

Huckleberry Harvesting of the Salish and Kootenai of the Flathead Reservation

UNDERC West: Practicum in Field Biology

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2010

Abstract

The Salish and Kootenai are two groups of Native American people that live on the Flathead Reservation in Northwest Montana. The worldview of the Salish and Kootenai is unlike that of many Euro-American cultures, and this is especially true for their view of nature, and plants in particular. The Salish and Kootenai are reverent of all plants, but huckleberries are a plant that is historically important as a winter food. The berries are important not only as foodstuff, but are also important culturally, economically, and spiritually. The purpose of this study is threefold. First, I look at huckleberry harvesting as a practice that is significant in the Salish and Kootenai culture. Then, I will examine how the tradition of huckleberry harvesting has changed over time. Finally, I look at things that have a detrimental effect on the huckleberries including commercial harvesting and fire prevention. The huckleberry was used as a model organism to look not only at Salish and Kootenai culture, but also how it is different from most Euro-American cultures. I performed interviews with 7 Salish and Kootenai tribal members, and also corresponded with a doctorate student and the tribal liaison from the Kootenai National Forest. Through these interviews, I learned that wild huckleberries are extremely important in the Salish and Kootenai culture, and that many Native people are dedicated to the protection of it. Their respect for wild huckleberries in the ethos held by the Salish and Kootenai can be seen in the way they respect plants, specifically in the way that they relate to and use Huckleberries.

Introduction

Many Native Americans have a much different view of nature than Euro-Americans, especially in their view of plants. One study by Ross et al (2007) showed

that the Natives gave a higher importance rating to plants both in how the plant was important to the forest and how the plant was important to the self. Six of the seventeen natives that were interviewed gave the most important rating to all of the plants, whereas no Euro-American did so. Native peoples place this importance on plants because they see that each plant has a role to play in nature and is therefore an important part of nature.

Indigenous knowledge is the traditional or local knowledge of people who are native to an area. Indigenous knowledge (IK) has traditionally been seen as primitive or simple, but this knowledge has been collected by a group of people for hundreds, possibly thousands of years. Indigenous peoples have the knowledge that they needed to acquire in order to live, and this can include very specific information about plants, animals, and natural phenomenon. Many times IK is transmitted orally, which not only adds to people's skepticism, but also can make transmission difficult, especially in changing cultures. Many Indigenous cultures are being affected by the encroachment of other cultures, which causes disruption of traditional methods of acquiring and transmitting knowledge (Grenier 1998). It is because this traditional knowledge is being lost that it is important to study it so that it will be recorded and passed on to future generations.

Many Indigenous cultures have much traditional knowledge about the environment, and ethnoecology is one way that scientists can study and record this knowledge. One of the originators of ethnoecology, Charles Franke said that field workers, "cannot be satisfied with a mere cataloging of the components of a cultural ecosystem according to the categories of western science. He must also describe the environment as the people themselves construe it according to the categories of their

ethnoscience.” Native American cultures have much to teach scientists about ecology in general, but especially botany. They have been collecting and passing on this knowledge for hundreds of years (Minnis 2000). Through ethnobotany, we can study not only the facts that Natives can give us, but we can learn about plants using Native culture as a lens through which we can gain a better understanding.

The Salish, Pend d’ Oreille, and Kootenai are three Native American groups that constitute the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe (CSKT) and today occupy the Flathead Indian Reservation in Northwest Montana. Historically the Salish (including both the interior Salish and the Pend d’ Oreille) lived east of the Rocky Mountains, but due to pressures by neighboring tribes were pushed into the mountains. The Kootenai have lived in this area traditionally, possibly since the retreat of the last glacier (LeCompte-Mastenbrook 2008). The three tribes were placed together on the reservation after signing the Hellgate Treaty in 1855 (History 1978, Challenge 2008). Although the three tribes live together now, they each have distinct histories and cultures, and this must be taken into account in this study.

Because Native Americans view plants so differently than Euro-Americans, plants make a model study material in order to ascertain how Native peoples view nature differently than other cultures. Many people can understand why an animal would be so important to a culture, but there are not many cultures that place so much importance on plants. For my study, I have chosen to work with huckleberry (*Vaccinium spp.*), which is a plant that has historically been important to the Salish and Kootenai and is still of importance today. The berries are picked in summer and dried to last throughout the year. The berries have also traditionally been used as a medicine to treat heart trouble,

arthritis, and rheumatism (Hart 1976). Although huckleberries are still used as a food source for many Native Americans today, huckleberries may be on the decline due to overharvesting from commercial pickers. Several sources have even mentioned that overzealous harvesters try to run people off what they think of as their huckleberry patches. This pressure by outside sources has changed the way the CSKT use huckleberries today.

Methods

This study used qualitative methods to address the importance of huckleberries for the Salish and Kootenai. As Miles and Huberman (1994) noted, a qualitative approach to social inquiry allows the researcher to develop a more complex understanding of actors. A qualitative approach is well suited for this project in order to understand the ritual of huckleberry harvesting as a meaningful cultural process as well as look at how the process has changed and how commercial harvesting affects the way in which the Salish and Kootenai use huckleberries.

An ethnographic approach would be ideal for this project, but time constraints do not allow this. As an alternative approach, data collection came in the form of semi-structured interviews (Stephens et. al 1998). Essentially, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to develop and ask any interesting or important questions that come to mind during an interview in addition to a preconceived set of questions (Appendix 1). This open-ended format also allowed the respondent to talk at length about issues or concerns important to him/her. I contacted potential interviewees from the CSKT members and the Kootenai National forest, and conducted 9 interviews.

The field notes were analyzed as individual cases, and data from the cases was compared against one another in order to “triangulate” responses from the various respondents. In the end the goal was to create a single narrative from the separate cases by combining the triangulated data, thereby creating an account of how huckleberries are historically and culturally important, as well as concerns surrounding huckleberry harvest, by tribal members.

Results

The huckleberry is a plant that seems to be shrouded in mystery, and this has led to many misconceptions about this peculiar plant. Many people think that there is no difference between the huckleberry and the blueberry, yet others will tell you that the huckleberry looks and tastes nothing like a blueberry. Confusion about huckleberries and blueberries may be due to the fact that both plants belong to the *Vaccinium*. There are as many as twenty-six species of *Vaccinium* native to the United States, but only three are common to Northwest Montana; blue huckleberry (*V. globulare*), *V. scoparium* (grouse whortleberry), and *V. caespitosum* (dwarf huckleberry) (Richards and Alexander 2006). One respondent mentioned that there were several different types of huckleberries, but that she picked all the types and used them all in the same manner. One difference between huckleberries and blueberries is that blueberries tend to grow in bunches whereas huckleberries grow singly along the stem (Bowen 1988).

Huckleberries are highly climate specific, but can live in a variety of areas as long as its specific needs are met. They usually grow between 3500 and 7000 feet of elevation, and they require a constant supply of water. They do not grow in heavily shaded areas such as under a forest canopy, yet they do not flourish in areas with too

much sunlight. In addition to its specific elevation, light, and moisture requirements, it is also highly variable from year to year based on the weather (Bowen 1988, Barney 2008). Many of the respondents mentioned that the number, size and sweetness of the berries depended on the weather that the plants experienced during the year. Hail has a detrimental effect by either bruising the berries or knocking them completely off the branches. These highly specific requirements of the huckleberry creates a condition in which even in the same year there can be both good and bad crops (Bowen 1988).

Huckleberries can reproduce sexually through its berry production, yet most of its reproduction is done vegetatively through its rhizomes. The root system of huckleberry plants grow in shallow soil, so the plants find it difficult to compete for water and nutrients. Because of its need for sunlight and its inability to compete for resources, huckleberries grow in areas of high disturbance. Just after a fire, the plants can re-grow before other plants, and can therefore take advantage of sunlight that comes into the area opened by fire (Barney 2008, Miler 1977). One study looked at how to create a more favorable huckleberry environment without harming the huckleberries by testing four treatments: sheep grazing, cut and burn, burn, and borax application. They found that none of the four treatments controlled competing plants without harming the huckleberry plants (Minore, et al 1979). Traditionally, Native Americans used fires to control the canopy of the forest to allow enough sunlight for the huckleberries. Instead of doing a total burn, they would burn only specific trees or specific areas so that the heat would not harm the existing huckleberry plants (Barney 2008). The burning done in the Minore study was too intense; it instead harmed the plants instead of promoting growth (1979). Another study by Miller found that spring fires were less intense, and this led to more

stems on the bushes after a spring fire but not a fall fire because these are too intense (1977).

For the Salish and Kootenai, the harvest of huckleberries cannot be separated from the rest of the year's harvest, and the berry itself cannot be examined separate from the other plants that are needed to harvest and use the berries. The gathering season starts with bitterroot in the spring. At this time, a woman who was appointed as the caretaker of the root would decide when it was the right time to harvest, and she would go out and dig just enough roots for a feast. They would pray for a good gathering season and give thanks. It wasn't until after this that people were able to go out and harvest bitterroot. The appointment of caretaker was handed down through families, and the practice still takes place today.

For the Kootenai, the bear dance was an important ceremony prior to the harvesting of berries. The ceremony would last for three days, and they would honor the bear and the berries that the bear enjoys eating (LeCompte-Mastenbrook 2008). The ceremony would include singing, dancing and story telling. The ceremony would end with a feast that included many of the berries that the bears would normally eat (Bowen 1988). There is also a caretaker for the berries that decides when the huckleberries are ripe and ready to be picked, and it is not until after the caretaker tells people that they are allowed to harvest the berries.

The lives of the Salish and Kootenai were historically dependent on what food was ready to harvest. The people knew what foods were ready at what time of the year, and they migrated to different areas based on what they could harvest. Bitterroot, camas, and then the berries would be picked, and enough would be harvested and stored so that

the people could survive through out the year. Not only does the harvesting of huckleberries depend on the time of the year, but the huckleberry also has plants and animals that serve as helpers in harvesting the berries. Cedar is used to make storage containers, thimbleberry is used to line the baskets, mint prevents the insects from eating the berries, and deer hide parfleches are used to carry the berries.

Uses of Huckleberries

Traditionally, enough huckleberries would have been harvested to use year round, either fresh or dried for later use. The dried berries were added to soups or puddings along with other berries or meats to make them thicker. Later, the technology to can the berries was introduced. Women would take their canning equipment with them to the huckleberry patch, and can the berries over the fire, and the berries could then be stored for the winter. Today, the most common way to store the berries is to freeze them although there is still canning that takes place. It was the job of the younger generations to pick enough berries to provide for the older generations that could no longer cook. The berries are also given away for ceremonies or holidays. There are many ways to eat huckleberries today; they are put into cakes, pancakes, syrup, jam, dipped in chocolate, or added to butter. Although they may not be used in the same way as they were hundred year ago, huckleberries remain as an important food source for many Salish and Kootenai people.

Many people are realizing the importance of traditional foods, especially in the diet of Native peoples. It has only been a few hundred years since the arrival of white flour and sugar to Indian people. After removal to reservations, many Indians became dependent on government subsidies for food because they were not able to practice

traditional hunting and gathering customs. Since this change in diet, the obesity and diabetes rate among Indian people has skyrocketed. There are several initiatives today to use native, traditional foods like huckleberries in order to create healthy Indian communities. One initiative at the Salish and Kootenai College is the Center of Traditional Lifestyles for Healthy Communities. It focuses on using traditional foods along with fitness and recreation to promote health and wellbeing among tribal members (SKC website).

It has been reported that huckleberries and their leaves were used as medicines to treat ailments such as heart trouble, arthritis, and rheumatism (Hart 1976). While this may be true, one respondent emphasized that remedies were recommended by medicine men, so there was not one way in which the plant was used consistently. The medicine man may have given different treatments for different problems, or they may have been different based on the plant and the time of the year.

Huckleberry Harvesting

Prior to European influence, the Salish and Kootenai migrated from area to area based on what resources they needed at the time. One season of the year was devoted to the picking of berries. The entire family would move to the berry patch, and the men, women and children were all involved in the harvesting of the berries. Many families would return to the same berry picking location year after year. At this time, picking was all done by hand, and berries were placed into baskets made from cedar bark (Turney-High 1937). These baskets were made once people got to the berry patch and were used only for one berry season. They would line the baskets with thimbleberry leaves to protect the berries from being smashed on the bottom. Once the berries were picked they

could be eaten fresh or dried to store for the entire winter season. There are two known methods for drying the berries; they could be placed in the sun on mats and left to dry until they are the size of small marbles, or alternatively they could be dried next to a fire. To dry the berries, a decaying log would be chosen, and the earth next to the log would be removed on one side. The berries would be placed on a mat next to the log, and the log set on fire. In order to keep the fire from getting too hot, a branch could be dipped in water and touched to the fire to keep it cool (Filloon 1952). Enough huckleberries were harvested and dried to last the whole winter.

Horses changed the huckleberry process in that they made it much easier to access the huckleberry patches, and it also became easier to transport goods from camp to camp when migrating. Being able to harvest more berries (along with more roots and meat) meant that the risk of starvation decreased dramatically. It was after the introduction of the horse that there became an increased difference between the rich and the poor. People with more horses could harvest and transport more food and hides and were in turn more wealthy than those without horses. Although the horse decreased the threat of starvation, it increased conflicts with neighboring tribes (Challenge 2008). Much of the fighting of both the Salish and the Kootenai was with their neighbors to the east, the Blackfoot. It was partially because of the prospect of protection and trading for guns that the tribes signed the Hellgate Treaty in 1855. The United States government promised the tribes peace with the Blackfoot along with the easier life that would come with the goods available through trade with the United States. The Hellgate Treaty placed the Salish, Pend d' Oreille, and Kootenai together on the flathead reservation in Northwest Montana (Brown 1943).

Reservation life was much different than what the Native had been used to prior to signing the treaty. Instead of migrating each season to follow the resources, the Salish and Kootenai now lived in one place year round and were encouraged to give up hunting and gathering in order to become farmers. This changed the way that Indians lived off the land, and had a large impact on berry harvesting. Now, it was not possible to leave the reservation without permission and an escort, so many families were not able to return to their traditional berry picking locations. This meant that they either gave up berry picking or they found new locations on the reservation to pick berries. Although the Salish and Kootenai were removed to the reservation, they still retained the right to hunt and gather from their traditional locations, and once they were able to freely leave the reservation, they continued to gather in these areas.

The flathead reservation encompasses about 1.2 million acres of land in Northwest Montana, and when it was originally set aside for the Salish and Kootenai, the tribe owned all the land. In 1904, the Dawes act was applied to the flathead reservation, which meant that land was allotted, and eventually much of the land was sold to white homesteaders (Flathead Historical Society 2004). After this point, the Salish and Kootenai were constantly in contact with American people, and they soon adopted technology that made their lives easier. The Indians began using a horse and buggy to make their way to the huckleberry patches. One respondent remembered stories about her grandmother taking a horse and buggy to the traditional harvesting areas. She said that along the way, they would stop to make a full meal over a fire for both lunch and dinner. They would continue to stop at the same traditional places they did before they had the buggy, but they adopted the buggy because it made harvesting and transportation

of the berries easier than before. Again when cars became commonplace, the Indians embraced the new form of transportation yet continued their same traditional picking customs.

People would move to the huckleberry patches for as long as they could, from a weekend all the way to several weeks during huckleberry season. The picking of huckleberries is not just a custom that functions to get enough food for the year, it was a social time when families, bands, and even separate tribes would come together and have a good time. During the picking, there would often be talking or story telling among those in the patch. At night, there would be games and gambling. Several of the respondents described being in the berry patch as children and how much fun it was to be with all the other children. There was work to be done, yet there was plenty of time to have fun. Before there was a set currency, the huckleberries would be used in gambling. Because people went back to the same places each year, it was common to meet the same people every year. One traditional place to pick is in Buckhorn, Idaho, and many tribes would meet each year. The day was time to work and pick berries, but the night was time for fun, storytelling, and gambling. One respondent even remembered marriages taking place in the huckleberry patch.

Commercial Picking

As Native culture and white cultures became more entwined, the tradition of harvesting huckleberries began to change. Prior to white contact, Native people didn't have any sort of currency; it was not needed because the greatest value of Native culture was generosity. Everyone was provided for, and society had no need for money. As whites began to move into the area, they pressured the Natives to conform to their Euro-

American way of thinking. As they started to assimilate into white culture, Native peoples also adopted their teachings on money and wealth. They learned that they could earn money by picking and selling huckleberries in town. Demand for berries escalated, and eventually it exceeded the supply that Indian people could provide by picking berries. Other people began picking the berries to meet the demand of buyers. Two canneries were built in the area, one in Kalispell and one in Hamilton (Richards and Alexander 2006).

As the demand for huckleberries continued to increase, people quickly realized that they could harvest more berries through alternative harvesting methods than they could picking the berries by hand. One method is to beat the berry bush with some sort of paddle and allow the berries to fall into something that collects the berries on the ground. A second method is to use a picker or a rake, which is usually some sort of coffee can with tines attached. The picker is raked through the bush and the berries fall into the can. Both beating and using pickers remove not only berries, but also remove the foliage from the plant. The berries must then be cleaned before they can be used. One method of cleaning the berries is to use a board covered in a blanket or some sort of screen, which is then placed on a downhill angle. The berries are then rolled down the hill; the berries roll all the way to the bottom while the leaves and twigs get caught on the way down.

Damage to the Berries

There are two things today that are harming the berries and causing them to decline: people and changing environment. The commercial picking of huckleberries is harming the plants and causing them to not produce as many berries each year. The

beating of the huckleberry bush or the use of pickers removes both bark and leaves along with ripe and unripe berries. A study by Stark and Baker says that pickers or rakes can remove up to 30% of the natural foliage (1992). This means that the berries cannot photosynthesize at the same rate, so berry production goes down, or sugar production reduces and the berries are not as sweet. All of the respondents said that they had seen berry patches where commercial pickers had gone through and there was nothing left except twigs and branches. This seriously damages the plant, and if the bush survives, it may take several years to return to its former level of berries. The commercial harvesters move from place to place each year, but for the Salish and Kootenai who return to the same berry patch each year, this could have a huge impact on their traditional harvesting of huckleberries.

The commercial pickers not only harm the plants, they threaten pickers with physical danger when trying to prevent others from picking from “their” patch of berries. Although most of the land where berries are picked is public land, commercial pickers become territorial over patches of berries where they like to pick. All the respondents had either experienced or heard about people being threatened when going out to pick berries. Some had even heard of people using guns or dogs to prevent others from intruding in a certain patch of berries.

In addition to the destruction of berry patches by commercial pickers, the berries are also declining due to change in the environment in the areas where berries traditionally grew. The Salish and Kootenai would routinely set fires to prevent the canopy from becoming too thick and shading the plants too much (Barney 2008, French 1965). Today, fire prevention has meant that the canopy is filling in, and many areas

where the berries traditionally grew no longer have berry bushes, or they have bushes that do not produce berries. Several respondents mentioned that they had heard stories about the berries in the past being much bigger than they are today, even as big as cherries. One respondent who remembers moving into berry camps as a child said that when she picked as a child there was never a bad year when there were not many berries. Now, there are some years when there are almost no berries. This change in the berries may be due to the change in the environment in these berry patches. Huckleberries are an early successional plant that needs 60-70% sun to grow (Barney 2008). Because fires have been prevented, there is not enough open area to support these berries, and because they reproduce primarily by rhizomatous shoots they do not spread quickly to other areas (Miller 1977). All these factors contribute to the number of berry plants is decreasing. Ray Filloon, a US Forest service employee noted in 1952 that the amount of berries had already dwindled to 1/3 the amount that he saw as a child in the same area (1952). Today, over fifty years later, people are just starting to realize that practices such as fire suppression are having such a profound effect on the berries, and if nothing is done the berries will continue to diminish.

Saving the Berries

There are a couple initiatives being put into place to stop the berries from disappearing both from commercial picking and from environmental change. The Salish and Kootenai tribe is pressuring the Kootenai National Forest to find a way to rejuvenate the berries in the forest. Working together with biologists, they are looking at areas where the berries once grew but no longer grow to determine if there is a way to manage the forest in a way that will allow the berries to grow return. What they have found is

that the canopy is too thick for the berries to grow, and they will have to open the overgrowth if the berries are to grow. They have also been looking at the possibility of planting berries in areas that meet the requirements of the berries.

To prevent harm to the berries, the forest service would have to monitor how many berries people are harvesting, and also how they are picking the berries. As the regulations now stand, you must purchase a permit to pick more than 30 gallons of berries in a season. Last year, not one permit was sold. This means that people are on forest service land picking berries commercially, but there is no way to know how many berries are being removed. The only state law in Montana that affects huckleberry harvesting says that products labeled with both the words “Montana” and “Huckleberry” must register their product and tell where the berries were picked. Violation of this law is a misdemeanor and is punishable by six months in county jail or up to \$500 in fines (Montana Senate 2007). This is in contrast to the Washington state law in which both pickers must have a permit, and sales must register both buyers and sellers information. Violation of this Washington State law is a class C felony and is punishable by up to \$5000 in fines (Washington State 2008).

A study at the University of Idaho is looking at how to manage huckleberries both to protect wild stands from overharvesting and also how to produce fruit commercially from managed forest stands and through cultivation. It gives recommendations of how to manage the forest, including: choosing areas that have the correct climate, precipitation, and soil type, as well as thinning the overstory to promote huckleberry growth. This project has shown that it is also possible to cultivate huckleberries as long as the plant’s specific needs for soil type, pH, and temperature are met (Barney 2008). This project

could lead to the cultivation of huckleberries for commercial use, which would place less strain on wild huckleberries that could be harvested by recreational pickers and for tribal use.

Harvesting Today

In a past study, 85 percent of the Kootenai people interviewed said that they pick berries, and of those 85 percent said that it was a social activity (LeCompte-Mastenbrook, 2008). All but one of the respondents from this study said that they still go out to pick berries, and many talked about going with friends or relatives. For them it means more than just having berries to eat for the year. One respondent said that she was going to take her granddaughter to learn how to pick berries. It became a way to spend time with family and also to teach about traditional customs. For others, they were going camping for the weekend with friends to pick the berries. It is a time to catch up with friends while being outside in nature.

Respondents disagreed about whether more people harvest today than in the past. Some thought that the number had gone up, but others said that less people harvest today than in the past. One woman mentioned that the presence of commercial pickers threatening tribal pickers has made many people not want to harvest berries anymore. Another woman attributed a decrease in harvesters to society getting in the way. Not only do people have jobs or other things that prevent them from getting out to pick for an extended period of time, many people do not have the resources to travel to the berry patches. It cost money to drive to the mountain and camp for the weekend. It has become much easier to just buy the berries than to go and pick them yourself.

Discussion

Many things about huckleberry harvesting have changed over the years. People originally walked to the patches, then they used horses, and today drive cars. Berries used to be dried, and today are canned or frozen. Berries used to be added to soups, and many times today they are added to cakes or made into jams or syrup. Just as with everything else, the Salish and Kootenai have adapted to new technology and use the technology that benefits them and dismiss the technology that doesn't. Rakes and even mechanical pickers were created to make picking easier and more efficient, and at first some Native people used these devices. When they realized that this was harming the plant, most Native people went back to picking the berries by hand. All of the respondents said that they did not pick with pickers, and they didn't know anyone else that did either. They chose not to use this new technology because it would interfere with their ability to practice the custom of harvesting huckleberries in the future. One woman told me that she looks not only to the next generation, but feels responsible to look to the next seven generations and to do whatever it takes to make sure that all the future generations will be able to harvest huckleberries.

With the availability of berries and other fruits that can be purchased at the supermarket, one may wonder why the Salish and Kootenai still harvest huckleberries at all. The answer lies in the importance that is placed on all plants. For Native people, plants are just as important as animals. Plants are stewards of the land, and they sustain people with their nourishment and medicines. The Salish and Kootenai follow their ceremonial teachings such as the bear dance and the first roots ceremony because they believe this is how they can make sure that the spirit of the plant is thanked for giving of itself in order to sustain of the people. Plants are considered visitors to the earth, and you

must know the right time to find the plant in order to harvest it. People were not allowed to harvest plants before the blessing because they believed that each plant had its own heart, and without the proper care it would not return the next year (Challenge 2008). These customs show the reciprocal connectedness of plants and people. People pray prior to harvesting both during the first roots ceremony, but also personally before harvesting by giving thanks and giving of tobacco. To show that they respect the plants, they only take as much as they need to survive, and they don't waste plants or animals. One respondent shared how her mother taught her to only take the largest berries in order that the smaller ones continue to grow. They can later be food for other people or the bears. She was taught that the bears also eat the berries to survive, so you must leave some berries for them as well.

I was told a Kootenai story about a man who did not follow the correct way to harvest plants. This man did not wait for an elder to go out and tell him that a plant was ready to be harvested, but instead he went out first and gathered all of the plant for himself. He went home, cooked the plant, and ate it. The man had gathered the wrong plant, and he soon died. This shows three lessons that must be followed by anyone gathering plants. First, you must learn about the plants. Not only must you know which plants are edible, but also you must learn about how to correctly gather and prepare plants. You must know when the plant is ready to be harvested and how to harvest the plant in a sustainable way. Second, the man did not listen to the Kootenai teachings about waiting until an elder who knows about the plant to tell you that something is ready to harvest. If he had done this, not only would he have learned that the plant was not edible, but had it been an edible plant he would have learned to give proper thanks and

respect to the plant so that it would continue to grow for future generations. Finally, the man gathered all of the plant for himself and did not leave any of the plant for the other people or animals. One of the most valued qualities in Kootenai culture was generosity, and this meant providing not only for the other people, but also taking care of the plants and animals to see that everyone is provided for in the future generations.

The Salish and Kootenai value the huckleberries as plants, as a food source, and as a traditional harvesting custom of their people. Stories are the way that most Native cultures pass on their traditions and values, and the huckleberry finds its way into several traditional stories, including stories about coyote the trickster. In one story, coyote has three sisters who live in his stomach as huckleberries, and these sisters help coyote to steal fire to give to the people (First People). The value of huckleberries can be seen in the fact that the Kootenai use huckleberry as an endearment for people that they love; they would tell someone “ You’re my little huckleberry” or refer to their “huckleberry eyes.”

The Salish and Kootenai value huckleberries, and they are worried that they may not be able to harvest them in the future if they are not protected. The Salish and Kootenai have the right to harvest Huckleberries in their traditional places based on the Hellgate treaty, but what if their ability to harvest the berries is put in jeopardy by actions of not-tribal members? This is why the tribes are fighting to protect the berries from both commercial harvesters and environmental change.

While studying about huckleberries, several themes emerged. The first is that for the Salish and Kootenai, Huckleberries are a part of nature and can therefore not be separated from the rest of nature. They are intertwined with the plants, animals and

people in a way in which it is impossible to talk about them without explaining about the rest of nature. Second, huckleberry harvesting is a tradition that has changed throughout the years only because Indians have adapted new technologies, but harvesting is still done today for many of the reasons it was done hundreds of years ago. Third, the traditions of the Salish and Kootenai cannot be separated from the history of the tribe. Treaties and agreements have influenced these traditions, and things such as treaty rights are still coming into play today. Although I separated these into three different themes, these too are linked together so that one has an effect on another. This is the problem when it comes to Native issues today, you cannot simply talk about one aspect because it inevitably affects several other issues. Huckleberry harvesting is no different, but the important thing is that the Salish and Kootenai have been harvesting huckleberries for hundreds of years, and they will continue to do whatever is necessary to continue this tradition in the future.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the Salish and Kootenai tribal members from the Flathead Reservation for assisting me in my mission to learn more about the Salish and Kootenai culture, especially huckleberries. I would especially like to thank the Salish and Kootenai preservation office for assisting me in setting up. I would like to thank the UNDERC faculty Gary Belovsky, Page Klug and Gretchen Garrish along with the TA Garrett Coggon for their hard work to make this summer possible. Finally I would like to thank the University of Notre Dame for creating the UNDERC program and providing financial support.

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Appendix 1
Potential Interview Questions

Is there a traditional method for harvesting Huckleberries?

Has this method changed throughout the years?

Do you know of any spiritual importance of Huckleberries (as medicines)?

How important were Huckleberries in the diet of tribal members in the past?

How important are Huckleberries to the diet of today's tribal members?

How has commercial Huckleberry harvesting affected how they are harvested or used today?

Do the Salish/Kootenai have any spiritual connection to plants? Are there traditional teachings about plants?