

Urbanization in *S'olh Temexw* (Our Land)
Stó:lō People and Urbanization

Social Studies 11

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December, 1995

Introduction:

Urbanization is a word used to describe the process and the result of the human transformation of the landscape from a rural or natural setting to one with developed roads, buildings, sewers, power lines and parks, in an area of dense population which makes up cities. The lower Fraser Valley has been occupied continuously for the past 10,000 years. Yet, it has only been within the last 100 years that the results of urbanization have been felt throughout this entire area. This section looks at urbanization in the lower Fraser Valley, particularly the area between Vancouver and Hope. It will discuss the history of the development of urban centres in the area, and the many ways in which this development has effected Aboriginal communities. The ramifications of urbanization go far beyond Aboriginal communities, but by using this as a focus for discussion, a broad understanding of the impact of urbanization on all communities will become apparent.

Imagine what the lower Fraser Valley would have been like before the development of cities. Imagine Douglas fir, cedar and hemlock trees covering vast expanses of land, with poplar trees and berry bushes growing in the low lying areas. The Fraser River would be free of pollution, with its many streams and tributaries winding their way through the landscape. Every year tens of millions of salmon would spawn up the river. Elk and deer could be found throughout the woods. *Stó:lō* villages would have dotted the landscape, particularly at the convergence of the many tributaries and the Fraser River. A few trails provided overland routes, but the streams, creeks and rivers were the "highways" of the people. Some areas of the forest were burnt each year, a method used to ensure rich berry picking and root harvesting soils in the seasons to come. A population of between 10,000 and 30,000 *Halq'eméylem* speaking people in the lower Fraser Valley were easily supported by the area's vast renewable resources.

Now think of the current situation, as you drive along the Trans-Canada Highway. You are able to catch a few glimpses of the Fraser River, the former major transportation and communication artery for the valley. On a warm sunny day, the eastern valley skyline is brown and hazy from a variety of gasses produced by cars and industries. Signs beckon drivers, advertising the newest and best housing developments to be constructed in previously undeveloped areas. A non-native population of two million people have settled throughout the vast expanse of the now clear-cut forests, and this area is rapidly expanding onto the hills and mountains along the valley's fringe. Nineteen cities and twelve towns are linked by a complex series of roads, redefining the landscape. Urban underground infrastructure providing fresh water and sewage disposal take the place of streams and creeks. Forests and farmland are being encroached upon from all sides, as the fastest expanding region in Canada experiences urbanization.

Population History

The *Stó:lō* have lived in this area throughout the entire process of urbanization. The development of cities, towns, villages and rural areas have had a major effect on the lives of

every person, Native and non-Native living here. Prior to the first non-Native settlement of Fort Langley in 1827, the *Stó:lō* occupied permanent villages throughout the Fraser Valley during the winters. In the summers, family groups moved from winter villages to summer camps constructed various fishing and resource extractions sites. The population of the Fraser Valley increased every fall when large numbers of Aboriginal people from Vancouver Island came to fish at locations along the Fraser River.

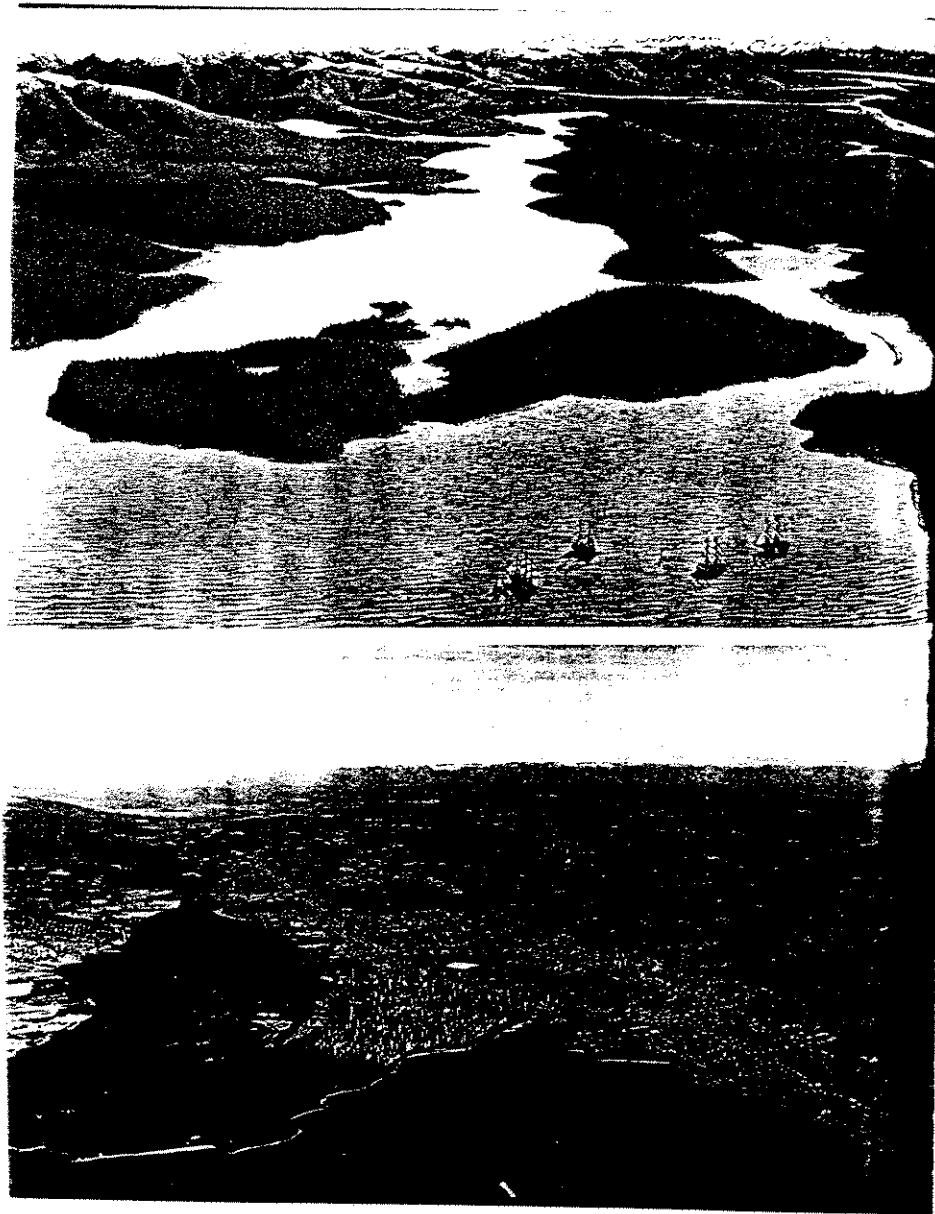


Figure 1: (Top) The lower Fraser Valley, as it would have been seen looking east from the air as Capt. Vancouver sailed into the bay which would soon be the city that bears his name. Note the villages which dot the shores of the heavily forested region (Picture courtesy of Jim McKenzie). (Bottom) An *oblique* aerial photograph of the Lower Fraser Valley taken in 1990, just west of Vancouver. The landscape is transformed (Allen Aerial Photos).

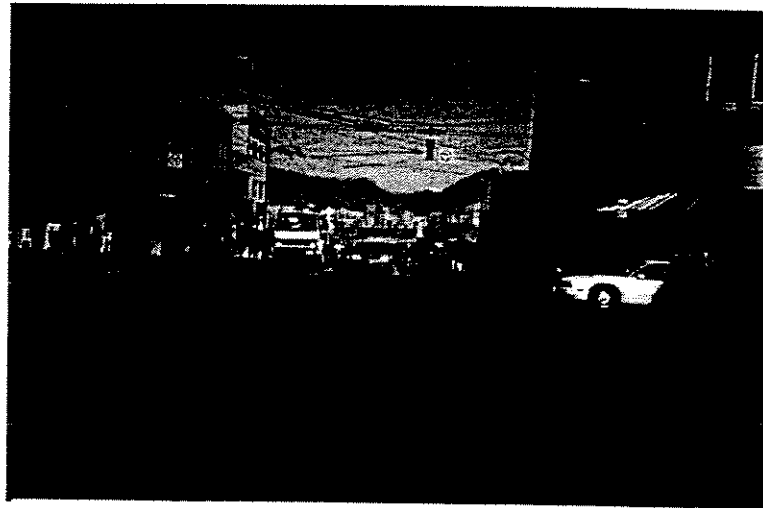


Figure 2: (Top) Granville Street, looking north, 1885 (CVA). (Bottom) Granville Street, looking north, 1995. (Brian Thom, 1995).

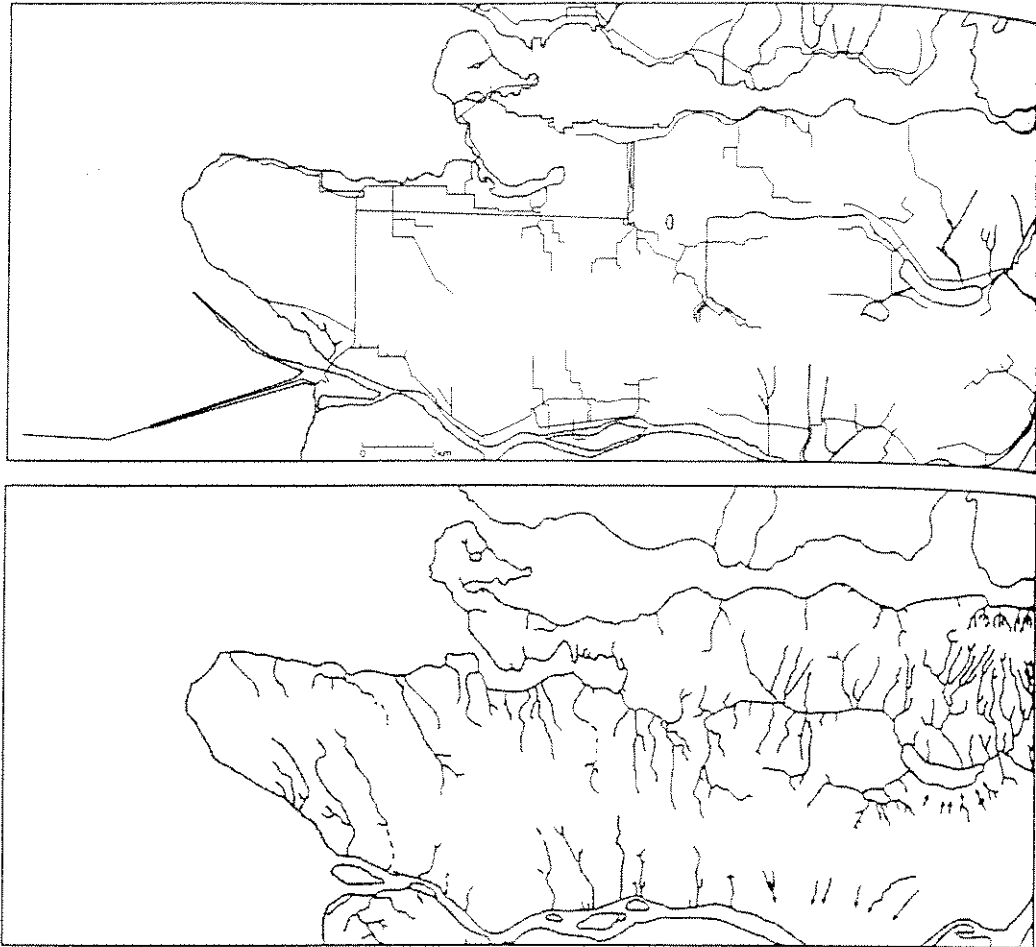


Figure 3: (Top) The current system of natural streams and creeks in the Lower Mainland. Notice how the drainage patterns have completely changed. (Bottom) The system of natural streams and creeks in the Lower Mainland prior to 1880 (Map taken from Oke, North, and Slaymaker in Wynn and Oke, 1992).

Figure 4 provides an outline of the history of *Stó:lō* population from before the influence of non-Natives to the present. Prior to the coming of diseases that killed many of the Aboriginal people living in what is now called British Columbia, the *Stó:lō* population is estimated to have been between 10,000 and 30,000. After the arrival of Europeans, this population steadily declined. It reached its lowest point of just under 1,300 people in 1928, and has since risen steadily to the 1993 level of 5,700.

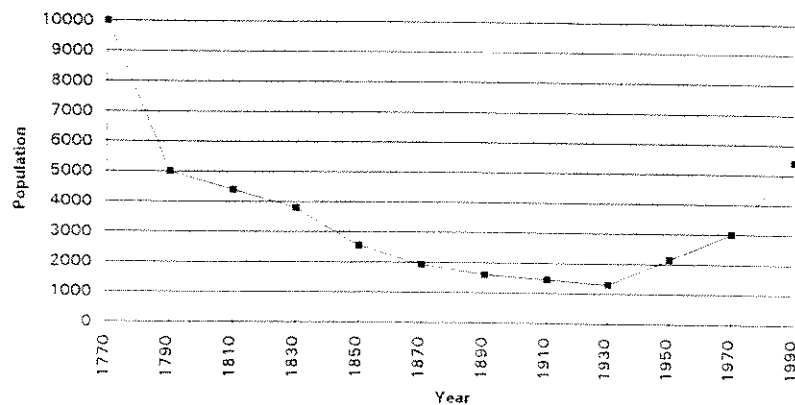
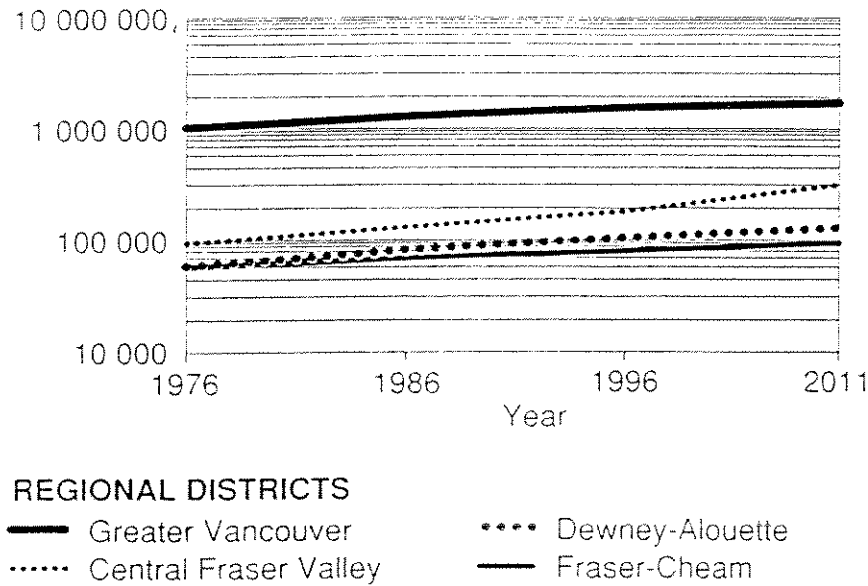


Figure 4: Estimated Population History of the *Stó:lō* (B. Thom, 1995).

The non-Native population history has been very different. Between 1827 and the Fraser River Gold Rush in 1858, the non-native population was transient, with less than 100 people settled at and around the site of Fort Langley. Fort Hope and Fort Yale had been abandoned as permanent settlements, and Victoria was the closest town. As a result of the Gold Rush, the population boomed to approximately 30,000 people, the majority of whom were American men who had travelled to the Fraser Canyon, between Hope and Hell's Gate. This drastic increase in population lasted only two years. By 1871, the permanent population was no more than 1,500, with almost one-third centred in New Westminster. The non-native population grew steadily, particularly in the urban centres around New Westminster and later Vancouver, and to a lesser extent in the mostly rural Fraser Valley.

The 1991 Canadian Census recorded a population of 2.7 million in the lower Fraser Valley (From Yale to the mouth of the Fraser River). The Native population comprises only 0.2% of this total figure. These shifts in population, through which urbanization has been a continuous process, explains in part some of the processes involved in establishing the urban landscape, and the subsequent marginalization of the *Stó:lō*.

Population Growth, 1976–2011



SOURCE: Greater Vancouver Regional District 1988.

Figure 5a: Population Growth, 1976-2011 by Regional District (Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1988).

Thus, we can say that urbanization has a relatively short history in this province. This history has set the stage for how our communities will develop in the future. We know that the lower Fraser Valley is presently experiencing a population growth like never before. Figure 5a shows the known and predicted population of the Greater Vancouver area, illustrating enormous population growth, particularly in the Central Fraser Valley. The second graph in Figure 5b shows how the population of the Fraser Valley has been growing at a faster rate than the urban centres in Vancouver. Projected populations figures for these urban areas are stunning. Figure 6 illustrates how this growth will be experienced the greatest in areas such as Abbotsford, Surrey and Chilliwack. It is estimated that the District of Abbotsford will grow from its present population of 80,000 in 1995 to 250,000 in 2010. The City of Surrey will soon surpass Vancouver as the largest city in the province. Neighbouring Langley will also experience intense population growth. Chilliwack, situated on the edge of the commuter's circle to other major urban centres, will see a slightly less intense increase in population. Hope and Agassiz will surely feel the residual effects of the nearing urban sprawl, as more people move to these communities in an attempt to escape from the city.

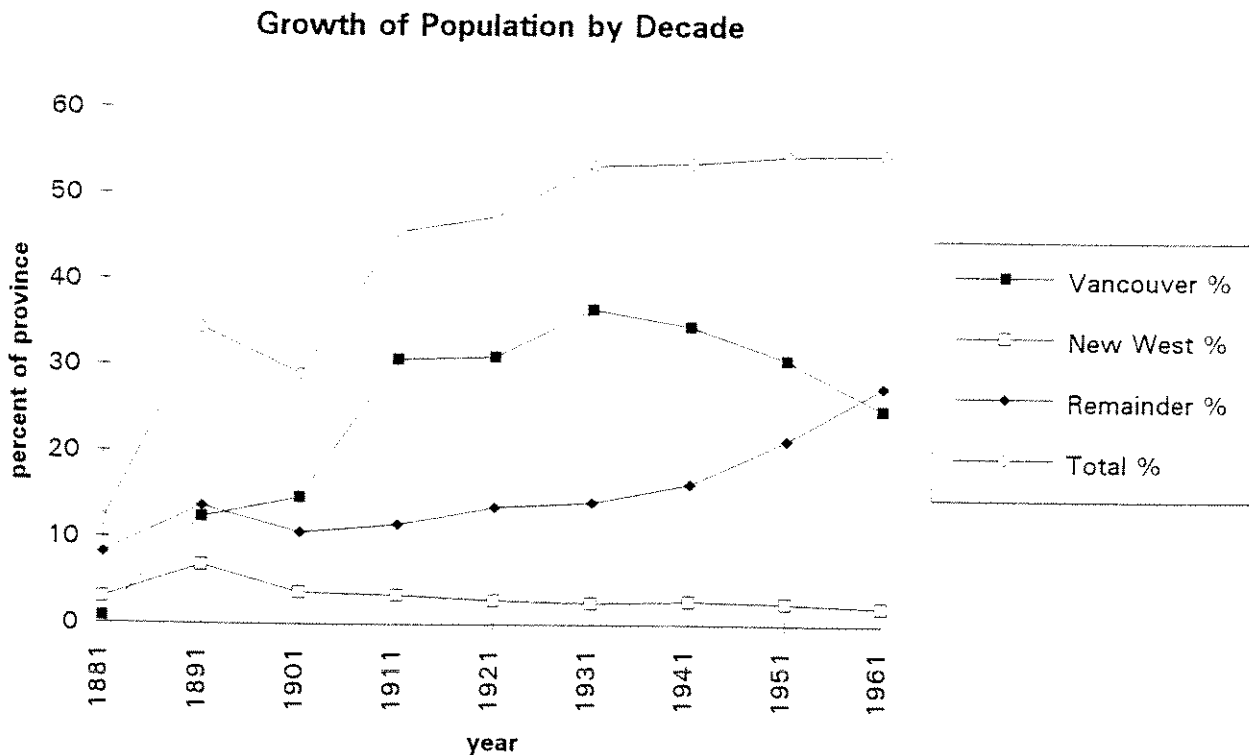


Figure 5b: Growth of General Population by Decade as a percentage of the Province. Note the rapid recent growth in the non-Vancouver/New Westminster area (B. Thom, 1995).

FIG. B-1:

POPULATION PROJECTIONS TO THE YEAR 2010
IN THOUSANDS

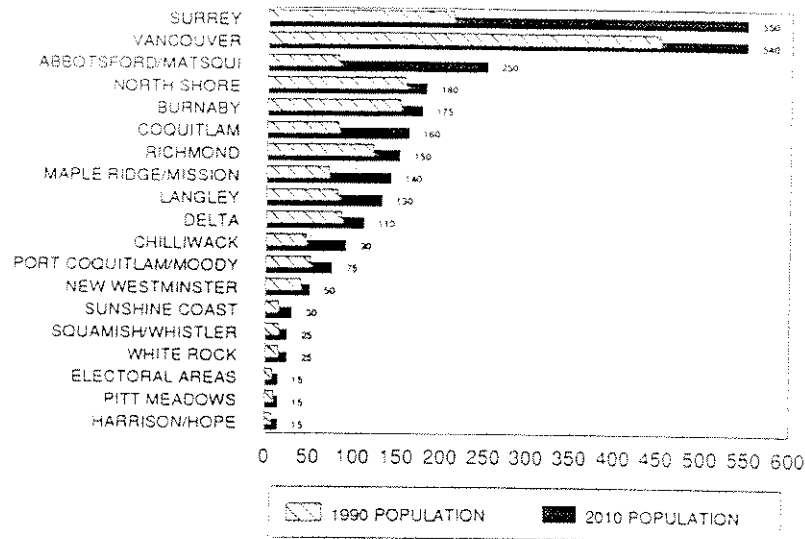


Figure 6: Population Projections to the Year 2010 (in thousands).

With these population increases, we need to think how this will affect people's lifestyles. The landscape is being profoundly transformed. How this landscape is shaped is the concern of everybody. Understanding the concerns and perspectives of Aboriginal people in this changing population may help all of society better understand the process of urbanization, and can provide some perspectives on how to successfully manage this growth.

Urban Transportation Systems

Because of our complete reliance on automobiles, roads have become the focal point of our communities today. They are the links by which we organize ourselves in relation to the people around us. In this way, analyzing roads provides a useful method of measuring urbanization. If we look at the development of the intensity of roads (as can be seen in the map series in Figure 7), we see in what areas the urban setting has been most dense, and in which areas it has yet to expand. Urbanization has been heaviest near the mouth of the Fraser River, particularly in the primary urban centre of Vancouver. It becomes less dense as one moves away from this "core," but gets more intense at regular intervals. These are secondary urban centres, which provide all the essential services of the primary centre in addition to many other market functions. These communities, such as Langley, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission, Agassiz and Hope, are often more important to the people living in the rural areas around them, than the primary centre of Vancouver. Aboriginal communities, however, have not been established in this pattern, but can rather

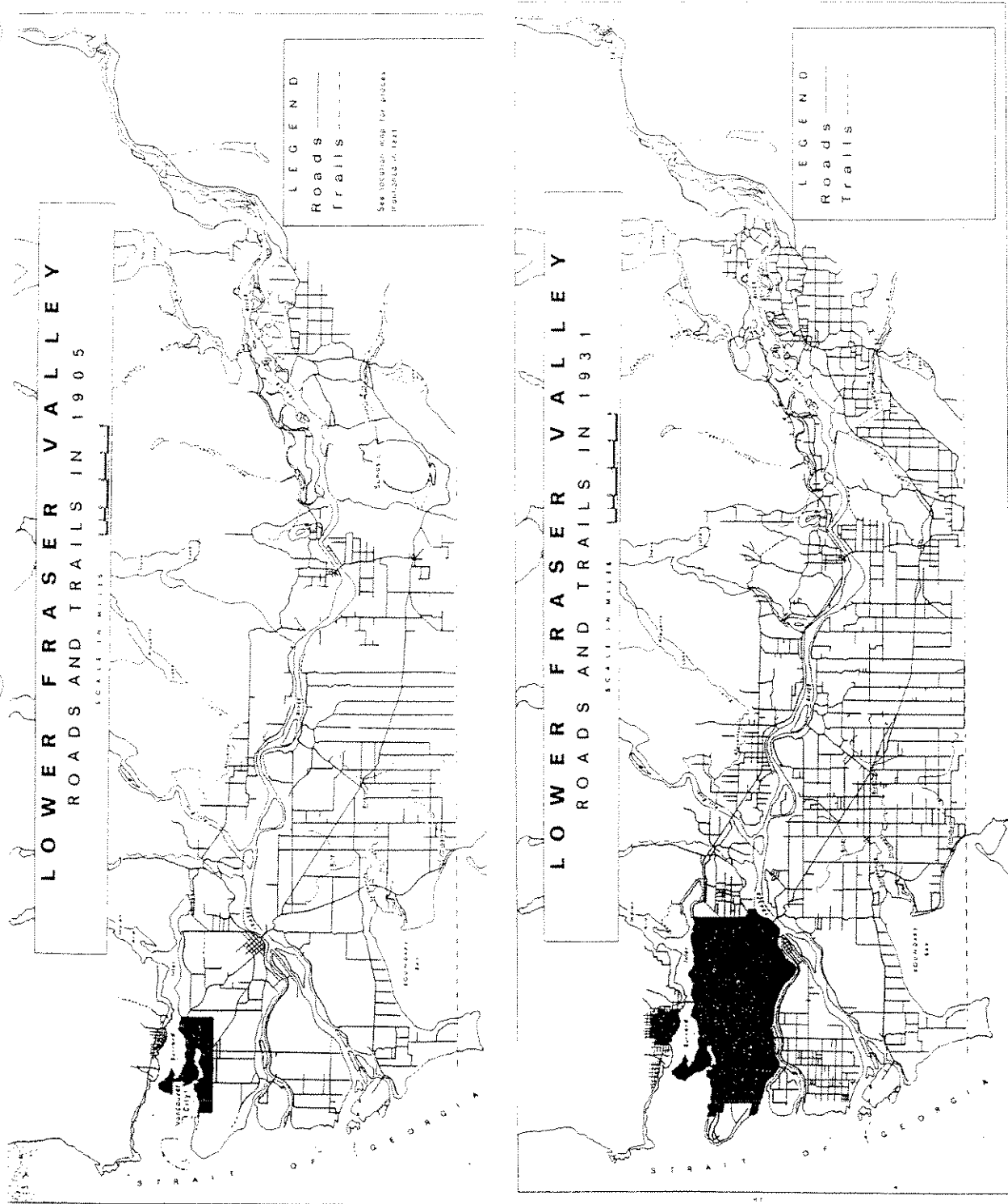


Figure 7b: Trails, Roads, and Freeways in the lower Fraser Valley, from 1866 to 1990 (G.I.H. Jones' article, "The Urbanization of the Fraser Valley," in Siemans, 1968).

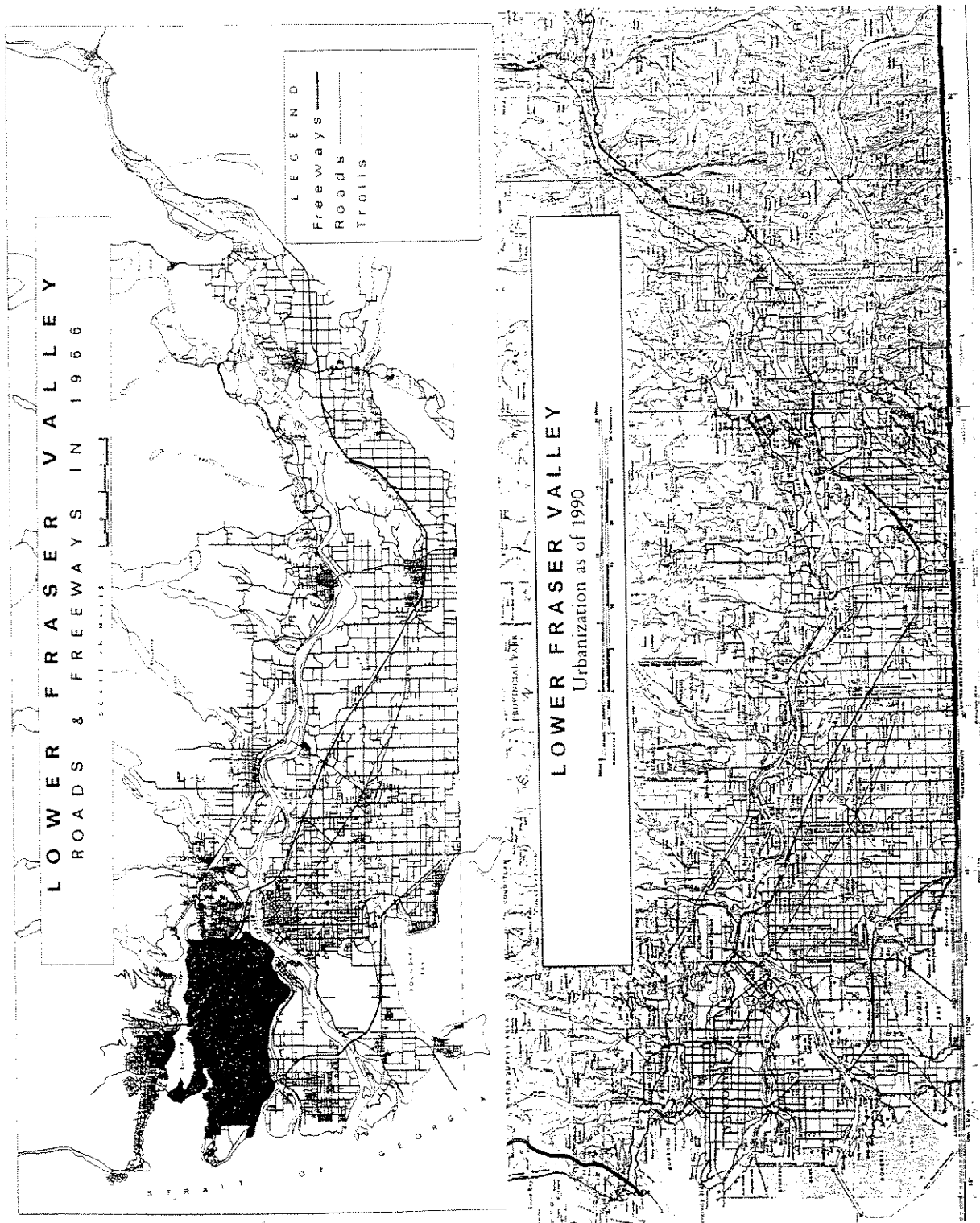


Figure 7c: Trails, Roads, and Freeways in the lower Fraser Valley, from 1866 to 1990 (The 1990 map was taken directly from a modern government map, while the previous maps are from figures in G.I.H. Jones' article, "The Urbanization of the Fraser Valley," in Siemans, 1968).

be found along the Fraser River and the major tributaries which run into it. These communities have been established following the more traditional settlement patterns of the *Stó:lō*, which are focused around the river and the utilization of its resources (see Figure 8), not by the market forces which shape the placing of our communities today.

Besides being a useful measure of urbanization, roads themselves have particular social implications to Aboriginal people. Prior to the establishment of cities, towns and villages, the main method of transportation for the *Stó:lō* was canoe, along the many rivers, streams, creeks and sloughs in the Fraser Valley. Some overland trails were also established, linking different rivers and creeks (along which neighbouring communities lay), and opening the heavily wooded prairies and hillsides to hunting and gathering places. As roads were built to access the different areas of urban population, old transportation routes were shifted away from the waterways and became more land-based. But this shift occurred slowly, for canoes were the main source of transportation for the *Stó:lō* well into the 20th century. Figure 9 shows a *Stó:lō* canoe in front of the early town of New Westminster. As recently as the 1960's, many people who lived in *Chehalis* at the base of Harrison Lake, travelled down the Harrison River by canoe and across the Fraser to Chilliwack for everyday occasions such as shopping and visiting family and friends. Although roads can be seen in the town, the river was still the most important means of transportation.

The impressive developments of roads and freeways in the Fraser Valley show how communities have shifted from a river-centred group of towns and villages to a massive urban sprawl over almost the entire Fraser Valley. Again, Figure 7 shows the development of road systems in the lower Fraser Valley from 1866 to 1990. By 1931, most areas of the Fraser Valley were accessible by road or trail. The wide-open landscape which was once heavily forested became divided by the road. By 1966, the vast web of road and freeway networks completely enmeshed communities from Hope to Vancouver and beyond.

The development of urban transportation systems has implications on many societal levels, beyond the obvious change in technology. Roads provide access to people and places which were never possible before. Although *Stó:lō* communities are located along major rivers and sloughs, these are no longer the main means of travelling between communities. During the summer months, it is common to see Salish-style canoes tied to the top of trucks, vans, cars, and trailers travelling down the freeway on their way to attend racing competitions like the one at Cultus Lake. In many cases, the development of these kinds of transportation systems have been to the detriment of the landscape and the people living within it. The amount of pollution that cars and trucks produce is remarkable, and adversely affects the health of many people living in the Fraser Valley each summer. Old stream channels are affected by the drainage culverts put in to allow roads to cross them (not to mention that it is very difficult to take a canoe through a culvert). These measures often make streams inhabitable for salmon returning to spawn. This is of particular concern to the *Stó:lō*, as the salmon is their most important traditional resource.

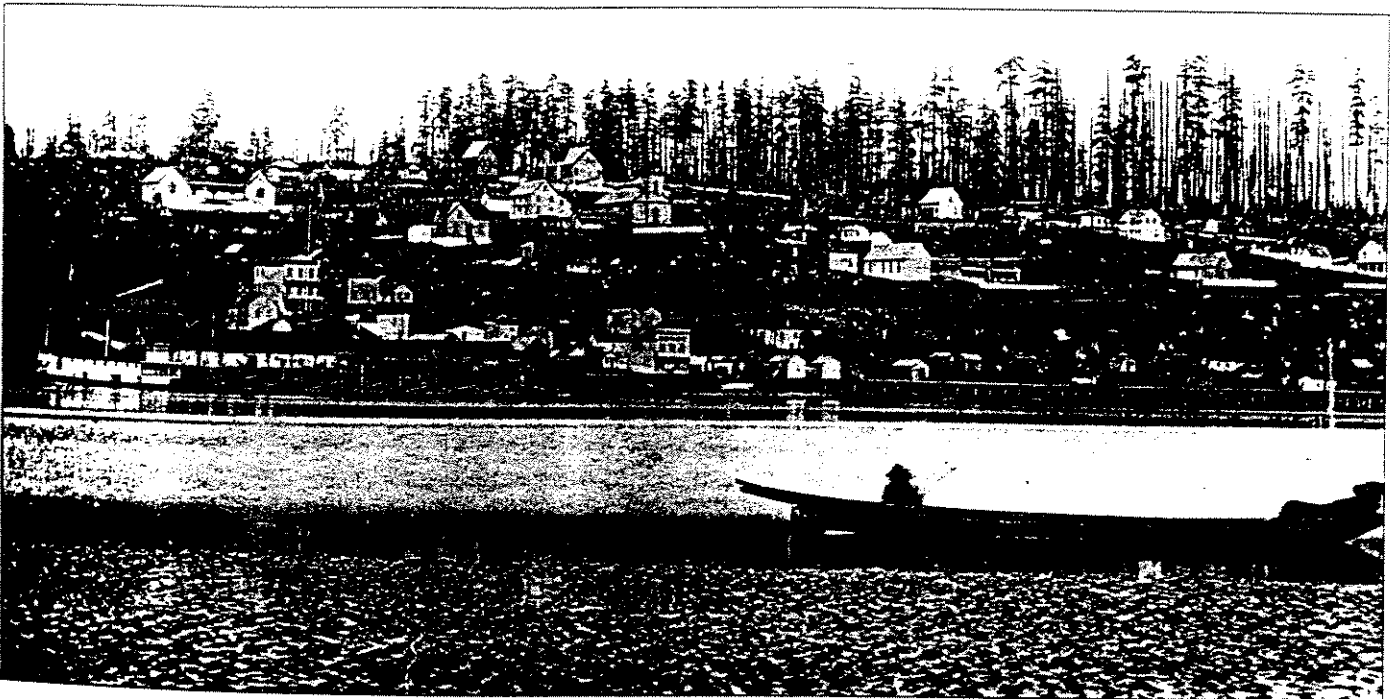


Figure 9: A Stó:lō canoe on the Fraser River in front of the new town of New Westminster, 1871 (Langley Centennial Museum).

Ecosystems & the Diminishing Land/Resource Base

The lower Fraser Valley is one of the most important and complex ecosystems in the country. Part of Canada's richest agricultural land is found here, as well as diverse wildlife and forests. The conversion of these natural ecosystems to urban areas through the growth of cities has irreversible, long-term impacts on the landscape and people. Many *Stó:lō* feel the most critical concern about the process of urbanization is its impacts on the ecosystems, and the related impact on the diminishing land and resources. These have been the foundations of *Stó:lō* culture for thousands of years. As urbanization continues, their culture and livelihood is threatened.

The Canadian Wildlife Service records the Fraser River and its tributaries as being the home of approximately 80 species of fish and shellfish, and is the single largest salmon producing waterway in the world. This area supports the highest densities of waterfowl, shorebirds in Canada, while acting as an important "stop-over" for migratory birds. The diverse forested mountains which border the Fraser River provide habitat for a variety of species. Figure 10 illustrates land use in the lower Fraser Valley in 1986/87, as computed by a Geographic Information System (GIS). As seen in this map, few areas of the Fraser Valley are left undisturbed, and urban expansion through the forests and agricultural lands is extensive. The forested areas are primarily in the mountains which flank the valley.

The close proximity of cities to these resources creates very unique opportunities, having a

market for natural resources so close to their actual location. This increases the value of the natural land to people in the cities and those who live and work in the rural areas. However, as the city expands, less and less of these valuable resources survive.

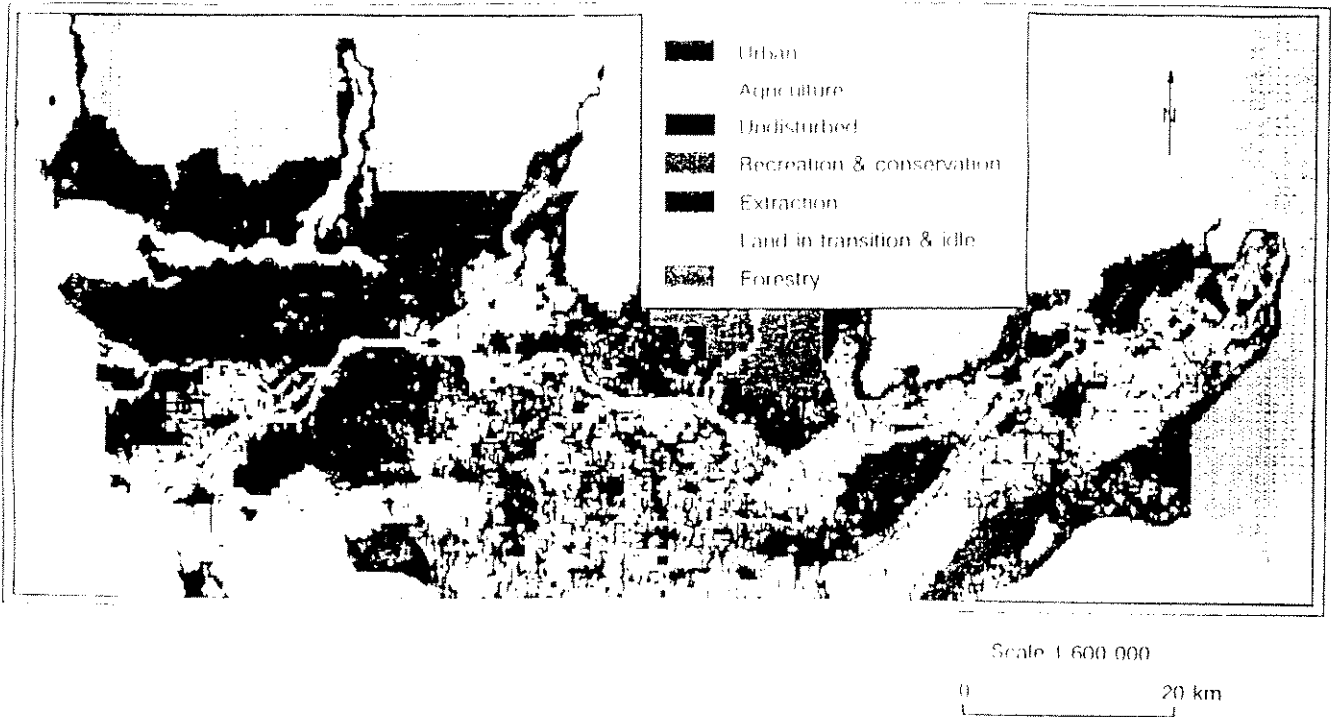


Figure 10: Land Use in the lower Fraser Valley 1986/1987. This map was produced using SPANS, a micro-computer based Geographic Information System (GIS), (Canadian Wildlife Service report "Urbanization in the Lower Fraser Valley, 1980-1987").

The *Stó:lō* have seen this process in operation for decades, as urban areas have displaced many species of animals and plants. The draining of Sumas Lake and the subsequent relocation of the Chilliwack and Vedder rivers is an excellent example. Sumas Lake was drained in the early 1920's by the municipality of Abbotsford & the federal government. They touted this as a solution to the terrible mosquito problem the urban residents of Abbotsford frequently complained about. It was thought that the mosquitos originated from this lake, and if it were drained the infestations would be wiped out. Of course, other factors, such as the creation of new areas for agriculture and providing new land to settle returning soldiers, underlaid their decision. The lake was drained over the course of a few years. Farmers who utilized this land in later years repeatedly found sturgeon bones in their fields, where fish had died after the water was drained away.

An indigenous *Stó:lō* solution to the problem of mosquitos had been developed years earlier. A number of families who lived near Sumas Lake built a village on the lake itself. The village of *Snaníth* was constructed on stilts in the middle of the lake, and occupied when the mosquitos were at their worst. To ensure a mosquito-free environment,

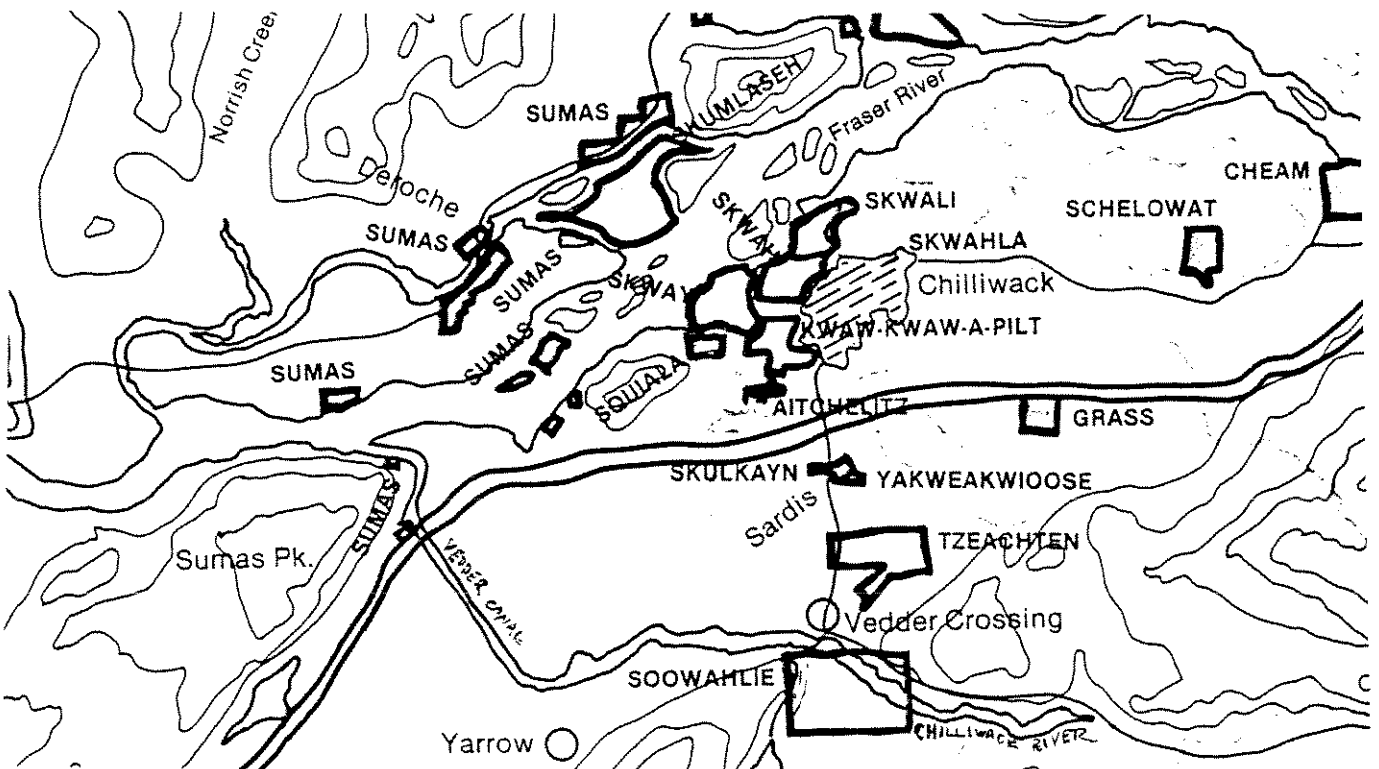
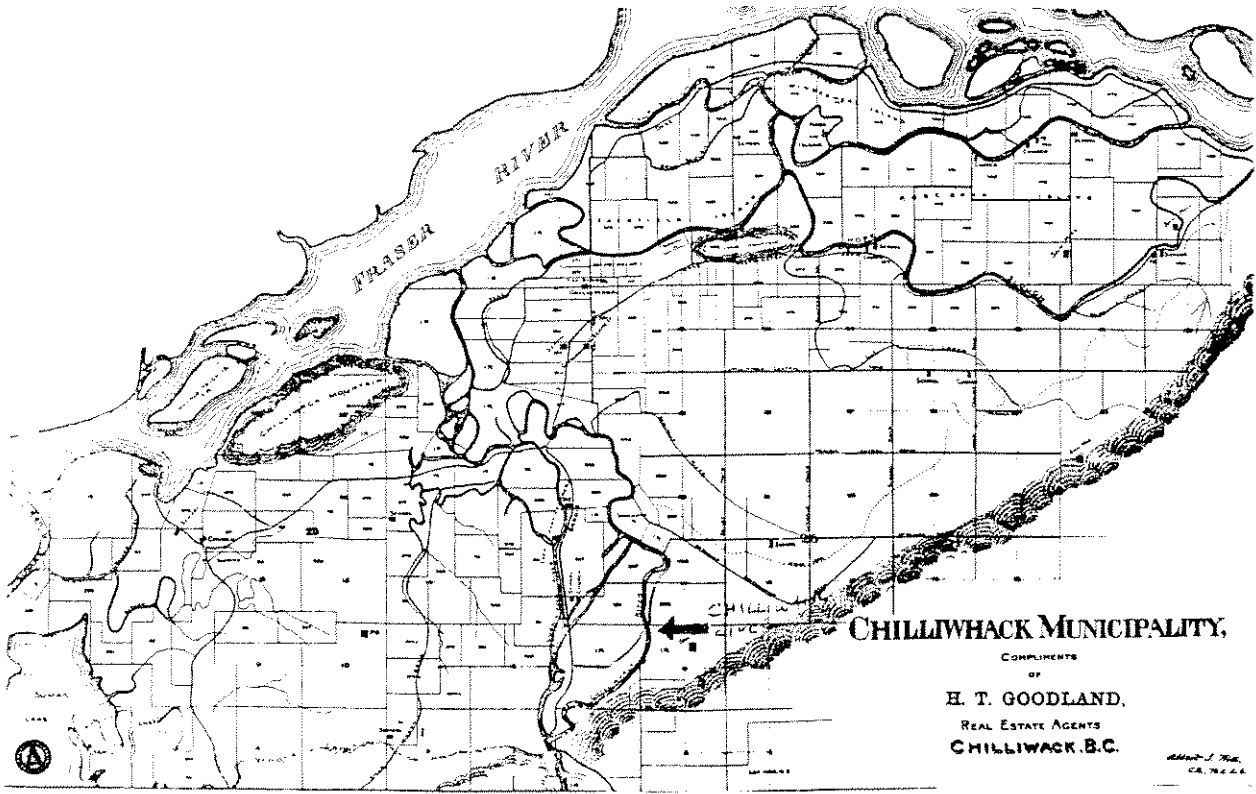


Figure 12: (Top) Map showing course of Chilliwack River before the Vedder Canal, with its mouth east of Chilliwack Mountain (H. T. Goodland). (Bottom) Current course of Chilliwack River in relation to the present-day Indian Reserves, river just west of Sumas Peak (Stó:lō Sitel Curriculum).

passengers in canoes travelling to the village on the lake carefully killed every mosquito that hovered around them.

The lake was an important resource site for many Stó:lō people, who fished, gathered plants, caught birds and used the lake for spiritual purposes. The lake and its drainages provided important transportation routes and was the centre for a number of communities, which can still be seen today in the reserves set out in that area. This was changed by the drainage of the lake, and it was done without the consultation or consent of the people who utilized and lived on the lake.

The subsequent changes in the course of the Vedder and Chilliwack Rivers affected additional Stó:lō communities. Looking at the present-day locations of the *Skowkale* and *Yakweakweiwioose* Reserves in Sardis, they appear situated no-where near a body of water that would have been necessary to make these village viable in pre-urban times. When the Chilliwack River was re-channelled into the Vedder, the flow was reduced to a seasonal trickle (what is now called Chilliwack Creek), and it no longer bore salmon stocks or the abundant shore plant life that was important to people living in those villages. Prior to the creation of "Indian Reserves," if a river changed its course naturally - which they often do if left un-dyked - the village would be relocated accordingly. Contemporary Indian Reserves fix the inhabitants of these villages to specific plots of land.

There are other innumerable impacts on the ecosystem which have occurred with the growth of cities in the lower Fraser Valley including, the Stave Lake Power Plant; the ever-increasing use of forest lands; the expansion of sub-urban communities onto hill-sides; the conversion of massive tracts of agricultural land to dense housing areas; the dyking of wetland and bog areas; the blocking and culverting of streams; the disposal of urban sewage; the diminishing supply of clean drinking water; and so on.

A healthy ecosystem is full of many diverse plants and creatures. To maintain that ecosystem, we must develop a long-term perspective on the resources of the Fraser Valley and seek to understand linkages between the human and the non-human. Similarly, a healthy understanding of the place where we live involves opening ourselves to diverse ways of understanding history and geography. We must strive to find these connections. Knowledge about place is available to us in the stories of Stó:lō Elders and in the actual places where stories reside. Field-trips and classroom speakers are strongly encouraged to develop a person's sense and appreciation of the local ecosystems.

Impacts on Cultural Heritage

Urban development also has a destructive impact on the cultural heritage of the Stó:lō. "Archaeological sites" and "traditional use sites" are areas within the landscape which are irreplaceable heritage locations. These sites are important and sacred to the Stó:lō. They represent direct connections to their ancestors and the spirit world. Urban development constantly threatens and impacts this kind of cultural heritage.

Archaeological sites in the lower Fraser River area are the material remains of the ancestors of the *Stó:lō*. These remains include the artifacts, living spaces, burial grounds, spiritual sites and resource procurement locations that the *Stó:lō* have used. In many instances, archaeological evidence demonstrates that these places have been in use for thousands of years. The only way to preserve this heritage is to leave these sites undisturbed. If they must be disturbed, they can be best understood by careful and sensitive archaeological excavation. Meaning from archaeological resources comes from knowing the spatial and temporal relationship of the things found within that site. If artifacts and features, (such as house floors), are not found in their original context, their significance is largely lost, and their meaning cannot be understood. Once such a site is destroyed by urban development it is lost forever, even if the artifacts remain, because the deposition can never be reconstructed.

Spiritual sites have inherent cultural value. They are important places in the landscape which have spiritual qualities, whether they are locations associated with stories connected to *Stó:lō* oral traditions, or places which have spiritual powers. Because archaeological and spiritual sites are non-renewable resources (they can never be replaced once they have been destroyed), they must be provided the utmost care and protection.

Traditional use sites are locations where the *Stó:lō* travel to for a variety of cultural reasons. They can be places where people involved in the winter spirit dance go to become cleansed or have visions. They can also be locations where traditional doctors or healers go to obtain plants used for medicinal purposes. These sites are also often spiritual sites, and embody a special relationship between the *Stó:lō* and their spirituality.

Developments in urban areas often occur without any consideration for cultural heritage, even though places with heritage value are protected in the British Columbia Heritage Conservation Act. The Archaeology Branch and Heritage Conservation Branch of the province of British Columbia have been given power and authority to protect these resources and sites, but the task is extremely challenging. Disinterested developers also contribute to the destruction of these kinds of cultural heritage resources, as they remain unaware of their value, and in many cases, their very existence. Preserving this kind of heritage in the wake of development costs developers money, and is often time consuming if archaeological investigation is done. These factors all stack up to make managing Aboriginal cultural resources very difficult.

The long-term process of urbanization has revealed clearly that Aboriginal people have had little voice in determining how the future of the landscape, in which their communities have been established in for thousands of years, will proceed. The population history shows the *Stó:lō* amount to only a small fraction of the overall expanding population of the lower Fraser Valley. Transportation networks have redefined the cultural landscape of the valley, creating an orientation away from the river. What were once community centres are now often marginal reserves. When they are found in cities, they often tend to become "urban ghettos." Resources which were once used and managed by extended family

networks are now often alienated by private ownership. Ecosystems are being disrupted and changed on an increasingly rapid level in all areas of this region. Cultural heritage sites are becoming bounded parks in positive cases and are completely destroyed in others. Until recently, Aboriginal people who have a great stake in the development of this area, have rarely been given the power to make decisions, or the voice to influence the decision makers.

Since treaties have never been signed with the Aboriginal people who live in most of British Columbia, the alienation of this land has been illegal and unconstitutional. Unless some further measures are taken to ensure that careful development continues in the lower Fraser Valley, there will be a profound loss of opportunities for children (native and non-native) of future generations. Recently, Aboriginal people throughout the province have been asserting their Aboriginal rights and title to the land and its resources. Land claims negotiations are on-going, and directed towards a shift in how decisions about how land management takes place.

There is a place for traditional *Stó:lō* culture in all of this development and urbanization. Ethnographer Michael Kew and ecologist M. Griggs have suggested that understanding how Aboriginal people have managed sustainable growth in the environment for thousands of years, can provide a model from which society at large can also manage this system. They are not advocating that we live in ways indigenous societies did over 200 years ago. Instead, it is a suggestion which acknowledges that a great deal of knowledge can be gained from understanding past conditions.

The key features of traditional *Stó:lō* systems of sustainable growth involve: (1) relative closure of who can impact the ecosystem; (2) local control of the resources in the environment and; (3) a real commitment to place - having respect for and a connection to the land. First Nations people developed adaptable and flexible social structures which allowed these elements to be successfully applied in resource use.

In traditional *Stó:lō* society, non-local interests had little influence on how local resources were used. Other than barter, trade and occasional raids, neighbouring groups did not have regular large-scale population shifts into this region. Influence and interest remained on the level of local control, and communities were largely self-sufficient. Household heads maintained their positions of status and social order in the communities largely through their own strong values of respect and ethical behaviour. The kinship based society connected people to place through birth and marriage. These connections to place remained intact through life and even after death. Loyalty and obligations to communities were strong and locally centred.

These things are all in contrast with present-day urban society. Multi-national corporations and foreign investors control a great deal of the region's economy and resources. Decisions about what happens in and around local communities are often made in provincial and federal capitals located hundreds of kilometres away. Individual people and families who

live in cities and towns are connected by property ownership, not kinship, and are on the whole, far more migratory than *Stó:lō* communities have ever been.

In the future, people in the lower Fraser Valley can learn a great deal about sustainable growth of urban centres by understanding what impacts on local communities. Focusing on *Stó:lō* communities provides a unique vantage from which to understand these impacts on a variety of levels, and suggests a number of cultural alternatives to the current development path. Knowledge of these complex issues will make for more careful and sensitive decision making in the future.

APPENDIX I

Suggested Further Reading
for: Urbanization in S'olh Temexw

Duff, Wilson

- 1952 The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia.
Anthropology in British Columbia, Memoir 1. British Columbia Provincial
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Siemens, Alfred

- 1968 *Lower Fraser Valley: Evolution of a Cultural Landscape.* University of
British Columbia Geographical Series 9. Vancouver.

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- 1955 Katzie Ethnographic Notes. *Anthropology in British Columbia, Memoir 3.*
1987 *Coast Salish Essays.* Talonbooks, Vancouver.
1990 Central Coast Salish. In *Handbook of North American Indians. Volume 7,*
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Washington.

Wells, Oliver

- 1987 *The Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors.* Talonbooks, Vancouver.

Wynn, Graeme & Timothy Oke (editors)

- 1992 *Vancouver and Its Region.* University of B.C. Press, Vancouver.