

— Shuswap Tourism

Indigenous Stakeholder Engagement Report

February 22, 2024

Prepared by
the Culinary Tourism Alliance



Context & Methodology

The Shuswap Farm Gate Trail will be located in the traditional territory of the Secwepemc peoples, a Salish First Nation consisting of 17 bands. Additionally, the Columbia-Shuswap Regional District region remains home to a diverse population of Indigenous peoples. Here, Indigenous people represent 7.89% of the regional population (**Figure 1**). Area D specifically has 395 Indigenous inhabitants, who make up 9.04% of the population (**Figure 2**). Comparatively, British Columbia's 290,210 Indigenous people make up 5.9% of the provincial population (4,915,945).¹

Figure 1. Indigenous populations in Columbia-Shuswap Regional District.²

Indigenous Group	Population	Percentage of Total Population (55,770)
First Nations	2,030	3.6%
Métis	2,175	3.9%
Inuk	20	0.03%

Figure 2. Indigenous populations in Area D.³

Indigenous Group	Population	Percentage of Total Population (4,365)
First Nations	200	4.6%
Métis	170	3.9%
Inuk	0	0%

The significant Indigenous population in the Columbia-Shuswap Regional District – especially in Area D where it is proportionally over 1.5x the provincial figure – makes Indigenous engagement and participation even more important for the purposes of the Farm Gate Trail.

¹ Census Profile, British Columbia, 2021, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=British%20Columbia&DGUIDlist=2021A000259&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>.

² Census Profile, Columbia-Shuswap Regional District, British Columbia, 2021, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0&DGUIDlist=2021A00035939&SearchText=Columbia-Shuswap>.

³ Census Profile, Area D, Columbia-Shuswap Regional District, Area D, British Columbia, 2021, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Columbia%2DShuswap%20D&DGUIDlist=2021A00055939039&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>.

Key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from Neskonlith and Splatshin Bands. Concerted efforts were made to engage additional Indigenous community members during this process. An additional meeting was held with representatives from Little Shuswap Lake Band, though the meeting format was not aligned with that of a key informant interview.

Interview candidates were identified by Jamie Bourne, Indigenous Tourism Specialist at Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA). A total of two, one-hour interviews were used to understand the perceived impact of the proposed farm gate trail on Indigenous communities, and to discuss solutions to any potential challenges. We also explored avenues to maximize the trail's benefits for the Shuswap's Indigenous communities.

Findings

Overall, support for the Shuswap Farm Gate Food Trail was strong. The Splatshin and Neskonlith key informants both believed that reception for the initiative would be generally positive. They identified potential benefits that the trail could provide for their respective communities. They also discussed how histories of trauma may pose challenges for the trail's development. Highlighted was the loss of cultural knowledges and practices inflicted through European colonialism and residential school systems. These events increased the prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse, further challenging cultural identity formation and entrepreneurial opportunities.

These factors inform local Indigenous perspectives on opportunities and challenges that may arise as a result of the project. By appropriately addressing these factors during the conceptualization phase, Shuswap Tourism and CTA can ensure that the trail meets the needs of Indigenous communities residing in the Shuswap.

Opportunities

Economic

According to the key informants, the Shuswap Farm Gate Trail would offer potential economic benefits to locals. Splatshin and Neskonlith reserves are home to many producers and artists who would benefit from increased revenue as a result of visitor spending.

However, both interviewees submit that tourism currently has limited benefits for their respective communities. The majority of visitors pass through the Splatshin community to access chalets and watersports, including paddleboarding. Those stopping often do so for the on-reserve gas station. Opportunities for locals to sell their products through the gas station are limited, and so the majority of products offered to visitors there are non-local. The Neskonlith narrator expressed a similar sentiment, stating that they have not been too highly involved with tourism to date, further advising that visitors are drawn to the gas station and cannabis store while some recreate along the river.

The Shuswap Farm Gate Trail, which is positioned to attract tourists interested in celebrating local foodways and producers, is expected to generate increased revenue for Indigenous producers. For example, both interviewee suggested recruiting producers to talk to visitors about herbs and plants used in traditional medicine. After the educational experience, visitors can be given an opportunity to pick their own produce on a garden walk, or sample and purchase the produce.

In supporting producers, the initiative is also expected to benefit Indigenous artists, because visitors seeking taste of place experiences are often interested in local cultural

practices more broadly. These artists may even partner with producers participating in the trail to promote their crafts.

Both interviewees recounted that numerous community members wished to become involved in agriculture, while others wanted to expand their capacities. The Shuswap Farm Gate Trail can support in either case. For example, the Neskonlith informant noted that the trail would be an opportunity for Neskonlith community members who had taken horticultural courses to leverage their training. Furthermore, through partnerships with the appropriate federal, provincial, and municipal agencies, the Shuswap Farm Gate Trail represents an opportunity to secure training and funding for operators and aspiring producers alike, furthering the capacities of Indigenous entrepreneurs to offer agritourism experiences.

Culture & Knowledge

According to informants, the farm gate trail's promotion of agricultural activities would positively impact culture and knowledge. For example, the Splatshin informant stated that it would encourage older generations of community members to pass cultural knowledge about traditional foodways to younger generations, strengthening familial bonds through the preservation of culture – connections and traditional knowledges eroded by colonialism and residential school systems.

The Splatshin narrator advised that the farm gate trail may be a means to reinforce community connections. Indeed, they posited that those who leave the reserve for too long may be perceived as strangers in the community once they return. For those individuals, the farm gate trail represents an avenue to begin building connections once again, for example through partnership opportunities. However, food also carries with it symbolic meanings of memory and nostalgia. As such, it can also be used to relate to fellow community members through discussions about shared recipes or agricultural practices, in turn bolstering cultural ties. Relatedly, by strengthening community linkages and creating sense of belonging, the Splatshin narrator noted that the farm gate trail may help those suffering from loneliness or mental illness.

Furthermore, by encouraging storytelling related to traditional foodways as a strength for agritourism ventures, the farm gate trail would also encourage Indigenous operators to narrate their personal connections to these foodways. This would represent an educational opportunity for visitors, that, if leveraged, would further perpetuate these important cultural connections.

In considering the impact of the farm gate trail for the career orientations of younger generations, the Splatshin interviewee advised that the initiative would increase appreciation for hard, ethical work, and promote the importance of non-university-oriented careers. "Those who know will teach those who don't know," they noted, referring to the generational loss of cultural knowledges as a result of residential schools.

They went on to state that this process would, in turn, generate knowledge in a way that cannot be replicated at a university. Ultimately, the key informant concluded that the trail would offer operators an opportunity to build entrepreneurial confidence.

For their part, the Neskonlith interviewee noted that the area has an abundance of land for the growth of produce to support agritourism ventures – it simply had to be leveraged for the correct crops. They went on to state that, while Neskonlith producers commonly cultivate the alfalfa plant, there were opportunities to grow a wider variety of crops that would be more financially profitable for Indigenous producers. Additionally, the range of fresh, low-cost produce would also prove attractive to visitors.

Education and training were important steps in this diversification strategy for the Neskonlith interviewee. Indeed, if Neskonlith producers are taught how to grow traditional crops, the resulting ventures could even represent an educational opportunity for agritourists eager to learn about Indigenous foodways and cultures. The interviewee highlighted the importance of Indigenous persons speaking to, and demonstrating, their own cultural practices, providing the example of visitors walking right by wild plants – strawberries and ginger, for instance – without realizing that these plants are present and edible. The same sentiment extended to important Indigenous landmarks in the region. Visitors would be unaware of the cultural importance of these sites without explanation from a person of that culture. For the Neskonlith interviewee, these examples underscored the value of having knowledgeable Indigenous persons present at the helm of businesses to teach visitors about traditional foods and the cultural stories behind them.

The trail represents an opportunity to stimulate businesses outside of the culinary tourism value chain while encouraging trail participation. For example, utilizing daycares that teach the local Indigenous languages and cultures would benefit those businesses while supporting cultural continuity. This would be an important step in a more cohesive plan that supports operators who may not otherwise have the time or resources to participate in a trail. Along this vein, training support and funding for enthusiastic prospective operators would be an equally important part of any such plan.

Environmental

The Splatshin interviewee spoke to the potential environmental benefits of the Shuswap farm gate. Indeed, increasing the number of Splatshin community members pursuing agriculture would improve the general health of the soil. Furthermore, the venture would increase community knowledge about climate change and sustainable cultivating practices, including pathways to waste reduction – knowledges and practices that may be transmitted to visitors thereafter.

Challenges

A number of perceived challenges were identified during the interviews. Overall, interviewees agreed that any challenges were surmountable and did not pose a substantial barrier to the trail's development.

Traffic

The farm gate trail may generate increased traffic. However, the Splotsin interviewee also noted that the main two-lane access through Enderby was under development. The resulting four-lane access should help mitigate this challenge.

Scaling

Small-scale indigenous producers may have trouble keeping up with increased demand for produce from the farm gate trail. The potential for visitor disappointment from this challenge can be mitigated if participating businesses consistently communicate their stock to the trail operator, who will convey this information to visitors through a centralized platform.

Resources

Generators and other appliances needed to keep some produce or products edible may not be feasible to keep in a farm gate stand, typically located in a field. This can be mitigated by encouraging operators to offer products that do not require refrigeration.

Morale

One interviewee expressed concern that, if the trail receives limited initial interest, the relatively slow start may discourage existing and prospective participants. This can be addressed by Shuswap Tourism managing the expectations of participants.

Wayfinding

In some cases, those passing through reserves did not know they were on a reserve and were unaware of the kinds of activities and experiences available to visitors therein. Appropriate signage should help to mitigate this challenge.

Recommendations

Based on the above, we submit the following recommendations to ensure that the Shuswap Farm Gate Trail is inclusive of local Indigenous communities, while providing equitable opportunities to Indigenous stakeholders along the culinary tourism value chain.

1. Address historically driven disparities in market readiness by providing guidance on accessing extra training and funding opportunities for prospective and existing Indigenous entrepreneurs. Shuswap Tourism can initiate conversations with funding bodies, including but not limited to those from the federal, provincial, and municipal sectors. For example, Jamie Bourne from TOTA offered an Indigenous interviewee access to training funds that TOTA had secured. We encourage Shuswap Tourism to consider a partnership with TOTA for the benefit of trail participants.
2. Encourage and facilitate partnerships between Indigenous producers and non-Indigenous businesses, with the goal of creating one-of-a-kind, value-added experiences for the trail.
3. Partner with Indigenous organizations to deliver training and resource support to trail participants. For example, partnering with an Indigenous daycare to support participating operators will ensure cultural continuity for proceeding generations. Simultaneously, it will amplify the value of funding by keeping these funds within Indigenous communities.
4. Collaborate with Indigenous organizations that have space available for agritourism ventures. This would be helpful in securing farmable land for prospective Indigenous participants who do not have their own land.
5. For on-reserve trail participants, create signage that informs visitors that they are on an Indigenous reserve, and that they can purchase local food by following the directions.