

## Fishing Rights and Community Conservation Converge in Halifax



Standing in Mi'kmaw territory in present day Nova Scotia, Kluskap, the first human, watches over Mi'kma'ki (the land of the Mi'kmaq).

What motivates people to conserve resources like fish and other seafood? How can we balance the need to conserve those resources with the need to earn a living? How can indigenous people ensure our rights to those resources are respected and recognized in government policy?

Those are some of the questions Uu-a-thluk staff discussed with a network of scientists, researchers and community partners last month during a weeklong meeting in Halifax. Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, the meeting is part of a six-year project designed to understand community conservation and influence conservation policy around the world. The project is called the Coastal Communities Research Network (CCRN).

"We attended to learn from other researchers and connect with countries who are working on community-based resource management," said Dawn Foxcroft, one of the Uu-a-thluk representatives who attended the conference. "We also attended to share the story of Nuu-chah-nulth fishing rights with an international audience."

Hosted by Saint Mary's University (SMU), the gathering brought together more than 25 people to establish a research network that spans the globe and include topics such as marine protected areas, indigenous fisheries, and sustainable livelihoods. Foxcroft attended along with Uu-a-thluk Program Manager Don Hall and Outreach Coordinator Shannon Cowan. Together the team forged connections and shared the story of Nuu-chah-nulth fishing rights with other researchers from Canada, India, Iran, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, South Africa, Mexico, Kyrgyzstan, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil.

The project leader, Dr. Tony Charles (SMU), is familiar with Nuu-chah-nulth efforts to secure economic access to their sea resources. Two years ago former NTC President Cliff Atleo, Foxcroft and Hall presented to an international forum organized by Dr. Charles about the Nuu-chah-nulth Fishing Rights case. That meeting led to a visit by Dr. Merle Sowman to Port Alberni to share with the T'aaq-wiihak Nations and DFO negotiators the very similar plight of indigenous people in South Africa to have their fishing rights recognized and protected. Foxcroft, Hall and Cowan expect similar collaborations to arise from this new CCRN project.

Being part of the CCRN comes with two responsibilities. First, the NTC team will contribute to the network's overarching goals for understanding what motivates people to conserve and how that understanding can lead to better government policy. Second, Foxcroft will conduct her own research into the developing T'aaq-wiihak fisheries that will benefit Nuu-chah-nulth Nations directly.

"Nuu-chah-nulth Nations are trying to create community-based, economic fisheries," she said. "We want to ensure those fisheries are successful, so my research involves developing ways to track and measure that success."

Over the next five years, Foxcroft will build on previous work to develop indicators for the T'aaq-wiihak fisheries. "We'll be looking at factors that indicate sustainability, efficiency, economy, and more," Foxcroft said. "We'll also be looking for feedback from fishers and communities. Do these fisheries meet our needs? If not, why not?"

Supporting her work will be input and advice from network researchers from around the world. "We are all looking at biodiversity conservation for our main areas," said Dr. Dachanee

Emphandhu of Thailand, of the network's goals. Dr. Trudy Sable of Saint Mary's University later added during her presentation, "Cultural diversity is important for biodiversity. They don't exist in isolation."

Attending the meeting were also representatives of the Innu

Nation, who share similarities with Nuu-chah-nulth history and are now struggling to regain access to the natural resources they depend upon. The last day of the meeting involved a field trip to Mi'kmaw territory where NTC representatives learned first hand about the power of traditional place names from Mi'kmaw linguist, Bernie Francis.

Now back in B.C., Foxcroft will begin meeting with communities to talk more about the project and conduct her research. She recognizes that her findings are just one piece of the larger puzzle that will, one day, see Nuu-chah-nulth communities regain access to our resources. "Nuu-chah-nulth want access for economic reasons, but we also want a place in managing those resources. Conservation and sustainability is a huge part of having that in place."

For more information about the Community Conservation Research Network, visit [www.communityconservation.net](http://www.communityconservation.net).

*"Cultural diversity is important for biodiversity. They don't exist in isolation."*

—Dr. Trudy Sable, Saint Mary's University

From left to right: Helen Andrew of the Innu Nation, Dawn Foxcroft of Tseshaht First Nation, Trudy Sable of Saint Mary's University, Bernie Francis of the Mi'kmaw Nation, and Don Hall of Uu-a-thluk.



Halifax, once home to thriving fisheries, was the host city for the CCRN meeting attended by NTC delegates.

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