

Traditional recognition and Forestry's involvement in Indigenous research

By Seraphine Munroe



Seraphine (3rd from left) and family, visiting headdress in the Royal Ontario Museum

Much of the common discourse surrounding Canada's 150 years in Confederation has been to shed light in celebration of settlement and success. However, for many First Nations people in Canada, the 150 years marks a time to reflect on dispossession and oppression.

For one First Nations family in central British Columbia, May 15th, 2017, marked a significant moment that was over a hundred years in the making. A headdress, known to the family as their ancestral family chief's symbol of jurisdiction over their family territory, was found at the Royal Ontario Museum in April 2017.

During the period of the 1880s to 1890s, the family chief (known in the First Nations Dakelh Language as Keyohwhudachun) was recorded to have 'given' the headdress to Father Adrien Morice, a well-known missionary in the area. Much of the information concerning the whereabouts of the headdress was lost until research by family members connected the headdress back to the Museum. On May 15, the family was very excited to be able to connect with this prestigious headdress taken nearly 140 years earlier. This moment further symbolized a family legacy that legitimized authority over their heritage.

The headdress (which is made from flute shaped seashells strung on the

hair of revered female ancestors) is associated with a long line of descendants that are a part of a larger network of family territories also known as Keyohs. The people from these territories are strongly connected to the forests, with much of their cultural activities taking place on their family lands.

During the past 150 years, families faced significant oppressive changes to their way of life. Between residential schools and the establishment of reserves; the Dakelh, like many other First Nations across Canada were restricted from practicing their cultures, including the use of traditional regalia such as an ancestral headdress. Furthermore, modern threats to the forests, specifically clear-cut logging practices with intensive road building, continued to erode cultural uses. In response to these pressures, the family associated with the headdress solidified their Keyoh by creating a formal society known as the Maiyoo Keyoh Society to consult and seek accommodation. The Keyoh family were involved in various attempts to reassert control and diminish the erosion of cultures related to poor forest practices. However, despite various blockades and countless meetings between the Ministry of Forests and the local band, the Keyohs were unable to establish adequate lines of communication with the government. Fueled by frustration over a continued

lack of consultation, the family sought alternative avenues for decision making authority. One such consultation was with the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Forestry.

In 2007, Jim Munroe, president and spokesperson of the Maiyoo Keyoh Society, contacted the Faculty of Forestry for assistance in developing a consultation process. This has led to a strong relationship between several Keyohs and the Faculty of Forestry. Over the past several years, UBC's Faculty of Forestry has been a major contributor to Indigenous research by providing an environment of mutual benefit that has allowed students to gain meaningful practical experience and First Nations to acquire a deliverable that supports their consultative efforts.

Currently, many family members are involved in both the governance and academic endeavours related to protecting their rights. UBC Forestry has had a significant influence in the community and is currently "home" to Maiyoo Keyoh family member, Seraphine Munroe. Seraphine is working on her MSc degree in the Department of Forest Resources Management under the supervision of Drs Gary Bull and Verena Griess. She attributes her efforts in research to her Indigenous experience on her traditional family territory stating, "I grew up being told by my grandmother that we must never take more than we need, and we must not forget where we came from". Taking these statements as a core value of her upbringing, Seraphine is investigating the intergovernmental complexities to protecting traditional values while providing a sustainable livelihood.

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