

Thomas James

Tk'emlùps te Secwépemc
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"To me, Indigenous research is our way of life. It's a way for us to connect with our stsptékwle/tellqelmúcv on a deeper level, understanding and building on our future endeavors."

IMPACT & NATURAL ECOLOGICAL INFLUENCES THAT CLIMATE CHANGE LEFT ON INDIGENOUS WOMEN

"Building a sustainable future entails harnessing the knowledge, skills and leadership of women in climate action."

United Nations Women. *Climate action by and for women* (<https://www.unwomen>)

Weyt-kp xwexweytep. Thomas James en skwékwst. Hello. My name is Thomas James. I am a Tk'emlùps te Secwépemc member of the Secwépemc. Our traditional territory stretches from what is called by some as the Columbia River valley along the Rocky Mountains, west to the Fraser River, and south to the Arrow Lakes. Within this vast ecology I represent the Paul/Fraser/Casimir family (three of the 13 Tk'emlùps Families). My community honors the role of women as leaders. We are raised within a matriarchy.

This research recognises those women and family nearest to me; remaining close by, teaching me our traditional ecological knowledge, and guiding me. I thank my sister, Lucinda Paul, for being there for me throughout my educational experiences growing up, watching over me with all the decisions I make to improve myself. I learned the most about my culture through Lucinda and her husband Greg Ferguson. To Knowledge Makers and the Elders at Thompson Rivers University thank you for guiding me and bestowing knowledge.

Indigenous women of North America see climate change as a critical issue in their communities. Our stsptékwle/ tellqelmúcv (ancestors) have known the surrounding environment for such a long time, tending to and delivering the resources they use to accommodate their family and their communities (Dictaan-Bang-Oa, 2009). They know first-hand the devastating consequences of the ecological variation in this modern age: "Mother Earth is no longer in a period of climate change, but in a climate crisis" (Dictaan-Bang-Oa, 2009).

Throughout North America, a seemingly insignificant variation in temperatures generates negative outcomes in the environment, prompting more issues as the years go past and a powerful impact and the role of Indigenous women in responding to that impact. Plants used to create medicine, food or manufacturing homes have prolonged growing periods.

"Women's traditional ecological knowledge and tribal experience play a role in developing prospective systematic solutions for acclimatizing to the impact of climate change."

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Deforestation, can create a loss of habitat for not only animals but plant species as well. We lose not only those known to us but also those unknown. In this modern-day, desiccations and heatwaves are creating the inability for crops to develop, impacting small-scale livestock, and relocation by Indigenous people. How will the present climate change issues influence Indigenous women as guardians for future generations? Autumn Peltier said, "One day, I will be an ancestor and I want to leave a legacy for my great-grandchildren so they know I worked hard to ensure they have a future" (Becking, 2019).

Climate-Related Issues

Indigenous women are unique bearers of traditional knowledge systems and the cultural practices and abilities that maintain biodiversity and environmental sustainability (Tovar-Restrepo, 2010, p. 2). Harvesting wild meat, berries, or other plants, Indigenous peoples continue to be contaminated from specific environmental changes and that modify the food supply (Power, 2008). The traditional food gathered gives us the necessary nutrients needed to survive. Major changes in the ecosystem impact our traditional ways including our crop systems we have in place, such as, rotational agriculture or hunting practices. Throughout history, environmental contamination of traditional food systems is one of the impacts global climate change is having on Indigenous peoples (Power, 2008).

The association between nature and Indigenous history is expansive and as yet underdeveloped as Indigenous-led research in general and for Secwépemc in particular. Women's traditional ecological knowledge and tribal experience play a role in developing systemic solutions to the impact of climate change. More needs to be known about the different perspectives

of Indigenous women activists facing the current environmental and climate issues happening within Canada and Secwépemc.

Autumn Peltier and Ta'Kaiya Blaney are two Indigenous youth activists. Blaney, advocates for environmental and Indigenous rights and the preservation of marine and coastal wildlife; and Peltier, advocates for the preservation of water for First Nations in Canada. Peltier and Blaney are examples of Indigenous activists taking a step forward in advocating for environmental and Indigenous rights and the preservation of waterways and coastal wildlife. Climate Change has brought into sharp focus the dire need for the voice of Indigenous women to take action against a damaged ecology. Peltier in advocating for the preservation of water for Indigenous in Canada has stated: "Canada is not a third-world country, but in this country, the Indigenous people here live in third-world conditions" (Peltier, 2019).

The Tiny House Warriors (THW), are a group of Secwépemc land and water defenders. THW are asserting collective Secwépemc responsibility and jurisdiction to our lands and water, and the need to protect women and girls from the impact of industry across Secwépemc. THW contends that more researchers should join gendered points of view and that they separate Indigenous history from North America. THW critically examines varying cultural perspectives on assets and nature, and the colonizing impacts of mechanical and extractive practices on Indigenous civilizations. Of concern are climate-related issues for Indigenous women and communities, including the suppression of traditional knowledge, along with forests and ecosystems, food preservation, traditional food, water, permafrost thaw, and relocation.

Our stsptékwle/ tellqelmúcw bestowed upon us the traditional knowledge needed to strengthen our land, using the resources gifted

"Indigenous activists Autumn Peltier and Ta'Kaiya Blaney are two prime examples of taking a step forward in advocating for the environmental and Indigenous rights and the preservation of marine and coastal wildlife."

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to us. Indigenous women of Secwépemcúlecw created ways to keep our past memories in the present (Ignace & Ignace, 2017). "Many of the old people say this is our land. When the creator placed us on this land, he gave us land to look after, so that the land will look after us forever (Michel, 2005). How will we honor the role of Indigenous women as leaders at a time of major changes in the ecosystem?"

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