

**Master's Thesis:**  
**Equity, Decolonization, and the Urban Forest: Exploring Indigenous-Led Urban Forest Planning  
Practices in the Capital Regional District**

By

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2020

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək'wəḡən (Songhees and X̱wsep̱səm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'wəḡən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

**Supervisory Committee**

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### **Acknowledgements**

To begin, I acknowledge with respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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### **Abstract**

Equitable access to urban green spaces is vital for citizen health, climate change mitigation, and reconciliation. However, the urban forest planning processes in British Columbia's Capital Regional District (CRD) currently do not adequately support Indigenous inclusion, knowledge, and self-determination. This deficiency in planning impedes efforts to achieve urban forest equity, decolonization, and reconciliation. Addressing this issue is essential to ensuring that urban forest management is inclusive, equitable, and respectful of Indigenous perspectives. This Master's thesis examines potential barriers, best practices, and approaches to collaborative urban forest policy within the CRD in order to advance greenspace equity, decolonization, and reconciliation for all residents.

Promoting collaborative urban forest planning policy is supported under B.C.'s *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan*, which outlines a framework for the province and municipalities to fulfill the goals of the United Nations Declaration. While the CRD facilitates regional decision-making and positive relationships with local Indigenous communities, it currently lacks specific policies for Indigenous participation in greenspace policy and planning. Using interpretive policy analysis, thematic analysis, and a critical policy lens, this thesis reviews findings from jurisdictional scans, a literature review, and eight interpretative interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members to determine potential pathways towards collaborative urban forest planning.

The collective findings suggest that there are several approaches that the CRD (or the municipalities within the region) could adopt in order to increase Indigenous inclusion in local urban forest planning. Participants emphasized the need for shared priorities, engaging early and often, relationship-building, and clear communication. Key barriers included considerations around working within ongoing colonial systems, such as honoring Indigenous cultures and traditions in ways that are non-extractive or appropriative, ensuring continuity in work and relationship-building, and working within potential funding constraints. Preferred approaches emphasized proper engagement (such as through establishing protocols in the early stages), ensuring that all voices and concerns are heard equally, and an emphasis in bringing knowledge together in a relational way rather than an extractive one.

Through analysing these findings, this thesis presents several short, medium, and long-term recommendations to increase education and capacity-building within government, continue to build relationships with local First Nations, and create ongoing spaces for co-governance in urban forest planning at the regional level in order to foster improved collaboration and equity. This thesis advances local regional efforts towards reconciliation, sustainability, and environmental equity by identifying existing barriers and proposing potential ways forward through collaboration built on trust and partnership.

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose Statement

Equitable access to green spaces in communities is an essential part of citizen health, climate change mitigation, and reconciliation. Yet, urban forest spaces are often designed through colonial methods that are not inclusive to Indigenous communities and that result in inequities for residents (Mullenix, 2022). This Master's thesis examines how urban forest policy within the Capital Regional District (CRD) can shift towards collaborative governance in order to promote greenspace equity, decolonization, and reconciliation for all residents.

### 1.2 Problem Statement and Significance of Contribution

There is an increasingly important role for urban forest planning in advancing climate resilience, biodiversity, and community well-being. However, questions remain about the extent to which Indigenous perspectives and knowledge are meaningfully uplifted in urban forest planning processes in British Columbia's Capital Regional District. This gap can hinder efforts toward achieving urban forest equity, decolonization, and reconciliation, and can lead to missed opportunities for increased collaboration and health benefits (Nelles & Alcantara, 2014). Addressing this issue is crucial to ensuring that urban forest management is inclusive, equitable, and respectful of Indigenous perspectives.

Promoting collaborative urban forest planning policy is supported under British Columbia (B.C.)'s *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan*, which outlines a framework for the province and municipalities to fulfill the goals of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (Government of British Columbia, 2022). While the CRD facilitates regional decision-making and positive relationships with local Indigenous communities, it currently lacks specific policies for Indigenous participation (Capital Regional District, 2014). This study will contribute to the current literature by helping to establish potential barriers, best practices, and pathways towards Indigenous-led and collaborative governance approaches in greenspace planning, aiming to support urban forest equity, decolonization in policy, and the ongoing work of reconciliation.

### 1.3 Scope

This research explores a range of potential approaches to facilitate Indigenous involvement in urban forest planning within the CRD, including examples of participation in decision-making processes and collaborative or co-governance arrangements in other jurisdictions. As part of this scope, the study considers examples of collaborative governance within the CRD and other areas, such as partnerships between Parks Canada and local Indigenous communities related to sea garden restoration, to contextualize how different forms of interactions and authority can operate in practice.

In overcoming key barriers to collaborative governance, government involvement and interactions with other partners must be examined (Smith, 2022). Collaborative governance literature suggests that interactions among governmental and non-governmental actors can support place-based policymaking by fostering political and relational connections (Smith, 2022). Furthermore, enhanced understanding can lead to better and more well-informed decision making, particularly when taking a collaborative approach to complex issues (Doberstein, 2016). The overarching goal of this research is to explore pathways for supporting Indigenous-led urban forest management practices within the CRD, identify potential barriers involved, and highlight principles and considerations that may help to inform future co-governance partnerships.

The scope of this study primarily focused on the traditional territory of the *ləkʷəŋən*-speaking Peoples, specifically the Songhees, Esquimalt, and *WSÁNEĆ* communities, within the region of what is now referred to as the CRD (Songhees Nation, n.d.). The study primarily concentrated on the City of Victoria and surrounding areas, as it is the most densely populated area within the CRD and therefore has some of the highest impacts from the urban forest and associated environmental equity concerns. Additionally, references have been made to other urban areas such as Oak Bay, Saanich, and Esquimalt, which are neighboring municipalities and are also part of the traditional territories of the *ləkʷəŋən*-speaking Peoples (Capital Regional District, 2023a). The majority of this research was conducted between February and August 2025, with revisions continuing into the autumn of 2025 as well.

## 1.4 Research Question

This thesis proposes the following research question: What strategies and collaborative approaches can local governments within the CRD consider in order to promote Indigenous-led, sustainable and culturally relevant urban forest management practices in order to aid reconciliation and increase equitable access to green spaces?

This research question is further explored by examining the following questions through the literature review, jurisdictional scan, and analysis of interviews with local community members:

- How can Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge better inform current planning practices to improve greenspace equity outcomes?
- What are some indicators that signal appropriate pathways for the integration of Indigenous perspectives in urban forest planning?
- What are some potential barriers for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in urban forest planning, and what strategies could help address these challenges and improve equity outcomes?
- What might co-governance in urban forest planning look like in practice?

The first three sub-questions were designed to be exploratory in nature, examining how Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are currently approached within municipal urban forest planning, as well as the institutional constraints and assumptions that shape these approaches.

This thesis raises and addresses these questions to examine local forest governance policy and planning within the CRD in order to identify potential pathways for how Indigenous knowledge could be better upheld and included over time. As discussed in this thesis, such an approach requires respect for Indigenous self-determination, and a sincere acknowledgement of their authority and input with the ultimate intention of proposing a shift towards long-term co-management. These questions do not presume that the integration of Indigenous knowledge into existing planning frameworks is sufficient to achieve reconciliation or equity outcomes; instead, they were used in an attempt to identify some potential pathways to improve inclusivity and application of Indigenous self-determination in local regional governance, as well as address limitations and institutional barriers.

The fourth sub-question builds directly on these insights by shifting the analytical focus towards Indigenous-led governance and co-governance, examining what more substantive forms of shared authority in urban forest planning could entail.

## 1.5 Definitions

In order to provide additional context for this thesis, the following words and phrases have been defined:

- ***Urban forest*** is defined as the combination of all trees and greenery on private and public land across an urban space that are vital to biodiversity and liveability (*Urban forest master plan*, 2013). However, a further definition of the urban forest in a local and Indigenous context can be found in **Section 2.0 - Background and Legislative Frameworks**.
- ***Local government*** is defined as a municipal and regional settler government established under the *Local Government Act* and the *Community Charter* of the Government of British Columbia to represent and serve their communities (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.
- ***Settler government*** is defined as any government that has been established or sustained through the process of settler colonialism (particularly within the context of Canadian settler colonialism for the purposes of this research).
- ***Indigenous Peoples*** is loosely defined as a “collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants” who have “historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed in their territories and who identify as distinct from the dominant societies that now exist there” (Government of Canada, n.d.; Assembly of First Nations, n.d.). This primarily includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples within Canada (Government of Canada, n.d.). However, there is no official or universally-agreed upon definition of Indigenous Peoples, and this term is often used to refer to Indigenous Peoples in both Canada and internationally (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.).

- ***Indigenous governments*** are defined as the self-identified bodies or entities within an Indigenous nation that provide governance and leadership, grounded in the nation's traditional practices and knowledge.
- ***Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)*** is defined as the understanding, skills, and practices developed by Indigenous Peoples over generations through their close relationship with the land, plants, animals, and ecosystems (Berkes & Sluyter, 1999). TEK often incorporates spiritual, cultural, and historical insights, and can be passed down through oral traditions, practices, and experiences, contributing to sustainable resource management and environmental stewardship.
- ***Co-governance*** is defined as structured, collaborative arrangements where decision-making authority and responsibility are shared between Indigenous peoples and other governing bodies, such as local governments (Dodson, 2024; Ford & Waters, 2025; West Coast Environmental Law, n.d.).
- ***Co-management*** is defined as a partnership where Indigenous peoples and governments share responsibility and authority for the management of specific resources or areas (Assembly of First Nations, 2014). However, it must be noted that specific approaches to co-management can often vary depending on the communities and resources involved; therefore, frameworks of co-management may remain flexible depending on place and context (Armitage et al., 2008).
- ***Indigenous-led governance*** is defined as systems of governance, decision-making and authority that are conceptualized and implemented by Indigenous peoples themselves, rooted in their own legal, cultural, and political traditions and priorities (Artelle et al., 2019). This also includes the strengthening and revival of Indigenous governance systems that were impeded by colonization (Kimmerer, 2013; Wildcat et al., 2014)
- ***Indigenous self-determination*** is defined as the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to freely determine their political status, pursue their economic, social, cultural development, and control their own institutions, lands, and resources (United Nations, 2007). This includes going beyond merely participating in settler institutions, and exercising Indigenous decision-making authority in ways that reflect Indigenous worldviews and priorities (Corntassel & Bryce, 2012).

## 1.6 Research Client

This Master's thesis was completed independently without a formal research client. Although no formal client has been established, recommendations are targeted towards local settler governments and urban forest planners in British Columbia. This research was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master's award, as well as funding from the University of Victoria, the RBC Foundation, the Sara Spencer Foundation, and the Local Government Management Association.

## 1.7 Positionality Statement

Since the early conception of this research, it has been evident that my own positionality as a researcher and student must be examined. I identify as a white cisgender female who grew up in a middle-class family on Sylix territory, in what is now known as the Okanagan. Being a person of settler descent, I recognize that I am an uninvited guest on the traditional territories of the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples. I recognize that as a researcher, I am implicated within many of the same settler-colonial systems of power that I analyse within this thesis. Although I continue to view these systems through a critical lens, my positioning within these systems as a non-Indigenous researcher affords me privileges that could unintentionally reinforce past systems of oppression.

Throughout my studies, I have always held a deep interest in reconciliation, participatory governance, and environmental equity. However, it was important to note potential challenges in my research, including the risk of being unaware of specific protocols for approaching Indigenous community leaders or Elders, which could lead to mistrust and harm. Therefore, I have made an effort to learn and follow these protocols to the best of my abilities prior to any interviews, seeking guidance from community members to ensure respectful and ethical engagement (CIHR, NSERC, 2022, Chap. 9, Art. 9.8). This research has also been informed by my time volunteering with the W̱SÍ, KEM Ivy Project and the PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation, contributing to ecosystem restoration and decolonization efforts by removing invasive plant species on W̱SÁNEĆ territory. These experiences both helped to partially inspire my research

topic as well as continually ground my research and further remind me of the importance of grounded governance, community connections, and reciprocal relationships with the land.

While conducting this research, I have also remained mindful of the fact that supporting and amplifying Indigenous voices in environmental policy and local government is challenging as a settler person participating in conversations within colonial frameworks. My research is informed by a position of privilege, and it is important to acknowledge that the CRD, the City of Victoria and other municipalities, and the University of Victoria are inherently colonial institutions. With a background in political science, local government, and public administration, I recognize my bias toward government interventions as a primary response to policy issues. Further, while I have made attempts throughout this research to remain guided by principles such as Two-Eyed Seeing, I recognize that my position as a settler person means that I will never have a full understanding of Indigenous perspectives, learnings, and lived experiences. This lends an inherent challenge to my research in attempting to uplift both settler and Indigenous knowledge systems, since my own experiences have been largely shaped by colonial institutions such as the City of Victoria and the University of Victoria. While I have attempted to account for this throughout my research and am always challenging myself to expand my knowledge of other worldviews, I recognize the limitations in my own perspectives and how this may shape my approaches in research.

I also recognize that interview participants who are currently working in government positions may inherently hold positions of power over me as an interviewer, as I often have a reflex of deferring to authority. Further, it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous communities and individuals hold diverse perspectives on policy issues, and therefore some may disagree with the recommendations in this report; for this reason, this thesis is intended as a set of suggestions to complement existing policy and reconciliation efforts. This research is guided by a commitment to supporting reconciliation efforts, dismantling colonial practices, and prioritizing Indigenous voices in this field.

## 1.8 Ethical Considerations

Since this research topic intersects with historical and ongoing issues of decolonization and involves Indigenous participants, it carries a medium risk level due to the social and cultural sensitivity involved. This study underwent a full research ethics board review and adheres to the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014). Engagement with Indigenous community members and members from the Lək'wəḡən (Songhees and X<sup>w</sup>sepsəm/Esquimalt) and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples has been conducted in a manner that respects their autonomy and cultural protocols. This has included sharing interview transcripts after interviews as requested so that participants could keep a record their transcripts if they wished. Further, participants were consulted regarding their descriptions in the participant chart in order to ensure that their experiences were appropriately captured, with edits or adjustments being made as requested. However, while analysis of the transcripts and the development of the recommendations was done solely by the researcher, future research would benefit from the added participant review of transcripts and recommendations, where appropriate and desired. Participants were also offered to be provided with a copy of this thesis after it was finalized and approved. Ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and adapting the research process as needed has been central to conducting this study ethically.

Furthermore, since a significant portion of this collaboration is still taking place in colonial contexts, it is imperative that Indigenous voices are at the front and centre of any collaborative processes. One primary ethical concern regarding this area of research is how to support and lift Indigenous voices in spaces such as those having to do with environmental policy and local government, while remaining mindful that these conversations are still taking place in largely colonial settings (Booth & Muir, 2011). There are significant limitations as to how settler law can exist as a foundation for advancing Indigenous self-determination in cities, especially when Indigenous Peoples have been left out of policymaking for so long (Nejad et al., 2019). In order to achieve proper collaboration, Indigenous voices and principles of ecological governance must be brought to the forefront of legal traditions and policy, including in local governance (Wilson-Raybould, 2019). In the planning of this research, a key focus involved determining how to actively and appropriately include some Indigenous

perspectives by incorporating Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and voices, particularly through primary interviews. This research strives to uphold the equitable valuation of both Western and Indigenous knowledge throughout the study, aligning with the Mi'kmaw concept of Two-Eyed Seeing, while remaining mindful of the aforementioned limitations.

## 2.0 Background and Legislative Frameworks

### 2.1 Background

Urban forest planning in British Columbia operates within a network of various legislative frameworks, policies, and declarations that help shape environmental management and land use decisions. Historically, colonial processes, land use policies, and municipal regulations have influenced the governance of urban forests (Mullenix, 2022). Environmental management has also been guided by commitments to reconciliation that have largely evolved over time, particularly in more recent years (Government of British Columbia, 2023; Government of Canada, Government of British Columbia, & First Nations Leadership Council, 2025; Government of British Columbia, BC Parks, n.d.). Provincial and federal legislation, alongside Indigenous governance agreements and municipal policies that vary by region, establish the legal foundation for urban forest management and environmental stewardship within BC.

### 2.2 Defining the Urban Forest in the CRD

As previously covered in the “Definitions” section, the urban forest can be defined as the combination of all trees and greenery on private and public land across an urban space, greenery which has a significant impact on biodiversity and liveability (*Urban forest master plan*, 2013). This includes understory plants such as shrubs, bushes, and grasses as well as larger trees and forested areas (*Urban forest master plan*, 2013). Within the CRD, this includes a mix of urban, suburban, and rural forested spaces across thirteen municipalities and three electoral areas, ranging from the Gulf Islands all the way up to the Port Renfrew area (Capital Regional District, 2017, n.d.-a). Urban forests are also not uniform; they include provincial and local parks, boulevards, and people’s backyards, as well as natural areas and culturally significant spaces (*Urban forest master plan*, 2013). When examining the urban forest in the context of the CRD, it is important to not only consider the local application of the term, but also what the term might mean in light of local Indigenous perspectives and relationships to the land as well.

Due to both previous and ongoing colonization, the historic landscape of what is now known to many as the CRD has significantly changed. These changes have primarily been imposed on the land due to colonization, agriculture (e.g. farmland conversion), and urban development, and has included significant changes to environmental and culturally relevant areas. For instance,

SNIDÇEĒ (Tod Inlet, Gowlland-Tod Provincial Park), the location of the first WSÁNEĆ village site, was significantly damaged due to heavy chemicals and industrialization during the operation of the Portland Cement Company from 1904-1921 (PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation, n.d.). The area has also suffered from the inundation of invasive species due to settler activity, such as Himalayan Blackberry and Creeping Buttercup, with continuing efforts from the PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation to aid ecosystem restoration since its establishment in 2010 (PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation, n.d.). The PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation describes the lasting impacts from colonialism:

“From 1904-1913 the Portland Cement Company operated a limestone quarry in SNIDÇEĒ, seriously impacting the lands and waters in this special place.

The structures built to house management level staff were used by white settlers as homes as late as the 1950s. In the 1970s local firefighters burned down the remaining structures as a practice exercise for their crews since most of these buildings had become derelict.

The remains of these buildings can be seen throughout the forests of SNIDÇEĒ today. This legacy left behind soil contamination, invasive species, and displacement of Indigenous people, plants, and animals. This history is an important reminder that we must honour the land and treat it with respect.” (PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation, n.d., para. 3).

Other examples of urban green space areas within the CRD that are of significant Indigenous cultural importance and that have been impacted by colonisation and development include the Gorge Waterway (currently undergoing environmental remediation by organizations such as the Gorge Waterway Action Society) and WSÍ,ĶEM, a small village within the nation of WSÁNEĆ (currently undergoing restoration by the WSÍ,ĶEM Ivy Project) (Gorge Waterway Action Society, n.d.; Capital Regional District, n.d.-b). In considering the histories of green spaces within the CRD, it is important to highlight and remember the reciprocal relationships that have existed between the land, animals, and humans for millennia in these areas. While some forested areas may have undergone significant changes over the years, either due to human and colonial activity or natural shifts in the landscape, examining this history serves to emphasize the adaptable and continuous nature of green spaces and nature as a whole. Despite the hardships

that some of these areas have faced from increasing populations and human activity, many of these areas continue to support complex ecosystems and cultural practices, both through the land's own resiliency as well as through the work of Indigenous stewards, local ecologists, and community volunteers.

This history also helps emphasize the need to view urban green spaces as the relational, layered, and historically significant areas they are – not just ecological assets or green infrastructure to be utilized in urban settings (Park People, 2021). For instance, while the conservation and remediation of green spaces is an important practice, it is important to remember that colonial notions of “conservation” may conflict with Indigenous stewardship practices, in the sense that they may take a lens of exclusionary land protections of certain areas versus relational care of the environment and ecosystems as a whole (Shultis & Heffner, 2016). Therefore, when considering how more inclusive urban forest planning could be conceived in the future, it is important to keep these perspectives and worldviews in mind, especially when the overarching goals of reconciliation and equity are included in these processes as well. This dual understanding is one of the main principles that underlies the research in this study; while the benefits that urban green spaces bring to people are numerous and important, it is important to consider not only the “valuation” of urban forests and what the land can do for us, but what we can do for the land; only then can the relationship with the land be truly reciprocal, rather than one-sided (Park People, 2021).

## **2.3 Legislative Frameworks**

### *2.3.1 Provincial Frameworks*

Within the province of British Columbia, the Community Charter and Local Government Act are the two primary pieces of legislation that define the core authorities for local governments (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). The Community Charter (which applies to all municipalities in B.C. except for the City of Vancouver) provides the framework for municipalities' main areas of authority, including bylaw enforcement and broad powers such as entering into agreements (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). The Community Charter directly states local governments' authority over greenery such as trees; for instance, Section 8(3)(c) states that "a council may, by bylaw, regulate, prohibit and impose requirements in

relation to trees” (Government of British Columbia, 2003). Further, while the Local Government Act does not use the term “urban forest” directly, authority over trees is generally found under provisions for land use bylaws, development permits, and environmental protection, which are referenced within the Act (Government of British Columbia, 2015).

Additionally, the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan* provides a framework for the Province of British Columbia and municipalities to align their policies with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This includes a multitude of policy recommendations and actions that include provisions for better including, collaborating, and upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples in social, cultural, and economic well-being priorities across the province. While the *Declaration Act Action Plan* primarily applies to decision-making at the provincial level, its action plan encourages alignment across all levels of government, particularly in areas having to do with sustainability, climate change mitigation, and reconciliation efforts.

The premise of this thesis research aligns strongly with several of the highlighted actions in the *Declaration Act Action Plan*, particularly those that emphasize collaboration, recognition of Indigenous self-determination, and the stewardship of traditional territories. In particular, Action 4.27 calls on local governments to “evolve practices to foster reconciliation in local processes”, signaling a need for further inclusion in decision-making at municipal and regional levels (Government of British Columbia, 2022, p. 27). This is further highlighted by Action 4.38, which supports Indigenous stewardship of territories, and Action 4.39, which seeks to develop mechanisms that “ensure inclusion of First Nations at a regional decision-making level” (Government of British Columbia, 2022, pp. 27–28). These actions collectively support the integration of Indigenous knowledge and collaborative governance into urban forest planning practices as part of a wider strategy for supporting reconciliation and climate resilience.

### 2.3.2 *Municipal Frameworks*

In addition to the Local Government Act, since there are several municipalities and regions that make up the Capital Regional District, there are also varying pieces of legislation that guide urban forest work, such as local bylaws, frameworks, and strategic plans. This can also include

Official Community Plans (OCPs) and zoning bylaws, which often include policies to protect or encourage existing and new greenery.

For instance, in examining the City of Victoria's legislative frameworks for urban forest work, one primary provision framework that encompasses the City of Victoria's urban forest planning is the Tree Protection Bylaw No. 21-035, formerly known as the Tree Preservation Bylaw (City of Victoria, 2021). This bylaw helps to protect Victoria's existing trees and supports the continuing growth of the urban forest into the city's future, both by regulating tree cutting and removals as well as introducing tree planting requirements at the time of land redevelopment. (City of Victoria, 2021). The City of Victoria also has protection for trees integrated within its Streets and Traffic Bylaw No. 09-079 and Parks Regulation Bylaw No. 07-059 (City of Victoria, 2024a, 2024b).

Moreover, strategic plans and policies within the CRD, such as the City of Victoria's Urban Forest Master Plan, have acknowledged the high value of trees within the municipality, particularly in denser urban areas with lower canopy coverage such as the downtown core (Urban forest master plan, 2013). The City of Victoria's Urban Forest Master Plan is described as having four primary goals: "to develop and maintain strong community-wide support for the urban forest; protect, enhance and expand Victoria's urban forest; design and manage the urban forest to maximize watershed health, biodiversity, and conservation of sensitive ecosystems; and maximize the community benefit from the urban forest in all neighbourhoods" (Urban forest master plan, 2013). A significant issue facing the expansion of the urban forest in urban contexts is the climate crisis, and the impacts of the changing climate on the environmental conditions that both old and new trees need to grow in. This, coupled with the increasing densification of housing and underground infrastructure in the city, means that urban trees have a challenging existence in urban areas. As municipalities and Indigenous nations seek to advance reconciliation and environmental equity, legislative frameworks governing urban forests must be examined through a lens of environmental justice, co-governance, and sustainability.

On a larger scale, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action for Municipal Governments released by the federal government in 2015 as part of the TRC's broader Calls to

Action directly highlight several ways in which municipal governments can take action related to reconciliation within their respective authorities. Some of the actions highlighted on the City of Victoria's website include:

- **#43:** We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.
- **#47:** We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous Peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts" (City of Victoria, n.d.).

Further, another Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action specifically regarding the education of public servants is laid out as follows:

**“Professional Development and Training for Public Servants**

- **#57:** We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills- based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Together, these legislative frameworks and calls to action highlight the responsibility of local governments and employees to actively participate in reconciliation, and utilize their authority in ways that support Indigenous rights and self-determination. They provide a foundation for municipal and regional practices that both recognize historical injustices and support meaningful relationship-building with Indigenous communities going forward. As municipalities engage with these frameworks and work to create new policies, they have the opportunity and responsibility to advance reconciliation in tangible, locally-grounded ways.

### 3.0 Literature Review

#### 3.1 Introduction

This thematic literature review explores literature relevant to the topic by examining key concepts, challenges, and existing knowledge gaps related to facilitating Indigenous inclusion in urban forest planning and management. This includes reviewing relationship dynamics between local governments and Indigenous communities, exploring the importance of equity in the urban forest context, and developing an understanding of decolonization in planning.<sup>1</sup> This literature review focuses on three primary themes: equity and inclusivity; sustainability and environmental justice; and decolonization in governance and greenspace planning. This section also includes a review of current knowledge gaps and the conceptual framework used for this research, which includes themes of equity-informed collaboration, Two-Eyed Seeing, and grounded co-governance.

This literature review encompasses a review of scholarly articles, selected books, government documents, and web resources from relevant organizations. To identify relevant literature, a systematic search strategy was employed using keywords related to the primary themes of the study. The main database consulted was the University of Victoria library website. Initially, the phrases "environmental equity," "collaborative governance", "co-management", and "Indigenous knowledge" were selected as the main search terms. To narrow the results, a second search adding the words "environmental equity" and "urban forest" was conducted in order to locate general studies connecting these topics. Sources were chosen from these search strings based on relevance, publication year, and title. These were then further refined based on relevance and their applicability to the research context.

In addition to conducting keyword searches in academic databases, further sources were identified by reviewing the reference lists and citations of initial sources. This approach helped to identify additional relevant literature and further explore established research in the field. Web

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<sup>1</sup>A substantial literature on collaborative governance and co-governance exists beyond urban and municipal contexts, particularly in natural resource management and Indigenous co-management. While conceptually relevant, this study adopts an urban-specific lens to reflect the institutional, political, and functional dynamics specific to local urban forest governance. Therefore, this literature review primarily focuses on literature situated within urban and local government contexts that more directly align with the study's research questions and contextual setting.

resources also include organizational websites such as those from the Songhees Nation, the Assembly of First Nations, the City of Victoria, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, the Capital Regional District, and the Government of British Columbia. These sources were selected based on relevancy to the research topic, with an emphasis on Indigenous-led sources.

### **3.2 Theme 1: Equity, Inclusivity, and Collaboration**

To begin, it is important to note that equitable access to green spaces in communities is an essential part of citizen health, climate change mitigation, and reconciliation. However, while Indigenous TEK and approaches to land stewardship are deeply rooted in place and shaped by generations of lived experience, they are often not meaningfully reflected in contemporary urban policy and planning. (Park People, 2021). Researchers have noted that urban forest spaces are often designed through colonial methods that are not inclusive to Indigenous communities, and that often result in heightened inequities for residents (Breyer and Mohr, 2023; Steenberg, 2018; Watkins and Gerrish, 2018).

For instance, in many colonial regions, agricultural policy was often at least partly motivated by the desire to create an environment that was climatically reminiscent of Britain (Mahony and Endfield, 2018). One example of this that can be observed in many of the City of Victoria's neighbourhoods is the use of invasive plants such as English Ivy, an ecologically domineering plant which was introduced intentionally from its native range of Europe and is often used for decorative cover on walls and buildings (Invasive Species Council of British Columbia, n.d.). The unchecked spread of invasive species such as English Ivy negatively impacts the land by creating a monoculture and harming the biodiversity of the local ecosystem, which can result in a loss of space for native animals and plants and the inaccessibility of traditional foods and medicines for local Indigenous community members (Jim, n.d.).

The continued reliance on traditionally colonial practices has resulted in a planning gap that frequently overlooks Indigenous traditional knowledge and further entrenches community divides (Matunga, 2013). Increasing planning equity through methods such as 'grounded governance' and place-based learning can help cultivate stronger community relationships and center Indigenous land knowledge (Wiebe, 2024). Accounting for structural power dynamics and

critically examining urban forest planning policy through an intersectional and equitable lens can also aid in improving greenspace access for all residents, while respecting and incorporating Indigenous wisdom into greenspaces (Miller, 2019). Proper collaboration and co-governance can in turn lead to significant benefits from the increase in shared knowledge and resources between parties (Nelles & Alcantara, 2014).

There have been many examples of successful co-management regimes between Indigenous nations and different levels of government, such as between the federal government and Parks Canada (Park People, 2021). For example, the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve is co-managed by the Haida Nation and Parks Canada, blending traditional knowledge with scientific monitoring to protect biodiversity and cultural sites (Parks Canada, 2018). Mutually beneficial collaborations between Indigenous nations and other governments have already shown positive effects of ecological conservation, such as the protection of mature forest (Waller and Reo, 2018). To further highlight this point, there has also been ample evidence that biodiversity thrives on Indigenous-managed lands (Bosshart, 2019). A study conducted by researchers through the University of British Columbia highlighted the importance of Indigenous stewardship practices, finding that there were approximately 40% more unique species on Indigenous-managed lands (Schuster et al., 2019). These findings reflect the significance of Indigenous TEK in practice and the effectiveness of long-standing stewardship practices. This also has broader implications for other related areas, such as food management systems and sustainability (CBC News, 2019). Such outcomes underscore the importance of supporting Indigenous-led conservation through increased equity and inclusivity policies as well as the benefits of collaborative co-governance models, both of which hold a particular importance in light of Canada's commitments to reconciliation and climate action (CBC News, 2019).

### **3.3 Theme 2: Sustainability and Environmental Justice**

Throughout the past decade, research has highlighted the fact that planning practices need to focus on urban forest strategies that protect social equity as well as ecological sustainability (Wolch, Byrne, and Newell, 2014). Many Indigenous Nations and communities are traditionally collective by nature, and learn from a young age that interconnection with other people and place can help support balance and well-being (United Nations, 2009; Redvers et al., 2022). Urban

forests are one of these spaces that are both deeply interconnected with people, and essential to mitigating impacts from climate change (McMillan et al., 2022). For instance, when there is little canopy cover in traditionally industrial areas, this may leave already vulnerable communities susceptible to flooding, air pollution, high temperatures, and other climate change impacts (McMillan et al., 2022). The ‘built environment’, or areas in which people live, work, and play, has a key role to play in community health and health equity; for instance, extreme heat in ‘urban heat islands’ can pose a significant risk to communities, particularly those who are at a heightened risk of heat-related illness (Health Canada, 2020). This can particularly impact those who are living in areas that already have lower tree canopies and higher percentages of built surfaces, which are often predominantly marginalized populations and residents of lower-income communities who have less green space (Health Canada, 2020; Park People, 2021).

While a multitude of benefits stemming from forest protection are related to human physiology and health, there are also significant economic benefits to be gained from protecting forested areas as well. Studies produced in recent years have begun to help place actual dollar amounts on the value that protecting the environment brings; for instance, a report produced in March 2025 studying the Prince George Timber Supply Area (TSA) (Carrier-Sekani territory) and Okanagan TSA (Sylx, Secwepemc and Nlaka’pamux territories) showed that the combined net benefits of deferring harvest of varying amounts of old-growth in these areas could reach upwards of \$43 billion dollars (Morton et al., 2025). This is largely due to carbon storage and sequestration, but there are additional benefits from tourism, recreation, and non-timber forest products as well (Sierra Club BC, 2025). Additionally, the financial figures in the report excluded benefits such as improved water quality and supply, flood mitigation, habitat for species, and cultural or educational values – many of which are difficult or impossible to quantify in monetary terms (Sierra Club BC, 2025). Ultimately, safeguarding British Columbia’s natural assets during the transition away from traditional resource economies supports long-term prosperity for communities that depend on the province’s biodiversity, as well as the wide-ranging ecological, cultural, and economic benefits provided by forest ecosystems (Sierra Club BC, 2025).

Furthermore, in order to better integrate environmental justice into urban forest planning, there is a need to shift the focus towards the relationship between trees and people (Breyer and Mohr,

2023). This includes examining the relationships between environmental justice and ecological justice, the former of which focuses on environmental risks to humans within communities, and the latter of which examines the relationships between human communities and the rest of the natural world (Schlosberg, 2007). One rule of thumb that has emerged in recent years within environmental justice literature is the idea of the “3+30+300” rule, setting clear criteria for the provision of green space in urban areas (Konijnendijk, 2021). These criteria would mean that every household would be able to see three mature trees from their home, there would be a minimum thirty percent tree canopy cover in every neighbourhood, and they would be no more than 300 metres from the nearest high-quality public park or other green space (Konijnendijk, 2021). Criteria like these can help set a baseline in conducting equity analysis, as well as determining which neighbourhoods may already meet these parameters. Analysing environmental and ecological justice can help determine who benefits from and has access to urban green spaces, work which is foundational to achieving the wider goal of environmental equity in urban areas. However, it is also important to note that access to greenspace is not experienced equally; increased access for Indigenous peoples, in and of itself, does not necessarily constitute justice or reconciliation.

This examination of environmental and ecological justice is also necessary in order to avoid potential negative impacts from non-inclusive planning methods, such as ‘green gentrification’. ‘Green gentrification’ describes a process wherein the addition of green spaces to a neighbourhood results in increased property values and the displacement of lower-income residents as wealthier residents move into the area (Breyer and Mohr, 2023). Achieving environmental and ecological justice requires more than just addressing the distribution of green spaces; there is a need to properly focus on procedural justice, such as fair decision-making processes, as well as distributive justice, such as equitable access to green spaces (Schlosberg, 2007).

As Schlosberg describes, while examining discrepancies in distribution is foundational to justice, it is also essential to address the processes that construct this maldistribution (2007). In terms of the wider idea of recognition justice, this can include cultural and racial barriers, which can arise from a lack of participation and recognition in processes leading to environmental injustice

(Schlosberg, 2007). Therefore, achieving justice requires recognition at both the collective and individual levels, movements which can include distribution, recognition, and participation (Schlosberg, 2007). However, while this framework offers a useful starting point for understanding environmental justice, it does not explicitly account for the distinct legal, political, and relational positions of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples' experiences of environmental injustice are shaped not only by inequitable distribution of greenspace or exclusion from decision-making, but also by ongoing colonial governance structures, dispossession of land, and the denial of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. As such, Indigenous peoples cannot be understood simply as one equity-seeking group among many environmental justice frameworks; Indigenous scholars emphasize that justice in environmental contexts must extend beyond recognition and participation within existing systems to include Indigenous self-determination and authority in decision-making (Coulthard, 2014; Whyte, 2018).

### **3.4 Theme 3: Decolonization in Governance and Planning**

The impacts of how colonialism has shaped the cities that we live in today cannot be understated, and the repercussions of colonial interventions continue to extend into current social developments in policy and society-building (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2017). At its foundation, settler colonialism is about the pursuit of land and the reconfiguration of Indigenous land into settler property (Rowe and Tuck, 2017). This is reflected in the neighbourhoods and greenspace that we see today, and has a significant impact on the quality of citizens' lives. Colonization has also had a significant impact on traditional Indigenous botanical knowledge, including impeded access to harvesting areas and the loss of education regarding ecological foods and plant-based medicines (Joseph, 2023).

However, despite the ongoing pressures of settler-colonialism and past attempts by government to subdue their customs, Indigenous Peoples in Canada have continued their fight for self-determination and self-governance, both of which are fundamental human rights (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). In First Nations, Métis, and Inuit terms, self-determination refers to the fact that Indigenous Peoples should “be able to actively construct solutions that work for them, according to their own experiences”, as well as fundamentally reconsider how relationships impact community (National Inquiry into Missing

and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, p. 11). The understanding of policies and collaboration as being rooted in key relationships is foundational to many Indigenous laws and beliefs, and is used as a method of critically observing modern systems and structures and emphasizing the potential for change (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, p. 12). This method of reframing relationships as being foundational to collaboration can provide a powerful lens for envisioning healthier, more hopeful futures of partnership between Indigenous communities and governments (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, p. 12).

Moreover, prior to colonisation, Indigenous planning was rooted in the idea of the right of inheritance being “invested in land and culture” (Jojola, 2013, p. 457). Decisions in Indigenous communities made by their planners were made specifically with future generations in mind, even if that meant that the current planners would not get to see the full results within their lifetime (Jojola, 2013). Since the 1980s, and bolstered by the passing of legislation such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, there has been a resurgence of Indigenous-led planning as a form of self-determination; for many Indigenous Peoples, sovereignty involves connecting place with culture through the acknowledgement of territorial rights and Indigenous governance (Hibbard, 2022). However, these long-held, diverse planning practices among Indigenous nations have long been undermined and have faced additional barriers due to colonialism, such as government paternalism and the dispossession of lands and resources (Kobzik and Krawchenko, 2023).

### **3.5 Knowledge Gaps**

In conducting the literature review, one of the primary knowledge gaps identified is the lack of information specific to the Capital Regional District, South Vancouver Island region, and B.C. in general. While several sources provide useful context regarding TEK, environmental justice, and urban forest equity, much of the existing literature and research has been conducted elsewhere in Canada, the United States, or other countries. This suggests that while some findings may still be thematically applicable, others may be less relevant to the context of this research topic.

Although municipalities and Indigenous Nations vary widely across Canada, the insights from this study may be relevant to other local governments and Indigenous communities grappling

with similar environmental equity challenges. Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, these findings may inform context-specific, relationship-based approaches to policy development grounded in local Indigenous priorities.

Additionally, there is a notable absence of case studies and practical examples of the successful integration of Indigenous knowledge in urban forest planning, particularly in a local context. This is of particular concern because municipal processes often have a direct impact on community members; this can result in power imbalances when certain policies benefit some residents over others, thereby exacerbating inequities (City of Victoria, 2025). A significant gap exists in exploring effective methods for engaging Indigenous communities in the planning process, ensuring their continued participation, and harmonizing their knowledge with existing policy and planning practices. This limits the ability to learn from best practices in other jurisdictions and replicate successful models in different areas.

### **3.6 Conceptual Framework: Equity-Informed Collaboration, Two-Eyed Seeing, and Grounded Co-Governance**

This research is situated within an equity-informed and justice-oriented approach. It is guided by a conceptual framework that centers Indigenous governance principles, relational forms of collaborative governance, and environmental justice perspectives. This framework has been informed by several of the themes examined through the literature review, and provides a lens for understanding how Indigenous and Western knowledge systems can work together to support more sustainable and inclusive urban forest planning in the CRD. Three key, interrelated components make up this framework: equity-informed collaboration, Two-Eyed Seeing, and relational accountability in grounded governance. By incorporating these principles, this approach ensures that Indigenous leadership models and perspectives are meaningfully included in this research.

#### *3.6.1 Equity-Informed Collaboration*

Equity-informed collaboration refers to collaborative processes that intentionally address and rectify systemic inequalities, ensuring that all participants – particularly those from historically marginalized communities – have meaningful opportunities to contribute and influence

outcomes. While this can take varying forms, depending on the context and history of the project in question, the root of this approach remains the same; recognizing and addressing power imbalances, facilitating inclusive participation, and ensuring that the collaborative process is flexible enough to adapt to the unique needs of the communities involved (Phoenix et. al, 2024).

As previously mentioned in section 3.2, *Theme #1: Equity, Inclusivity, and Collaboration* of the literature review, this also includes centring diverse ways of knowing and principles of decolonization (Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion [Public Health Ontario], 2024). For example, when examining green space inequities, this means emphasizing a focus on participation (e.g. who gets to make decisions surrounding greenspace policy), and not just the distribution of green spaces (Park People, 2021). Another factor to consider with equity-informed collaboration is that approaches may also evolve over time based on the particular circumstances surrounding each initiative. Overall, as previously examined, relationship-building, inclusion, and trust form an essential foundation for collaboration; these principles go hand in hand with equity-informed collaboration to lay the groundwork for meaningful cooperation.

### 3.6.2 *Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk)*

Developed by Mi'kmaw Elders Murdena Marie Marshall, Albert Marshall, and biologist Cheryl Bartlett, Two-Eyed Seeing emphasizes balancing Indigenous and Western knowledge systems (Bartlett et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, in this particular research, this means recognizing Indigenous ecological governance as equally valid and necessary in current urban forest planning. Throughout her life, Elder Murdena remained firm in her views that Indigenous Knowledge or TEK “was never meant to be static and stay in the past; rather, it must be brought into the present so that everything becomes meaningful in our lives and in our communities” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 336).

Within the context of this research, this approach reinforces the view that in order to develop effective collaborative climate or sustainability policies, planners should not seek to eliminate differences in co-creation or shy away from Indigenous-led practices. Rather, they should seek to embrace diverse ways of knowing and bring Indigenous knowledge to the forefront by

prioritizing connection and relationship building to shape transformative futures together, and in a way that respects Indigenous agency and self-determination. While some aspects of TEK are unable to be directly translated, bringing together different ways of knowing in this way can serve to motivate people to utilize different understandings and leave the world a better place overall (Bartlett et al., 2012). It is also important to note that traditional knowledges are not meant to be simply amalgamated into Western knowledge systems; rather, traditional knowledges generally take a holistic and collective approach, providing land-based ways of knowing that are meant to be interconnected with communities, people, and the environment (Nalau et al., 2018; Redvers, 2018).

### *3.6.3. Grounded Governance and Relational Accountability*

Another benefit of recognizing Two-Eyed Seeing as foundational is that it allows people to fine-tune their minds into different places at once, and always look for other perspectives and “better ways of doing things” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 336). In many Indigenous communities, governance is rooted in their unique laws, relationships, and responsibilities to land (Kimmerer, 2013; Napoleon & Friedland, 2016). Observing Indigenous methods such as bringing oral histories, narratives, and stories in law and policy together with Western methods can serve as a foundation for respectful engagement, grounded governance, and relational accountability in collaboration.

In the context of this research, relational accountability means ensuring that the research is connected to and respectful of the Indigenous communities whose knowledge and governance principles are highlighted (Robinson & Wilson, 2022). This requires recognizing the relationships between the research, the community members involved, and the broader environmental and governance systems that this work seeks to inform. Wilson also highlights that ethical engagement with Indigenous communities involves reciprocity, respect, and co-creation of knowledge (2008). With relational accountability, this also means that researchers must remain ‘accountable’ to all of the people that the research refers to, and that you are essentially “answering to all your relations” (Wilson, 2008, p. 177). This implies that research must fulfil its end of the relationship, keeping researchers accountable to the communities that the information will then go on to serve.

The principles of relational accountability also support the idea of grounded governance, where governance structures are responsive to place-based Indigenous knowledge and community priorities. Collaborative governance primarily involves a focus on power-sharing between governments, Indigenous Nations, and community organizations (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Key principles include inclusivity (such as including Indigenous leadership in decision-making processes) and decolonial approaches (such as addressing the historical exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from urban land-use planning), with an overall goal of formalized partnerships that uphold Indigenous self-determination (Reo et al., 2017). However, grounded governance builds upon these ideas further, with the added focus of cultivating community relationships and uplifting Indigenous Peoples' relationships to lands and ecosystems that have existed for millennia (Wiebe, 2024). This also recognizes that traditional knowledges are inherently contextual and closely tied to the specific lands with which they are connected, making them a vital source of insight for environmental management and strategic planning in distinct ecosystems. (Redvers et al., 2022). The use of these approaches and the overall framework in this research has aided in guiding analysis and ensured that research findings contribute to both theoretical advancements in co-governance and practical recommendations for Indigenous-led environmental planning within the CRD.

### **3.7 Literature Review Summary**

This literature review has served to highlight key information and themes within the existing literature regarding equity and urban forest planning. These topics included equity and inclusivity in planning, environmental justice and sustainability, decolonization in governance, and current knowledge gaps within the current literary landscape.

There are several key takeaways to be noted in exploring and analyzing this literature. Firstly, in order to create a proper foundation for equity in urban forest planning, special attention must be paid to grounded governance and nurturing relationships. Many Indigenous principles of collaboration are grounded in relationship-building, and so in order to potentially achieve co-governance, these relationships must be brought to the forefront of urban forest planning. This can also aid environmental equity and sustainability in ensuring that the voices of those who may

not have equal access to greenspaces are heard, further highlighting the need for a focus on relationships within urban forest planning.

Overall, it is clear by examining the literature that there is a significant emphasis on relationship building and genuine listening as a necessary foundation to collaboration in policymaking and co-governance. This is also reflected in the conceptual framework, which highlights the approach taken to this research and the overall need for acknowledging the relationships between land and people. This approach is reflected through the lenses of Equity-Informed Collaboration, Two-Eyed Seeing, and Grounded Governance and Relational Accountability, each of which serve as foundational principles for the findings of this research.

## 4.0 Approaches, Methodology, and Data Collection

### 4.1 Epistemology and Methodology

#### 4.1.1 *Epistemology*

In order to conduct research with a focus on Indigenous perspectives, the role that epistemology plays in research must be acknowledged. Through the continued work towards reconciliation and Indigenous sovereignty, there has been a renewed emphasis on the need to learn from Indigenous research methods and epistemologies, or ‘ways of knowing’, and integrate them alongside Western research approaches to develop processes and outcomes that honor and uplift Indigenous priorities and needs (McGregor, 2004, 2012). This also includes a strong emphasis on centering heritage, identity, land, and community as being foundational to research (Barnhardt, 2008).

In their “Lessons Learned” for interconnecting TEK and Western science perspectives, Bartlett et al. (2012) describe the importance of principles such as being guided by Two-Eyed Seeing, viewing “science” in an inclusive way, and weaving back and forth between worldviews (p. 334). These are the principles that this research strives to uphold, with a focus on uplifting various worldviews instead of amalgamating them (Nalau et al., 2018). This effort towards decolonizing research can in turn help to better respond to local contexts and centre Indigenous voices (Castleden et al., 2017). However, while attempts were made to be as equitable as possible in sourcing literature and other citation materials, it is important to acknowledge that many of the sources available for jurisdictional scans within British Columbia were often limited to settler governments or related associations.

#### 4.1.2 *Methodology*

Since the purpose of this study is to investigate how Indigenous knowledge can be better integrated and emphasized in urban forest planning within the CRD, a qualitative, interpretive policy analysis approach was selected. A qualitative research approach was chosen in order to further explore and uplift the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous communities and local governments, with methods including a combination of document analysis, jurisdictional scans, and interviews.

Since this research focuses on how Indigenous teachings and participation can be better encouraged in urban forest planning, attempts were also made to prioritize engagement with Indigenous community leaders and knowledge holders and conduct independent research in order to better understand cultural norms and protocols (CIHR, NSERC, 2022, Chap. 9, Art. 9.1). This also includes recognizing that different First Nations communities have their own distinct ethnic and political identities, with established governance structures and ethics processes that could conflict with institutional policies (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014). To complement the jurisdictional scan and literature review sections of this research, a small number of interviews with local community members were conducted in order to delve deeper into key themes being examined, such as co-governance, participatory decision-making, and the integration of TEK in urban forest planning.

## **4.2 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection methods for this thesis research included the examination of peer-reviewed literature, jurisdictional scans of other regional districts and local governments, and interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and urban forest planners within the region being studied. Literature for this research was sourced from a variety of databases, such as the University of Victoria Library, the SAGE database, Google Scholar, and government websites.

For the jurisdictional scan section, existing practices and agreements related to Indigenous-led urban forest planning were examined through a systematic review of policies, agreements, and initiatives between municipal, regional, provincial, and federal levels of government. This also included associated organizations and Indigenous nations within the CRD and other relevant jurisdictions, such as other municipalities on Vancouver Island and within British Columbia as a whole. This section of research was conducted through targeted searches on government and organizational websites, such as the City of Victoria, the Capital Regional District, the Province of British Columbia, and the Assembly of First Nations. Keyword searches within organizational document libraries included terms such as “environmental stewardship”, “reconciliation agreement”, “co-governance framework”, and “protocol agreement”. Municipal bylaws, urban forest management plans, reconciliation agreements, memorandums of understanding, and co-

governance frameworks were among the documents included for review. Additionally, academic literature and grey literature (e.g., reports, government publications, and policy briefs) were further reviewed to contextualize these agreements within broader themes of Indigenous governance, environmental stewardship, and urban forest planning.

Interviews were also conducted with nine participants from the CRD region to gather feedback and insights on preferred planning methods. Participants were selected based on their involvement in community decision-making, knowledge of Indigenous traditional ecological practices, and experience with urban forest planning. Participation in this research emerged through relational introductions and conversations supported by my supervisor, with care taken to follow relevant cultural protocols and to respect participants' decisions about whether and how to engage. This included people working in urban forest planning, local conservation, academia, and community planning. These participants were selected based on their direct involvement and experiences in urban forest management, knowledge of Indigenous management practices, restoration and policy development experience, and collaboration with local First Nations communities.

Purposive sampling was the primary method used for selecting interview participants. Also known as judgmental or selective sampling, purposive sampling is a method where researchers select participants based on their experiences, background, or knowledge relevant to the research question, rather than a larger representative sample of participants. Through using this method, it allows researchers to gather more in-depth insights from individuals who can provide firsthand knowledge of the field or research topic. In the case of this research, this also meant not prioritizing people solely based on academic or professional credentials, but broadening our search to equitably value and uplift the contributions of people with different lived experiences, such as those knowledgeable in Indigenous stewardship practices and those with experience in grounded governance.

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

A content analysis was used to systematically categorize and interpret the content of relevant literature and government policy documents regarding Indigenous policy priorities, co-

governance methods, and urban forest planning. This method was also used in conducting the jurisdictional scans and reviewing urban forest management plans within the CRD. A thematic analysis was also used to identify and analyze the qualitative data from interviews conducted. This approach was chosen in order to best identify recurring themes, policies, and practices concerning TEK and potential avenues for Indigenous and municipal or regional co-governance.

#### **4.4 Limitations**

One conceptual limitation of this research is its specific focus on the CRD and the local Indigenous communities in the region. This narrowed scope may limit the transferability of research findings to other geographical contexts. Given that different Indigenous communities may have varying preferences for urban forest policy, the best practices that are identified or recommended within this region may not be the best practices for another region depending on the variable context of the area.

Furthermore, a methodological limitation of this research is the sample size of selected interview participants. Nine participants were interviewed through eight interviews, with one group interview being held, and the interviews took place over the course of approximately one hour. The interviews were structured with questions brought by the interviewer (see Appendix B), but conversations remained flexible, with options available to adapt the questions to be more relevant to participant experiences as necessary and as the conversations evolved. While this sample size allowed for extended and deeper conversations while conducting interviews, this also limits the number of opinions and information gathered; for instance, there is also a need for future research involving more Indigenous leadership representation. As a result, this study should be considered as being exploratory rather than representative. Any future research intended to inform or support policy development would require broader and more sustained engagement with Indigenous leadership, and such policies should be developed through Indigenous-led or co-governance processes in which Indigenous governments play a central decision-making role. In addition, while interviews were intentionally chosen as a method to uplift community perspectives and reduce extractive research practices, future research would benefit from the added participant review of transcripts and recommendations, where appropriate

and desired. This would help to enhance relational accountability in practice and support more genuinely collaborative knowledge production.

Moreover, potential researcher bias must also be considered as a methodological limit; for instance, any unconscious biases towards government interventions or deference to authority must be noted and accounted for when preparing to analyze policy issues. As a non-Indigenous researcher, this also entails inherent limitations in the interpretation of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems, including but not limited to Two-Eyed Seeing and grounded governance.

Additionally, an aforementioned ethical concern in this research is ensuring the support and amplification of Indigenous voices in environmental policy and local government discussions, which are often conducted within predominantly colonial frameworks (Booth & Muir, 2011). There are significant limitations in relying on settler law as a foundation for advancing Indigenous self-determination in urban settings, particularly given the historical exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from policymaking (Nejad et al., 2019). This must be considered when striving to achieve genuine collaboration, including within local governance (Wilson-Raybould, 2019).

#### **4.5 Strengths and Contributions**

This research emphasizes the importance of collaboration and equity in decolonization, prioritizing the active involvement of Indigenous communities in urban forest planning. By engaging with local Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, the study will help lay the groundwork in research to better foster partnerships in governance, enhancing the relevance and applicability of the findings to the CRD. Furthermore, the study aligns with B.C.'s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan, promoting reconciliation and the equitable distribution of green spaces.

## 5.0 Jurisdictional Scan: Collaborative Governance in Practice

### 5.1 Introduction

This section describes the findings of the jurisdictional scan of several local governments and associations in British Columbia. The purpose of this jurisdictional scan is to review current existing initiatives supporting partnerships and collaborative policies between local governments, Indigenous nations, and community members in numerous municipalities in B.C., and examine how the principles of existing policies in other cities may be applied to urban forest policy and Indigenous co-governance within the CRD through a thematic review.

Each of the examples included in this jurisdictional scan include local policies, practices, or pathways to collaboration between local governments or associations and Indigenous Peoples and governments. While several of these examples explore collaboration in various areas, they each serve to showcase the attempts being made at fostering connection and relationships between local governments, Indigenous nations, and local communities, which can help to highlight potential avenues of future co-governance. Local governments and associations examined include the Capital Regional District, the City of Victoria, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM), the Assembly of First Nations, and more. A main source of information for this jurisdictional scan was the UBCM's Pathways to Collaboration, a joint initiative between UBCM, BC's provincial government, and the First Nations Summit, supported by funding from the Indigenous Business & Investment Council (IBIC) (Union of BC Municipalities, n.d.-b).

These examples were selected using a number of criteria:

- The example must include at least one settler government or association, as well as at least one Indigenous Nation, government, or community;
- The example must occur within British Columbia; and
- The example must include at least one action or policy working towards increased collaboration, reconciliation, or equity within the community.

Once the criteria and jurisdictions were determined, the jurisdictional scan examined the following categories: engagement and communication, joint development and collaboration, and sustainability and planning. Aspects for analysis included policy frameworks and pathways,

workplans, Indigenous co-governance models, existing TEK integration, and urban forestry regulations within B.C. This jurisdictional scan serves to highlight existing challenges, best practices, and policy gaps related to Indigenous participation and urban forestry policy in communities around British Columbia.

## **5.2 Theme 1 – Engagement and Communication**

Local governments in British Columbia have engaged in many forms of communication with local Indigenous communities over the years, and the way that this engagement has taken place has continued to evolve over time. Proactive communication and relationship-building between local governments and local nations can support more inclusive decision-making as well as reconciliation efforts in British Columbia, and local governments in B.C. are encouraged to build these relationships through the recognition of Indigenous rights as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (Government of British Columbia, 2025). Some methods local governments have used to increase communications with local nations include collaborating on the development of new information tools, such as protocols, service agreements, and memorandums of understanding (MOUs). These include initiatives such as the City of Victoria’s City Family, the UBCM Community to Community Program, and the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council and District of Saanich ÁTOL,NEUEL Memorandum of Understanding.

### *5.2.1 The City of Victoria City Family*

The City of Victoria’s City Family and Witness Reconciliation program are two local examples of Indigenous engagement and communication within the Capital Regional District. Victoria’s City Council created the Witness Reconciliation program and appointed a City Family in 2017, with the City Family including “members of the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations, other urban Indigenous people, the Mayor and select City Council members” (City of Victoria, n.d.-a). These unique Indigenous-informed governance models help to examine further ways in which the City may further respond to the TRC’s 94 “Calls to Action”, specifically the five recommendations highlighted by the TRC for municipalities, and implement change at the local level (City of Victoria, n.d.-a).

The City Family also hosts the Victoria Reconciliation Dialogues, a conversation series that engages the community in reconciliation on Lekwungen territory (City of Victoria, n.d.-b). These dialogues are a change for the community to share stories, have discussions, and bring forward ideas on how Indigenous culture and history can be uplifted in the community (City of Victoria, n.d.-b). Although these dialogues are not directly policy-oriented, they are one way that the City of Victoria has increased communication and engagement with local nations and brought reconciliation to the forefront in an educational capacity.

These programs focus on building relationships through ceremony, dialogue, and reciprocity rather than traditional consultation (City of Victoria, n.d.-a). This has included formal acts of recognition, such as land acknowledgements, declarations from local government officials, and ceremonies empowering local Indigenous communities and culture (City of Victoria, n.d.-a). They have also influenced policies related to place-naming, reconciliation, and cultural recognition in urban spaces. These programs are examples of how relational governance and decolonial approaches can exist in local governance spaces, and are centered on relationship-building and trust, exemplifying respectful engagement and communication.

### *5.2.2 UBCM Community to Community Program*

Another program that supports engagement and relationship-building between local governments and Indigenous communities is the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Community to Community (C2C) program. The C2C program, also supported by the First Nations Summit, aims to support communities in fostering partnerships and building stronger communication by funding forums and events, as well as collaborative initiatives between First Nations communities and local governments (Union of British Columbia Municipalities, n.d.-a). Initiatives resulting from these forums include the development of agreements such as protocols, MOUs, and service agreements, joint planning or strategy efforts, as well as the co-review of bylaws and policies to inform updates or new policy development (Union of British Columbia Municipalities, n.d.-a).

Since 1999, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Indigenous Services Canada have provided funding for the C2C program (Union of British Columbia Municipalities, 2019b). Over 600 C2C

Forums have been held in communities across the province, and past participants have stated that the forums have resulted in increased empathy, understanding, and trust between leaders and communities (Union of British Columbia Municipalities, 2019b). Funding these relationship-building activities between Indigenous and local governments are essential, as they are central to increased engagement and communication. This program highlights the desire on the sides of both local governments and Indigenous communities to continue building these relationships, indicating the potential support for further co-governance initiatives.

### *5.2.3 WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council and District of Saanich ÁTOL,NEUEL Memorandum of Understanding*

Examining recent policies and programs at the District of Saanich, one of the largest municipalities within the CRD, there are several reconciliation-focused initiatives that have been prioritized in recent years. Some of these initiatives include participating in the 2020 Victoria Urban Reconciliation Dialogue Gathering, in which the District of Saanich engaged in reconciliation-focused conversation, and the creation of a staff First Nations interdepartmental working group to assess the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s “Calls to Action” Report and bring forward potential initiatives for the District of Saanich to explore (District of Saanich, n.d.).

Further, in December 2021, the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) and the District of Saanich furthered their commitment to collaboration and reconciliation by signing an ÁTOL,NEUEL (“Respecting One Another”) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (District of Saanich, n.d.). Arising from the Cordova Bay local area planning process, the MOU includes commitments to relationship-building, shared decision-making, and supporting cultural practices. This includes highlighting certain areas of interest and priority themes for the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council and District of Saanich, such as: “Recognition of WSÁNEĆ rights, history, and culture; Governance and implementation of MOU; Environmental concerns; Protection of ancestral sites; Public art and education projects; Economic development opportunities, including housing; and Parks management” (District of Saanich, n.d.). Other priorities also include the “Saanich Recognition of Douglas Treaty Rights and Oral History of the Douglas Treaties and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (District of

Saanich, n.d.). Education and increased dialogue are highlighted as being two of the primary methods through which Saanich Council and staff will work to support these priorities, principles which would also be essential to the further exploration of potential avenues for co-governance in policy (District of Saanich, n.d.).

### **5.3 Theme 2: Joint Development and Collaboration**

Joint development and collaboration in British Columbia are key to creating sustainable economic solutions while also focusing on reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination. As communities navigate challenges in areas such as land use planning, infrastructure development, and citizen engagement, taking a cooperative approach can foster mutual understanding and trust between levels of government. In British Columbia, common pathway activities are already in place in some jurisdictions, including shared communications agreements, servicing agreements and infrastructure projects (Union of BC Municipalities, n.d.-b). Some of these examples include the Capital Regional District (CRD), *WJOLEEP* (Tsartlip), and *WSIKEM* (Tseycum) First Nations Memorandum of Understanding, the strategy adopted by Namgis First Nation and the Village of Alert Bay, and the North Island Regional Protocol Agreement.

#### *5.3.1 Capital Regional District (CRD), WJOLEEP (Tsartlip), and WSIKEM (Tseycum) First Nations Memorandum of Understanding*

On March 21, 2025, the Capital Regional District signed a deal with the Tsartlip and Tseycum nations through the *WSÁNEĆ* Leadership Council to increase collaboration efforts on topics ranging from land management to economic development within the region (Lo, 2025). The MOU includes \$50,000 in annual funding as well as monthly joint-staff meetings and annual leadership reviews to support facilitation and consultation between the two nations and the CRD (Lo, 2025). While there are continued negotiations with other local First Nations within the regional district, this agreement has aided in formalizing the intergovernmental relationship between the Nations and the CRD, and provides a route for formal recognition and collaboration on issue areas that have been highlighted by the *WSÁNEĆ* Leadership Council (Lo, 2025).

The “Priority Topics” that are indicated in the MOU as being the main areas for collaboration and input include: “Governance; Economic & Employment Opportunities; Protection of

Ancestral Sites; Solid Waste Management; Regional Parks; Electoral Area Community Parks; Environmental Protection; Land Acquisition; Art, Place Names & Public Education; Harvesting Opportunities; Cultural Learning Opportunities for CRD Board and Staff; [and] Any other topics identified and agreed to by the Parties” (Capital Regional District, W̱JOŁŁŁP [Tsartlip First Nation], & W̱SIKEM [Tseycum First Nation], 2025). The MOU also acknowledges that some topics may require joint advocacy to the Province of B.C., specific workplans for certain priority topics, and/or the creation of collaborative working groups consisting of W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council members and CRD staff, depending on need (Capital Regional District, W̱JOŁŁŁP [Tsartlip First Nation], & W̱SIKEM [Tseycum First Nation], 2025). Overall, this MOU reflects the desire of the Capital Regional District as well as both the W̱JOŁŁŁP and W̱SIKEM Nations to address their highlighted priorities through increased government-to-government collaboration, while establishing this collaboration through a lens of reconciliation, stewardship, and respect.

### 5.3.2 *‘Namgis First Nation and the Village of Alert Bay*

Another example of joint development and collaboration between a local government and local nation in British Columbia was the collective effort to improve Cormorant Island’s local economy when faced with a shrinking and aging population. In facing this challenge, the ‘Namgis First Nation and the Village of Alert Bay created a joint economic development strategy to engage the broader community and support local business ventures (Union of British Columbia Municipalities, 2019a). Some of the collaborative pathway activities undertaken included shared tourism projects, collective land use planning and development, and communication and protocol agreements (Union of British Columbia Municipalities, 2019a).

This partnership-based initiative is aimed at uplifting shared goals, such as those related to economic, social, and cultural development. However, it is important to note that collaboration between communities will always require a unique approach in order to best reflect the context and needs of the communities involved, as each community will have different perspectives and priorities (Union of BC Municipalities, n.d.-b). For ‘Namgis and Alert Bay, this included an emphasis on fostering personal relationships, creating an action implementation plan, and

creating a joint Advisory Committee of representatives from the two governments as well as local community members.

### *5.3.3 North Island Regional Protocol Agreement*

The North Island Regional Protocol Agreement is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was created on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010, between the Regional District of Mount Waddington, District of Port Hardy, Town of Port McNeill, Village of Port Alice, Village of Alert Bay, Kwakiutl First Nation, 'Namgis First Nation, Da'naxda'xw/Awaetlala First Nations, Kwik'wastutinuxw Haxwamis First Nations, Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw Nation, Quatsino First Nation, and Tlatlasikwala First Nation (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010). The agreement is a formal, multi-party collaboration that outlines shared responsibilities and commitments, highlighting the authority of the aforementioned Indigenous communities in the region (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010).

This MOU was created to “establish a cooperative framework that will lead to bi-lateral or multi-party agreements to address specific issues of mutual interest or concern” (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010, p. 1). The four highlighted articles within the MOU are: Article 1 - Mutual Recognition and Cooperation; Article 2 – Maintenance and Strengthening of Relationships; Article 3 – Inclusion and Information of the Community at Large; and Article 4 – Living Document. The main principle of cooperation underlining the MOU are those of mutual respect and recognition, as highlighted in Article 1 (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010).

This mutual recognition includes both the recognition of First Nations as the original owners and stewards of the lands within the Mount Waddington region, as well as the local governments created under the legislative authority of the Government of British Columbia (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010). The MOU also highlights how members of the respective communities within the Regional District of Mount Waddington are best served by the communities working together in the spirit of cooperation (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010); this is particularly true given the fact that often issues within

communities transcend community borders, as previously highlighted through the literature review section of this research.

#### **5.4 Theme 3: Sustainability and Environmental Planning**

When examining the urban forest and green space equity in an urban context, sustainability and planning are foundational pieces of local governance that must be examined. As highlighted in the literature review, applying lenses of grounded governance and community inclusion in planning can not only aid equity outcomes, but support sustainability through shared knowledge as well. This is particularly true when considering the inclusion of Indigenous TEK; however, the approaches to collaboration and co-creation can vary, and it is vital to ensure that space is being created to include Indigenous nations and community members as early and respectfully as possible. The following approaches each show equitable, collaborative initiatives to sustainability and planning, with most utilizing an environmental justice lens as well. These examples include the City of Vancouver's Initiative Zones, the restoration of Salish Sea Gardens by Hul'q'umi'num' and WSÁNEĆ First Nations and Parks Canada, and the CRD's Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan.

##### *5.4.1 The City of Vancouver - Initiative Zones*

One example of equity and utilizing an environmental justice lens in greenspace planning is the City of Vancouver's Initiative Zones. The City of Vancouver acknowledges that “systemic discrimination and past policy decisions, including urban and land use planning policies, have contributed to the continuing oppression of Indigenous people, racialized, and other disproportionately impacted communities” (City of Vancouver, n.d.-a, para. 1). These Initiative Zones use geographic mapping and indicators related to greenspace equity in order to prioritize investment and plan urban forest space more strategically (Park People, 2021). This is done with the understanding that access to greenspace and parks is an inherent privilege held by some populations, privilege which is closely tied to determinants such as income levels, social class, race, and other systemic inequities (City of Vancouver, n.d.-b). The Initiative Zones strategy aims to consider all of these factors by utilizing an intersectional lens in planning and thus open the doors to increased community involvement, communication, and the better identification of uneven resource distribution (City of Vancouver, n.d.-b).

For the equity analysis factors involved in these Initiative Zones, three primary indicators were chosen to be examined: park provision, or areas of the city with low park spaces per person; areas of the city with heightened demand for low barrier recreation; and access to nature, measured as “areas with less than 5% canopy cover” (City of Vancouver, n.d.-b, “Equity analysis factors” section). Utilizing these factors, the City is able to then identify priority areas and address inequities by applying an intersectional lens to planning practices (City of Vancouver, n.d.-b).

By taking an equity-based approach to park development, and particularly focusing on communities that may be more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, these plans help work towards cities that allow more residents to share in the climate resilience benefits of green spaces (Park People, 2021). This is a method of co-creation in city planning that attempts to not only hold space for those who have been less empowered through environmental injustices, but further reflect and examine how these injustices came to be in the first place.

#### *5.4.2 Hul’q’umi’num’ and WSÁNEĆ First Nations and Parks Canada – Restoring Salish Sea Gardens*

The restoration of Salish sea gardens in the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve is yet another example of collaborative action between First Nations and the government, in this case involving government at the federal level. This initiative supports ecological restoration of ancient Indigenous Sea Gardens in the Salish Sea, combining traditional ecological knowledge alongside modern methods of habitat restoration that are responsive to challenges from climate change and coastal development (Parks Canada, 2023).

Sea gardens, an Indigenous technology developed by observing and listening to the sea, creates a productive habitat for seafoods such as clams and crabs (Parks Canada, 2023). Similarly to how forests in urban areas have been challenged over time due to colonial practices, sea gardens in Coast Salish territories that had thrived for over 4000 years under Indigenous stewardship soon became suppressed after the onset of colonialism (Parks Canada, 2023). This decline was compounded by impacts from climate change and coastal industrialization and development

(Parks Canada, 2023). The restoration of these Sea Gardens has been rooted in collaboration, bridging different perspectives, and strengthening the connections between people and their cultures (Parks Canada, 2023). This collaboration has taken place between two Indigenous knowledge working groups, eleven First Nations, researchers, other federal departments, and non-governmental organizations (Parks Canada, 2023).

While this example takes place in a coastal setting, this model of co-management and stewardship can potentially offer transferable insights to urban forest co-governance, particularly regarding partnership in practice and uplifting Indigenous-led restoration and knowledge systems. This is especially true in examining the root principles of the project's collaboration, such as relationship-building, knowledge sharing, and rebuilding the reciprocal relationships between people and the land (Parks Canada, 2023). Guided by historic Indigenous knowledge of the area, this work is also another example of how the principle of Two-eyed Seeing can be put into practice (Parks Canada, 2023).

#### *5.4.3 CRD Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan*

Within the Capital Regional District, the CRD is responsible for managing and protecting over “13,200 hectares of natural areas in 32 regional parks and four regional trails on southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands” (Capital Regional District, n.d.-c). In 2022, the CRD updated their Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, seeking to include input on the updated vision, values, and priorities as well as utilizing a conservation and biodiversity protection lens (Capital Regional District, n.d.-c). This also involved consultation and partnerships on land stewardship, as well as collaborative approaches to conservation.

Within the updated document, the CRD highlights that it “wishes to work with local First Nations in the spirit and practice of reconciliation to determine appropriate actions in regional parks and trails that respect Indigenous rights, uplift Indigenous governance and that strengthen government-to-government relationships” (Capital Regional District, 2023b, p. 2). The plan, developed to guide regional parks planning processes over the next decade, also highlights the need to protect cultural heritage, improve climate resiliency, and support Indigenous rights within the region (Capital Regional District, 2023b). This will be evaluated over the decade

through continued monitoring and reporting, tracking the status of actions and progress towards achieving the desired outcomes (Capital Regional District, 2023b).

## **5.5 Summary of Findings**

In reviewing these joint ventures regarding economic and community development, three major categories of relationship-building activities were revealed. Engagement and communication activities mainly include methods of increasing connections between municipalities and First Nations communities, such as forums and MOUs. MOUs and protocol agreements have also been shown to be preferred methods of increased development and collaboration, the second category of relationship-building. Finally, the third area of collaboration noted was sustainability and environmental planning, an area foundational to increased resiliency, reconciliation, and environmental justice in urban areas.

In analyzing these diverse approaches to collaboration, it became clear that certain intergovernmental activities appeared to be preferred due to their high rate of utilization, such as MOUs and protocol agreements. These agreements may exist for the sole purpose of establishing protocol, or may be utilised for further topics of collaboration, such as emergency response, strategic planning, or operations management. Further, it became clear that even within the other categories, the theme of communication was still strong within government activities, reaffirming that communication is generally seen as a prerequisite to any intergovernmental collaboration, especially when involving Indigenous communities.

Through reviewing the jurisdictional scan of collaborative projects, programs, and agreements, several challenges also became evident. One of the primary challenges remains in the fact that that there will never be a one-size-fits-all solution for all communities, whether it be a municipality, regional district, or Indigenous community. As previously mentioned, the most ideal pathway to collaboration will likely vary for different areas, and will be based on the needs and priorities of the parties involved. Taking a unique approach to collaboration based on the context of the communities involved was one of the main themes of success, and this success is compounded when these needs and priorities are further outlined through community engagement. Community engagement can take many forms, such as through joint advisory

committees built up from members of local government, First Nations governments, and community representatives, and is a foundational part of ensuring that agreements or planning processes are unique to the community's needs. Finally, the theme of respect and relationship building was foundational to each of the themes and examples explored. Fostering mutual understanding around development issues, particularly those involving historically or culturally significant areas, is as essential as it is mutually beneficial. Such dialogue not only enhances environmental and cultural awareness, but also contributes meaningfully to the ongoing work of reconciliation.

## 6.0 Research Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

To complement the jurisdictional scan and literature review sections of this research, a small number of interviews with local community members were also conducted in order to delve deeper into key themes being examined, such as co-governance, participatory decision-making, and the integration of TEK in urban forest planning. This research included interviews with nine participants in both individual and group interviews in order to include various voices and experiences from the local community. As this research is largely influenced by the concept of grounded governance and the desire to increase inclusivity in policymaking, these interviews aimed to highlight lived experiences within the community, particularly as this research serves to explore best practices and preferences for collaboration in a localized context.

### 6.2 Summary of Interviews

As the primary goal of this research is to increase inclusivity, environmental equity, and reconciliation through collaborative urban forest design, a small number of participants were selected based on their professional and lived experience in these areas. These participants were identified through personal and professional connections, organization websites, and through the snowball method of participants recommending other potential contacts during the interview process.

Throughout conducting these interviews, it was important to “meet people where they are at” both figuratively through the discussion questions and literally in terms of the interview locations. This meant that the interviews were conducted in person, via Zoom, and via Microsoft Teams, depending on each participant’s preferences. These options were given in order to help accommodate busy work and life schedules and offer flexibility to both the participants and researchers. This also included several interview sessions taking place while volunteering with PEPAKEN HÁUTW in SNIDÇEĒ (Tod Inlet, Gowlan-Tod Provincial Park) and with WSÍ,ĶEM Ivy Project on WSÁNEĆ land to aid in ecosystem restoration and the decolonization of the land, an experience which allowed us to also further connect with the land throughout our discussion.

Through interview discussions, there was a consistent emphasis on the importance of knowledge-sharing and how traditional ecological knowledge offers invaluable insights into sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. Participants included individuals working in academic research, federal government, environmental stewardship, and municipal urban forest planning, with diverse experiences in Indigenous collaboration and ecological restoration.

This research remains grounded in a commitment to inclusivity, relationship-building, and the recognition that Indigenous voices are essential to equitable and effective urban forest governance in the region. One of the primary focuses of this study is building research through connections, and vice-versa; therefore, the interview process was guided by a relational ethos that prioritized information sharing through shared dialogue, rather than interrogative questioning (Fujii, 2017). This relational interview approach was selected in an attempt to decolonize both policy and research practices. Acknowledging the importance of trust and reciprocity – particularly when engaging with Indigenous participants – we prioritized existing relationships and connections when identifying potential interviewees. This approach helped ensure that participation was grounded in mutual respect and ongoing dialogue, rather than extractive or transactional knowledge-gathering.

For instance, by conducting some of the interviews while volunteering in invasive species removal with PEPAKEN HÁUTW in SNIDCEĒ (Tod Inlet, Gowlland-Tod Provincial Park) and the WŚÍ,ĶEM Ivy Project on WŚÁNEĆ land, we were able to conduct interviews while physically working on the land in tandem as well. This allowed for a more reciprocal research experience, and also allowed both the researcher and interview participants to feel more grounded and connected to the land we were discussing. Not only did this experience help to keep us engaged through movement, but it allowed for an opportunity to reconnect with both our senses and the land, allowing for the more thoughtful and reflective experience needed for grounding in place (Wiebe, 2024). This also supported the principles of “grounded normativity”, an idea uplifted by Indigenous political theorists which upholds the fact that relationships to place can help to better inform what it means to have a reciprocal relationship with the land (Wiebe, 2024; Coulthard, & Simpson, 2016). The participants represented a diversity of

perspectives, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals. Among the Indigenous participants, some were local to the lands encompassed by what is now referred to as the Capital Regional District while others were Indigenous to different regions, including areas outside of Canada.

As reflected in the findings below, it is essential to engage in self-directed learning and reflection while striving for inclusive practices, in order to reduce the disproportionate burden often placed on Indigenous experts and knowledge holders. It is also important to note that these interviews are not intended to speak on behalf of any specific demographic group or organization; rather, they reflect the individual perspectives and experiences of participants, and are used to identify and build upon common themes, challenges, and successful practices observed through different lives, lenses, and professions within the CRD.

### **6.3 Key Findings - Challenges**

#### *6.3.1 Interview Theme #1 – Continuity and Commitment in Policy and Practice*

“I think we're going to have to make sure that whatever we hear from communities ... [is] actually going to be listened to, and actually be considered.” (Personal Communication, Participant #7, Victoria, June 2025)

When asked about potential challenges in integrating Indigenous knowledge into urban forest planning, one of the first themes that was identified by several participants was the challenges associated with ensuring that collaborative efforts and existing policies continue beyond current employees. Since the primary collaborators in these policies would likely include local municipalities (such as the City of Victoria) or the Capital Regional District and local Nations, challenges may arise due to fundamental differences in governance structures; particularly the fact that municipalities operate as corporations, whereas Nations have distinct forms of governance and continuity on a generational scale.

For instance, staff turnover within local governments was highlighted as being a major issue (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). In considering the transfer of knowledge and collaboration, there is a challenge in the fact that Indigenous communities will have generations of people working on an issue, and governments are run by

employees who will inevitably leave, change jobs, or retire (Personal Communication, Participants #2, #3, and #4, Victoria, May 2025). Therefore, there is a need to ensure continuity through long-term knowledge and relationship building; otherwise, there is a high likelihood that the work may stall or that Indigenous community members may get frustrated if it feels like they have to restart the process or continuously re-explain things to newer employees (Personal Communication, Participants #2, #3, #4, and #7, Victoria, May and June 2025). This can include building in space for things such as ongoing protocols, employee briefings and trainings, and ensuring that project records are up to date and accurate, practices which can help towards an eventual shift to co-governance.

Another noted challenge of continued collaboration with local governments is that of the ever-continuous election cycles, and the policy shifts that often accompany them (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). Although these cycles are a key feature of democratic governance, their short-term timelines – which are also rooted in colonial systems – can disrupt ongoing initiatives and rarely align with Indigenous governance principles, such as the ‘Seven Generations’ approach, which emphasizes long-term thinking and intergenerational responsibility (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). While local government elections are a key facet of democracy and it is natural to experience a shift in priorities, these are the considerations that must be built into long-term collaboration and timeline planning in order to avoid frustrations and maintain transparency.

As an example of continuity in practice, the previously mentioned North Island Regional Protocol Agreement highlighted the need for it to be a living document in order to reflect the relationship between the parties and include the potential addition of new signatories (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010). The protocol noted that any changes must be mutually agreed to by all parties as well, but by building in space for these future changes, it allows the protocol space to remain flexible over time as needed (Regional District of Mount Waddington et al., 2010).

### *6.3.2 Interview Theme #2 – Uplifting Indigenous Worldviews in Policymaking*

“Knowledge sharing...comes not from a textbook, but from practice, like relationships and practical actions.” (Personal Communication, Participant #2, Victoria, May 2025)

“The [meeting] minutes don't tell you how the room felt.” (Personal Communication, Participant #3, Victoria, May 2025)

Tying into the theme of continuity in collaboration, another challenge having to do with equity in policymaking is that of the actual methods of collaboration being utilized. For instance, there is a significant reliance on Western society and governments to rely on written documents such as Memorandums of Understanding; however, in some participants' experiences, those methods are not always reflective of strong working relationships (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025). Several participants noted that in collaborating, it was the meetings, discussions, development, exchanges, and ceremony that often led to the strongest working relationships (Personal Communication, Participants #2, #3, #4, and #7, Victoria, May and June 2025). In other words, it was the in-person engagement and the collaborative process of developing documents - including how that process unfolded - that were more indicative of successful working relationships with First Nations communities (Personal Communication, Participants #1, #2, #3, and #4, April, May, and June, Victoria, 2025).

For instance, the methods in which information is passed on often vary in First Nations communities compared to local governments and other places of business. One example is the fact that oral histories are often a method of passing information down through generations, while government agencies often rely on hard copies of forms and documents (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). One participant noted that, on some reserves, preferred methods of information sharing often include community newsletters and dedicated engagement sessions; in contrast, channels such as social media may be less effective or overlooked, resulting in missed opportunities for meaningful engagement (Personal Communication, Participant #9, Victoria, July 2025). Taking the time to develop tailored content, requesting its inclusion in local newsletters, and organizing in-person engagement sessions (particularly those that include food and/or honoraria) were identified as approaches that can foster more effective participation and help build trust through face-to-face interaction, rather than relying solely on online formats (Personal Communication, Participant #9, Victoria, July 2025).

It is also worth noting that differing interpretations or understandings of certain words and concepts may exist in different communities; for example, some Indigenous communities may critique the concept of conservation, viewing it as incompatible with holistic environmental worldviews that emphasize the interconnectedness of all systems (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025). While the idea of conservation is often seen as a positive in Western society, many may challenge the idea of compartmentalizing nature into areas to be preserved versus areas to be exploited, which remains centered in human needs instead of taking a reciprocal and relational lens in working with the environment (Personal Communication, Participants #4 and #9, Victoria, May and July 2025).

In the context of this research and considering varying definitions, it is also worth remembering that the idea of “urban forests” themselves may not be considered the same across communities. For instance, it is important to remember that in some areas, Indigenous forests could still be engineered forests; areas that were engineered to provide food, sustainable shelter sources, or other materials used in day to day life (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025). Some participants emphasized that urban forests should not be limited to isolated, designated areas within a city, but rather envisioned as a network of interconnected green spaces that span across municipalities (Personal Communication, Participants #8 and #9, Victoria, 2025). This approach would, for example, enable a cougar to navigate safely back to broader forested areas without encountering significant barriers such as highways or urban infrastructure—reaffirming the view of nature as an interconnected whole rather than a series of compartmentalized zones (Personal Communication, Participants #8 and #9, Victoria, July 2025). These perspectives and discussions served as a valuable reminder of the importance of collaboration and the inclusion of diverse worldviews in policymaking processes.

### *6.3.3 Interview Theme #3 – Funding Challenges and Budgetary Constraints*

“We are talking about multigenerational responsibilities, and you know ... we just have this Western way of thinking about urgency, and about rushing, and about doing things quickly and you just can't approach it that way. You know, you work at the time and the pace of community.” (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025)

The third theme that was identified as being a potential major challenge for increasing Indigenous inclusion in planning was that of financial and budgetary constraints. Often, there are challenges in funding at the local and regional governance levels, as there are so many priorities being considered within generally tight budgets (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025). However, in the same vein, there is a need to be able to compensate Nations or other community members for their time and energy when considering consultation processes (Personal Communication, Participants #6 and #7, Victoria, May and June 2025). There is also the risk that funding constraints can result in timeline pressures, as funding can often be contingent upon meeting specific deadlines depending on the source of funding (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025). This can in turn strain relationships, as accelerated timelines may compromise the depth and quality of engagement, potentially undermining trust-building and collaborative processes (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025). When the goal is to have ongoing collaboration, it is also important to have this funding on an ongoing level as well (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025).

On a practical level, there is also the high cost of planting trees in urban areas that must be considered (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). For instance, in urban areas, planting trees is often not a simple process; in order for trees in cities to thrive, municipalities must account for aspects such as infrastructure, temperatures, root systems, and spatial planning (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). Soil conditions in urban areas can also vary as well, and are often engineered and therefore no longer native soils that certain types of trees may thrive in (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). In response to these challenges, municipalities have at times opted to plant non-native species – such as those more common in drought-prone areas like California – that are perceived to be better adapted to urban stressors (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). However, these decisions contribute to the ongoing transformation of the landscape in ways that reflect and reinforce colonial values, prioritizing efficiency and cost-effectiveness over ecological integrity and cultural connection to place. This pattern highlights how capitalist and colonial systems continue to influence land-use decisions,

often at the expense of decolonial approaches grounded in Indigenous knowledge and relationships with the land.

## 6.4 Key Findings - Successful Practices

### 6.4.1 Interview Theme #4 – Relational Governance and Making Space in Policy

“My advice ... if you're wanting to be involved with Indigenous consultations, [is to] just show up for a while; and don't try to force yourself on anyone, but just be helpful. I think it's a slow burn, building those relationships.” (Personal Communication, Participant #9, Victoria, July 2025).

When asked about successful practices that they had experienced in collaboration within the CRD or working with other government entities, such as provincial or federal government departments, one of the first themes that participants often placed significant emphasis on was that of consistent relationship building and trust. This included upholding these principles through methods such as collaborating early and often, and uplifting Indigenous culture and practices in policy in a respectful, non-appropriative manner.

For instance, part of this includes creating proper spaces for Indigenous Peoples to be heard, and more importantly, listened to and acted upon (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025). This means ensuring that true listening and consultation is taking place with those with lived experiences – not just inviting people to collaborate, and then overriding any concerns or wishes that they may raise (Personal Communication, Participants #1, #6, and #7, Victoria, April, May and June 2025). This also includes considering angles such as how to uplift Indigenous traditions in collaboration as Indigenous communities may see fit; for instance, considering oral histories in policymaking spaces (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025). In order to create spaces in the proper manner, the determinants of a good working relationship must first be established (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025).

This also ties into the concept of trust in policymaking and collaboration. Not only is the creation of proper spaces important in the foundation of trust, but communication plays a significant role as well. For instance, it is worth noting that most relationships are rarely frictionless; it's being

able to communicate and work through any frictions that are a sign of a strong relationship and foundation of trust (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025). If collaborators have the ability to talk through difficult situations, that can serve as a building block for a successful dynamic and a resilient relationship (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025). Taking other factors and community needs into account, particularly if working with local collaborators and those with lived experiences, is also essential; for instance, considering the fact that standardized meeting times may conflict with the schedules of those within the wider community who may wish to participate (Personal Communication, Participant #7, Victoria, June 2025). Taking steps to mitigate challenges around participation – and encouraging participation through other means such as honorariums and offering food and refreshments – can help to both reach a wider audience and also build trust within the community (Personal Communication, Participant #7, Victoria, June 2025).

Strengthening these relationships will also enhance their longevity, which should be regarded as a primary objective. While short-term planning remains necessary, such collaborations should be approached through a long-term, intergenerational lens (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025). This entails designing relationship-building and planning processes that endure beyond four-year strategic plans or electoral cycles, grounded in a vision that both honours the generations who have stewarded these lands in the past and anticipates the needs of those yet to come (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025).

#### 6.4.2 *Interview Theme #5 – Increasing Education and Capacity Building*

“I think that [within the urban forest] it can be very difficult to find the right space to nurture if you do try to bring a sense of forest back ... but I think it is really important to try to keep instilling the value of why [we] would do it.” (Personal Communication, Participant #5, Victoria, May 2025)

In discussing the topic of best practices with interview participants, the second theme that was highlighted several times throughout the course of the interviews was that of education and increasing intergenerational capacity building. In the context of urban forest education, this was highlighted as being important for both government employees as well as children who are currently in school, in order to continue passing environmental knowledge on to future generations. In turn, highlighting education from the top-down as well as from younger

generations and up can help foster better understanding that spans generations and can lead to more inclusive policymaking in the future.

The importance of increasing education is twofold. Participants noted several times that there is significant importance in supporting environmental stewardship and education in schools from early on, including a mixture of concepts and Indigenous pedagogy such as Two-Eyed seeing, the importance of native species, and the significance of Indigenous stewardship (Personal Communication, Participants #1 and #5, Victoria, April and May 2025). This could also include incorporating local histories and stories into the curriculum. For instance, in the Greater Victoria area, this could mean sharing the history of Indigenous farmers losing land through ongoing colonial practices and how this continues to shape green spaces to this day (Personal Communication, Participant #1, Victoria, April 2025). Understanding the historic context of a place is crucial in order to properly plan and understand the geography of where we live (Personal Communication, Participant #1, Victoria, April 2025). This is especially significant because the first step to supporting capacity-building for future generations is implementing stronger education for them within current systems; as an example, sharing how trees have served as the backbone of traditional Indigenous societies in the region in the past and present (Personal Communication, Participants #1 and #5, Victoria, April and May 2025). This is also important given the fact that the number of individuals who hold and are willing to share this knowledge can be limited, both because of the pressures placed on Indigenous communities with constrained capacity and because much of this knowledge has been eroded over time through colonial processes (Personal Communication, Participant #5, Victoria, May 2025). These factors underscore the urgency of ensuring that such knowledge is preserved and carried forward for future generations, in order to both rebuild and foster continued relationships with the land (Personal Communication, Participant #5, Victoria, May 2025).

Moreover, the idea of highlighting more inclusive education also extends within government and the idea of “doing our own homework” in policy and practice as well (Personal Communication, Participants #4, #8, and #9, Victoria, May and July 2025). For example, several participants emphasized the importance of government employees making use of existing resources to educate themselves as fully as possible prior to approaching Indigenous communities for

background information (Personal Communication, Participants #4, #8, and #9, Victoria, May and July 2025). Indigenous communities are often already overextended by consultation demands and continue to confront broader challenges, including the ongoing impacts of colonialism and generational trauma (Personal Communication, Participants #4, #8, and #9, Victoria, May and July 2025). This can also help strengthen continuity in policy and practice through building this longer-term knowledge, which can also help avoid the frustrations of Indigenous partners feeling like they need to re-explain concepts or protocols (Personal Communication, Participants #2 and #3, Victoria, May 2025). It is important to emphasize, however, that this guidance pertains solely to employee education and background preparation; the development of new ideas and any form of collaboration should occur in direct partnership with the relevant Indigenous communities from the outset.

Further, participants noted that education in the form of acknowledgements, treaties, or protocols is also a significant sign of success (Personal Communication, Participants #1 and #4, Victoria, April and May 2025). This could include gestures such as land acknowledgements by government entities, as well as larger of recognition such as the Haida Nation's title to Haida Gwaii being officially recognized by both the British Columbia government and the Canadian federal government (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025). This may also involve considering recommendations such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and analyzing how protected rights can be re-established and reinforced through policy (Personal Communication, Participant #5, Victoria, May 2025). For example, the restoration and protection of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) can be understood both as a right and a responsibility, grounded in the reciprocal obligation to give back to the environment (Personal Communication, Participant #5, Victoria, May 2025). When these acknowledgements can evolve into the official use of protocols in collaboration, that can also help further advance reconciliation in partnerships, and can be a significant sign of success and building trust (Personal Communication, Participant #8, Victoria, July 2025).

#### *6.4.3 Interview Theme #6 – Transparent Action Planning*

“It's hard to keep engagement through a strategy process without being clear about ... how [the process is] going to actually result in the action that's desired.” (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025).

Finally, the last theme that emerged from conversations with participants on signs of success in collaboration was that of transparency in action planning. Participants noted that there is a need for transparency in what is realistic for governments and partners to be able to achieve when undergoing strategic planning, consultation, or collaboration (Personal Communication, Participants #4 and #6, Victoria, May 2025). Several participants noted the risk involved in pushing for collaboration that ultimately may fail to produce concrete outcomes, potentially resulting in exhaustion, frustration, and diminished trust in government action on all sides (Personal Communication, Participants #4 and #6, Victoria, May 2025).

Therefore, there is a need for setting expectations early around what is actually possible in terms of budget and scope, and remaining fully transparent in what the actual end results or actions can potentially look like while collaborating on shared priorities (Personal Communication, Participants #1 and #4, Victoria, April and May 2025). This involves emphasizing the importance of structure in action planning, including the clarification of concrete goals, highlighting potential shared benefits, and the rationale behind why these priorities should be advanced collectively (Personal Communication, Participant #4, Victoria, May 2025). Planning should also be grounded in explicit recognition of Indigenous rights and authority; for example, governments might acknowledge treaty relationships and Indigenous homelands, commit to co-stewardship aligned with Nations' goals and objectives from the outset, and ensure that the decision-making bodies involved have the authority to make decisions and achieve the desired outcomes (Personal Communication, Participant #6, Victoria, May 2025). Eventually, focusing on transparent action planning can also further reduce the repetition of information and action requests directed at Indigenous communities, as it establishes clear processes for how previously collected knowledge will be considered for future policy decisions (Personal Communication, Participants #2, #3 and #4, Victoria, May 2025).

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Through conducting interviews with participants over the course of several months, a number of recurring themes emerged. Within the topics of challenges and successes in collaboration, three main topic areas were selected for each, based on analysis of the interviews and the frequency of

which these topics were brought up among participants. For the aforementioned challenges to be aware of, these included: Continuity and Commitment in Policy and Practice; Uplifting Indigenous Worldviews in Policymaking; and Funding Challenges and Budgetary Constraints. For the signs of success, the main themes noted were: Relational Governance and Making Space in Policy; Increasing Education and Intergenerational Capacity Building; and Transparent Action Planning. Major underlying principles of each of these themes – both in terms of challenges and in successes – included an emphasis on trust, respect, open communication, inclusion, and education.

These themes have significant overlap with several of the themes examined in the Jurisdictional Scan and Literature Review sections, primarily those involving communication, equity, and sustainability. For instance, the emphasis on protocol agreements and how they can be used to aid collaboration in several ways – from serving as a framework outlining best practices, to formally establishing protocols – was reiterated during several interviews as a preferred method of practice. Further, the idea of trust and relationship-building as being a pre-requisite for other activities to occur was also reiterated several times throughout the course of these interviews. Ultimately, each of these themes has been confirmed as being essential to furthering not only collaboration on Indigenous-led urban forest planning practices, but other forms of partnership between Indigenous communities and government entities as well.

Further, as was highlighted in the introduction section, it must be reiterated that these findings are not meant to speak for any demographic, organization, or Indigenous community. Rather, these interviews and discussions serve as a method of including the voices of those with lived experiences in these topic areas, and bringing this knowledge together in order to determine common themes and ideas. As always, it is important to continue self-guided learning and research using existing resources where possible, whether that be in academia, government, or within the community.

## **7.0 Discussion, Analysis, and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This study explored its research questions through a thematic literature review, a scan of collaborative governance in practice, and interviews with local participants with lived experience from the CRD area. This discussion and analysis chapter revisits the research questions and new themes uncovered from the research, as well as explores the extent to which the questions could be answered within the scope of this study. This section also discusses the significance of the research findings, offers several potential short, medium, and long-term recommendations based on the research conducted, and explores multiple areas for further potential research in the future.

### **7.2 Revisiting the Research Questions**

The primary research question that was examined through this research was: What strategies and collaborative approaches can local governments within the CRD consider in order to promote Indigenous-led, sustainable and culturally relevant urban forest management practices in order to aid reconciliation and increase equitable access to green spaces?

This research question was further explored by examining the following questions through the literature review, jurisdictional scan, and analysis of interviews with local community members:

- How can Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge better inform current planning practices to improve greenspace equity outcomes?
- What are some indicators that signal appropriate pathways for the integration of Indigenous perspectives in urban forest planning?
- What are some potential barriers for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in urban forest planning, and what strategies could help address these challenges and improve equity outcomes?
- What might co-governance in urban forest planning look like in practice?

Through the previously stated research methods, the collective findings suggest that there are several approaches that the CRD (or the municipalities within the region) could adopt in order to increase Indigenous inclusion in local urban forest planning. Participants emphasized the need for shared priorities, engaging early and often, relationship-building, and clear communication.

Key barriers included considerations around working within ongoing colonial systems, such as honoring Indigenous cultures and traditions in ways that are non-extractive or appropriative, ensuring continuity in work and relationship-building, and working within potential funding constraints. Preferred approaches emphasized proper engagement (such as through establishing protocols in the early stages), ensuring that all voices and concerns are heard equally, and an emphasis in bringing knowledge together in a relational way rather than an extractive one. Together, these findings not only help to address the research questions and inform several potential policy recommendations, but also raise broader considerations, which are explored in the following sections.

## **7.6 Recommendations**

The recommendations noted in this section are primarily geared towards audiences that include local governments, regional districts, and other municipalities that could potentially utilize these recommendations in their own local contexts. Specifically, these recommendations have been created to be reflective of the Capital Regional District's context and needs. This also includes the municipalities located within the Capital Regional District (such as the City of Victoria, the District of Saanich, and the District of Oak Bay) and potentially some local educators within the CRD region as well. These could include all levels of education depending on the recommendation, from elementary schools to the University of Victoria. Much of the above research also indicated that efforts towards either increased collaboration or education on Indigenous rights and reconciliation should be implemented early and on an ongoing basis wherever possible, insights which have been reflected in the below recommendations. Ideally, each of these recommendations could be implemented at different stages, building to the final long-term recommendation as needed. These recommendations were influenced and informed directly by the information gathered throughout this research project, including existing literature and examples found throughout the jurisdictional scan.

### *7.6.3 Long-term Recommendations*

Advancing genuine governance transformation and reconciliation requires an ongoing commitment to dialogue and relationship-building, supported by the creation of meaningful

spaces for the resurgence of Indigenous law and community knowledge (Redvers et al., 2022; Miller, 2019; Wiebe et al., 2019). In order to truly focus on the incorporation of Indigenous teachings and knowledge in urban forest policy within the Capital Regional District (CRD), the primary long-term recommendation based on the research conducted in this thesis is to create ongoing spaces for co-governance in urban forest planning at the regional level in order to foster improved collaboration and equity.

Existing co-governance arrangements in British Columbia demonstrate how such a recommendation could be feasible over the long term. For example, the Cowichan Watershed Board provides a collaborative governance model grounded in shared stewardship and Indigenous leadership, with a board consisting of people from the Cowichan Tribes, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, and people with special watershed expertise (Cowichan Watershed Board, n.d.). Further, the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve's co-management framework through the Archipelago Management Board illustrates how Indigenous and Crown governments can jointly exercise authority over land and resource management (Parks Canada, 2018). Made up of an equal number of representatives from the Council of Haida Nation and the Government of Canada, the Archipelago Management Board is responsible for the planning, oversight, and operation of the area (Parks Canada, 2025). While these models operate in different ecological and jurisdictional contexts, they offer relevant lessons for how Indigenous governance principles and authority can be operationalized in regional environmental planning.

This approach would directly address ongoing colonial planning and governance methods, and creates a space for open and continued dialogue that could also translate over to other issues in the future. In this sense, this recommendation could also help set a future precedent for establishing co-governance in other areas as well, in order to tackle other joint issues and priorities. As noted through the jurisdictional scans, several local government initiatives already exist in similar forms, as governments and First Nations work towards increased partnerships in various focus areas, and could serve as relevant frameworks.

Moreover, aligning this recommendation with existing CRD frameworks, such as Bylaw No. 4575 on Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship, could provide an institutional entryway

for advancing co-governance. Embedding Indigenous perspectives into regional decision-making through these means could strengthen current biodiversity and climate adaptation goals while also addressing long-standing equity gaps in access to greenspace, as noted through the themes in the literature review. Over time, the establishment of shared governance models in urban forest planning may also help further normalize co-governance between governments and First Nations.

### *7.6.2 Medium-term Recommendations*

While the emphasis remains on the importance of co-governance for the primary long-term recommendation, in order for the CRD to move towards more inclusive, equitable green-space planning, one of the medium-term recommendations is to continue to build relationships with local First Nations, potentially through exploring other initiatives in the medium term. Primarily, if there are expressions of interest and consent, one recommendation could be to create an ongoing urban forest and environmental justice advisory committee for urban forest planning and education within the CRD, either at the municipal or, preferably, the regional level.

Creating an advisory committee in this fashion would allow for government organizations and Indigenous communities to have a clear avenue for information sharing and relationship-building. However, the development of such an initiative would require the full involvement and leadership of the Indigenous communities as desired by the Indigenous communities. It is essential to ensure that this form of recommendation is not approached as the creation of yet another advisory body without the proper consent or approval, but rather that it reflects priorities identified by the affected Indigenous communities themselves. This includes upholding the principles of free, prior, and informed consent as being central to Indigenous self-determination. A similar example of a community-based Advisory Committee is the one established by the 'Namgis First Nation and the Village of Alert Bay, as noted in the jurisdictional scan.

If this recommendation were pursued, this could then serve as the first step towards establishing a space to share perspectives based on locally grounded lived experiences. Its implementation would also be considerably less complex, as there are numerous existing advisory committees

that could provide models for implementation while still allowing for adaptation to fit the specific context of the region.

However, there would need to be considerations regarding accountability and decision-making authority, in order to ensure that Indigenous priorities were upheld and that any advice given would lead to concrete outcomes. Such an approach would continue to operate within colonial frameworks, and is therefore less ideal, as these frameworks inherently constrain Indigenous self-determination and perpetuate systemic barriers. There is also the added risk that in taking this medium-term approach, further efforts towards co-governance could be forestalled. In addition, any advisory body of this kind would need to ensure that honoraria are provided in recognition of the time and expertise contributed by committee members and leaders.

#### *7.6.1 Short-term Recommendations*

In the shorter term, one of the first steps that organizations could take in moving towards more equitable urban forest planning practices and the goal of co-governance is to better operationalize active listening, data organization, and employee education. This was highlighted during several of the interviews with research participants as being key to both increasing efficiency and reducing pressures on Indigenous communities and First Nations.

One second short-term recommendation is to enhance education and training opportunities for urban forest planners, arborists, and other staff engaged in urban forestry. This could be achieved through the implementation of targeted courses, workshops, or assigned readings in the short term to strengthen awareness and capacity in areas of co-governance education and cultural sensitivity. This recommendation also keeps in the vein of reducing pressures on Indigenous communities, with the added benefit of increasing cultural mobility and awareness within the workplace. Further, this recommendation is supported by the aforementioned Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Call to Action #57 – Professional Development and Training for Public Servants, which calls upon municipal governments to provide and increase education for public service on the history and impacts of colonisation on Indigenous people and communities, increasing “skills- based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Through these shorter-term recommendations, hopefully staff can be more empowered to implement genuine engagement and collaboration models with First Nations communities, thereby uplifting inclusivity, self-determination, and continuity in practice in the longer term.

#### *7.6.4 Strategic Implementations and Recommendation Considerations*

The above recommendations are able to be connected and built upon one another, allowing for continuity in the process and time for continued relationship-building to take place. As such, and as with any policy recommendations, there are several considerations for implementation that must be considered: primarily, the limitations of pursuing this work within governmental structures, the importance of centering Indigenous priorities and agency, and the importance of maintaining community engagement and equity. Further expanding on these points, the advantages of institutional alignment and the importance of establishing proper accountability and monitoring methods are noted as well.

Firstly, as noted throughout the Recommendations section, existing power dynamics and the constraints of colonial structures must be taken into consideration when working within governmental frameworks. The development of partnerships, building trust in relationships, and expanding worldviews each require time in order to genuinely implement any meaningful forms of co-governance. Further to this point, any work towards any of these recommendations must remain centered on Indigenous-led priorities. In respecting equitable partnerships and Indigenous autonomy and self-determination, it is essential that engagement does not take place after the fact, but that these recommendations be led by and responsive to local Indigenous Nations' self-identified priorities, values, and laws. This also helps to ensure that collaboration is not tokenistic, but built on genuine relationships. For wider engagement, specific community and Nations' preferences in information sharing should be prioritized, such as through community newsletters or dedicated information sessions as noted through the research findings (Personal Communication, Participant #9, Victoria, 2025). Providing transparent and accessible opportunities for engagement and public participation ensures that more people have a voice in urban forest planning, aiding equity and ensuring greenspace benefits are shared across communities.

Further considerations for implementation also include examining the advantages of institutional policy alignment in implementing these recommendations. Since various forms of partnerships between local First Nations and governmental organizations already exist within the CRD, these can be analyzed for best practices and preferred communication methods, as noted in the jurisdictional scan section of this research. Some CRD initiatives and bylaws, such as the City of Victoria City Family, existing MOUs, or the Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Service Bylaw No. 4575, could be leveraged as platforms for early implementation as well. This could also include integrating recommendations into wider municipal and regional planning frameworks, such as those involving climate change adaptation strategies, land-use planning, and equity frameworks. Moreover, leveraging existing services could help ensure that there is adequate staff capacity and accountability measures in place to aid longer-term implementation as well. This could include establishing concrete goals from the outset, and setting structured timelines for regular progress reviews and accountability check-ins throughout the collaboration or co-governance processes. Through utilizing these methods, partners can strengthen accountability and ensure that priorities remain responsive to collective needs.

## 8.0 Conclusion

### 8.1 Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

As outlined in the Literature Review, the principles of Equity-Informed Collaboration, Two-Eyed Seeing, and Grounded Co-Governance and Relational Accountability continuously guided this research. By returning to the Conceptual Framework, this section examines how these concepts were able to contribute to a deeper understanding of the research, and vice versa.

Each of these three themes were continuously highlighted throughout this research, not only by nature of using them as guiding concepts, but naturally throughout conversations with interview participants as well. To begin, equity-informed collaboration was noted several times throughout the jurisdictional scan, literature review, and research findings as being an essential approach to partnership. As previously highlighted in the literature review, urban forest spaces have frequently been designed through colonial methods that are not inclusive to Indigenous communities, which can then lead to heightened inequities for residents (Breyer and Mohr, 2023; Steenberg, 2018; Watkins and Gerrish, 2018). Therefore, taking an equity-based approach is necessary to ensure the voices of varied demographics are heard, as examined through initiatives such as the City of Vancouver's Initiative Zones (Park People, 2021). Further, applying an equity-informed lens can help account for potential impacts on collaboration, including differences in cultural practices, the incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing, and the challenges posed by limited capacity within Indigenous communities that are often navigating multiple priorities and needs.

The idea of approaching collaboration through an equity-based lens also ties into the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing, or *Etuaptmumk*, as developed by Mi'kmaw Elders Murdena Marie Marshall, Albert Marshall, and biologist Cheryl Bartlett (Bartlett et al., 2012). The idea of uplifting Indigenous principles and ways of knowing was reiterated several times throughout the course of this study; for instance, throughout the interview process, several participants expressed the desire for governmental partners to find more methods of further including Indigenous knowledge in their work. Embracing diversity this way can serve to both aid equity and reconciliation in making spaces more inclusive as well as help sustainability and climate change mitigation practices.

Finally, the importance of grounded governance and relational accountability to the themes in this research was also highlighted throughout this study. Complementing the ideas of equity-informed collaboration and Two-Eyed Seeing, the additional lens of grounded governance promotes community relationships and uplifting Indigenous Peoples' relationships to lands and ecosystems within governance structures (Wiebe, 2024). In addition to tying into the above themes, applying a lens of grounded governance can support place-based knowledge and inclusion, principles which were identified by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants as highly significant. This has been demonstrated through several local initiatives, such as the W̱SÍ,̱KEM Ivy Project, the PEPAKEN HÁUTW Foundation, and the Hul'q'umi'num' and WSÁNEĆ First Nations and Parks Canada's work towards restoring Salish Sea Gardens. These themes can also be observed in government-to-government partnerships and MOUs such as the The City of Victoria City Family, the Capital Regional District (CRD), W̱JOĒĒLP (Tsartlip), and W̱SI̱KEM (Tseycum) First Nations Memorandum of Understanding, and the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council and District of Saanich ÁTOL,NEUEL Memorandum of Understanding.

## **8.2 Areas for Further Research**

### *8.2.1. Broadening the Comparative Jurisdictional Analysis*

Due to the chosen timeframe and scope of this research, this study was limited to British Columbia to maintain relevance and feasibility for the CRD area. However, there are several areas that could warrant further exploration for future studies, or to build on this work in the future. A jurisdictional scan of relevant areas and initiatives within B.C. was completed as a part of this research; however, this was kept to a mainly regional and provincial scale, with some wider Canadian literature included in the literature review section. A broader examination of jurisdictions beyond British Columbia could identify additional best practices in urban forest planning and co-governance.

Expanding to a more fulsome review of other Canadian provinces and territories, as well as comparable regions internationally, could offer valuable methodological and policy insights. Given more time, an opportunity to explore further jurisdictions outside of just BC could prove

useful to further explore other potential methods and existing research. This could include exploring international examples of co-governance and environmental equity for best practices as well as other examples within Canada. For example, expanding the scan to include countries with similar climates such as New Zealand, areas of the United States, and Sweden, could give interesting insight into what other countries' preferred practices are in terms of both Indigenous collaboration and climate change mitigation within this field.

### *8.2.3 Exploring Intersectionality with the Land Back Movement*

The intersections between greenspace equity, green gentrification, and land ownership – which were raised in multiple interviews – also point to the potential relevance of the Land Back movement in urban forest planning, a concept which would be interesting to explore in further research. The Land Back movement is often perceived primarily as the transfer of legal ownership of land, whether private or public, to Indigenous Peoples. However, these interpretations are situated within a colonial framework, as the very notion of land “ownership” reflects colonial legal constructs that are often incompatible with Indigenous worldviews.

Within the context of urban forest governance, it would be interesting to explore how the Land Back movement could extend beyond only the idea of “ownership” to also include inclusive, Indigenous-led stewardship, decision-making, and knowledge integration. This could involve co-management models, the recognition of Indigenous authority in planning processes, and the restoration of Indigenous land-based practices in urban settings; each of which are themes and ideas that are highly relevant to this research. An expanded investigation could explore how Land Back might be applied in ways that align with the principle of free, prior, and informed consent, avoid extractive engagement, and reflect the diverse understandings Indigenous communities themselves hold about the term. For example, Land Back in this context could mean restoring Indigenous presence, leadership, and ecological governance in urban forest planning, recognizing that these lands have been stewarded by Indigenous Peoples for millennia. Such research could further investigate how reconciliation and decolonization efforts can be meaningfully advanced when operating within inherently colonial municipal systems, and how those systems might adapt to share decision-making power in practice.

### 8.3 Significance of Findings

As has been reiterated throughout this study, while there are many reconciliation and equity-focused initiatives that have been uplifted within the CRD in recent years, urban forest planning processes in the region still lack a cohesive, collaborative means of better including Indigenous perspectives, teachings, and knowledge. This gap hinders efforts toward achieving urban forest equity, decolonization, and reconciliation. In order to improve equitable outcomes for the future, this gap must be addressed in a way that is inclusive, culturally appropriate, and Indigenous-led.

The primary significance of these findings is in the value that this research lends to adopting a regional, localized approach focused specifically on these topics within the CRD region. While some literature exists regarding the concepts explored in this research, such as Indigenous worldviews in planning and the links between equity and climate change mitigation, there is limited existing research that focuses on perspectives within the CRD region specifically. This means that the findings in this study, particularly the perspectives highlighted in the findings of this research, can shine light on local viewpoints and therefore add relevance for policymakers and local government employees within the CRD region.

These findings also emphasize the need to adjust approaches to collaboration when working within the confines of existing power imbalances and colonial structures. If these structures are not challenged, the financial and timeline pressures on organizations may lead to tokenistic or extractive engagement with Indigenous communities, limiting the legitimacy of collaboration and potentially damaging relationships in the process. Moreover, the findings in this research serve to reinforce and re-emphasize the rights of Indigenous communities who have been stewarding these areas for time immemorial, including the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples. As noted earlier in this thesis, the foundational principles of these findings – the desire to support increased inclusion and collaboration within the region through a lens of inclusivity and reconciliation – are also supported under British Columbia (B.C.)'s *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan*, which provides the framework for the province and municipalities to fulfill the goals of the United Nations Declaration (Government of British Columbia, 2022). Through the research and recommendations provided, this thesis highlights

potential opportunities for change moving forward, as local governments continue to adjust policies and work to improve active collaboration in governance.

#### **8.4 Final Reflections and Conclusion**

This research set out to address questions regarding the existing inequities in urban forest planning, particularly in the Capital Regional District area, and how this impacts greenspace equity, reconciliation, and climate change mitigation. Primarily, it sought to examine how urban forest planning practices can be made more inclusive to Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and through the findings highlighted the need for an active shift towards co-governance and Indigenous-led urban forest management practices. This also served to uplift the importance of this work as well as the benefits that can be shared throughout the community from these partnerships. This research was completed by conducting a thematic literature review, localized jurisdictional scan, and several interviews with community members local to the CRD.

Based on this research, several short, medium, and long-term recommendations were suggested, primarily focused on increasing education, organizational capacity, and inclusive practices, as well as potential steps towards establishing co-governance on this topic. Conducting this research highlighted that while several strong partnerships and initiatives exist between local municipalities, the CRD, and Indigenous communities, there is a need to further advance Indigenous-led urban forest co-management. While this research highlighted several partnerships in action, as well as some local perspectives on themes of success and potential challenges, further research is needed to better understand how this work could be established most effectively in the CRD area. In particular, while municipalities and regional districts can and should take it upon themselves to increase education and more inclusive policy, further discussions with Indigenous communities must be had in order to specify their own priorities and ensure autonomy in any policy-sharing processes.

While the related priorities of the communities involved will continue to shift and thus this subject area will remain ever evolving, this research was undertaken in the hopes of providing insight to localized thoughts, concerns, and ideas on the topic. Hopefully, this can eventually

help serve as a tool for both individual and organizational reflections on how important these viewpoints are in policy, offering a chance for long-term healing, reconciliation, and resiliency.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participant Consent Form



#### **Participant Consent Form**

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##### **Equity and Decolonization through Indigenous-Led Urban Forest Planning in the Capital Regional District**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Equity and Decolonization through Indigenous-Led Urban Forest Planning in the Capital Regional District*. As a graduate student, I am conducting this research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Public Administration. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sarah Marie Wiebe, who can be contacted by e-mail at [swiebe@uvic.ca](mailto:swiebe@uvic.ca).

This research is being funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC).

##### **Purpose and Objectives**

This research aims to study how urban forest planning in British Columbia's Capital Regional District (CRD) can be conducted in the most equitable way possible, and how Indigenous teachings can be more emphasized in this type of land-use planning in order to aid decolonization and reconciliation efforts.

Our research questions is: What strategies and collaborative approaches can local governments within the CRD adopt to promote Indigenous-led, sustainable and culturally relevant urban forest management practices in order to aid reconciliation and increase equitable access to green spaces?

These questions will be answered through qualitative methods, involving secondary and primary research (interviews).

##### **Importance of this Research**

This project applies an equity-informed lens to create a respectful and inclusive space for Indigenous community members and urban forest planners to share their perspectives, seeking to inform urban forest policymaking and promote collaborative governance structures within the CRD.

##### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your experience as either a local Indigenous community member with lived experiences, knowledge, or insights about traditional ecological practices and perspectives on urban forest planning, or as an urban forest planner within the Capital Regional District involved in planning, managing, or influencing urban forest policies and practices in the region.

##### **What is involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include completing an interview. Written notes and audio recordings will be taken by our research team, and a transcription can be made available afterwards if you wish.

##### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including travel to any in person meetings or emotional discomfort when discussing historically colonial planning practices or environmental inequity.

##### **Risks**

The only anticipated risk is the potential discomfort from discussing colonial structures and their ongoing impacts, particularly within urban forest planning and environmental inequity. These topics may be sensitive for some participants. To help mitigate these risks, the research team aims to provide a safe space for dialogue, with participants able to pause or withdraw at any time.

#### **Benefits**

Participation in this study will provide an opportunity for participants to share their valuable insights and experiences, contributing to a deeper understanding of how Indigenous perspectives can be integrated into urban forest planning. This research aims to enhance knowledge on best practices for co-governance, reconciliation, and the incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in environmental decision-making. By amplifying Indigenous voices, the study seeks to foster more equitable access to green spaces and promote environmental justice. Ultimately, the findings could help shape policies that support sustainability and inclusivity, advancing reconciliation and contributing to the broader goal of green space equity in urban areas. While the focus is on the Capital Regional District, the findings could have broader applicability in other regions or municipalities striving to integrate Indigenous perspectives into urban planning and governance.

#### **Compensation**

You will not receive compensation for taking part in the study, but you will receive a thank-you card as a small thank-you.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be used only with your permission granted in writing.

#### **Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity, all interview results will be included without identifying information, unless you have provided documented consent to waive confidentiality. You may use a pseudonym for the interview if you wish. All participants will be included anonymously unless written consent has been provided below.

#### **Confidentiality**

The limits to confidentiality in this study may arise from the context and the nature of the participants. Some participants may be public figures, in which case their identities could be more easily inferred due to their roles or positions if they choose to be named in the study. Participants may also choose to not remain anonymous in the dissemination of results because Indigenous identity, culture, and traditional knowledge are deeply tied to personal and community identity, and recognizing their contributions aligns with the study's focus on inclusion, respect, and honoring the voices of those involved. The use of pseudonyms may be offered if participants prefer. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all transcripts and recordings in a password-protected computer which is only accessed by members of the research team.

#### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared through the publication of the researcher's thesis (most UVic theses are posted on 'UVicSpace' and can be accessed by the public). The research results will likely be disseminated through an executive summary, which will provide a concise overview of the findings, as well as a link to the full thesis for participants and interested groups. The executive summary and link to the thesis will also be shared with participants if they prefer, in order to ensure that they are informed of the research outcomes. There is also the potential for this research to be discussed at scholarly meetings or published in an article/chapter/book in the future.

#### **Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be kept by the members of the research team. A copy of any transcripts and visual materials will be provided back to participants upon request. These materials will be stored for a maximum of 5 years before being disposed of, or will be deleted upon the completion of the researcher's thesis.

**Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Sydney Stoltz  
Master of Public Administration student, University of Victoria  
Phone: 250-718-8279  
Email: [sstoltz@uvic.ca](mailto:sstoltz@uvic.ca)

Sarah Marie Wiebe  
Assistant Professor, University of Victoria  
Phone: 250-986-4298  
Email: [swiebe@uvic.ca](mailto:swiebe@uvic.ca)

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

**COVID-19:** Participants will be advised if they have or may have come into contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. Contact information for participants will be stored in a separate file from research data in the event that follow up is needed.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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*PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT only if you consent:*

I consent to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study: \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant to provide initials)

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

### Interview Guide - Equity and Decolonization through Indigenous-Led Urban Forest Planning in the Capital Regional District

**Purpose of the Study:** This research seeks to explore how Indigenous perspectives, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge, can be integrated into urban forest planning to promote environmental equity, reconciliation, and sustainable management practices in the Capital Regional District.

**Research Question:** How can Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge inform urban forest planning to achieve equitable and sustainable outcomes in the Capital Regional District?

#### Interview Details:

- **Duration:** Approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour
- **Format:** Semi-structured interview to allow for open dialogue and exploration of key themes.
- **Recording and Confidentiality:** With your consent, the interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. All information will remain confidential and used solely for research purposes.

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#### Sample Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your role and your experience with urban forest planning or related areas?
2. How do you think Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge can be integrated into current planning practices to improve greenspace equity outcomes?
3. In your opinion, what are some of the key signs of success or achievements in integrating Indigenous perspectives in urban forest planning?
4. What are some challenges that you foresee with integrating Indigenous knowledge into urban forest planning?
5. What strategies do you believe could help address these challenges and improve outcomes?
6. (For urban planners) How does your work currently integrate Indigenous perspectives, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge? Are there any additional areas where you think that this inclusion can be strengthened?
7. What would your preferred approach to co-governance in urban forest planning look like? Are there any principles that you believe are essential for advancing reconciliation and participatory governance?
8. Is there anyone else that you think I should speak with who has relevant experience or could provide valuable insights on this topic?

Appendix C: Interview Flyer

Sydney Stoltz – Master of Public Administration student,  
University of Victoria

## Call for Interview Participants: Equity and Decolonization through Indigenous-Led Urban Forest Planning in the CRD

**We invite you to participate in an interview about Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, environmental equity, and urban forest planning.**

**Purpose:** This research seeks to explore how Indigenous perspectives, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge, can be integrated into urban forest planning to promote environmental equity, reconciliation, and sustainable management practices in the Capital Regional District.

### Who Can Participate?

We are seeking participants from **two key groups:**

- **Local Indigenous Community Members:** Individuals with lived experiences, knowledge, or insights about traditional ecological practices and perspectives on urban forest planning.
- **Urban Forest Planners within the Capital Regional District:** Professionals involved in planning, managing, or influencing urban forest policies and practices within the CRD.

Your participation will help inform research on integrating Indigenous perspectives into urban forest planning to promote environmental equity and reconciliation.

### Contact

- The interview should take approx. 30 minutes-1 hour
- For questions or to participate in an interview, please contact [sstoltz@uvic.ca](mailto:ssoltz@uvic.ca)

**This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sarah Wiebe. For any questions or concerns, you may contact her at [swiebe@uvic.ca](mailto:swiebe@uvic.ca).**

Interview slots available from March 1st - May 28th, 2025

## Appendix D: Participant Table

Participant	Role / Professional Affiliation	Relevant Experience and Lived Context
Participant #1	Living Lab Program Director	Experience supporting community-driven and Indigenous social and environmental justice initiatives through partnerships with post-secondary institutions, including work with the University of Victoria's former Office of Community-Based Research and Environmental Law Centre and CBR Canada.
Participant #2	Local Government Manager – Urban Forest Services	Professional experience overseeing municipal urban forest management within a local government context.
Participant #3	Local Government Employee – Parks Planning	Experience in parks and urban forest planning and policy development within municipal government.
Participant #4	Public Sector Employee	Experience working across multiple levels of government, including the Capital Regional District, with recent work involving collaboration with local Indigenous communities.
Participant #5	PhD Student; Living Lab Research and Program Advisor; Elected Band Council Member	Academic and applied research experience related to community-based initiatives; elected member of the STÁUTW Band Council. <i>Self-identified as Indigenous.</i>
Participant #6	Associate Professor	Academic expertise in community-engaged research relevant to local land and resource management, and heritage conservation of sacred sites and places.
Participant #7	Climate Equity Lead & Community Engagement Support	Experience working in community social planning and collaborating with Indigenous communities in Canada and Guatemala, with a focus on community development, food sovereignty, and culturally grounded climate adaptation.
Participant #8	Ecosystems Director - PEPÁKEN HÁUTW Foundation	Leadership experience in ecosystem stewardship, restoration, and land-based initiatives within an Indigenous community based organizational context.
Participant #9	Visual Artist and Land Steward - WSÍ, KEM Ivy Project	Experience as a visual artist and land steward, with advocacy focused on Indigenous ways of being and relationships with ecosystems. <i>Self-identified as Indigenous.</i>