledge.⁵ Since mapping is so crucial to this project, we describe the development of participatory mapping and online mapping in an Indigenous context in the next section before we move on to a more detailed description of the place names website.

Indigenous participatory and online mapping

As other scholars have noted, maps have been used in both historic and contemporary contexts to normalize and reinforce colonialism (Harley, 1989). However, there is a growing trend in the field of mapmaking towards participatory mapping and decolonization of geographic information and its associated tools (Dunn, 2007). It is increasingly recognized that the process of map creation can be intentionally shifted away from the realm of the professional cartographer and into the hands of the non-expert (Crampton and Krygier, 2005). This practice and associated theory is often, though not exclusively, referred to as participatory mapping. Participatory mapping seeks to make the associations and interactions between land and place-based communities visible to outsiders through a common tool - maps. Participatory maps often represent a socially or culturally distinct understanding of landscape and include spatial knowledge and perspectives that are most often excluded from mainstream maps, which in turn represent the views of the dominant communities. Participatory maps can, therefore, pose alternatives to existing power structures and become an agent of change (Peluso, 1995). Many

⁵ However, for a detailed summary of websites that address language learning and land knowledge see: Parker, Aliana (2012). *Learning the Language of the Land*. Master's Thesis. University of Victoria, Department of Linguistics.

participatory mapping projects begin with the hope that through engaging in the process of new map creation community members will have the capacity to impact social institutions within the community, as well as wider relationships on a social, cultural as well as political level (Corbett and Rambaldi, 2009).

Participatory mapping can also potentially play a role in addressing the land-based struggles faced by Indigenous communities throughout the world (Chapin et al, 2005). However, as maps are often colonial tools, new maps need to reflect the goals, needs, and cultural aspects of the communities. More modern forms of digital cartography are helpful for enabling communities to express themselves (Eades and Sieber, 2010; Rundstrom, 1991; Wainwright and Bryan, 2009). The contemporary access to new cartographic and geographic information software, in particular the increasing significance and usability of the geospatial web (referred to from here as the geoweb) is leading to the growing use of these tools in participatory mapping projects, including in Indigenous communities. The geoweb is the geographic platform for interactive social networking applications. These web-based technologies are by default interactive, allowing users to contribute their own geosocial and spatial information, seamlessly communicate and collaborate with one another in real time, and share or display a variety of qualitative data using a range of media with a constantly evolving range of web-based applications. The geoweb is beginning to have a profound impact on the way that spatial knowledge is being organized and communicated (Scharl and Tochtermann, 2007). In the geoweb model everyone is potentially a contributor, producer and consumer of geographic content (Sui and DeLyser, 2012). Geoweb applications, therefore, display the potential to be highly democratic due to their ability to enhance citizen access and participation (Crampton, 2009; Tulloch, 2008), which is why we have chosen it for the current project on Taku River Tlingit place names. Next, we describe in more depth, the structure of the map and how it can be used to both learn Tlingit language, as well as how to be a steward of the land.

Online stewardship for Taku River Tlingit First Nation

Online mapping has been integral to illustrating the principles of stewardship that are embedded within the policies and actions of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and can also be seen to emphasize stewardship, or “exercise[ing] our leadership in all aspects of caring of our lands” (TRTFN, 2003, p. 17). As well, stewardship themes emerged from the interviews that Schreyer conducted with Taku River Tlingit First Nation community members at the outset of this project. Therefore, these themes have been the principles that have guided the development of the Taku River Tlingit Place Names website. Within the following section, we include quotes from Taku River Tlingit community members that appear under the section of the Taku River Tlingit Place Names website entitled ‘Why Place Names are Important’; audio files for each of these quotes are also available on the website (<http://trt.geolive.ca>). We then discuss each quote in relation to the theme and how this has played out with the website.

Names teach you how to respect the land

This section illustrates that stewardship is tied to being responsible for the land and how one way that people can learn their responsibilities from the website is to learn about the Tlingit names since the names are often tied to stories about ways to respect the land.

Andrew Williams:

You know, my mother when she was alive, she stressed to us boys as we were growing up and throughout the years as we sat and had her tell us stories about our history, she was always of the opinion that the names that our people gave certain places, they gave that name because it had a meaning and that meaning we had to take to heart. And we had to make it a living mandate for us to follow, the markers and what not.

One of the key features of the website is that the “places” layer, which you see when you first open the map, includes a wide-range of information about the Tlingit place names, including the English translation of the name and any story that might be connected with it, as told by Taku River Tlingit ancestors. One critique that is often laid against websites for language learning is that the connection to Elders is lost (Corbett and Kulchyski, 2009 and Nevins, 2004), but on the ‘Learning to Talk to the Land’ website, whenever possible, information from the community’s Heritage archives have been utilized, as well as information from current Elders, such as Jackie Williams. Many of the place name points also have audio recordings of how to pronounce the name in Tlingit, as well as photos of the place so people can see it and further commit it to their memory and their learning. In this way, the website can also aid individuals who are either planning a trip on the land or who want to learn more about the places they have just visited. For instance, individuals who want to learn more about a potential hunting or berry gathering area prior to traveling on the land may choose to visit the website in advance of their trip and begin to acquire knowledge about the land from this online platform. They could then use this information as conversation starters with Elders when they are out on the land. Similarly, an individual could use the website to learn more about a place they have just visited, including learning the name of the area in Tlingit and possibly the Tlingit names for any resources found in that area. In this way, an individual’s respect for the land will grow with their knowledge from both the physical and online worlds.

Bryan Jack:

You know Atlin Mountain? If you ask any child in our reserve, what mountain is that? They would say Atlin. They wouldn't say Áa Tlein, which is Big Water. And K'iyán, you know, and the stories around it. Kids are interested and I know that because when I was a kid I used to sit down for hours and listen to Elders talk about medicines and the stories that applied to the land and how we respected the

land. They used to tell scary stories and I used to think, how come the lake's scaring us, us kids? But the point was that if they told those stories then the children, as they grew up, would respect the land more.... So I think [knowing] the named places would be an awesome thing. And it would give the land back its spirit.

One of Bryan's points is that children today don't know the Tlingit words for the places in their territory and the website helps children (and others) learn this via the written form, but also from the audio recordings. Bryan also thinks that if children learn the stories about the land, like he did when he was a child, then the children would grow up to "respect the land more." Stories about the land, including historical boundaries and how to treat animals respectfully, are also found on the website and these rules for respecting animals can be put into practice when individuals are out on the land.

Louise Gordon:

I don't want to say we're going to put place names on a map and then that's it - it's finished. It's the beginning. I think that if we get those place names that the Elders picked out to name our [reserve]; those were obviously the most important places. So if we start with that, if we start out with Elders, the Elders already blessed that [project] and then there's a common rhythm and there's a really good rhythm with the land.

Louise's comments describe an early project where the members of the Lands and Resources department, in particular Susan Carlick, worked with Taku River Tlingit Elders to rename the streets on their reserve lands with names from the territory, in 1999. Some of the names included are: *Gaat*, *L'óox'u*, and *Naak'ina.áa* - these are rivers that flow through Taku River Tlingit territory and are tributaries of the *T'aakú*. The Elders blessed this project and were happy that people wanted to use these names. The project to name the reserve roads was one of the beginning steps to this current website project as these names are ones that have some of the most information available (Carlick, S. interview 2011).

Susan Carlick:

One of my things is around being responsible for the land and I think one of the ways to encourage responsibility is for people to remember their history and the promises ancestors made for looking after places and staying connected to places.

Susan's comment summarizes this section perfectly; one of the ways she believes people will be encouraged to be more responsible for the land is to remember their history and to stay connected to places. This website, which can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection, allows even those community members who are away from their home territory to

stay connected to the places in their territory and their family through listening to Elders, but also reading posts made by their family members. As well, since we recognize that there is still a digital divide within many reserve communities, community members will also be able to access the map at the community-use computers provided at the Band Office in Atlin.

Names give you pride

This section is one that illustrates that learning how to be a steward of the land, which is something the community values, allows individuals to feel pride in their ability to fulfill their community responsibilities and feel tied to this place.

Andrew Williams:

I think today, more than ever, if the younger generations could start understanding that [our ancestors named the land] then they could start their journey back to their roots and find out who they really are. And once they find out who they really are that's when the pride is going to come back and they are going to walk around the streets with their heads held high and they'll be able to tell anyone who they are and where they are from. That's really important.

In this comment, Andrew describes how understanding and learning about the land is what will help younger generations feel pride in their identity as Tlingit people, which is necessary to be a responsible steward of the land. The website helps develop pride since it is a tool that allows people to learn about the land, but it is also helpful in understanding that “our ancestors named the land.” Currently, the website has two features that help illustrate this point. One of these is the toggle button, which switches the place layer from clustered points (with numbers indicating number of points in each cluster) to individual points (see Figure 5). Many people (community members as well as outsiders, including members of the research team) have commented on the impressive nature of the number of individual points, which illustrate the density of the Tlingit names. The layered density shows how deeply embedded in their lands the Taku River Tlingit people are currently and how they have used the land for generations. The second feature that helps illustrate continued use of the land is the traditional territory layer of the map, which shows the distribution of place names *throughout* the territory. It is evident that the majority of the names are along the tributaries of the Taku River, but names appear throughout Taku River Tlingit territory.

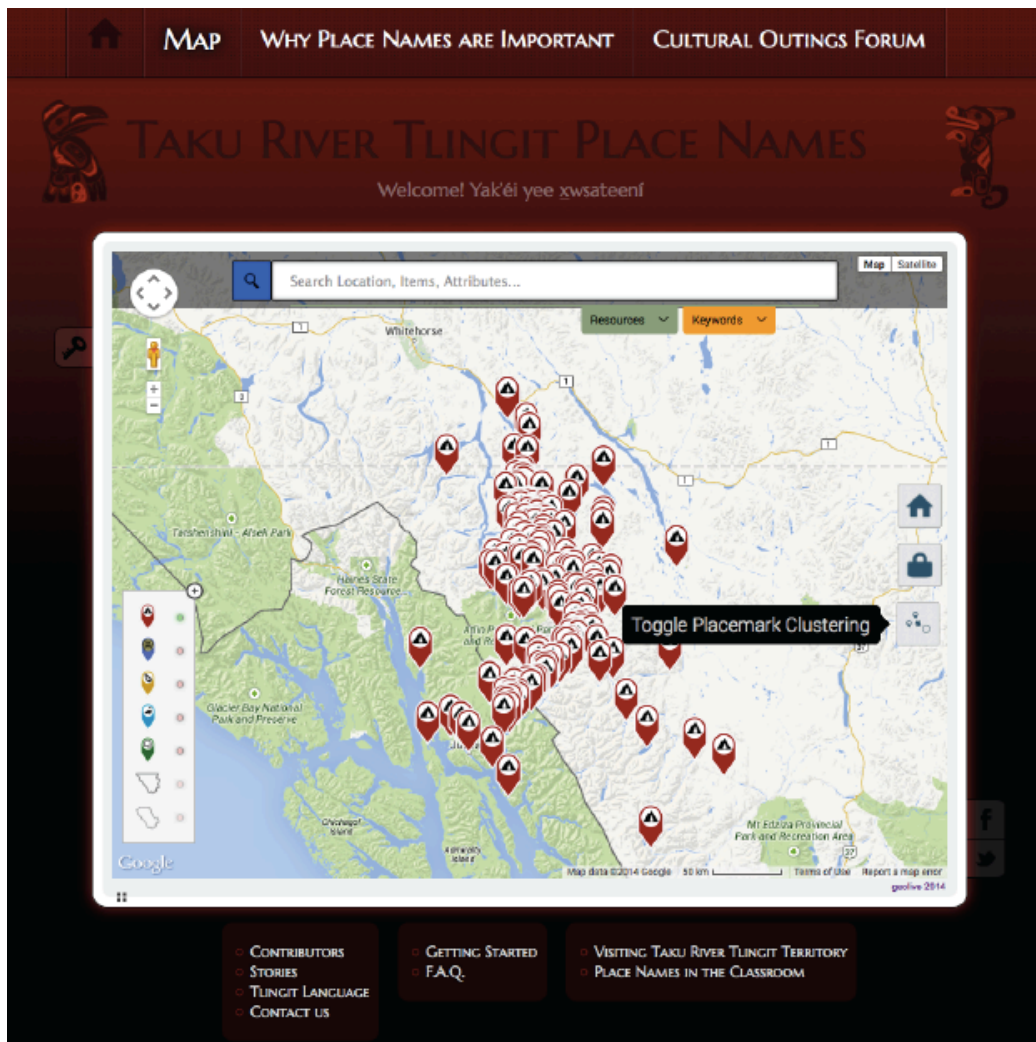


Figure 5: Unclustered red place names markers, with toggle button indicated. (<http://trt.geolive.ca>)

Susan Carlick:

I would love for this generation and future generations of young people to be raised to know those names and to not have to be convinced that it's not a fairy tale when we tell them about who they are and what their responsibilities are. You know, even my own Tlingit name, I've known my own Tlingit name for a long time and when my daughter's headstone potlatch happens this fall (2011) it's the first time it'll be called at potlatch and so it will be legal then. And that means so much to me, and that's kind of how I feel about [place names] going on the maps. It's like you know at potlatch they rub that money on your face. They call it "putting your name on your face" and everybody says the name and says the name and says the name and then that's your name and it's legal. And so that's what I would compare the mapping of the names too. It's like putting it on the face of the

mountains and on the surface of the lakes and on the land's face. It's probably a really important part of our healing, who we are, that we would learn to talk to our land and call it the right things.

Here Susan emphasizes how learning the names will give young people pride and help them learn who they are and their responsibilities as stewards of the land and of the Tlingit language. In particular, she connects the mapping of the names in official ways, such as on the website, as being similar to making Tlingit ancestral names official at potlatches. As well, Susan describes her belief that one of the ways that Taku River Tlingit people can be good stewards is to call the land "the right things" and the Tlingit names in both written and audio form on the website will help individuals achieve this and, therefore, further develop their ability to be stewards of the land.

Names tell you about the land

In this section, the comments that community members provided describe how the descriptive nature of the Tlingit names, as opposed to the English ones, allow individuals to learn more about the land.

Jackie Williams:

See where the white man came and started to call the native people the "wild Indians" – they didn't know nothing. It's not that way. All these names on there, they're connected to Mother Earth's way of doing things. [The names] are connected into how the land looks and everything.

In his comment, Jackie illustrates that the Tlingit names are rooted to the knowledge Taku River Tlingit ancestors had about their land, in particular, how the land looks, but also the resources that are found there. Knowing this detailed knowledge about the land is what is needed to continue to be responsible stewards of the land and the website helps with this by providing information about the meaning of the Tlingit names, as well as the names themselves.

One name that Jackie often discusses when talking about Taku River Tlingit territory is the mountain Yayuwaa, which he is named after.⁶ Yayuwaa in English means "cloud on the face of the mountain" (Williams, 2013, p. 5) and illustrates how Tlingit place names often describe the physical features of the land (see Figure 6).

⁶ One of Jackie's Tlingit names is Yáx góos', for more information on this see: Williams, Jackie (2013).

David Moss:

A lot of the Tlingit names were that way because of the use of that land. A mountain would have a name that would be specific to the use of that mountain or the area of that mountain. But Teresa Island, I don't know who Teresa is, but it used to be Goat Island right? That gives you a better idea of what's on that island.

David's comment illustrates how Tlingit names, similar to many other Indigenous place names (for example, Basso, 1996; Cruikshank, 1990; Hedquist, 2014; and Thornton, 2003 & 2008), describe the resources that are found in the land. Knowing the Tlingit place names teaches about the land and also provides information about the best places to harvest resources.



Figure 6: The marker for Yayuwaa in Jackie's Lingit *Kusteeyi* layer (<http://trt.geolive.ca>)

The website helps share this information via the place names layer, which gives the English meaning (as noted above), but there is also a “fish” layer on the map, which provides the Tlingit

names for fish, as well as information about some of the well known and popular fishing areas that are currently utilized by individuals in the First Nation. For instance, the community has fish weirs to track salmon numbers and these are marked on the fish layer of the map. As well, the First Nation operates a company called Taku Wild, which sells smoked salmon, and a point on the fish layer is connected to the company. Last, the map has a keyword tagging device that allows individuals to look up places and points that have been marked as “resources” (see Figure 7). Some places on the place layer also have a specific resource tagged to them and this is to correspond with the traditional ecological knowledge that was utilized in the making of the board game “Haa shagóon itx̱ yaa ntoo.aat” (described before). In this game, players travel through the land collecting resources, such as berries, fish or moose, at particular places in the land.

In order to correlate the two projects, we have matched the game information to the website so it can also be a resource for game players. In particular, the CD that accompanies the game has audio recordings for the Tlingit place names associated with the game, but it does not include the Tlingit words for the resources. Therefore, we have added audio recordings of the resource words from the game to the website. This will be beneficial in adding a new layer of language learning to the map website.

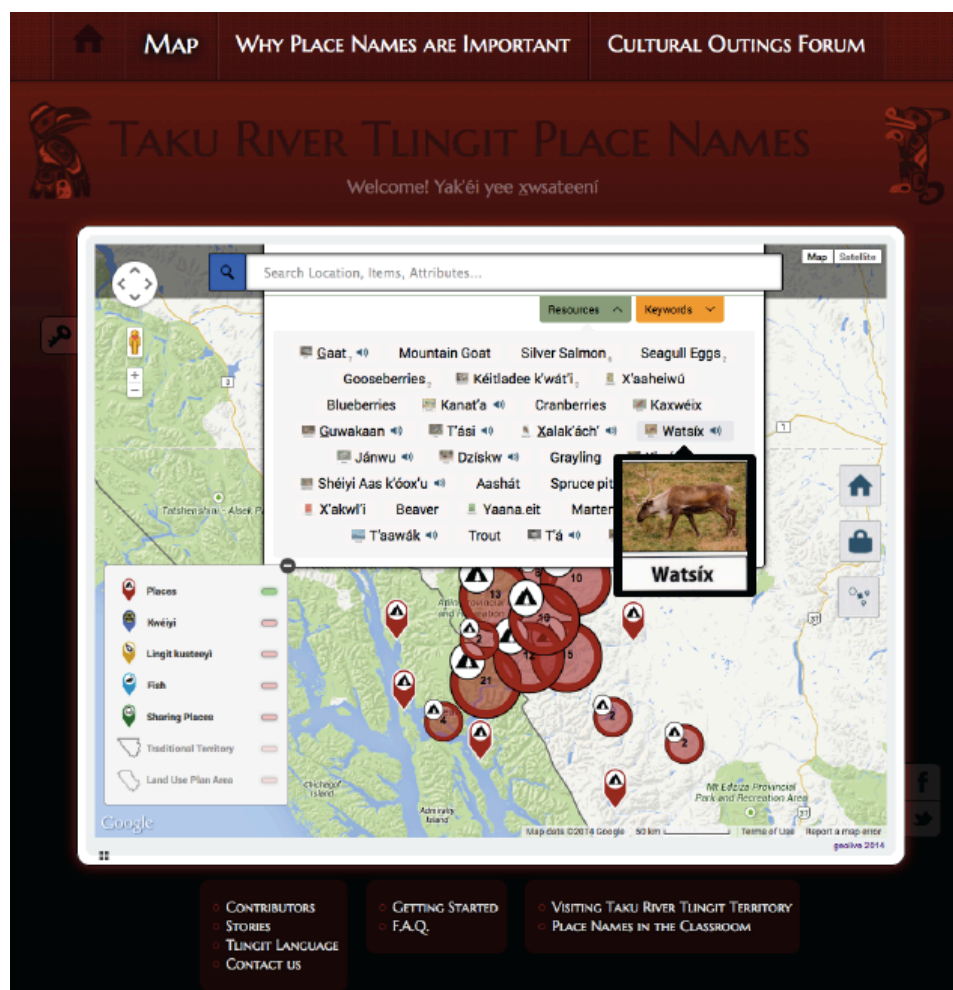


Figure 7: Resource keyword search with Watsix (Caribou) card highlighted (<http://trt.geolive.ca>)

Ed Anderson:

Why they gave the names to these various places? It was because of what was there. Like yourself, if you name something in a particular area it's for a reason, and we were no different.

Ed's comment on naming practices summarizes this section well; the Taku River Tlingit First Nation ancestors named their lands in ways that enabled them to be the best stewards possible and the website is helping their citizens achieve this goal through helping to teach people about land knowledge.

Names let you leave your mark

This section describes how using Tlingit names show people, both within the community and outside of it, that the ancestors of the Taku River Tlingit have used this land since "time immemorial".

Nicole Gordon:

Place names let you leave your mark instead of the English names, and could be used in the BC land use plan. In terms of Aboriginal Title, place names prove that we were there, and they are a part of our history.

Nicole Gordon's comment above specifically relates the knowledge of Tlingit place names to Aboriginal Title and continued use of the land, which is important for both the land claims and the government-to-government negotiations that the community is currently involved in. The website then can be utilized by both community members, and potentially by government negotiators who want to learn more about the ongoing stewardship that is occurring in Taku River Tlingit territory.

Ed Anderson:

I really think that it's important that we re-establish our jurisdiction in whatever ways we can.

Ed's comment reminds us that decolonization or re-establishing our jurisdiction "in whatever ways we can" is important. Knowing Tlingit place names helps community members learn about the land and their responsibilities as stewards of the land, as we have seen in the other categories, but learning the Tlingit place names can also be a decolonizing project. The website also aims to erase "[Tlingit] toponymic silences", or "power [strategies] used by a majority to control and dictate which names in which language can or cannot be used in official contexts" (Rautio Helander, 2009, p. 256). As mentioned above, the Taku River Tlingit Place Names website

developed out of the community's desire to reclaim Tlingit place names in order to "give the land back its spirit" (Jack, B., interview, 2010) and to "get in a good rhythm with the land" (Gordon, L., interview, 2010) and these intentions are part of this decolonizing project.

Ed Anderson:

I think this particular project is a pretty important step here, and again just telling the world that this is our land and we have our names on it and this is what the names mean.

Ed's comments here again emphasize the importance of reclamation, honouring the stories and names, and decolonization. This website, which can reach to the far corners of the world via the internet, helps the community assert themselves as the continuing stewards of their lands, while using the language that has grown and developed in this place.

Conclusions

The "Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names" project is ongoing and, therefore, it seems premature to comment definitively on whether or not it will succeed in: 1) helping community members learn more of the Tlingit language or 2) helping community members learn more about being stewards of the land. However, we feel that the pieces are in place that will continue to encourage users in these goals. For instance, individual members of the university research team have, through their involvement in this project, learned more about both of these two topics. As well, research team members from the Taku River Tlingit community have also come to see how the website can be used in different ways to help support the work in the Lands and Resources department, such as in government to government negotiations and for looking up Tlingit words and place names. As well, Todd, in her article on Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace asks, "Who considers the seventh generation when creating spaces and narratives in cyberspace" (Todd 1996, p. 159)? In order to consider the future generations, particularly children in the community, the research team has created lesson plans on the website which follow the B.C. curriculum, and the team has been working with the local Atlin school to show teachers and students how the map website is a useful resource to support many topics in many subjects in many grades. The website is also a useful tool for individuals when they are playing the "Haa shagóon ítx yaa ntoo.aat" board game.

In fact, both of these initiatives, the website and the board game, were developed with the intention that whatever could be learned from these tools could then be used out on the land since many community members continue to support themselves with subsistence activities, such as hunting and fishing. Individuals can also share their experiences out on the land, including what they have learned from Elders during subsistence activities, on the website through the user-created content. In particular, the Sharing Places layer and the Cultural Outings Forum are places that can help support and foster land-based learning. If individuals post their own land-

based experiences here, others can read them (or listen to them if they post audio recordings) and learn from them in a modified version of learning via oral tradition via this new multi-media format (Patterson, 2010). In our ongoing research project, one of our challenges will be to continue to raise awareness about the website both with members of the Taku River Tlingit community, but with other interested parties. As well, beyond making people aware of the website, we will also need to continue to encourage individuals to fully participate and engage with the website, including visiting often, as well as contributing their own information. The model for this website was participatory mapping and online language revitalization and we will continue to assess how successful we have been at both of these goals.

To conclude, we hope that our paper has illustrated how the joint research efforts described here can be a useful model for other communities and researchers who aim to decolonize their research practices through long-term collaborative research projects. The website has been built on the four key themes described throughout: 1) Place names teach you how to respect the land, 2) Place names give you pride, 3) Place names tell you about the land, and 4) Place names let you leave your mark. These themes tie to Indigenous pedagogy, as traditional ways of learning are embedded in place-based learning, and the website provides parallel learning both for those who can still go out on the land, but also for those who choose to live away from Taku River Tlingit homelands. The themes also tie to decolonization since the root of this project has been reclaiming Tlingit place names; as online worlds continue to grow the Internet will become another official space that needs to be claimed. The Taku River Tlingit First Nation is working to help develop stewardship in this new online territory as much as they are on the land.

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