

The Monopoly System of Wildlife Management of the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Early History of British Columbia¹

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During the centuries before the white man's arrival in British Columbia, the native peoples, belonging to ten linguistic groups and numbering from 80,000 to 125,000,² developed a system of land tenure that provided the base for effective management of major animal, fish and plant resources needed for a livelihood. Because this system lasted well into the European/Canadian fur-trade era, there is considerable documentation of it and of the monopoly wildlife management practised by the Indians of British Columbia at the time of contact.

Each of the ten Indian language groups divided into several bands or tribes who separately held a generally well-defined territory, the sovereignty of which was recognized by neighbouring tribes. Tribal territory, in turn, divided into hunting territories and fishing sites, the possessory rights of which were held and strictly guarded by a clan, a smaller family group or even an individual. Usually these rights were handed down from one generation to another. This monopoly control provided the essential conditions upon which the efficient management of important resources could be implemented. The recorded evidence of Indian ownership of hunting and fishing grounds in British Columbia covers the entire province.³

¹ This article is an extraction of the author's MA thesis, "A History of Wildlife Management Practices in British Columbia to 1918," University of Victoria, 1981. Throughout this account the territory of the present province will be referred to as British Columbia, notwithstanding that it had not attained provincial status during the period under discussion.

² Wilson Duff, *The Impact of the White Man, The Indian History of British Columbia*, Anthropology in British Columbia, no. 5 (Victoria: Provincial Museum of Natural History Memoir and Anthropology, 1964), pp. 38-39.

³ For an overview of hunting and fishing territory ownership by British Columbia Indians see D. S. Davidson, *Family Hunting Territories in Northwestern North America* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1928), pp. 5-34. Davidson discusses the various types of ownership and compares eastern woodland Indian land tenure systems with that of British Columbia Indians. His 1928 article is based on the assumption that both eastern and western tenure systems evolved in prehistoric times.

However, since the publication of this article, anthropologists have divided on the contentious issue of whether land tenure systems of eastern Indian tribes were aboriginal or a response to the European fur trade. Two leading exponents of aboriginal land ownership, Frank G. Speck and Loren C. Eisely, vigorously defend their position in the article, "Significance of Hunting Territory Systems of the Algonkian in Social Theory," *American Anthropologist* (American Anthropological Association, vol. 41, no. 2, April-June 1939), pp. 269-80. Among many others who concur with the two writers is John M. Cooper, who, in his article, "Is the Algonquian Family Hunting Grounds System Pre-Columbian?" *American Anthropologist* (American Anthropological Association, vol. 41, no. 1, January-March 1939), pp. 66-90, puts forth the view that, while aboriginal family ownership was probable, there was a blurred line between band sovereignty and family ownership in severity. Like Cooper, many anthropologists have argued not only the question of aboriginal versus historic beginnings of land ownership, but also the types of ownership: e.g., nuclear family, enlarged family, clan, allotment by chiefs or ownership by individuals. Those anthropologists who contend that family hunting territories developed as a result of fur-trade competition and the consequent diminution of game and fur bearers are exemplified by such people as Eleanor Leacock, who expounds this argument in "The Montaignais 'Hunting Territory' and the Fur Trade," *American Anthropologist* (American Anthropological Association, vol. 56, no. 5, part 2, memoir no. 78, October 1954), pp. 1-71, and Charles A. Bishop, who expresses similar views in "The Emergence of Hunting Territories Among the Northern Ojibwa," *Ethnology* (vol. 9, no. 1, January 1970), pp. 1-15.

Like Davidson, I contend that there is convincing evidence that the Indians of British Columbia developed land tenure systems within recognized territories during aboriginal times. The why or how the systems developed is not relevant to this article. However, I can offer three possible reasons why: the first reason is that the comparatively dense Indian population on the Pacific watershed put pressure on the resources; the second is that the Pacific watershed Indians relied heavily on anadromous fish for sustenance and trade items — consequently they lived rather sedentary lives compared to many eastern tribes; and the third is that the Indians did not exploit the resources solely for local and tribal use but also for intertribal trade. For archaeological evidence that this trade went back as far as ten thousand years ago, see Roy L. Carlson's paper on "Prehistoric Trade in British Columbia: Obsidian" that he presented to the B.C. Studies Conference in Vancouver in February 1984.

Aurel Krause provides further corroboration of aboriginal intertribal trade in his 1885 work on the Thlingit Indians. He writes:

Besides hunting and fishing, the Thlingit devotes the greatest part of his energy to trade. Long before the coming of the Europeans this was carried on; not only the neighbouring tribes exchanged different products of hunting and fishing, but there is evidence that more distant coastal territory and remote interior tribes carried on an active trade to tribe trade through to the Thlingit.

... That this trade is not a new custom and that it moves along ancient trails and probably was only intensified by the interference of the Europeans can be seen from the reports of the fur traders who found the natives endowed with all the tricks of trading, and we can see it even today in the household possessions of the Thlingit, which are the products of many different places. The caribou skin which the Chilkat use for their clothing, the sinew with which they sew, the lichen with which they dye their dancing blankets are all secured through trade with the Athapaskan-speaking Indians of the interior.^a

^aAurel Krause, *The Thlingit Indians; Results of a Trip to the Northwest Coast of America and the Bering Straits*, trans. Erna Gunther from original edition, *Die Tlinkit-Indianer* . . . , Jena: Hermann Costenoble, 1885, English edition published

The North West Company trader, Daniel Harmon, described the land tenure system of two tribes, the Beaver and Sekanni, who lived east of the Cordillera :

Every tribe has its own particular tract of country; and this is divided again, among the several families, which compose the tribe. Rivers, lakes and mountains, serve them as boundaries; and the limits of the territory which belongs to each family are as well known to the tribe, as the lines which separate farms are, by the farmers, in the civilized world.⁴

Harmon then gives perhaps the earliest description of the conservation measures that could result from ownership :

These people have nothing with which to purchase their necessities, excepting the skins of animals, which are valuable for their fur; and should they destroy all these animals in one season, they would cut off their means of subsistence. A prudent Indian, whose lands are not well stocked with animals, kills only what are absolutely necessary to procure such articles as he cannot well dispense with.⁵

In the competitive environment in the area east of the Rockies, where liquor was often a trade item, an Indian was not always prudent. Numerous accounts indicate that the Sekanni did not always defend their territory against the encroachments of the Beaver people who were pressed by the Cree.⁶ However, territoriality was probably much more stable in the pre-contact times because hunting for fur bearers was much less intense.

Like the Déné (Athapaskan) linguistic group of northeastern British Columbia, two tribes of which were described by Harmon, the Déné tribes west of the Rockies, the Carrier, Chilcotin and Tahltan, recognized territoriality and family ownership. For example, the Tahltans of the

for the American Ethnology Society (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1956), pp. 126-27.

In this and succeeding paragraphs, Krause describes numerous trade items like various utensils, copper, food and slaves that the Thlingets acquired from near and distant tribes.

There is no doubt the intertribal trade was well in place before the arrival of the Europeans. It could have succeeded only if recognized land tenure systems existed.

⁴ Daniel Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America* (Andover: Printed by Flagg and Gould, 1820), p. 379.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

⁶ For the first recording of the encroachment see Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the Years 1789 and 1793* (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig Ltd., 1971), p. 140.

upper Stikine and Taku watersheds divided their country among clans and subdivided them among households and individuals. Ownership rights were so well respected that one who killed an animal for food while travelling through another's territory gave the pelt to the landowner.⁷

According to ethnographer A. P. Niblack, the other Indian tribes of the northwest coast also recognized family ownership of territory:

The whole of the territory on the northwest coast adjacent to the Indian villages is proportioned out amongst the different families or households as hunting, fishing, and berrying grounds, and handed down from generation to generation and recognized as personal property. Privilege for an Indian other than the owner, to hunt, fish, or gather berries can only be secured by payment. Each stream has its owners, whose summercamp, often of a permanent nature, can be seen where the salmon run in greatest abundance. Often such streams are held in severalty by two or more families with equal privilege of fishing.⁸

A similar type of land tenure applied to the Thlinget, and to the Tsimshian, the Nootka and the Kwakiutl further south.⁹ Apparently the Kwakiutl were quite hostile about trespass. Franz Boas, the noted anthropologist, reported that if a Kwakiutl goat hunter found another hunting on his land there was a fight and generally one or both were killed.¹⁰

Even the Haida, who depended as much on the sea for food as they did on the streams, had developed a system of territorial rights, although it was somewhat different from those of the mainland tribes. John Swanton found that

each Haida family had its own creek, creeks, or portion of a creek, where its smokehouses stood. Some of the smaller creeks are said to have had no owners; and, on the other hand, some families are said to have had no land. In the latter case they were obliged to wait until another family was through before picking berries, and had to pay for the privilege.¹¹

⁷ G. T. Emmons, *The Tahltan Indians*, The Museum Anthropological Publications, vol. IV, no. 1 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1911), p. 28.

⁸ Albert P. Niblack, *The Coast Indians of Southern Alaska and Northern British Columbia*, Smithsonian Institution, United States National Museum (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), p. 298.

⁹ Davidson, *Family Hunting Territories*, pp. 24-25. See also Krause, *The Thlingit Indians*, p. 137.

¹⁰ Franz Boas, "Ethnology of the Kwakiutl," *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1913-1914, part 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 1345.

¹¹ John R. Swanton, *Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida*, vol. V, part 1, *Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History* (Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1905), p. 71.

Sometimes territories were individually owned, as in the case of one Tsimshian man who owned four hunting territories.¹² This practice appears reasonable in an area where only a few men of the coastal tribes would be skilled at hunting such animals as mountain goats. But generally ownership of land and streams passed matrilineally to heads of clans and families.¹³

Some bands also established rights to fishing sites outside their home territories. For example, the Cowichan band of the Coast Salish on Vancouver Island and other Coast Salish bands who did not have adequate or any sockeye streams on their home territories moved up the Fraser River during the spawning season to catch sockeye salmon. Some of these groups owned fishing sites on the Fraser while others leased them.¹⁴

Through their ownership of fishing and hunting territories, Indian clans were able to establish certain conservation measures to ensure satisfactory annual harvests of the most necessary species. Available records indicate that only certain fish and animals were accorded such protection. Of these, one of the most important groups was the Pacific salmon, upon which all of the tribes on the Pacific watershed placed high dependency. While doing field work with the Coast Salish, anthropologist Homer G. Barnett had a conversation with an old chief of the Sliammon, a Coast Salish Band that lives in the vicinity of the modern town of Powell River, and one of the many tribes that migrated to the Fraser for the sockeye runs. The chief told Barnett that to conserve or "make more" fish, the Indians did not eat female salmon or their eggs during the first half of the fishing season but returned them live to the river. Furthermore, since it was necessary for a number of fish, including the male, to return to the spawning streams, dams were deliberately constructed to allow salmon to leap over them during high water. Barnett concluded that the Salish frowned upon the wanton destruction of both fish and game.¹⁵

Co-operative fishing and hunting, with hereditary ownerships of particular sites, were also integral parts of the social structure of the Kootenay Indians. The Lower Kootenay bands depended more upon fish than

¹² Davidson, *Family Hunting Territories*, p. 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴ Hilary Stewart, *Indian Fishing Early Methods on the Northwest Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), p. 20.

¹⁵ Homer G. Barnett, *The Coast Salish of British Columbia* (Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 1955), pp. 68, 88-89.

game, and the Upper Kootenays depended more upon game. The co-operation between the bands was in the sharing of the expertise. The Upper Kootenays invited the Lower Kootenays to hunt bison with them on the plains, and the Lower Kootenays returned this hospitality by inviting the Upper Kootenays to share their weir fishing with them.¹⁶

The Kootenay Indians fished salmon, but the trout species of the Salmonidae, and suckers, sturgeon and whitefish were just as important. Because so much of the Kootenay fishing was done in sloughs of the river and at the mouths of the smaller streams, the most important fishing was done by traps or weirs. Such fishing required organization and controls.¹⁷

The trout fishing organizations of the Upper and Lower Kootenay tribes differed. The Upper bands allowed chiefs to grant franchises to individuals, who were each permitted to construct traps and weirs at a particular site on a specific stream. No more than one site was allowed each fisherman. In return for the franchise, the fisherman had to share his fishing produce with eight or nine families. The few men who were awarded franchises did not own the streams — only the weirs, traps and the catch. They were allowed to keep the lion's share of the trout and to enjoy the prestige of being the chief community providers. But the stream and the fish stocks were the property of the people under the supervision of their principal socio-economic functionary, the "Guide Chief"; they could not be abused by the fishermen without punishment. In this manner the Upper Kootenay assured, as far as possible, an adequate annual supply of trout.¹⁸

By contrast, the Lower Kootenay organized their trout fishing as a group effort under the direction of a fishing chief, who inspected the traps and instructed the workers.¹⁹ Both of these methods ensured a well-managed harvest with minimum waste. Furthermore, they both benefited all the people.

After white fishermen began to compete with Indian fishermen on the Fraser River system, the federal Inspector of Fisheries, Alexander Caulfield Anderson, investigated complaints that the Indians on Adams Lake had destroyed salmon fry and spawn. He interrogated interpreter Antoine Gregoire of Kamloops, who refuted the allegation in a sworn disposition,

¹⁶ Harry Holbert Turney-High, *Ethnography of the Kutenai*, Memoir No. 56 (Menasha, Wisconsin: American Anthropological Association, 1941), p. 44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46, 50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

dated 24 September 1877. Gregoire's testimony reveals the Indians' attitude towards their usage of salmon, their most valuable resource:

That early in the year, from the end of April to the middle of May, the waters (in the shallows) are usually alive with the young fish. That the Indians — who in any case could have no object in catching them for food, having copious resources in their trout and other fisheries — abstain from molesting them on higher grounds. They know, and say, that if the young fish are destroyed, the shoals returning from the sea will be proportionately diminished. That the Indians with this fact in view, are careful not to destroy, wantonly or wastefully, the mature fish, or to impede their passage to the spawning beds. That the barriers they construct in rivers are only to retard the passage of the fish, to enable the Indians to obtain their necessary winter supply, and that these temporary obstructions are thrown open, as necessary, to give passage to the ascending fish.

2. As to the assertion made some years ago that the Indians destroy the spawn in the beds, by gathering it for food?

That the allegation is altogether unfounded. That even if it were practicable (which to any extent is very questionable) the Chief would not permit it, for reasons before stated. The roes of the fish caught and cured for consumption, are, of course, preserved, and form an item of the usual diet of the Indians.²⁰

Gregoire emphasized that to his knowledge the alleged practices were never carried on elsewhere, and that his experience extended to the upper Fraser. In conclusion the interpreter testified that the chiefs were so careful of the salmon they would not even

permit the Indians to use the pole to propel canoes in passing over the spawning shoals, after the spawn is deposited, but the paddle only. Also, that in the spring, when the children sometimes seek to amuse themselves by making mimic weirs to entrap the young fish, they are at once made to desist by their parents. In brief, he says that he believes firmly that the Indians act most prudently with regard to the salmon, and do all in their power to protect them.²¹

These conservation measures were effective only when the Indians adhered to monopolistic land and stream ownership.

Other species of fish were also important to the coastal Indians, although there appears to be little recorded evidence of conservation measures for them. One of these was the eulachon, an anadromous fish which frequents most of the rivers of the mainland coast of British Co-

²⁰ Canada, Department of Marine and Fisheries, Reports of the Fisheries Officers, 1877, Ottawa, *Sessional Papers*, Appendix no. 1, 1878, 41 Vict., p. 297.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 297-98.

lumbia. Because the eulachon oil was highly regarded as a condiment for many foods, it was a valuable export item for island and interior trade. Families or clans owned the valued eulachon fishing sites. Coastal villages without hereditary rights to eulachon fisheries occasionally acquired temporary rights by purchase. The Indians would camp on the purchased site until the fishing and processing were completed, and then return home with the oil.²² It is likely that the spawn and the harvest of such a highly prized fish were managed as well as that of salmon.

There is evidence that herring spawn enhancement was practised by Indians to whom this food source was just as popular in the pre-contact era as it is with the Japanese today. To produce more spawn, the Indians who owned herring spawning beds set out evergreen branches on the kelp beds upon which the herring naturally lay their eggs. These branches, laden with spawn, were collected along with some of the spawn-covered kelp.²³ By collecting herring spawn on evergreen branches, the Indians conserved the spawn and prevented it from being washed ashore with the tide and killed. Most of the spawn-laden seaweed was then left undisturbed, leaving the spawning habitat intact. This is an early example of habitat protection. Only strict ownership of these areas prevented poaching or free-for-all fishing which, had it occurred, would have made the effort to increase spawn productivity futile.

The unique status of the most necessary mammal species, comparable to that of salmon among the fish species, can be given to the beaver over all the mammals in the pre-contact era. Perhaps the most ubiquitous of British Columbia's larger mammals, the beaver was a reliable source of food and blankets for many tribes. Fortunately, it was one important animal whose harvest could be managed carefully because it practised a sedentary, familial lifestyle. For the same reason, the beaver could be extirpated easily on any one stream. Realizing this, Indian tribes who placed high dependency upon beaver regulated their harvest through monopoly control.

The best documentary evidence of the ownership and conservation practices regarding the beaver relates to the Carrier Indians of the wide-ranging Déné linguistic group. The beaver streams among the Carriers were family-owned. During his journey through the area in 1828, George Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company observed that parts of the Carrier country were not well stocked with beaver and that if the hunting

²² Stewart, *Indian Fishing Methods*, p. 150.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

grounds had been common to all the natives, the beaver would have been destroyed because the Carrier population was considerable.²⁴ Fortunately the Carrier owners took only such quantity as they required "and any encroachment, even by their next door neighbours, is tantamount to a declaration of hostilities, and frequently punished by Death. . . ."²⁵ Simpson did not exaggerate the ferocity of the Carrier in protecting their necessary resources. Ten years earlier, Daniel Harmon described the Carrier's reaction to Iroquois intrusions onto their territory:

As they [Iroquois] are mere rovers, they do not feel the same interest as those who permanently reside here, in keeping the stock of animals good, and therefore they make great havock [*sic*] among the game, destroying alike the animals which are young and old. A number of Iroquois have passed several summers on this side of the mountain, which circumstance they knew to be displeasing to the Indians here, who have often threatened to kill them, if they persisted in destroying the animals on their lands. These menaces were disregarded. A month since, an Iroquois, with his wife and two children were all killed, while asleep, by two Carriers of the village, which melancholy event, I hope, will prevent any of the Iroquois from coming into this region again.²⁶

Territorial rights to tribal, family or individual hunting grounds allowed Indians to develop hunting methods that could enable them to conserve the game population. For example, the Thompson Indians of the Interior Salish linguistic group hunted deer when these animals were making their fall migration from the high country to the low, by constructing fences and setting snares. Like the fishing station and eagles' eyries, the Thompson Indians' snares, traps and fences were inherited by the male members of a family. The mountain passes, where the deer were trapped, and the equipment used were individually owned.²⁷ Recognized ownership prevented competition and, consequently, encouraged discriminate use of the snare.

Hunters often used trained dogs for hunting bear, deer, caribou and elk. The trained hunting dogs were cared for by the hunters, who frequently washed or sweat-bathed them and purged them with medicine

²⁴ E. E. Rich, ed., *Simpson's 1828 Journey to the Columbia* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1947), p. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁶ Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages*, p. 268.

²⁷ James Teit, *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia*, Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. 1, part 4 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), pp. 293-94.

before a hunt.²⁸ The dogs were used to pursue the deer or elk after the hunter spotted the tracks of a big buck or bull. The dogs ran the prey to water where the other hunters stood watch. But the dog who could hold the animal at bay until the hunter arrived was considered the most valuable.²⁹ Dogs are still used in many European countries for the same reason, to facilitate the hunting and killing of a mature animal. Without the use of trained dogs, Indians would have been much more indiscriminate in their killing of game.

Certain Indians also effected a measure of habitat improvement by periodically burning forested land.³⁰ They knew that certain berry species (particularly huckleberries) inundate a burned-over area and that new growths of deciduous trees and browse in these burns attract members of the deer family. Walter Colquhoun Grant, the first independent settler on Vancouver Island, complained of the Indians' "abominable custom" of setting fires to the forest, and James Teit noted that the Thompson Indians regularly set fire to the hillsides so they might secure a greater number of roots.³¹ As late as 1906, L. H. Estell, in his report of a game inspection trip in the East Kootenay, remarked on the Indians' habit of deliberately setting forest fires which he thought was "for the purpose of burning off the timber and brush in order to make it easier for them to hunt and slaughter game."³² However, Estell also noted that, notwithstanding the many years of indiscriminate slaughter by many Indians and whites who hunted there, the presently large numbers of moose and elk made the area a great game preserve. Ironically, he did not connect the burning by Indians with the stability of, or the growth in, the ungulate population. It would take the white man many more years to appreciate that the setting of periodic fires by the Indians was a form of manage-

²⁸ James Teit, *The Lillooet Indians*, Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. 4, part 5 (Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1906), p. 226. James Teit, *The Shuswap*, Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. 2, part 7 (Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1909), p. 520.

²⁹ Teit, *Thompson Indians*, p. 245.

³⁰ For an account of how the eastern woodland Indians of North America made effective use of fire to improve bird and mammal habitat see: James B. Trefethen, *An American Crusade for Wildlife* (New York: Winchester Press, 1975), pp. 118-19.

³¹ James E. Hendrickson, ed., "Two Letters from Walter Colquhoun Grant," *BC Studies*, no. 26 (Summer 1975), p. 11; Teit, *Thompson Indians*, p. 230.

³² L. H. Estell to A. Bryan Williams, undated report Jan. 1906-July 1907 correspondence, Provincial Game Warden, Official Correspondence, GR 446, uncatalogued material, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

ment designed to alter the environment to increase the yield of certain plants and game.

Indian wildlife management practices continued in British Columbia long after the arrival of white traders. Yet it was during the three decades immediately following the arrival of the first trader that one of the saddest chapters in the history of animal destruction was written: the near extermination of the sea otter.

The fur trade in British Columbia began in 1785 with the arrival of a British trader, James Hanna, on the coast of Vancouver Island.³³ Other British, European and American sea captains quickly entered the lucrative sea otter trade on the northwest coast, as there was a ready market for the otter pelts in Canton. By the end of the eighteenth century almost all British traders and the few European traders had to withdraw from the Pacific coast because of the Napoleonic Wars. The coast was left to the unfettered and aggressive American traders and, in Alaska, to the Russian American Company which, from 1799, held the exclusive Russian trading rights in North America.³⁴ The competition did not slacken but intensified among the few remaining British vessels and the many more American traders.³⁵ The peak year of competition was 1801.³⁶ There are no figures available for the total number of sea otter pelts bartered by either the British or American traders during the busy thirty-year period of 1785-1814, but it has been estimated that American traders alone collected 48,000 sea otter pelts during the peak years from 1799 to

³³ For an early account of exploration of the northern Pacific coast and the early marine fur trade see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the Northwest Coast*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890).

³⁴ For a complete account of the Russian company's activities in North America see P. Tikhmenev, *The Historical Review of the Formation of the Russian-American Company and Its Activity up to the Present Time*, parts I and II, trans. Dimitri Krenov (St. Petersburg: Edward Veimir, 1861; English edition, Seattle: Works Progress Administration, 1939).

³⁵ The number of competing ships and the shift to American dominance can be illustrated by the following table.

	<i>British</i>	<i>American</i>
1785-1794	35	15
1795-1804	9	50
1805-1814	3	40

F. W. Howay, "An Outline Sketch of the Maritime Fur Trade," Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Reports*, 1932, p. 7.

³⁶ Howay, *ibid.*, p. 12. See James G. Swan, *The Northwest Coast* (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1966), pp. 423-24. See also S. W. Jackman, ed., *The Journal of William Sturgis* (Victoria, British Columbia: Sono Nis Press, 1978), p. 117. The three sources agree that the peak year was 1801, but they do not agree as to the number of ships on the northwest coast that year.

1802.³⁷ By 1802 the sea otter were on the decline; it was becoming rare for a vessel to obtain a cargo of skins in less than two seasons. As a consequence, trade was extended to the pelts of other fur bearers, and rum became an item of barter.³⁸ Rum and disease began their erosion of the coastal tribes' cultures, yet this erosion cannot account for the indiscriminate slaughter by Indians of the sea otter, because the excessive killing began before rum and disease were major problems.

It is quite possible that one reason why the Indians participated in the extermination of the sea otter on the northwest coast was because this animal was not requisite to the survival of the coastal tribes. Its pelt was a luxury, not a necessity. Perhaps the Indians could have restricted the harvest of sea otter once they obtained a sufficient supply of metallic trade goods, but newly acquired tastes, acquisitiveness, and potlatch gift requirements created a demand for non-metallic goods like cloth, rice, bread, molasses, rum, ermine skins and other ornaments.³⁹ To pay for these items the Indians killed thousands upon thousands of sea otters because their pelts brought the highest prices. The War of 1812 brought a respite to the slaughter because it restricted movements of trading ships from the east coast, but the absence of any authoritative power to control its harvest eventually led to the extermination of the sea otter on the British Columbia coast. Fortunately for the future of this species, the Russian American Company, because of its monopoly position in Alaska, was able to control the sea otter harvest in the Aleutians and in the Kodiak district after the company restricted American trading and whaling operations in Alaska.⁴⁰ And fortunately for the future of the staple fish and game of British Columbia, the Indians kept their territorial rights intact throughout the assault on the sea otter. When the land traders arrived, they found a land rich in wildlife. However, for a few

³⁷ Swan, *Northwest Coast*, p. 424. The average price received at Canton per sea otter skin ranged from \$25 in 1799 to \$20 in 1802. Jackman, ed., *Journal of William Sturgis*, pp. 113-20.

³⁸ Howay, "An Outline Sketch," pp. 6, 8.

³⁹ For an account of trade items, see Jackman, ed., *Journal of William Sturgis*, pp. 56, 57, 65.

⁴⁰ Tikhmenev, *Historical Review of Formation of the Russian-American Company*, part 2, pp. 247-49, 254. The Russia/United States 1824 Convention allowed the Americans to fish and trade along the Alaska coast for ten years. However, after 1834 Americans continued whaling the waters of the northern archipelago, often within the three-mile limit. The Russian company maintained that the whalers scared the sea otters with their fires on the beaches. After 1850 Russian naval cruisers prevented abuses of the otter, thereby allowing conservation measures to be effected. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.

years, the competitive traders themselves threatened the stocks of beaver and game in the Peace River district of the province.

The story of the bitter and sometimes bloody rivalry between the fur traders from Montreal and those of the Hudson's Bay Company has been recounted many times.⁴¹ One of the consequences was the devastation of the beaver population, already decimated by disease (probably tularaemia), on the northwestern prairies.⁴² Before the North West Company and the XY Company amalgamated in 1804, they carried their competitive struggle to the territory of the Beaver Indians, part of which is in the Peace River district of British Columbia. Both companies had been in the habit of importing Indian (usually Iroquois and Ojibway) hunters from Canada to trap because the plains Indians were not primarily interested in trapping as long as bison were available.⁴³ The traders moved the alien Indians, along with steel traps, into the best beaver country of the West, the upper Peace River basin held by the Sekanni and Beaver Indians. The Iroquois took a heavy toll of the beaver, thereby incurring the wrath of the local Indians and the consequent tragedy described earlier in this article. During one season, 1802-03, the foreign hunters supplied one-third of the North West Company's beaver packs for the Athabasca department and forty-six of the eighty-four packs of beaver collected by the XY Company.⁴⁴ The Iroquois and the other eastern Indians had no vested interest in the resources of the Beaver and Sekanni Indians and therefore made no effort to conserve them.

The depletion of furs brought about the move across the mountains by the North West Company, immediately after its amalgamation with the XY Company in 1804. By 1807 Simon Fraser and John Stuart, with their voyageurs, had established five posts in New Caledonia; and in 1808 they succeeded in tracing the Fraser River to its mouth. In 1807

⁴¹ The basic history of the fur trade in Canada is: Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956).

⁴² Two outbreaks of tularaemia have been recorded, one in 1781-82 and another twenty years later. Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game, Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 134-35.

⁴³ The thesis of *Keepers of the Game*, which attempts to explain why eastern Indians joined in the destruction of fur bearers and game, has been attacked by several anthropologists. The accounts critical of Martin's thesis have been compiled by Shepard Krech III in *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of Keepers of the Game* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

⁴⁴ W. A. Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 60 (September 1979), p. 295.

David Thompson began his surveys of the Kootenay/Columbia river systems for the North West Company. By 1812 he had established four posts in the Columbia district and completed his explorations to the mouth of the Columbia River.

In 1812 the North West Company bought John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company's posts and property on the Columbia. Within eight years this Canadian company had gained trading control of a territory extending from the Spanish possessions in the south to the Russian territory on the far northern coast. In the meantime the Hudson's Bay Company moved aggressively into the Peace and Athabasca regions offering fierce competition to the North West Company. The Montreal company incurred great expenses in the west building and maintaining posts and transportation routes and in opposing the Hudson's Bay Company east of the Rockies. Consequently, in its attempt to meet expenses and make a profit, the North West Company scoured the country, both east and west of the Rockies, for as many furs as possible. There could be and there was no consideration for conservation. Both companies and the Indians east of the Rockies faced a rapid exhaustion of game and fur bearers, particularly beaver.⁴⁵ This ruinous competition was one of the factors that led to the amalgamation of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in 1821. Because the reorganized company held monopoly trading rights with the native peoples west of the mountains for a twenty-one-year period, it was able to institute conservation measures in the devastated areas.

To ensure the economic feasibility of its conservation measures, the company had to maintain exclusive control of Indian trade. This maintenance required the company to develop policies to secure the company's territory from interlopers and to conduct its affairs in a manner to gain approval of the British government for renewal of its licence. Assured long-term monopoly rights were absolutely essential for the implementation of any conservation measures. In British Columbia, monopoly control was precarious because the southern and coastal perimeters were threatened by American land and sea traders, and, in the north, by the Russian traders.⁴⁶

The 1818 Anglo/American agreement to a ten-year joint occupancy

⁴⁵ Innis, *Fur Trade*, p. 269. See also Frederick Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire, George Simpson's Journal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), p. xi.

⁴⁶ R. Harvey Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council, Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-31*, with an Introduction by H. A. Innis (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1940), pp. 302-03.

of the land west of the Rockies made it imperative for the Hudson's Bay Company to protect its valuable trade in New Caledonia by preventing the northwestern migration of American trappers. The company achieved this by retaining the posts on the lower Columbia and sending large hunting expeditions to trap the land south and east of the Columbia until it was exhausted of fur bearers.⁴⁷ The fur desert created by the company acted as a buffer zone until Oregon passed into American hands in 1846.

In the meantime, furs from New Caledonia and British territory further north were reaching American and Russian maritime traders. The Hudson's Bay Company decided to compete directly with the Americans by putting five trading vessels on the coast between 1827 and 1836. By the mid-1830s the company was winning the sea trade battle with the Americans.⁴⁸ The American fur traders were driven finally from the coast by 1840. In 1839 George Simpson, for the Hudson's Bay Company, and Baron Wrangell, for the Russian American Company, signed the Hamburg Agreement by which the Russians rented to the Hudson's Bay Company the commercial rights on the panhandle of Alaska in return for a rental which included foodstuffs previously supplied by the Americans.⁴⁹ Since the American traders needed an outward saleable cargo to make their trading expeditions more economically feasible, the Hudson's Bay Company, by this agreement, had eliminated all the competition for the land furs originating in its territory.

It had taken about two decades for the Hudson's Bay Company to secure complete trading control of the furs west of the Rockies. It is not known what conservation measures, if any, the company implemented in New Caledonia during these decades or after 1840, but it did take certain measures to conserve the beaver-depleted area east of the Rockies. The first act, though not a conservation measure per se, was the closure of four posts — Fort George, Fort St. John, Dunvegan and Rocky Mountain Portage — in 1824-25 to punish the Indians for killing company men at Fort George and Fort St. John in 1823.⁵⁰ When George Simpson

⁴⁷ Rich, ed., *Simpson's 1828 Journey*, p. 156.

⁴⁸ E. E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1820*, vol. 3, 1821-1870 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960), p. 634.

⁴⁹ R. H. Oliver, ed., *The Canadian North-West, Its Early Development and Legislative Records, Minutes of the Councils of the Red River Colony and the Northern Department of Rupert's Land*, vol. 2 (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1915), pp. 791-96.

⁵⁰ Rich, ed., *Simpson's 1828 Journey*, pp. 9-10.

Dunvegan was closed in 1825 and reopened in 1828. For three years Vermilion was the only post serving the Peace River. *Ibid.*

reported on his 1828 journey to the Columbia, he was able to recommend the reopening of at least two of the posts since the Indians had suffered enough for the crimes of a few and beaver population had recruited great numbers.⁵¹ The Sekanni and Beaver Indians had not ceased harvesting beaver for their own use, but the itinerant Iroquois and other free men had been forced out of the area, and excessive killing of beaver had ceased.

Moving posts was not always a satisfactory conservation measure;⁵² therefore it was imperative for Simpson and the Council of the Northern Department to introduce many other beaver conservation measures in their assured monopoly areas.⁵³ They ranged from offering higher prices for smaller furs like marten and for the pelts of those animals which were approaching their peak in the population cycle, thereby allowing the beaver to recruit,⁵⁴ to discouraging summer beaver trapping for food by providing summer employment for Indians and by selling fishing tackle cheaply.⁵⁵ It is quite likely that some of these measures were applied to the Peace River district of British Columbia; it is less likely that they were necessary west of the divide. It is certain, however, that the general ban of 1822 on the purchase of pelts of summer-killed beaver included New Caledonia. In the same year Simpson banned the sale of steel traps in all areas except the frontier posts where vigorous competition and the possible extirpation of fur beavers were the economic realities.⁵⁶ Simpson considered steel traps a scourge because they, unlike the pre-1790 Indian methods, promoted the indiscriminate trapping of beaver.

A major conservation measure instituted by Simpson and the Council

See also Innis, Introduction to *Minutes of Council Northern Department*, Fleming, ed., pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

⁵¹ Rich, ed., *Simpson's 1828 Journey*, pp. 9-10.

⁵² Because many prairie Indians, unlike the Beaver Indians, often followed a post from site to site when it was moved, the country became common property rather than the property of a band or family. Therefore the beaver were not as well managed. Innis, Introduction to *Minutes of Council Northern Department*, Fleming, ed., p. lx.

⁵³ Arthur J. Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 1 (January 1975), pp. 49-68.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52. See also Innis, Introduction to *Minutes of Council Northern Department*, Fleming, ed., p. lx.

⁵⁵ Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council Northern Department*, p. 229. See also Innis, Introduction, *ibid.*, p. lx.

⁵⁶ Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes," p. 55.

was the 1826 imposition of beaver pelt quotas in fourteen districts.⁵⁷ However, neither the Peace River district nor any post west of the Pacific divide was included in the limitation.⁵⁸ In the southern part of the Columbia district and coastal areas there could be no quotas because of American competition. The fact that no post in the Interior of British Columbia was assigned a beaver quota suggests that, for the most part, the beaver populations in this area were at a tolerable level. The marked decline in the number of beaver pelts shipped from New Caledonia in the 1840s may have been the result of diverse causes or one major cause like animal or human disease.⁵⁹ Since the pelt numbers rebounded in the 1850s, it appears that the Indian hunters nursed their beaver stocks back to carrying capacity.⁶⁰

There is no reason to suspect that where and when monopoly control was assured the company did not manage its far-flung animal resources in a responsible manner. Innis concluded that "the existing evidence points to the effectiveness of monopoly control."⁶¹ It was effective in that it assured a steady supply of a wide range of furs and other wildlife products in the face of natural fluctuation of fur bearers and the market, but at the same time it controlled production to conserve certain animals and to prevent a flood on the market. A monopoly over a large area enabled the company to diversify the product marketed overseas, from lumber and salmon to the introduction of smaller, cheaper furs such as skunk, raccoon and badger.⁶² Quick riches were forsaken for a long-term continuous supply of wildlife resources.

Edward Ellice Sr., a noteworthy British parliamentarian who had fifty years of experience with the fur trade, made perhaps the most succinct description of the Hudson's Bay Company's conservation measures.⁶³

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* See table 1, p. 56.

⁵⁹ See Appendix A. A smallpox epidemic spread over the Pacific northwest in the late 1830s and early 1840s. See Sir George Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey around the World, During the Years 1841 and 1842*, vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn Publishers, 1847), pp. 189, 207.

⁶⁰ Innis attributes the decline of the sale of beaver in Canada during the 1840s to the policy of nursing the beaver territories and to the increasing use of silk hats; *Fur Trade*, p. 334.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Edward Ellice, Sr. had been Montreal agent for the XY Company, London agent for the North West Company, and after 1821 a shareholder and Committee member of the Hudson's Bay Company. He also became Secretary of the Treasury in Britain.

Called as a witness before the 1857 Select Committee of the British parliament investigating the Hudson's Bay Company's licence-renewal application, Ellice defended the company's conservation program by explaining that "the valuable trade of the Hudson's Bay Company is in the remote districts, where, nobody having the power to interfere with them, they preserve the animals just as you do your hares and pheasants in this country."⁶⁴ It is true that Ellice was pleading the case of the monopoly company and was, therefore, biased. However, others, with no reason to love the company nor monopoly, agreed with him. William Ogilvie, who made a federal government inspection trip of the Peace River area in 1891, deplored the senseless destruction of fur bearers caused by competition in the fur trade. He concluded that although it was "contrary to the spirit of the time" a monopoly of the fur trade was justifiable.⁶⁵

Ogilvie's comment was made with the wisdom of hindsight. Few outside the company would have agreed with him in 1858 when the company lost its exclusive Indian trade licence and the new colony of British Columbia was founded. In British Columbia the end of the company's fur-trade monopoly and the beginning of the erosion of Indian wildlife monopoly coincided with the arrival of free-enterprise entrepreneurs eager to exploit the resources. Included among the resources to be exploited was wildlife.

⁶⁴ Quoted by James Dodds in *The Hudson's Bay Company, Its Position and Prospects, the Substance of an Address, Delivered at a meeting of the Shareholders, in the London Tavern, on the 24th January, 1866* (London: Edward Stanford, 6 Charing Cross S.W., 1866), p. 45.

⁶⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Report on the Peace River and Tributaries in 1891, by Wm. Ogilvie* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1872), p. 38.

APPENDIX A
New Caledonia Beaver Returns: 1825-1856

<i>Year</i>	<i>1825</i>	<i>1826</i>	<i>1827</i>	<i>1828</i>	<i>1829</i>	<i>1830</i>	<i>1831</i>	<i>1832</i>	<i>1833</i>	<i>1834</i>	<i>1835</i>	<i>1836</i>	<i>1837</i>	<i>1838</i>	<i>1839</i>	<i>1840</i>
Large	4238	3390	4540	5583	4607	6264	4873	5364	5375	4860	3854	4096	3808	3323	3474	3452
Small	2078	1809	2089	2181	1968	2106	2395	2011	3170	2262	1466	1655	1714	1314	1259	1008
Coating	870	132	61	278	621	396	299	235	263	111	83	53	70.5	13.5	80.5	20
Total	7186	5331	6690	8042	7196	8766	7567	7610	8808	7233	5406	5804	5092.5	4650.5	4813.5	4480

<i>Year</i>	<i>1841</i>	<i>1842</i>	<i>1843</i>	<i>1844</i>	<i>1845</i>	<i>1846</i>	<i>1847</i>	<i>1848</i>	<i>1849</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1851</i>	<i>1852</i>	<i>1853</i>	<i>1854</i>	<i>1855</i>	<i>1856</i>
Large	2889	2357	2828	1723	2252	1727	2778	1764	2340	2210	4264	4142	4203	4138	4460	4683
Small	1178	976	1448	943	1086	1320	1405	818	1240	1027	1475	1618	1573	1284	1590	1794
Coating	15.5	30.25	42.5	30	22	10.5	18.25	5.5	14.5	.5	7	1	3.75	2	25	—
Total	4082.5	3363.25	4318.5	2696	3360	3057.5	4201.25	2587.5	3594.5	3237.5	5746	5761	5779.75	5424	6075	6477

Source: James Douglas, “Fur Trade Returns — Columbia District and New Caledonia 1825-1857,” PABC.

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