Tezstan Biny & Surrounding Areas as a Cultural Keystone Place for the Tsilhqot’in Nation

Nancy J. Turner CM, OBC, PhD, FRSC, FLS
Distinguished Professor and Hakai Professor of Ethnoecology
School of Environmental Studies
University of Victoria

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• To the CEA Review Panel – Drs. Ross, Kupfer and Smyth: Thank you so much for this opportunity to present to you, from a distance

• Tsilhqot’in National Government, communities and cultural experts; thank you for your careful stewardship of your lands and waters over so many generations

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pesghunsh; ‘bear tooth’ or yellow glacier lily
My presentation:

• Brief Introduction

• Cultural Keystone Place: Concept & Criteria

• Tezatan Biny and Surrounding Areas as a “Cultural Keystone Place”

• Implications: Ecological and Cultural Losses & Impacts associated with Proposed Mine development

• Concluding remarks
My Background

• Have worked with First Nations in British Columbia for over 40 years, documenting Indigenous experts’ knowledge of plants and environments;

• Have worked with Tsilhqot’in people over the years, since the late 1980s; was qualified as an expert witness and provided expert testimony, in BC Supreme Court, in *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. BC*. (CV filed, written submission)

• have published many books and articles on this topic, many coauthored with Indigenous knowledge holders, students and colleagues;

• Distinguished Professor and Hakai Professor of Ethnoecology, School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria;

• am a member of the Order of Canada, Order of British Columbia, Royal Society of Canada and Linnean Society of London
Knowledge of Place: a major part of Traditional Ecological Knowledge Systems

- reflected in people's origin stories and other place-based narratives, discourse, plant and animal names, geographical names, activities at particular locales, art, and protocols of proprietorship and stewardship.
Social-Cultural Systems

• Wide recognition of parallels between ecological and social systems as well as in inextricable connections between them;
• Biological diversity is paralleled by cultural diversity: *biocultural* diversity is eroding worldwide;
• Ecological systems and social systems exhibit similar traits as complex, interrelated systems, and show similar responses to various processes and stressors (references provided in written report)
“Cultural keystone species” – (Garibaldi and Turner 2004)

- A parallel concept to “Ecological Keystone Species’
- biological species having particular, special roles in a people’s culture
- **Definition:** “Culturally salient species that shape in a major way the cultural identity of a people, as reflected in the fundamental roles these species have in diet, materials, medicine and/or spiritual practices.” (e.g. salmon and western redcedar on the NW Coast of N America)

Manuscript under preparation:

- to be submitted to *Ecology and Society*

- “Cultural Keystone Places: Conservation and Restoration in Cultural Landscapes”

- Co-authors: Nancy J. Turner, Alain Cuerrier (Université de Montréal); Ann Garibaldi (Integral Ecology, Victoria); Thiago Gomes, (Brazil, formerly University of Victoria)
“Cultural Keystone Place”

- Proposed Definition: A given site or location with high cultural salience for one or more groups of people and which plays, or has played in the past, an exceptional role in a people’s cultural identity, as reflected in their day to day living, food production and other resource-based activities, land and resource management, language, stories, history, and social and ceremonial practices.

Salmon River Estuary, Salmon Arm, BC
CKPs

- a relative concept, applicable over a range of temporal, geographical and social scales.
- Assessment requires inclusion of: history of the place (based on archaeology, oral history and memory); associated vocabulary; social-economic features; spiritual and ceremonial values; role in cultural knowledge transmission; and ecological function and processes.
CKP Criteria

1. Agreement within a cultural group about the importance of a place
2. Occurrence in language and discourse
3. Intensity and frequency of use
4. Diversity of use
5. Antiquity of use
6. Extent of traditional management undertaken
7. Uniqueness
8. Ecological diversity
9. Role in trade and cultural exchange
10. Role in cultural protocols
The Xeni Gwet'in and other Tsilhqot'in people identify this area as having major importance to their lifeways and culture, as evidenced in the testimonies provided and in the subsequent report of the Panel during the first Prosperity Mines hearings (Federal Review Panel 2010), e.g. First Nations people of all ages told the Panel that Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) was integral to the Tsilhqot'in culture (p. iii); … the Panel concluded that the area of Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) and Y’anah Biny (Little Fish Lake) was an important cultural and spiritual area … (p. 244).
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as a CKP:

1. Agreement within a cultural group about the importance of a place

- The Xeni Gwet’in and other Tsilhqot’in people identify this area as having major importance to their lifeways and culture: e.g., “During the public hearing, the Panel heard extensive information on the deep ancestral connection that the Tsilhqot’in had to Teztan Biny (Fish Lake), Y’anah Biny (Little Fish Lake), and to Nabas.” (p. 192)
Teztnan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

2. Occurrence in language and discourse

The lakes and a number of surrounding areas and features are explicitly named in the Tsilhqot’in language and feature frequently in discourse, conversation and stories.
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

3. Intensity and frequency of use

For generations, Tsilhqot’in families have travelled to Teztan Biny and surrounding areas to stay for significant periods of time over the different seasons and engage in a range of cultural practices; as noted by the previous Federal Review Panel: “Over the course of the public hearing, the Panel heard a substantial volume of information regarding how much of the Tsilhqot’in population continue to use the Project area for activities such as hunting, fishing, gathering of berries, plants and medicines, as well as for various cultural and spiritual ceremonies and activities” (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 179).
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

4. Diversity of use

- Tsilhqot’in people participate in a wide range of cultural practices, from fishing, hunting, trapping, berry picking and harvesting materials and medicines, to hay-making, grazing horses and cattle, camping, story telling and training children and youth (Federal Review Panel 2010, pp. 8, 182).
Teztn Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

5. Antiquity of use

The Teztn Biny area has deep ancestral connections by all accounts (cf. Federal Review Panel 2010, pp. 126, 178). Tsilhqot’in use of the area has been found to predate contact with Europeans (Tsilhqot’in Nation v. BC, 2007 BCSC 1700, para. 893). “First Nations have continued to occupy and use the Project area for traditional purposes since pre-European contact” (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 1, p. 182).
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP: 6. Extent of traditional management undertaken

The Tsilhqot’in have taken the role of caretakers of Teztan Biny and surroundings. A range of management practices, from selective and partial harvesting of tree bark, to annual hay cutting, to transplanting fish, have been undertaken by them to sustain the resources on which they rely.

Timothy hay, upper;
Mountain potato – different age categories
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

7. Uniqueness

No other areas exist that are both accessible and comparable in terms of the opportunities this area provides for diverse cultural activities. The Federal Review Panel explicitly acknowledged the uniqueness of this area in a number of places in its report: e.g. “In the Panel's view, the ability to practice these [cultural] activities in one location, together with cultural and spiritual values and the archaeological importance of the Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) area, contributed to the special value of this area for the Tsilhqot'in. ... the cultural importance and spiritual value of the Teztan Biny area could not be replaced or mitigated.” (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 3).
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

7. Uniqueness, continued...

The Panel notes that while the Tsilhqot’in may utilize other areas in their territory to support their current use activities, these areas may not necessarily have the same connection expressed for the Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) and Nabas areas.” “... the Panel is convinced that [these areas] ...are unique and of special significance to the Tsilhqot’in ...” (Federal Review Panel 2010, pp. 202-203)
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP: 8. Ecological diversity

- wide diversity of habitats and species, including many that are culturally important as Tsilhqot’in foods, materials and medicines.
- complex of lakes, creeks, wetlands, meadows, grasslands, and upland forests is particularly productive.

Tsilhqot’in sprucerooot basket decorated with grass and water birch [?] bark, Museum of Anthropology  Nd633
Teztan Biny ...as CKP: 
8. Ecological diversity, cont.

- genetically distinct Rainbow Trout, and the watershed supports a widely recognized, consistent sockeye run...
  
  [also] chinook salmon, bull trout, mountain whitefish and white sucker (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 78).


- a population of grizzlies, classified by the Province as “threatened” (Federal Review Panel 2010, pp. 105-6), as well as wolves, bear and other key predator species.
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

8. Ecological diversity, cont.

Native Plant species in the area are similarly diverse, and over 50 species were identified by the Tsilhqot’in National Government as having cultural importance (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 184).

“wild celery”; Prickly rose – hips; yellow pond-lily; silverweed
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:
9. Role in trade and cultural exchange

*Teztan Biny* serves as a social meeting ground for Tsilhqot’in families, who continue to exchange many food items and other products, as well as innovations and ideas, stories and ceremonial events (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 83).
"The Panel heard from educators in many of the communities that Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) was identified as an important teaching environment and that many trips were made to the area to teach the Tsilhqot'in language and cultural practices to Tsilhqot'in youth" (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 182).
Teztan Biny and surrounding area as CKP:

10. Role in cultural protocols, cont.

The Panel also reported on testimony from many Tsilhqot’in about the importance of this area for cultural gatherings, and: “...how adults would work with the youth to teach values, culture and language. Family and social gatherings, including camping trips, fishing trips and recreational use were also identified.” (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. 193).
A Living Landscape...

• *Lhindesch'oysh* [an ancient Transformer being], his two sons, and a woman named *K'ulebi* (also *K'unlebi*) came up Taseko River to Taseko Lake, and *K'ulebi* died at the shore of the lake\river below Fish Lake. The mountains all around are also ancient people who are still very much alive according to mom [the late Helena Myers] and other elders. Catherine Haller [a Tsilhqot'in cultural expert] mentioned one mountain in particular to the south of Fish Lake who she said was like Mt. Tatlow – a mountain that people are not supposed to stare at. There were numerous ceremonies done in the area. (Linda Smith, pers. comm. 2013)
Cultural Keystone Place Criteria

• These traits are interconnected
• There is a potential to assess through numbered scale system (0 = lowest agreement; 5 = highest agreement), based on consensus of the people group who would consider it a potential CKP;
• CKPs are universally important for a community’s identity, health and well-being
There is no question, from our definition, that **Teztan Biny** and adjacent areas, including **Y’anah Biny** (Little Fish Lake) and the **Nabas** meadows region, constitute a “Cultural Keystone Place,” a place of unique and special significance for the Xeni Gwet’in and other Tsilhqot’in peoples.
Anticipated Losses Associated with Proposed Mine development

The proposed New Prosperity gold-copper mine development would cover a substantial portion of the *Teztan Yeqox* (Fish Creek) watershed. The development as proposed would destroy *Y’anah Biny* (Little Fish Lake) and much of the *Nabas* meadows region and would change the character of *Teztan Biny* and the entire surrounding area permanently and irreversibly, especially in the context of other impacts.

Above: beetle killed Chilcotin forest, 2006; left, Fish Creek; right an open-pit mine site in Interior British Columbia
Anticipated impacts of the development

• Would Impact the Tsilhqot’in people’s self-determination and ability to have a real voice in their future;
• Endanger their ability to sustain their cultural identities and lifeways;
• Imperil their Indigenous food systems, health and well-being;
• Impact their ability to sustain their communities and to educate next generation;
• Impact their ability for environmental stewardship;
• preclude future opportunities
In Conclusion…

“While there are other areas where some activities such as hunting, trapping and gathering of plants and berries could occur, the availability of such areas has been reduced due to logging, ranching and private land ownership in the area. In the Panel's view, the ability to practice these activities in one location, together with cultural and spiritual values and the archaeological importance of the Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) area, contributed to the special value of this area for the Tsilhqot'in.” (Federal Review Panel 2010, p. iii)
Thank you!