

Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq and Kat (American Eel): Designing and Conducting Results-Rich Traditional Ecological Knowledge Social Research



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What is SRSF?

| Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) is a partnership linking university researchers with Mi'kmaq and small boat commercial fisheries community organisations. The SRSF project is administered at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia and operates on the ground, in northern Nova Scotia, through a working collaboration between:

- Gulf Nova Scotia Bonafide Fishermen's Association
- Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association (Canso)
- Paq'tnkek Fish and Wildlife Society, Paq'tnkek First Nation

Additional fisheries, community organisations and universitybased researchers are linked with SRSF through relations with these core partners (www.stfx.ca/research/srsf/2001.htm).

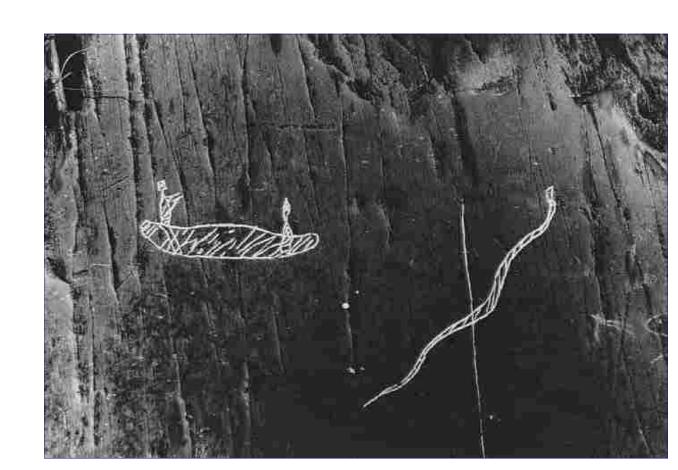
Pag'tnkek Fish and Wildlife Society (PFWS)/ Pag'tnkek First Nation

Kerry Prosper: Community Research Coordinator Mary Jane Paulette: Researcher

PFWS's research focus is to rediscover and document the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and Kat (American Eel), an important part of Mi'kmaq culture. PFWS's primary research documents local traditional ecological knowledge for the purposes of building community-level resource management and research capacity.

PFWS's Background research is ongoing and focused on the following key areas:

- Mi'kmaq language as it relates to Kat and resource manage-
- Mi'kmaq legends and stories involving *Kat*
- Traditional Mi'kmaq resource governance
- Environmental and cultural knowledge of the local area
- Land use changes within local watersheds
- Scientific, environmental and ecological data pertaining to
- Commercial eel fishery data and fisheries management



Mi'kmag man and woman in a canoe; serpent Fairy Bay, Kejimkujik National Park, NS Olive and Arthur Kelsall. 1946—1955 Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax NS

Petroglyphs in Nova Scotia that are thousands of years old, illustrate the traditional Mi'kmaa worldview in which humanity exists as a harmonious part of nature. The horned serpent, jipijka'mag, is spoken of in many legends as a great force in the worlds of both land and water. The serpent's actions described in the legends are similar to those of the eel.

RSF is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC) through its Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) programme (#833-99-1012). St. Francis Xavier University SRSF staff: Anthony Davis (Project Director), Holli MacPherson (Project Officer), and John Wagner (Research Coordinator).

PHASE I

Collaborative Definition of Research Area and Issues



Collaborative Development of Preliminary Research Design and Methodology



Consultation Re: Proposed Research with Mi'kmaw **Ethics Committee Members**



Develop and Submit Outline of the Proposed Research to the Mi'kmaw Ethics Committee Detailing Purpose and Design as well as Likely Methods, Provisions for Obtaining Informed Consent, for Archiving Data, and for Distribution of All Outcomes and



Once Research Ethics Approval is Received, Develop and Test Final Interview Questionnaire and Consent Forms for Phase I



Inform Chief and Council as well as the Community Through a Mail-Out About the Planned Research



Recruit and Train Interviewers from the Community with Ability in the Mi'kmaq Language



Complete Interviews in a Timely Fashion, with All Interviews Being Conducted by Teams of Two Persons and Administered by the Mi'kmag Partner



Develop Data File and Enter Information as the Interviews are Being Completed



Complete Analysis and Report of the Research Results in a Timely Fashion to Assure the Community Feedback As Soon As Possible

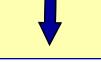


Organize a Community Meeting for the Purpose of Exploring Research Results and Their Implications as well as for Seeking Feedback and Further Advice Re: Phase II



PHASE II

Develop Interview Schedule and Consent Forms for Phase II of the Research—Detailed Face-to-Face Interviews with Those Recommended as **Knowing A Lot**





ceeds, Respecting Confidentiality Provisions



Complete Analysis of Results and Prepare a Preliminary Research Results Report in a Timely Fashion to Assure That the Community Receives Feedback ASAP



Distribute Report to the Community and Hold a Community Meeting to Discuss the



Disseminate Results As Widely As Possible



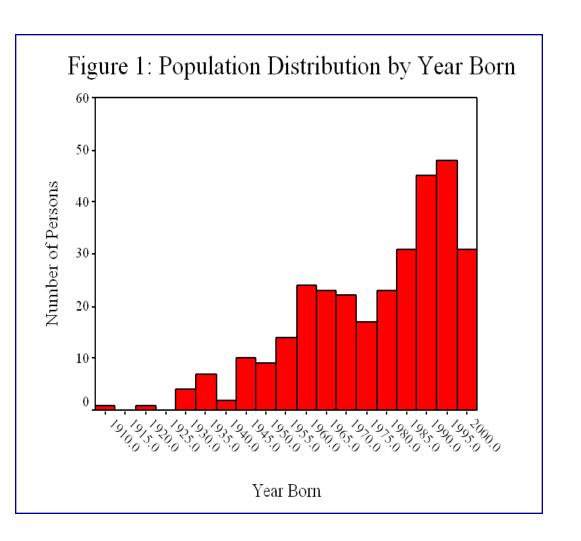
with the Mi'kmaq Partner and with All Confidentiality Provisions Satisfied

Eel Fishing Early in the Morning





Selected Research Results - Phase I (93 of 98 Paq'tnkek households participated in this study)



→ Prince Edward

St. Georges

20 Kilometers

(N=27)

15.2

Eel Fishing

Areas

▲ 1-5 sites

• 6-10 sites

11-30 sites

Antigonish Harbour

Table 1: Participation in Eel Fishing by Age

and Gender

Age Categories

42 Years to Oldest

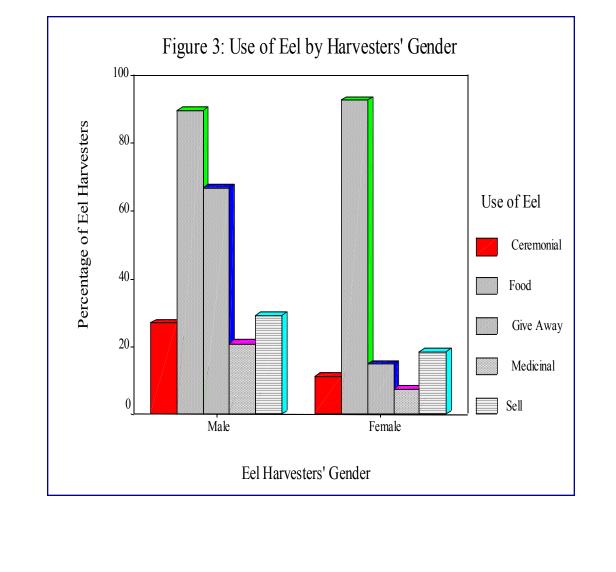
Youngest to 7 Years

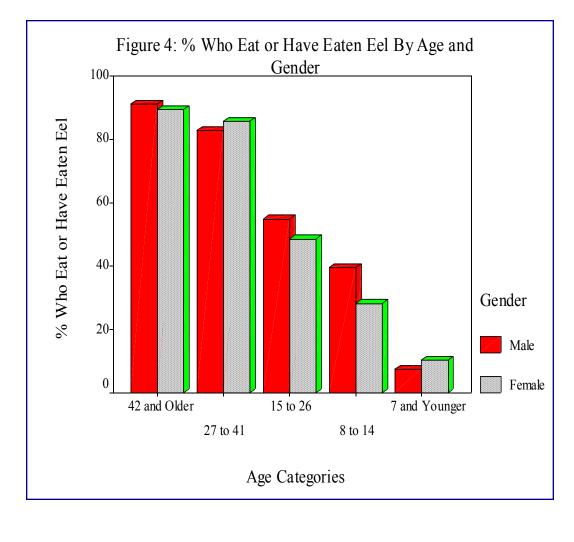
27 to 41 Years

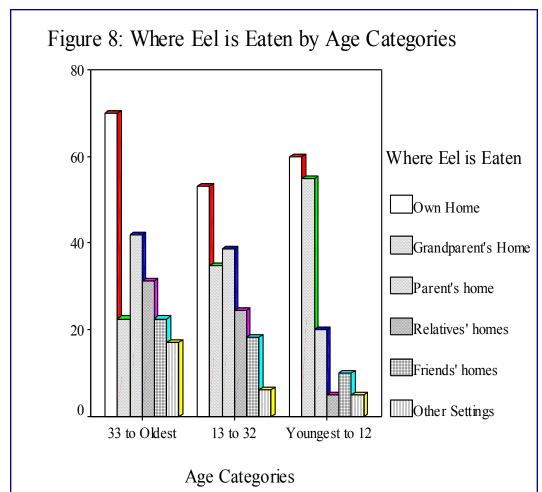
15 to 26 Years

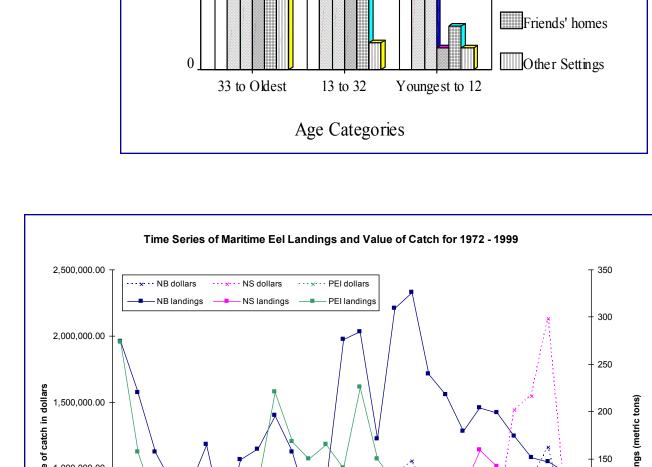
8 to 14 Years

★ 31-50 sites

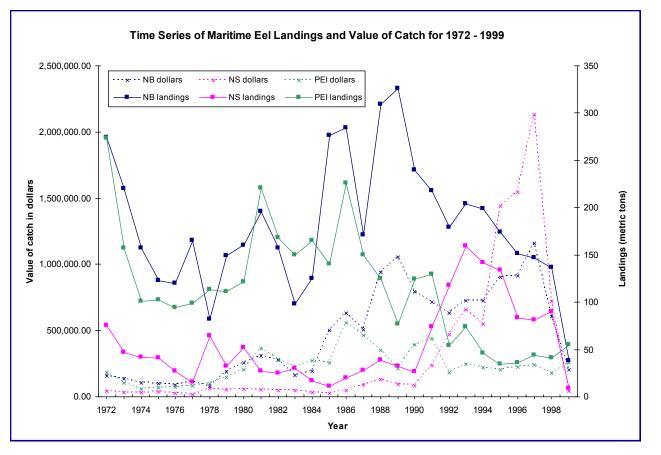














KEY FINDINGS

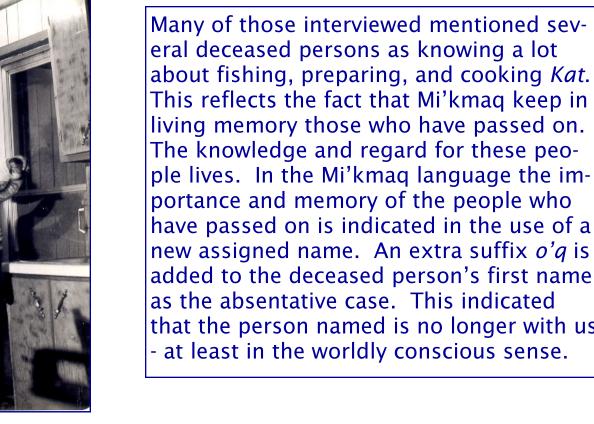
- The Paq'tnkek Band consists of 482 registered band members with 312 living on reserve. Out of the 98 households in the Pag'tnkek community, 93 households participated in the eel survey. The Pag'tnkek Mi'kmag have a keen interest in *Kat*.
- The median age of the on-reserve population was identified as 20 years. This finding suggests that the community is now facing serious concerns respecting provision of services.
- A population comprised of numerous youth and comparatively few elders within the community has created a social gap that is interrupting the transfer of knowledge from elders to youth concerning various qualities of Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq cultural and traditional practices.
- There is a sustained cultural and material connection between the Pag'tnkek Mi'kmaq and Kat. Kat continues to be harvested for food, ceremonial purposes and other uses. This indicates that the Pag'tnkek Mi'kmag remain to this day culturally and spiritually connected to the land, the water and their resources, and that the connection remains unbroken.
- The Pag'tnkek Mi'kmag have harvested and continue to harvest Kat in a variety of specific locations within the Antigonish and Pomquet estuaries and watersheds.
- Further, *Kat* is used by the Pag'tnkek Mi'kmag for ceremonial, medicinal and social purposes, as well as for food.
- But, recent trends in harvesting and use show that Pag'tnkek involvement with *Kat* is seriously declining, especially among the community's women and youth. This decline is likely linked to the decline in the eel population within the Antigonish-Paq'tnkek area. It is difficult to pass on customs and values in the uses of resources such as Kat when the resources themselves are in decline for reasons such as over-harvesting.
- Among the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq, Kat is mainly used as a food. Yet, the number of eel fishers compared to the number of people eating eel is disproportionate, i.e., there are comparatively few of the former relative to the latter. This indicates that Pag'tnkek Mi'kmag eel harvesters share a considerable portion of their catches with other community members and families. This practice shows that sharing remains a strong value among the Mi'kmag.
- Paq'tnkek women also fish eel; but, they tend to participate in one of the seasons, either winter or summer, whereas men tend to fish year round.
- Eel consumption within the community has declined in recent times, particularly among young people. Those still eating eel do so most commonly in their grandparents' homes, rather than in their parents' homes.
- The experience with *Kat* as food and for other purposes has declined throughout the community in recent times. The decline among young people is especially notable. Few report eating Kat in relatives' and friends' homes as well as in settings such as funerals, feasts, and gath-

IMPLICATIONS

- > The Pag'tnkek Mi'kmag are documented as having a sustained cultural and material relationship with Kat.
- The Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq are documented as having fished Kat for a considerable period of time within particular places in local watersheds and
- Recent and dramatic declines in the abundance of American Eel are affecting Mi'kmag access to, use of, and cultural relations with Kat
- Mi'kmag relation with and knowledge of *Kat*. Immediate action is needed in order preserve the knowledge of elders

> These conditions are contributing to the cultural deterioration of the

- and to promote the transfer of knowledge from elders to young people. The information concerning use of and relations with *Kat* support Pag't-
- nkek Mi'kmaq exercise of *treaty entitlements* respecting control and management of American Eel. This initiative, with a self-governance strategy, would assist in preserving, reconstituting and re-affirming the Mi'kmaq relation with *Kat*.
- > This research also illustrates the failure of the federal government to implement effectively food and ceremonial fisheries treaty entitlements.
- This work demonstrates that fully collaborative research processes provide results-rich outcomes.



eral deceased persons as knowing a lot about fishing, preparing, and cooking *Kat*. This reflects the fact that Mi'kmaq keep in living memory those who have passed on. The knowledge and regard for these people lives. In the Mi'kmag language the importance and memory of the people who have passed on is indicated in the use of a new assigned name. An extra suffix o'q is added to the deceased person's first name, as the absentative case. This indicated that the person named is no longer with us - at least in the worldly conscious sense.



Complete Interviews in a Timely Fashion

Interview Transcriptions Underway As Phase II Pro-

Results and Their Implications

Assure All Data and Research Results are Catalogued and Securely Archived,



