

# *Land, Language, and Leadership: Two-Eyed Seeing in British Columbia's Natural Resource Management*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Indigenous law and governance systems across British Columbia have experienced tremendous hardship and transformation since first contact. Colonial systems have stifled Indigenous cultural governance structures, compromising Indigenous communities' centuries-old methods of sustainable land and resource management through stewardship. Despite the acknowledged importance of Indigenous stewardship in natural resource management initiatives, land-based decision making within British Columbia continues to design and implement processes and mechanisms that stifle Indigenous law and governance and misrepresent Indigenous values.

This article uses document analysis of 123 forestry-centric government-to-government Forest Consultation and Revenue Sharing Agreements within British Columbia to explore how Two-Eyed Seeing manifests through the opportunity to uphold Indigenous law and governance in these agreements. Focusing on the use of Indigenous language, cultural values, and hereditary leadership, nine of the agreements studied showed signs of Indigenous law and governance in their terms. These findings highlight the need for a path forward that is inclusive and empowers Indigenous law and governance in natural resource decision making to ensure enhanced stewardship opportunities for future generations.

**KEYWORDS:** Indigenous law; governance; forest management; Two-Eyed seeing; environmental stewardship

Empowering Indigenous communities and promoting stewardship through sustainable natural resource management depends on the recognition, integration, and collaboration of Indigenous knowledge systems with Western scientific methods (Atleo, 2004; Coté, 2010). Indigenous governance systems' comprehensive approach to stewardship is firmly anchored in ecological and cultural contexts and stands in contrast to the technocratic and compartmentalized environmental management methods used elsewhere (Atleo, 2023). Because of this, it is important to balance and harmonize cultural Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives during the decision-making process to ensure a comprehensive and holistic approach to resource management and stewardship within Indigenous territories (Cajete, 2000; Caverley et al., 2020; Nikolakis & Hotte, 2020). This integration supports more effective resource management and empowers Indigenous communities by validating and asserting their law and governance systems.

Two-Eyed Seeing—a concept introduced by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall—emphasizes the value and necessity of using both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing to develop more inclusive and effective management practices and governance (Bartlett et al., 2012; Kutz & Tomaselli, 2019). Indigenous communities have practiced stewardship in their territories for millennia (Hamilton et al., 2021; Redvers et al., 2020; Sobrevila, 2008; Zander, 2013). In this context, modern concepts of natural resource management are a relatively recent development. Before colonization, there was no need to manage land. Communities existed in a reciprocal relationship with the land: people were one with the land and the land was one with the people (Atleo, 2004; Coté, 2022). The Two-Eyed Seeing approach would likely not resonate with Indigenous ancestors of this time, as their relationship with the land was strong and intact: additional ways of seeing would not have provided any added benefit. Today's world, however, has brought many new challenges to Indigenous communities, including issues brought forward by colonization, changes to governance, changing climates, urbanization, loss of culture, and loss of connection to land. As a result, the Two-Eyed Seeing approach is often inherent in Indigenous stewardship practices today, becoming the default framework for those working to reinvigorate and revitalize cultural ways of stewardship while navigating the new relationships and social, cultural, environmental, and economic challenges brought on by the impacts of colonization.

The concept of Two-Eyed Seeing can be used to examine the empowerment of Indigenous law and governance in natural resource management in British Columbia (Bartlett et al., 2007). Indigenous communities in this province continue to assert their rights to and responsibilities for their territories, so the recognition and application of Indigenous law and governance is not only a matter of justice but also an ecological imperative. This article explores how Two-Eyed Seeing manifests through the inclusion of Indigenous law and governance within forestry-specific government-to-government natural resource management agreements in British Columbia; it also looks at how language and cultural governance structures can invoke Indigenous law and governance values and perspectives.

## Methodology

The 203 Indigenous communities within the 34 distinct language groups in British Columbia are diverse, with their own unique systems of law, governance, resources, and capacity (Dunlop et al., 2018; First Peoples' Cultural Council, 2025). A nuanced methodological approach designed to respect these differences while also optimizing research outcomes is imperative to appropriately reflect individual communities' values and perspectives.

This methodological approach was developed in response to needs observed through years of work within Indigenous communities and Crown government settings, and is further reinforced by the researcher's cultural identity as an Indigenous scholar and practitioner. It is grounded in a lived understanding of the issues at hand, and framed by a community-based perspective that emphasizes responsibilities rooted in Indigenous law and governance. This dual positioning offers a unique combination of academic and experiential insight, allowing for a richer and more nuanced analysis of the data.

## Document Analysis

The primary data sources for this paper consist of Forest Consultation and Revenue Sharing Agreements (FCRSAs) between Indigenous communities and the Government of British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation [BCMIRR], 2022a). In the context of impact benefit and revenue agreements in British Columbia, forestry tenure agreements were initially established in 2003 to meet consultation obligations and to offer Indigenous communities the means to engage with forestry activities in their territories. Governed by the British Columbia Forest Act, these agreements began as direct award payments to Indigenous communities and were eventually replaced by FCRSAs. These agreements allocate a portion of forestry revenues to communities in exchange for their consent to allow forestry operations, and they include a commitment from the communities to refrain from disrupting the forestry activities. By entering into these agreements, the signing Indigenous community effectively acknowledges that the revenue sharing or compensation they receive reflects their acceptance of the potential negative impacts associated with forestry activities in their territory. As the FCRSAs were not created for the purpose of this research, they provide a non-reactive data source: this adds to their authenticity and credibility and offers a reliable reflection of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments' participation in the Forest Consultation and Revenue Sharing process (Scott, 1990; Stockmann, 2011).

While some caution against using documents as standalone data sources due to their potential to represent a constructed representation of reality, this paper contends that FCRSAs offer a reliable reflection of the legal and governance positions of both Indigenous communities and the provincial government (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011; Sankofa, 2022). The agreements are legally binding, and any deviation from the agreed terms would require an official amendment, reducing the likelihood of discrepancies between the documented terms and their real-world application.

The analysis of terms within the FCRSA documents focused on identifying the presence of Indigenous law and governance. This was achieved by closely examining the terminology and intent of the agreements, particularly acknowledgments of Indigenous governance bodies and the use of Indigenous language. References to specific Indigenous-led community organizations or leadership within the agreements also served as markers of representation. Additionally, references that explicitly mentioned culturally specific values, teachings, and protocols were noted as evidence of Indigenous law and governance embedded within the context and binding terms of the agreements.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The FCRSAs were first accessed through the Government of British Columbia's website. They were cataloged in a database and then sorted according to the Indigenous community that entered into the agreement. After cataloging the agreements, communities whose FCRSAs were either unavailable due to improper posting on the government website or because the community was engaged in a different forestry consultation process that did not involve a FCRSA were excluded from the analysis.

Once the FCRSAs were gathered, a systematic analysis of the 123 applicable agreements was conducted to extract relevant data. The extracted data included the date the agreements were signed, the presence of any amendments or extensions, the nature of the signing authority (elected chief and council versus a hereditary governance body), the first installment amount of shared revenue, the amount of capacity funding provided (if any), the term of the agreement, the percentage of forestry revenue shared, the language within the "Cooperation and Support Against Protest" section, the presence of Indigenous law and governance through direct mentions in English, the presence and use of Indigenous language, and any additional notes capturing unique features or errors.

For the qualitative analysis, a textual coding process was applied to identify whether there were explicit references to Indigenous law and governance and whether Indigenous language was present. Each document was coded as either "yes" or "no" to indicate the presence of at least one these elements in the FCRSA documents, therefore providing evidence of Indigenous law and governance influence within the agreement.

In analyzing the "Cooperation and Support Against Protest" sections (typically labeled as Section 8 or Article 11 in the agreements), each provision was extracted and cataloged across the 123 agreements. The content was then categorized based on its tone and strength, reflecting the level of cooperation expected between the community and the Government of British Columbia. This stage involved subjective judgment, with sections coded as either compliant, compliant/cooperative, cooperative, or considerate, depending on the community's perceived willingness to support provincial actions against interference in forestry activities by community members. The tonal differences were coded on a language-based scale: on one end of the scale, 'compliant' indicates an agreement to provincial terms without negotiation, while on the other end of the scale, 'considerate' reflects an approach focused more on community needs

and values along with a mutually respectful partnership. For example, the Ahousaht agreement is categorized as ‘considerate’ due to its empathetic yet non-committing tone and willingness to engage in dialogue, whereas the Leq’á:mel agreement is coded as ‘compliant’ due to its strict alignment with provincial directives.

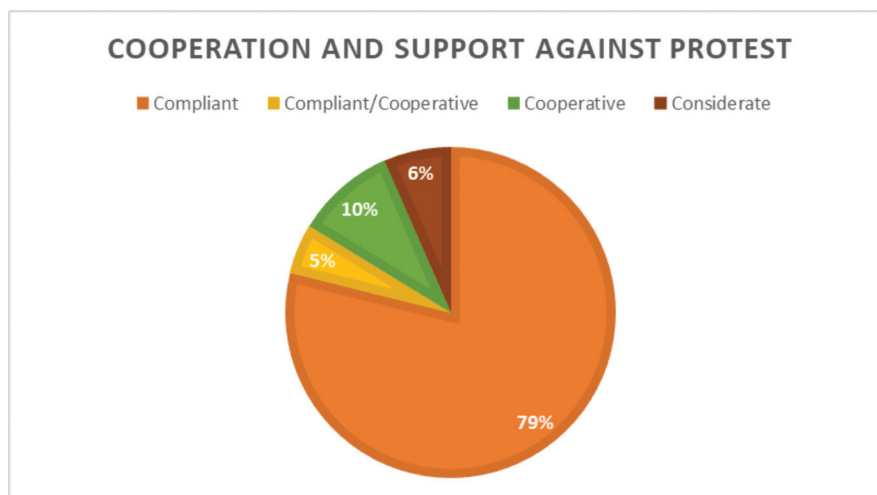
To facilitate quantitative comparison, these categories were assigned numerical values on a scale from one to four, with one being compliant and four being cooperative, allowing for averaging and comparative analysis across the agreements. This analysis was then cross-referenced with the year of signing, the average first installment amounts, and financial metrics including the capacity funding amount to determine any correlations with agreements that were marked “yes” regarding the presence of Indigenous law and governance elements.

## Results and Analysis

### *Cooperation and Support Against Protest*

Despite appearing under different numbered articles and sections, each of the 123 agreements contains a variation of the Cooperation and Support Against Protest section. Aside from sections detailing numerical differences such as terms, percentages, and first installments, the provisions outlining Cooperation and Support Against Protest are the most adaptable and amendable components of the FCRSA templates. As such, this section reflects not only the perceived negotiation capacity of each community but also the opportunity and subsequent impact for Two-Eyed Seeing to be applied to and influence the agreements.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Categorized Language Variance Representing Cooperation and Support Against Protest in 123 FCRSAs**



Note. From *Is Revenue Sharing Real Reconciliation? Recognizing the Role of Indigenous Law and Governance in British Columbia Crown Forestry Agreements*, by T. D. Atleo, 2023, University of Waterloo (<http://hdl.handle.net/10012/19637>).

Figure 1 illustrates the varying levels of willingness and responsiveness among Indigenous communities in addressing and reacting to members protesting forestry activities covered by their agreements. The examples below highlight two communities who have Indigenous law and governance values in their agreements but differing approaches to cooperation and support against protests. Here is the relevant excerpt from the Leq'á:mel First Nation agreement, which is categorized as compliant:

Leq'á:mel First Nation Forest Consultation and  
Revenue Sharing Agreement - 2022:

Article 11 - Assistance

11.1 Non-Interference. Leq'á:mel First Nation agrees it will not support or participate in any acts that in any ways interfere with provincially authorized forest activities.

11.2 Cooperation and Support. Leq'á:mel First Nation will cooperate with and provide its support to British Columbia in seeking to resolve any action that might be taken by a member of First Nation that is inconsistent with this Agreement. (BCMIRR, 2022b)

The terms from Article 11 in the Leq'á:mel First Nation agreement fully comply to the needs and demands of the Government of British Columbia as they pertain to this agreement. There are no terms that speak to Leq'á:mel needs or community process that may be engaged to address community interference in forestry activities.

Compare this to the language in the Ahousaht First Nation agreement, which is categorized as considerate:

Ahousaht Forest Consultation and Revenue Sharing Agreement - 2014:

8.0 Stability for Land and Resource Use

8.1 Ahousaht will respond to any discussions sought by British Columbia in relation to any acts of intentional interference with provincially authorized forest and/or range activities and will work co-operatively with British Columbia to assist in resolving any such matters. (British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation [BCMARR], 2014)

The contrast in wording within the two communities' Cooperation and Support Against Protest terms highlights a tension between Indigenous law and governance, which emphasizes a collective or community approach to decision-making, and the Western legal framework that often centers on individual authority. The more compliant terms such as "will not support" and "resolve any action", as in the Leq'á:mel example, may conflict with Indigenous governance values, even in agreements that strive to reflect them. The more considerate terms such as "will respond to any discussions sought" and "assist in resolving", as in the Ahousaht example, demonstrates a more community-focused and thoughtful approach to addressing issues of conflict. From a Two-Eyed



Seeing perspective, aligning these systems would require language supporting collective approaches and community-based dispute resolution. Communities that negotiated less rigid terms demonstrate Two-Eyed Seeing in practice, balancing cultural values within the constraints of the FCRSA legal template.

### ***Evidence of Indigenous Law and Governance***

Indigenous law and governance within the FCRSAs was assessed using three key criteria: direct references to Indigenous law and governance specific to the community, the use of Indigenous language within the agreements, and the representation of hereditary or cultural leadership as decision-makers and signatories. If agreements met at least one criterion, they were considered to be inclusive of Indigenous law and governance. Of the 123 agreements analyzed, nine met at least one criterion, as outlined in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Nine Communities with FCRA's Inclusive of Indigenous Law and Governance**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Governance Type</b>
Ahousaht First Nation	Hereditary Leadership
Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs	Hereditary Leadership
Gitwangak First Nation	Hereditary Leadership
Cheam First Nation	Elected Chief and Council
Leq'á:mel First Nation	Elected Chief and Council
Lower Similkameen Indian Band	Elected Chief and Council
Penticton Indian Band	Elected Chief and Council
Sumas First Nation	Elected Chief and Council
Xaxli'p First Nation	Elected Chief and Council

In the case of Ahousaht, Gitanyow, and Gitwangak First Nations, the agreements included explicit references to Indigenous law and governance, fulfilling the criteria through hereditary leadership representation and the use of Indigenous language. The other six First Nations—Cheam, Leq'á:mel, Lower Similkameen, Penticton, Sumas,

and Xaxli'p—were represented by elected leadership structures. For these communities, Indigenous law and governance was evidenced within the agreements through the direct use of Indigenous language and the explicit inclusion of governance values.

The use of Indigenous language is consistently recognized as a foundational element in operationalizing Indigenous law and governance, fostering opportunities for mutual learning and the co-creation of knowledge within the Two-Eyed Seeing framework (Atleo, 2023). The following examples illustrate the five distinct language groups found within the nine communities and highlight the communities' commitment to centring their respective languages as a key component in their land-based decision-making.

- ***St'at'imc language – Xaxli'p First Nation***

The Xaxli'p First Nation demonstrates the deep interconnection between language, land and their law and governance through the use and revitalization of the St'at'imc language. Their guiding principles reflect a stewardship approach to natural resource management grounded in reciprocity and respect:

In the St'at'imc language, the name for “land” is Tmicw, the name for the “people of the land” is Ucwalmicw, and the name of the “language” is Ucwalmicts. These three words are closely related in the language of the St'at'imc people and show how the land, the people and the language are all powerfully tied together. What happens to one happens to the others is the guiding principle of Xaxli'p attitudes toward land use. This means that when you damage one part of the three (land, people, language) you damage all. (Xaxli'p First Nation, 2017)

- ***Gitxsan language – Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs and Gitwangak First Nation***

The Gitxsan Development Corporation is an example of the assertion of Indigenous law and governance through a corporation focused on economic development. The corporation's structure is designed to uphold hereditary leadership and prioritize cultural stewardship while providing sustainable economic opportunities to Gitxsan communities:

The Gitxsan Development Corporation (GDC) is unique, melding the traditional governance of the Gitxsan with the contemporary needs of business, yet remaining faithful to the principles of the Gitxsan Ayookw (laws). Every Gitxsan person, who is a member of a wilp (house group), has a stake in GDC.

GDC is governed by a working Board of Directors who make business decisions, taking into consideration the Gitxsan Ayook and the overarching cultural values of the Gitxsan people. The Lax Yip Society and Lipgyet Trust are the shareholders of GDC, on behalf of the Hereditary Chiefs. (Gitxsan Development Corporation, 2021).



- ***Nuu-chah-nulth language – Ahousaht (ᑖᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ) First Nation***

Like the Gitxsan Development Corporation, the hereditary leadership of the Ahousaht First Nation developed a corporate model that guides economic and natural resource decision-making within their territories under the guidance of Indigenous law and governance and cultural mandate:

The Maaqutusiis Hahoulthee Stewardship Society (MHSS) Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from the three principal houses of the ᑖᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ Nation. They are supported and advised by the ᑖᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ musčim, Chief Councillor & Council representatives, together with other members of the ᑖᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ traditional governance structure, legal counsel and technical consultants. The role of MHSS is to exercise and invest in stewardship and the sustainable management of the resources of ᑖᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ ᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ in such a manner so as to balance Ahousaht cultural values, ecological integrity, and the social and economic wellbeing of the ᑖᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ people. (Maaqutusiis Hahoulthee Stewardship Society, 2022)

- ***Halq'emeylem language – Cheam First Nation, Leq'á:mel First Nation, Sumas First Nation.***

For The Cheam, Leq'á:mel and Sumas First Nations, the Halq'emeylem language embodies a living connection of these communities to the land. Language revitalization for Halq'emeylem is not only important to the culture, but is also an important legal and political tool that reinforces Indigenous law:

Our Halq'emeylem language was born of the land; this knowledge serves to strengthen our land claims, our claims to S'olh Temexw. By learning Halq'emeylem and its intricacies, our leaders will be able to advocate for what we need to maintain our unique Sto:lo identity embedded in our Halq'emeylem Riverworld view aesthetic. By reviving our Halq'emeylem language, we serve to strengthen the individual Sto:lo, our families and communities, and society in general. Atylexw te Sto:lo Shxweli (The Spirit of the Stolo Lives). (Gardner, 2004)

- ***Nsyilxcən language – Penticton Indian Band, Lower Similkameen Indian Band.***

For the Penticton and Lower Similkameen Indian Bands, revitalization of the Nsyilxcən language is an expression of sovereignty and cultural identify. The language serves as a foundation for land-based knowledge, and helps to demonstrate the Syilx holistic approach to stewardship rooted in their law and governance:

The Syilx Okanagan Nation is governed by the Chiefs Executive Council (CEC), a leadership body of the Syilx Okanagan Nation established under Syilx law, and comprised of the *ȷilmixʷm* of the affiliated communities, and the *xaʔtus*, the elected leader of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The mandate of the CEC is to advance, assert, support and preserve Syilx Okanagan Nation sovereignty. The *ȷilmixʷm* of the affiliated communities also serve as directors of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, a society that serves the Syilx Okanagan Nation and its people, carrying out work directed by the CEC. (Okanagan Nation Alliance, 2017)

## Capacity Funding

Over the 11-year span from 2011 to 2022, FCRSAs consistently allocated \$35,000 for capacity funding to support these agreements' negotiation process, with no deviations in this amount. However, due to inflation and rising wages—the minimum wage in British Columbia increased by 78.85% over this time—the real value of this funding decreased, limiting Indigenous communities' ability to engage in negotiations and relationship-building that would impact these agreements' outcomes. Despite British Columbia's ongoing reconciliation efforts, the stagnation of capacity funding has placed Indigenous communities at a disadvantage. Some agreements, including those with the Haisla Nation, omit capacity funding without explanation. In agreements where it is included, the funding serves as a minimum payment, even when forestry revenue sharing falls below \$35,000. Of the 123 agreements analyzed, nine list \$35,000 as the first installment, indicating their revenue sharing is at or below this threshold. This suggests these communities are less affected by fluctuations in forestry activity compared to those with higher revenue-sharing amounts. Additionally, these agreements do not overlap with the nine agreements that meet at least one of the three criteria for Indigenous law and governance.

### ***Operationalizing Two-Eyed Seeing in Natural Resource Management***

Cultural evolution within Indigenous communities emphasizes learning from all available knowledge systems while remaining rooted in core cultural values (Atleo, 2023). The word ‘tradition’ is often viewed as the preservation of longstanding customs and beliefs, yet tradition is inherently dynamic, shaped by evolving cultural contexts and societal needs. In many Indigenous communities in British Columbia, the natural progression of cultural practices was severely disrupted by colonial policies, including the *Indian Act*, residential schools, and restrictions on cultural ceremonies such as the Potlatch (Galley, 2016; Sewid & Spradley, 1995; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). These policies created generational gaps in knowledge transmission, leading to intergenerational trauma and an erosion of cultural knowledge practices.

E.R. Atleo (2004, 2011) argues against the perception that Indigenous cultures lose authenticity when they adapt or change. Instead, he stresses that cultural evolution is a necessary response to ongoing challenges, allowing communities to maintain their identity while engaging with modern realities. In today’s context, understanding what constitutes ‘traditional’ knowledge and governance is complex. The impacts of language loss, external influences, and shifting community values mean that Indigenous law and governance must continuously adapt. This evolution is particularly relevant in the face of contemporary challenges in natural resource management, where the need to honour cultural principles must be balanced with modern economic and environmental demands.

Economic participation in capitalist markets has become essential for many Indigenous communities as part of that evolution, particularly in British Columbia, due to limited authority within territories and access to resources. As Trosper (2009) notes, Indigenous governance systems have long incorporated principles of resilience, reciprocity, and sustainability, allowing communities to navigate complex relationships between people, land, and resources. These principles are crucial in addressing the environmental and economic challenges communities face today. Two-Eyed Seeing offers a way to harmonize cultural principles with contemporary resource management needs. Integrating Indigenous governance systems and worldviews into modern natural resource management can provide more balanced and sustainable approaches, offering insights and learning that Crown governments and industry have often been resistant to—but would benefit from—incorporating.

Within this analysis of the FCRSAs, Two-Eyed Seeing is most effectively demonstrated when agreements incorporate explicit references to Indigenous governance practices, the use of Indigenous language, and the inclusion of hereditary leadership structures. For instance, the agreements with Ahousaht, Gitanyow, and Gitwangak First Nations embody the principles of Two-Eyed Seeing by blending cultural Indigenous governance with Western legal frameworks. These examples illustrate how Indigenous communities navigate and integrate both knowledge systems, leveraging their cultural governance structures while engaging with colonial systems to assert their rights and responsibilities in natural resource management.

### ***Indigenous Culture and Economic Prosperity***

Empowering Indigenous communities through self-governance that aligns with cultural mandates strengthens opportunities for economic success. The following example showcases the inclusion of Indigenous law and governance within the Cheam First Nation FCRSA. With this statement, Cheam First Nation is asserting that the territorial boundaries being discussed are part of their land and they are responsible for its care:

Further to the previous recital, British Columbia also recognizes that the Cheam First Nation asserts that:

S'olh temexw te ikw'elo. Xyolhmet te mekw' stam it kwelat.  
This is our land. We have to take care of everything that belongs to us.  
This declaration is based on our Sxwoxwiyam, our Sqwelqwel and our  
connection through our Shxweli to S'olh Temexw.  
We make this declaration to protect our Sxoxomes (our gifts),  
including all the resources from the water, the land and the mountains  
including Xoletsa (Frozen Lakes) and Mometes.  
We make this declaration to preserve the teachings and to protect  
S'olh Temexw for our Tomiyeqw (seven generations past and future).  
(BCMARR, 2015, "Whereas")

The concept of 'cultural match' offered by Cornell and Kalt (2000, 2003, 2006) reiterates this alignment between governance structures, policies, and leadership and Indigenous communities' cultural mandates. Their research findings indicate that Indigenous communities with governance systems rooted in cultural mandates experience greater economic success compared to those governed by external governance influences, such as from federally required election processes under the Canadian *Indian Act*. From a Two-Eyed Seeing perspective, this alignment not only respects Indigenous cultural mandates but also integrates them with Western governance frameworks, creating more sustainable and equitable management practices. The nine FCRSAs that evidence Indigenous law and governance exemplify this approach, demonstrating how aligning cultural values with economic strategies can yield benefits for both Indigenous communities and broader systems.

### ***Indigenous Law and Governance in Stewardship***

Indigenous law and governance represent long-standing systems, deeply intertwined with the cultural practices and stewardship that have guided Indigenous communities for generations. These systems extend beyond colonial influence and are enacted through cultural governance structures that have historically mandated stewardship practices. The examples from communities like the Ahousaht and Xaxli'p First Nations demonstrate how Indigenous law remains central to resource management practices, even when intersecting with colonial legal systems and navigating through management processes that were imposed in territories without consent and do not align with culturally mandated stewardship practices:

Xaxlip has developed their Traditional Use Study (“Ntsuwa7lhkalha Tlakmen”) and an Ecosystem-based Management Plan for their Traditional Territory and Shared Area, currently used as the management plan for their Community Forest Agreement. (BCMIRR, 2021a)

The Maaqutusiis Hahoulthee Stewardship Society (MHSS) Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from the three principal houses of the ʕaḥuusʔaṭḥ Nation. They are supported and advised by the ʕaḥuusʔaṭḥ musčim, Chief Councilor & Council representatives, together with other members of the ʕaḥuusʔaṭḥ traditional governance structure, legal counsel and technical consultants. The role of MHSS is to exercise and invest in stewardship and the sustainable management of the resources of ʕaḥuusʔaṭḥ ha ḥuulii in such a manner so as to balance Ahousaht cultural values, ecological integrity, and the social and economic wellbeing of the ʕaḥuusʔaṭḥ people. (Maaqutusiis Hahoulthee Stewardship Society, 2022)

Likewise, the case of the Gitwangak First Nation, where hereditary leadership drives resource negotiations, highlights the importance of and opportunities for cultural alignment in achieving community-driven outcomes that are both economically and ecologically sustainable: “‘Gitksen Ayuukw’ means Gitksen laws and traditions founded on the knowledge, experience and practice of the Gitksen people since time immemorial which are reaffirmed and updated at the Li’ligit (formal public gatherings/ feasts) and encompass all aspects of Gitwangak society” (BCMIRR, 2021b).

The evidence gathered from this analysis highlights communities’ efforts to incorporate Indigenous law and governance into FCRSA agreements. The inclusion of Indigenous language, culturally specific protocols, and governance structures demonstrates opportunities for greater alignment between Indigenous and Western approaches. Through the lens of Two-Eyed Seeing, these agreements integrate the strengths of both knowledge systems by honoring cultural governance while navigating the practical requirements of formal agreements. This approach not only strengthens the agreements themselves but also paves the way for more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable frameworks in the future.

## Conclusion

The empowerment of Indigenous law and governance in British Columbia’s natural resource management is essential for fostering sustainability, revitalizing culturally informed stewardship, and advancing economic prosperity (Marshall, 2021; Nelson et al., 2019; Nikolakis, 2019; O’Regan, 2019; Cornell & Kalt, 2003). Through the lens of Two-Eyed Seeing, this article explores how Indigenous governance can influence Western approaches to resource management, highlighting the continued lack of inclusion in binding terms and decision-making roles within FCRSAs.

Despite these shortcomings, when Indigenous governance structures are meaningfully included, resource management practices become more aligned with community values and better serve future generations. The concept of cultural match underscores the link between cultural governance and improved socioeconomic outcomes. Future revisions to FCRSAs should explicitly prioritize cultural leadership and Indigenous language, ensuring agreements reflect community mandates while enhancing outcomes.

This research demonstrates the tangible benefits of Two-Eyed Seeing, bridging theoretical insights with practical applications to offer a replicable framework for other sectors. Respecting Indigenous law and governance while aligning resource management with stewardship principles creates opportunities for outcomes that benefit both the land and its people.

Operationalizing Two-Eyed Seeing in policy frameworks has far-reaching implications that extend beyond natural resource management. By centering Indigenous governance and fostering mutual learning between knowledge systems, Two-Eyed Seeing offers a model for rethinking policy in a way that addresses systemic inequities, enhances ecological integrity, and empowers communities to lead in land-based decision-making. The principles of Two-Eyed Seeing can guide the development of policies that are not only more inclusive but also more resilient and effective in addressing complex, interconnected challenges.

As recognition of Indigenous governance in resource management evolves, policy development must prioritize flexibility, cultural responsiveness, and inclusivity. Empowering communities to assert their governance ensures natural resource management honours the deep connections between culture, law, and the land while safeguarding opportunities for future generations. By operationalizing Two-Eyed Seeing, resource agreements can achieve equitable and sustainable governance, preserving cultural stewardship and ecological integrity for generations to come.

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