



**2014-2020**

**WSÁNEĆ CLAM  
GARDEN  
RESORATION  
PROJECT  
FINAL REPORT**

CARING FOR AND KEXALS-DIGGING CLAMS  
IN THE WSÁNEĆ TERRITORY

**PREPARED FOR THE GULF ISLAND  
NATIONAL PARK RESERVE AND  
PARKS CANADA**  
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### **Project Summary**

In 2014, the WSÁNEĆ people entered a partnership with Parks Canada with the goal of creating and implementing a project that would ecologically and culturally rebuild two clam gardens in the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve (GINPR) situated in WSÁNEĆ territory. This project was initiated in order to create a thorough record of WSÁNEĆ clam garden management and care practices that could then be used for future restoration projects and teaching purposes. Over the next five years, knowledge holders from the WSÁNEĆ communities; STAU, TW, WJOLEEP, WSÍKEM and BOKÉCEN, contributed essential knowledge regarding their responsibilities and care relationship with clam gardens and species that live in the inter-tidal zones.

This report provides access to information that was recorded in interviews with knowledge holders and taken in the field while restoring a clam garden in Fulford Harbour on Saltspring Island and another on Russel Island. This report also has collected knowledge from published sources that WSANEC elders have provided at different times throughout history. The information provided in this report includes; WSÁNEĆ creation stories, teachings, species identification, language, care techniques including wall building and beach cleaning practices. This report also details WSÁNEĆ harvesting and cooking methods, conservation practices, laws, uses, current practices and future objectives of the WSÁNEĆ people. This report also contains protocols and cultural practices that need to be followed in order to ensure respectful behaviour of all people when working on these sites. This report is important as it appropriately reflects the methods in which hundreds of highly productive clam gardens were managed by the WSÁNEĆ people.

The knowledge holders felt the need to get involved in this project because they do not feel anyone else is adequately taking care of the beaches and the clams. Concerns were raised regarding lack of access and mismanagement of these sites. WSÁNEĆ harvesters recognize that a healthy clam garden depends on consistence care and harvesting activity. WSÁNEĆ presence is necessary in order to protect the rights of their community, their elders and the children generations to come.

**How clams came to be:**

One day the creator XÁLS was changing people into places, lands and beings. Some people did not want to be changed, and when they heard the creator was coming, they went down to the beach and dug some holes and hid themselves. The creator overheard them and came to where they were hiding and asked why they were hiding. They told him that they did not want to be changed. The creator said that if he was to change them, that it was for the good of all people, and then changed them into clams.

The people that tried to run away from XÁLS were changed into LÁU,ĶEM- Mussels, and TĒXĒTĒX- oysters, they were attached to the rocks. STĒLO,EM- the Cockle clam means enough of the little ones. The SQĒÁ,I, Littleneck clams were provided for hunger and, S'OXE, butter clams question why do you go there, this is the meaning of the word clam. ŚWAAM, the horse clam, tried to dig himself deeper into the sand and still does today. The word XÁLS meaning creator is contained in the word for digging clams. ĶEXÁLS, digging clams is a word that reminds us of the origin, I am going to dig, caused by the creator- a gift from the creator.

We are reminded that the creators choices are his choices and within this he has given us a teaching, in life there are things that we have no choice over- who comes and who goes, even if it hurts. All clams have stories of how they came to be and how they relate to the “reverence for life”.

It is a sacred law given to us by the creator to look after the islands, we address the islands as our relatives, we are to look after them like our relatives, and in turn they will look after our people. This is the law of the people.

XÁLS and the ways of the sea told us how to live with others, eat well and prosper through sharing and trade. - John Elliott

### Cultural Protocols

The rights to harvesting clam garden sites were held by family units, or *TEXTÁN*. These family units belong to certain places, animals, plants, masks, rituals, song and dances. Family names, *NEHIYMET* get passed down through generations and provide a connection between a family and a place.

While each *WSÁNEĆ* family belongs to certain harvesting sites, some sites were shared with other families that had permission to use them through family ties or other arrangements.

Families had the right to do this. Families harvest clam garden sites and the yield of the harvest is preserved, stored, shared and traded.

Belonging to a harvesting site creates a responsibility to the family for the care of the site. It is important to show up and care for the clam gardens on time and prepared, it is also important for workers and harvesters to practice good work habits and to always work safely. Be respectful to each other while working, all work that takes place should be done in a respectful way.

Because it was our ancestors that were changed it is our responsibility to take care of them

We understand these places as gardens that need to be cultivated

### Shellfish Species

**STELO,EM:** Cockles will self-seed, they are the most mobile of the clams. They use their feet to move around and they travel with the north-wind swells/tides. Cockles travel to the same spot they were born, and settle to lay their eggs and die, similar to salmon. They are the most shallow of the clams, they are ‘meaty’ and have a salty-sweet taste. Don’t eat the stomach just the nose.

**SQĀÁ,I:** Little necks or Steamers are smaller, rounder, and rich in flavor. These clams are good to dry or freeze in their own water, they are cheaper per pound than Manilla’s. They bury themselves approximately 6” under the surface of the sand.

**S,OXE:** Butter clams but S,OXE can also be used as a generic word for clam. Butters clams bury themselves approximately 8-12'' under the surface of the sand can live up to 12 years, the lines on their shells can be read like tree rings. These clams are easy to preserve for the winter, are popular, and their shells are used to make clam rattles.

**SWÁÁM:** Horse clam shells were used as bowls or as a tool for scraping, they can also be used for the plates in a burning.

**SDEMYAAK:** Horse Clams that have white necks. To harvest dig 1- 2.5' under the surface of the sand, horse clams dig the fastest to get away. This is what the ancestors want, they are considered a delicacy.

**WOMELETĆE:** Geoducks can live up to 120 years, it is known that there are a lot of them in Cordova spit. Eelgrass is their habitat. To harvest, dig very deep or dive for them, 2' - 4', they are said to be just for the elders, and are not a preference for eating.

**LÁU,KEM:** Mussel's taste similar to clam's, they are sweet and can get very big. Mussel shells are found in most middens; they were eaten, used for bait and sometimes used as tools or weapons, the shell can also be used for a bowl. To harvest, they are pried from rocks.

**TEXTEX:** Oysters will grow anywhere, they are fast growers and are important for detoxifying and filtering water. To harvest, they are pried from rocks.

**XIWE:** Urchin, purple are males that carry the milt, the milt acts as a fertilizer that creates a nutrient rich environment for all sea species that live on the beach. Red urchins are the females with eggs.

**ČENÁM,EN:** Scallops fly through the water like a bird and bury themselves in the sand, scallop shells are used in ceremony but are over fished now. One needs to dive to harvest scallops.

**KEMÁNE:** Moon Snails clean the beach, they travel through the sediment cleaning toxins that are in the sand. Moon snails' prey on clams but they don't take them all, they clear areas and allow for new growth, it is good to have some but not good to have too many.

**Manilla's:** An imported species that grows fast and is harvested and preserved by WSÁNEĆ.

### **Parts of the Clam:**

**SPAT:** Eggs

**ČÁ,ŃEN:** Clam Shell

**FENÁ,TEN:** Ribbon of the Clam

**SJE,PWEN:** Button of the Clam

**SKÁLEX:** Mud vein of the Clam

**ŃEKSEN:** Siphon of a Clam

**ŃÁ,DAYE:** Clam Stomach

**KEXÁL,S:** Digging Clams

### **Clam related terms:**

**KOINAS:** Clam Place. A place to harvest clams.

**STELEK:** Clam Bake.

**ŠKEXÁL,S:** Clam Fork. Strong, made out of Ocean spray, aka ironwood or yew wood.

**SKÁLEX:** Digging stick. Strong, made out of Ocean spray, aka ironwood or yew wood.

**JODE:** Clam drying stick. A long, thin, flexible branch.

**STEL,KÁL,S:** Clams strung up on a strip of cedar to dry.

## **Clam Garden Restoration, Development and Care**

### **Building the Wall**

WSÁNEĆ families built clam garden retaining walls in inlets and bays in order to increase optimal habitat for clam production and increased habitat for other sea creatures. In order to build the walls, WSÁNEĆ people moved large, head sized boulders into a line at low tide. It is important to make sure that the wall is not placed too far up into the inter-tidal zone where clam species live, to avoid suffocating them and limiting their space. As the tide comes in, sediments collect in the inter-tidal zone. Within a few years this deepens and widens the habitat providing more space for clams and other shellfish for harvest. As the rock wall continues to be built up, so too will the clam garden. The wall is the foundation of a clam garden. The creation of the wall is an example of how WSÁNEĆ people's management was actually a symbiotic relationship with the landscape, increasing biodiversity and increasing food sources not only for themselves but for other animal species.

### **Seeding the beaches**

During this project the beaches were not intentionally seeded, but after years of caring for the gardens the WSÁNEĆ participants noticed that the clams were self-seeding and growing. WSÁNEĆ knowledge holders thought the beaches should have been seeded so that it would speed up the process and assist in re-establishment. It was made clear in these discussions that if there was intentional seeding of a clam garden there would need to be assurance that the beaches then would be tended to on a regular basis. After decades of restricted access, WSÁNEĆ clam garden health and production has greatly decreased, so before transplanting or seeding clams it is important to make sure that the rock wall is built and the beach area and clams are properly cleaned. This step will help ensure that there is adequate habitat and that they are not spreading disease or other contaminants from one beach to another.

When the clam garden area has been adequately cleaned, use a pitchfork to poke holes in the sand about a foot deep, then add one seedling per hole. After they have been placed in the hole fill in the hole in order to protect them from predators. It is a good practice to transplant baby clams in areas near running water where the beach naturally filters. It is also good practice to

seed in warmer weather. Water washing up over warm sand warms the water and helps with growth. Fluffing the beach, digging and scraping the top surface of the sand will also provide oxygen and help the eggs settle.

Seeding 20 sacks of littleneck, 20 sacks of butters and 20 sacks of cockles would not be too much. It is good to seed the garden with as many clams as possible. Clams can be transplanted from one beach to another but it is important to make sure that each clam garden has enough to share. It is important for the health of the garden to plant at least 20- 30 baby sea urchins by placing them on the rock wall, they are a durable species that are able to stay alive exposed to the heat of low tide and will move themselves if needed. Although there was visible growth over the years of this project, it was slow. Seeding the beaches in addition to adequate care would boost production levels effectively.

### **Beach Care**

Proper beach care is essential to the health of a clam garden, there are a few activities that should be done to help increase the health and abundance of the species in these areas. Rocks that exceed the size of a large dinner plate should either be left where they lay or used as part of the wall; all other smaller rocks should be removed; these smaller rocks can smother baby clams. Turning and fluffing the sand could be done every tide. The holes that are created with turning should be filled in and levelled off after digging. Fluffing is a method used that includes scraping the surface with a stick, this helps the eggs settle, adds air to the sand and also exposes food for the clams to eat.

It is important to encourage other plant and animal species to live in the garden, these inter-dependant relationships support the health and abundance of all species in the inter-tidal zone. Seaweed needs to be left on the beach, it acts as a filter for diesel and other fuels and contaminants; seaweed also helps by turning black sand into healthy sand sediments. Shells should also be left and spread out on the beach, this practice creates habitat for the baby clams. Otters and seals harvest the beaches which helps turn over and add air to the sand, this also makes new room in the garden for growth. Purple sea urchins' milt is a fertilizer that provides nourishment to clams and other species.

In order to keep proper care of the beach, it is important to return to the clam garden every tide or every second tide. While there, clean, pick up plastics and garbage, scrape sand, and tend to the rock wall. Without proper and consistent care, the health and capacity of a clam garden declines.

### **Clam Harvesting**

Knowledge of the tides is of utmost importance when harvesting clams. With the moon effecting the patterns of the tides and as they vary from month to month, knowing the best time to harvest is a respected skill that was handed down over generations.

SJELČÁ,SEN- December, the Elder Moon, put your paddle away in the bush. Low tide is around 3 am this time of the year, clams and other shellfish are gathered during these night tides. In the winter months, from October to February, clams were gathered by the women when their families were travelling less.

PEXSISEN- Mid-March to mid-April, the moon of the opening hands. In these Spring months daylight tides have arrived. Instead of having to go and dig clams at night you can now dig them in the day, clams, oysters and mussels were at their best at this time of year. In these months everything is breeding and there is new growth and babies, the urchins are milting. Do not harvest female clams at his time of the year, leave them be, only harvest male clams that are over 1.5- 2 inches. During the summer months WSÁNEĆ people dig, roast and dry clams daily.

ČEN, FÁ, WEN- September, the dog salmon returns to earth. With good weather conditions women gathered clams and made blankets.

When deciding whether or not to harvest a beach it is necessary to look for the ‘eyes’ in the sand, these are small breathing holes in the surface signaling that there is a clam directly underneath. In modern times it has become more difficult to see the ‘eyes’ on the beach because they are walked on so much the breathing holes get filled in with sand.

There are a few indicators that will appear if a clam is not good to eat; they can be runny or milky, the clam can be dark in color and have a bad odor, the shell can also be grey. WSÁNEĆ people also use birds and other species as indicators, if the birds, seals and otters are not eating the clams then people should not eat them either. If there is red tide on the beach and there are no birds and the seaweed has turned white this is also an indicator not to eat the clams.

Starfish are a good indicator species for clam abundance, the more starfish the more butter clams. It is also good to harvest clams where a stream meets the beach, here there should be many littlenecks, 15-20 per scrape.

Most clams are harvested with digging sticks at low tide on the lower edge of the gravel slopes. Clams can also be harvested with digging forks and large clam shells. A three pronged, carved deer antler attached to cedar pole is also used for harvesting clams, scraping sand and hooking urchins and crabs. Butters, steamers and manilla clams are found 6 inches- 1.5 feet deep and are harvested in the spring and early summer. Harvested in July, cockles are the easiest to harvest. Found under crab grass or seaweed you can feel cockles with your feet, this is why it is important to leave seaweed on the beach. Horse clams were harvested out on the mud flats and geoducks were harvested from under water, diving for them sometimes up to 4 feet deep. Areas that have been previously harvested are marked by sticks left in the sand.

### **Conservation Practices**

With the state that the beaches are currently in, many WSÁNEĆ people advocate for closing beaches to public use and commercial harvesting. It is believed that the beaches need at least five years of active care and growth in order to recover. This would allow time to rebuild the wall, for silt and sediment to build up on the foreshore, and to start investigations into pollution sources and control systems. Clam gardens need time and care to recover, grow, and reproduce without commercial pressures, this would be the initial step in conservation.

Practices moving forward should include; regular beach care and fluffing, wall maintenance, maintenance of other species habitat and harvesting only larger male clams, leaving the smaller clams to grow. It is important to consistently harvest small quantities of clams on all beaches, even on polluted beaches, this will help ensure that the sand is 'fluffed', and there is room created for the clams to breath and grow.

Do not over harvest or take too many clams, do not harvest babies or female clams. Do not take anything less than 1.5- 2 inches, if a small clam is dug up replant closer to the wall, this way other diggers will not harvest. To identify a female clam, pull it out of the sand and watch for a milky liquid to come out, if it does, this is a female clam whereas water comes out of a male. Babies will attach to the female clams and will come apart after Easter.

**Places:**

The two sites selected as the focus of this project are two out of hundreds of possible sites, nearly every bay and beach is a clam harvesting site that was stewarded by the families of the W̱SÁNEĆ. There are many sources that have recorded clam harvesting sites were cared for by the W̱SÁNEĆ people. Archeological sites and shell middens date back hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. The enormous amount of clam shells in middens along the coast indicate the importance of clams in the lives of the W̱SÁNEĆ people.

**These are a few of the sites spoken about in this project.**

SETI,NES- Sidney site that is recorded as stretching in length for more than a mile and varying in depth from six to nine feet.

SKEKETEK- across from Piers Island. “chest in the water”,

TEL,ILĆ- Cordova Bay sand bar, “place of the defeated”.

TEM,O,SEN- Tumbo Island, “becoming a good fishing tide”

SYOWT- Ganges, “make it cautious”

SISCENEN- Halibut Island, “all alone”

ĶENES- Hagan Creek in the Saanich Inlet

SXEXEĆO,FEN- Russell Island

WENÁ,NEĆ- Fulford harbour

SDÁ,YES- Pender Island/ Pender Canal

TEĶTEĶSEN- Saturna Island, east point

SQEQOTE- Piers Island

SNENHOLS- Moresby Island

SXEĆOFEN- Portland Island

W,ÁSWEM- Prevost Island

SKFOĶEL- Maine Island

LEKTINES- Coal Island

WELÁLĶEL- San Juan Island

ĆELĶINES- Moses Point

SXOXÍEM- Willis Point

WJOLELP- Saanich Inlet

TEXTÁĆ- Saanichton Bay

ÍY,EĶEN- Saanichton Spit

ILEĆEN- Bedwell Harbour,

WEWTENO,F- Cole Bay

SWEMWEMEN- Deep Cove

XTEWEĶ- Island View Beach

ĆTESEU- D’Arcy Island

ĶENES Stuart Island,

WMÍEFEN- McKenzie Bite

STOLĶEL Friday Harbour

PWÁÁN Forrest Island

SENIN,ES- Senanus Island

ETÁĆSEN- BOĶEĆ- ĶELJI,EWEĶ- James Island

TELXOLEU- ĶELTEMÁ,EĶS- WYOYOMEĆEN- ĆTESEU- ĶELSET- Sidney Island

**Cooking/ Preserving:**

Clams were and are baked in pits in the ground, this is called pit cooking. To do this, dig a wide shallow pit in the sand on the beach, usually 5' long by 3' wide; these pits can be much larger for bigger feasts. Establish a fire in the pit and add a layer of medium sized rocks. Once the rocks are hot take the clams and put them directly on top, cover the clams with mats, kelp blades or white fir boughs in order to hold in the steam cooking the clam. The clams are done after about 15 minutes and once the shell has opened up. The clam is then either "scaled" or scooped out of the shell and threaded onto long slender bendable sticks, that are bent into hoops and hung by the fire to brown, or skewered onto a sharp stick or iron wood, individually tied to the stick and leaned diagonally over the fire to roast. After they were done roasting/smoking they are threaded onto a line of cedar bark and traded or saved for winter use. Horse clams can be shelled, skewered onto a sharp stick and laid on dry cedar planks raw, then put in the sun to be dried. Open weave baskets are used for holding and cleaning clams, this keeps them off of the beach and away from pollutants such as goose droppings but they also allow water to drain in and out cleaning the clams. It is a good practice to prepare and cook everything outside. Rock clams, oysters, mussels and cockles can be broken open and eaten raw but were mostly steamed.

**Economy/ Trade**

"Clams were one of the most important economic items, they were traded with people from the interior." -John Elliott

Clams were used during big gatherings, feasts and giveaways. TÁTE,NEK- to give a potlatch, was a social and material investment for WSÁNEĆ people. During these gatherings the host would invite general community but they would also strategically choose guests for the reason that they could then provide a resource or service back to the host. This was a trade economy, this was an avenue for WSÁNEĆ people to build social and material capital within and outside of the region. The longer one could feed and provide for their guests the more respect, territory and material goods were made available to them. This system was built on values of relationship building, respect, trust and security.

When settlers came to WSÁNEĆ Territory it broadened the trading opportunities. WSÁNEĆ People would harvested at night, cook and prepare the clams during the day and then the following day would take the catch to the markets in Victoria. Harvesters remember selling to restaurants around Victoria all the way up to the 1980's without any trouble from the Department of Fisheries.

### **Uses/ Spiritual Matters**

Clams are harvested for funerals and burnings; clam shells were also used to hold food at a burning.

The shells were used to carry fire embers. Small blocks of rotted fir are lit with sap and kept smouldering in a clam shell while traveling.

Shells are used to make rattles and are used as general vessels. They are used as digging tools and sharp blades, the sharpest is the mussel shell used for cutting.

The butter clam shell can be crushed with dog fish oil in order to make white paint.

It is important to use the name of all things used. Mention the name giving thanks to it in order to complete the cycle, recognizing it for its life and for being what it is.

### **Laws**

A clam that is 1.5 inches and smaller is too small to harvest and should be re-planted where it is; this is a way to make sure that we respect the beach, our relationships, and support the growth of the next generation of clams.

KEXALS, digging clams is a gift that the creator has given us, this is a lesson to remind us that in life things are going to happen that we do not have choice over.

Other creations were/are made from the same 'cloth', clams were changed from people to clams for the good of all people, we are family. We have an inherent responsibility to look after our relatives of the deep, they are here to look after us and we are here to look after them.

**Present practices**

The WSÁNEĆ currently have many obstacles in properly caring for and harvesting their beaches. Present issues such as regulatory and jurisdictional restrictions, travel and boat access, dangerous levels of pollution, and department of fisheries management/treatment have contributed to a decrease in WSÁNEĆ clam harvesting. Many harvesters do not have boats making Parks their main source of transportation.

Because of these issues the WSÁNEĆ communities now have what is referred to as “super harvesters”. These people have dedicated their lives to harvesting food resources and distributing them throughout the community. Often these people are not the most well off, but work for trade, reciprocity, territory, relationship building, respect, and sometimes meager amounts of money. Super harvesters are important to the health of our beaches, the health of our people, and the health of our future.

Super harvesters witness the activity currently taking place in WSÁNEĆ territory. Stories of commercial, sometimes illegal harvesters taking 2500 lbs of clams as they travel through the islands and up the Saanich inlet in the early hours of the morning. Everything is getting over fished. Beaches are exposed to the ferry wake and are degrading faster than they have before, they can't even get in two or three days what they use to be able to harvest in half a day. To prevent confrontation with the Department of Fisheries and other fishermen, it has become a practice to keep live tanks hidden so that upon an emergency there are clams, crabs and urchins to give to families in need, a live tank also filters sand and toxins out of the clam.

A few super harvesters work very hard for the WSÁNEĆ people. It is their lifelong work, but due to the decline of harvesters and care takers, and an increase of challenges, present management practices are not adequately keeping WSÁNEĆ clam gardens healthy.

Taking care of our elders and assuring that they have what they need first is always a priority.

### Future Objectives

We have lived in harmony with our fishery and with our neighbours for thousands of years. We built clam gardens and expanded eel grass beds to increase habitat and intentionally increase the yield, this was good for our people and good for the clams. Today we have limited access to our beaches and many of them are too polluted to safely harvest from. Although this report in a way is a historical overview, everything in this report lays out process, values, and practices for the future.

It is our objective to ensure that there are boats that can be accessed so workers can easily travel to the clam garden sites. Actively seed the beaches and visit them to care for the clam garden at least every other tide. It is a WSÁNEĆ objective to train volunteers and students that will help with the work, increasing clam habitat and instilling WSÁNEĆ values and practices. It has also been stated that WSÁNEĆ needs to ensure that there is elder involvement. Kids need to learn about the importance of this work from the ones that carry the knowledge.

A large problem today is harassment that the WSÁNEĆ people receive when caring for and harvesting the beaches, in order to address this there were five additional objectives identified.

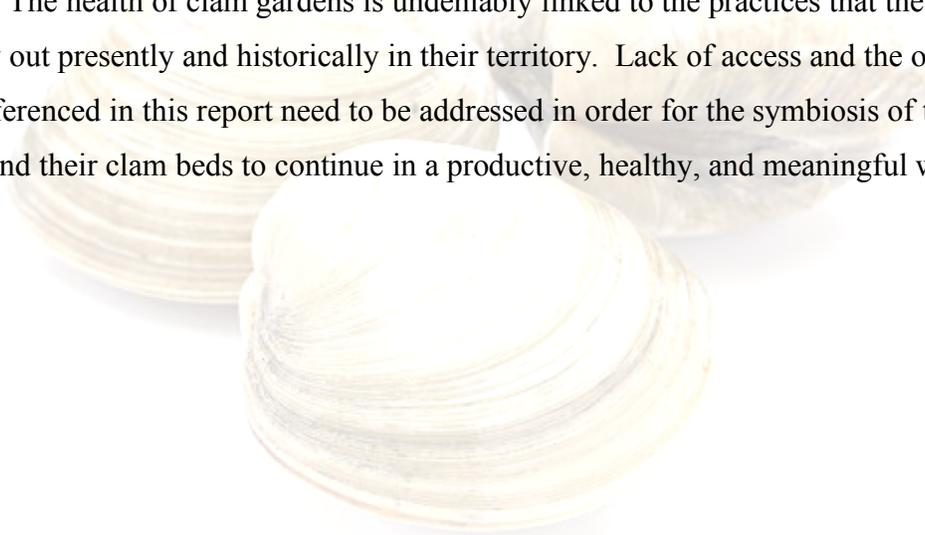
- 1) Regaining sole management and harvesting rights to WSÁNEĆ sites.
- 2) Having designated resources for the continued consistent care of these sites.
- 3) Actively seed, clean and harvest WSÁNEĆ clam garden site.
- 3) Train WSÁNEĆ People to test the beach and identify sources of pollution.
- 4) Provide access to deprivation plants under treaty right in order to sell at market.

WSÁNEĆ People would like a presence on the islands that properly cares for the clam gardens, returning them to health and abundance.

### **Lessons to Share**

At the beginning of this project it was difficult to find more than twenty clams in the clam gardens but today the beaches and quality of harvest has greatly improved. This change has been due to the active care of the beach. When activity ends and the WSÁNEĆ have no access to the clam gardens, they die. It is difficult to keep up with a project that requires multigenerational and life-long commitment.

Having this as a teaching place for the youth aligns them with the principles and values of the WSÁNEĆ and keeps them culturally engaged, out of trouble, and gives them something positive to focus on. The health of clam gardens is undeniably linked to the practices that the WSANEC people carry out presently and historically in their territory. Lack of access and the other obstacles referenced in this report need to be addressed in order for the symbiosis of the WSANEC and their clam beds to continue in a productive, healthy, and meaningful way.



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