Archaeological Overview Assessment and Ethnohistoric Summary of CVRD's Comox Lake East Lands

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Executive Summary

This report presents an Archaeological Overview Assessment (AOA) and ethnohistoric summary of CVRD's recently acquired lands at the eastern end of Comox Lake. The purposes of this report are to: 1) aid CVRD in the management of potential cultural heritage resources on these lands, and 2) identify ongoing use of this area by members of K'ómoks First Nation (KFN) to allow CVRD to ensure that development plans do not infringe on KFN Aboriginal rights and title.

The review of ethnohistoric information identified recorded oral histories, which describe events from ancient times, such as the formation of the Comox Glacier, to events in the early 19th century. Early first-hand descriptions of Comox Lake emphasize the abundance of beaver and elk there, and indicate that these species were regularly hunted by K'ómoks and Pentlatch people. The review of existing KFN TUS data indicated that this part of Comox Lake and adjacent lands are still used for hunting, fishing and gathering activities.

A review of recorded archaeological sites around Comox Lake identified several cultural modified tree (CMTs) sites, mainly located in the inundation zone, and two sites with associated stone tools. Based on this information, and surveys of other lake reservoirs in central Vancouver Island, it is anticipated that CMT sites, lithic sites, and rock art sites may exist within the study area. A preliminary field recognisance of the shoreline portion of the CVRD lands on February 26, 2020 assessed the archaeological potential of these areas and discovered a new archaeological site (DjSg-15) located near the western outlet of Black Lake, consisting of a single stone tool (a flake). The inundated shores of this area were assessed as having high potential for unrecorded archaeological sites. Most of the inland portions of the Comox Lake CVRD lands were assessed as having low archaeological potential, except for the lands adjacent

to Perseverance Creek and the lands adjacent to Black Lake (i.e., Scott's Slope Mine) that may have high archaeological potential, depending on the extent of historic disturbance there.

Introduction

This Archaeological Overview Assessment (AOA) report presents an ethnohistoric overview of Comox Lake, a review of recorded archaeological sites in the area, and a preliminary field recognisance (February 26th 2020) of the shoreline portion of Comox Lake adjacent to lands recently acquired by the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD). This information was used to assess the archaeological potential of several areas of these CVRD lands to guide future appropriate management of potential archaeological materials (i.e., pre-AD 1846 artifacts or features) within this property. The CVRD lands at Comox Lake fall within the asserted territories of the K'ómoks First Nation, the Wei-wai-kum First Nation, We-wai-kai First Nation, and the Homalco First Nation.

Cultural and Historical Background

The area of eastern Vancouver Island, Denman Island and Hornby Island from about Cape Lazo to Deep Bay was the territory of the Pentlatch people (Barnett 1955:23-24; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:442-443). Pentlatch is a Northern Coast Salish language, closely related to Comox/Ayajuthum and Sechelt (Thompson and Kinkade 1990:36-37). The Pentlatch peoples who lived between Deep Bay and Englishman River were also understood to have spoken dialects of the Pentlatch language (Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:443). Several variants of the name Pentlatch have been recorded (e.g., Puntledge, Punt-lutz, Pe'ntlatc, Puntlatch, Pūnt-lūch,

Pintlatc, péntl'ech, péntl'ets, pɛnLätc) referring to the Pentlatch people and their territory, and it is the origin of the name of the Puntledge River (Akrigg and Akrigg 1973:142; Arnett 2007:247; Barnett 1955:23; Bouchard and Kennedy 2006:237-238; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:451; Kinkade 2008:100; Rozen 1985:27). Thus, Pentlatch refers to the Indigenous people who were Pentlatch language speakers who lived in the Comox Valley area, which was formerly known as Pentlatch.

While the language of the Pentlatch people was clearly Coast Salish in affiliation, many if not most aspects of traditional Pentlatch culture were more closely related to their Kwakwala-speaking neighbours to the north than to their Coast Salish-speaking neighbours to the south (Barnett 1939:224-225, 1955:26). Examples of Pentlatch cultural traits associated with Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw (Kwakwala-speaking) cultures include their participation in a range of inherited prerogatives displayed at winter dance ceremonies (such as particular masks and dances), the use of gable-roofed houses with excavated floors, the use of painted house fronts, the use of totem poles, and the use of inherited titles/potlatch names (Barnett 1939:242-243, 276). All evidence indicates that the Pentlatch people were part of a hybrid culture including both Coast Salish and Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw traits, and it appears that this is a rather ancient pattern, and not as a result of historical acculturation.

The pre-contact Pentlatch people lived in a number of large settlements located around Comox Harbour, along the Courtenay, Puntledge and Tsolum rivers, and on Denman Island and Hornby Island (Capes 1964:22-23, 44, 58, 64; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:442-443). Like all Indigenous peoples of pre-contact British Columbia, Pentlatch people relocated to different settlements or camps throughout the year to take advantage of locally abundant resources. An example of this was recorded in March of AD 1860, when a large Pentlatch and K'ómoks village

of several hundred people on the Courtenay River relocated to Henry Bay on Denman Island and constructed their houses there to take advantage of the locally abundant shellfish and herring (Dorricott and Cullon 2012:34-35). The area around Comox Lake was probably used in a similar seasonal fashion by pre-contact Pentlatch people. It is expected that in the summer, Pentlatch people would have travelled to and camped around Comox Lake from their primary villages in Comox Harbour to harvest berries and cedar bark, and to hunt small game. In the late fall and winter, they would have travelled to and camped around Comox Lake to hunt large game, such as deer and elk, who descend from higher elevations during the winter. The waters of Comox Lake should not be viewed as a boundary, but rather as a travel corridor for canoe travel around the lake.

19th Century Changes

Around AD 1850 (between AD 1842 and 1852), several K'ómoks groups or tribes relocated from the Discovery Passage area to the Comox Valley and Denman Island (Everson 2000:17-19; Meade 1980:17-20; Hayman 1989:122; Kennedy and Bouchard 1983:16, 1990:441). This move was in response to a series of devastating raids from the Lekwiltok from the north that nearly wiped out a number of K'ómoks settlements in the AD 1840's (Galois 1994:42-55, 233-240; Meade 1980:17-20). Shortly after arriving in the Comox Valley area, K'ómoks and Pentlatch people began living side-by-side in the same village at the mouth of the Courtenay River, with distinct clusters of houses belonging to individual K'ómoks tribes and the Pentlatch (the future IR No.1). In AD 1876 the three K'ómoks tribes living at IR No.1 (the SaLαLt, Säsitla and Eiksαn) were amalgamated into the Comox Indian Band (Sproat 1876/77), now called K'ómoks First Nation. Based on this timeline, regular use of the Comox Lake area by K'ómoks people

likely began around AD 1850, when the surviving K'ómoks tribes had relocated to the Comox Valley.

Beginning prior to the K'ómoks relocation, perhaps by AD 1810, the Pentlatch became the subject of a series of overland raids from the Nuu-Chan-Nulth speakers of Alberni Inlet (Capes 1964:44; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:443). Significantly, the route taken in these overland raids originated in Alberni Inlet, headed north along the west flank of the Beaufort Range to Comox Lake via the Puntledge River, around Comox Lake and finally to the Courtenay area (i.e., the Alberni Trail). These raids wiped out one or more Pentlatch villages (Capes 1964:44). After the K'ómoks had moved south, they too became embroiled in these raids. The K'ómoks ultimately led a raid against the Opetchesaht and Sheshaht of Alberni Inlet and Barclay Sound, respectively, and nearly wiped out the former (Barker 1961; Hayman 1989:129). In AD 1864 while travelling to Comox Lake from Comox, Robert Brown's party discovered human skeletal remains near the junction of the Browns and Puntledge rivers, and were told by their K'ómoks or Pentlatch guides of the raids between the Pentlatch and K'ómoks and the Opetchesaht and Sheshaht, and Brown noted that his guides were fearful of reprisals from old enemies in the area (Hayman 1989:119, 129). Given this history, the Comox Lake area must have been a relatively dangerous place to be in the first half of the 19th century, and this may have dissuaded Pentlatch people from travelling here as frequently as they likely previously had, or triggered people to only travel in larger groups when using the area.

Early EuroCanadian Descriptions

Early EuroCanadian descriptions of Comox Lake provide some insight into local ecology and Indigenous land use. The first EuroCanadian description of Comox Lake is probably from

Reginald Pidcock in AD 1862 (Pidcock 1862:87). When Pidcock travelled up the Puntledge River with his K'ómoks or Pentlatch guides, he described an abundance of beaver around where the Puntledge River drains Comox Lake (Pidcock 1862:87). This description indicates that swamp and wetland environments that beaver thrive in must have been much more extensive at Comox Lake than they presently are.

Two years later, Robert Brown and the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition (including K'ómoks or Pentlatch guides) also ascended the Puntledge River, believing that they were the first EuroCanadians to do so (Hayman 1989:127). Brown's party left detailed notes and sketches of their explorations, and these materials are the most extensive early historic descriptions of Comox Lake and environs.

Travelling up the Puntledge River, near the junction of the Browns River with the Puntledge River, Brown's party found human remains and were told by their guides about the recent conflict between the Pentlatch/K'ómoks and the people of Alberni Valley (Hayman 1989:129). Brown further noted cedar trees with pieces of bark cut from them (i.e., cultural modified trees, CMTs) along this route, and interpreted them as signs of recent Indigenous use (Brown 1864:82). Brown's journal indicates that they observed beaver and their lodges on the upper reaches of the Puntledge River (Hayman 1989:132). After reaching Comox Lake (which he called Puntledge Lake in his personal journal), he observed "a beaver lake with extensive swamps" (Hayman 1989:133), and found a very old canoe (Brown 1864:82). Given that on this day Brown's party was very close to the outlet of the Puntledge River, it is likely that the "beaver lake" described is in fact Black Lake, and that Black Lake and its associated wet lands were much more extensive than they currently are due to the damming of Comox Lake. Brown further noted that "the Indians at one time used to hunt here for beaver, but have ceased to travel so far

for many years" and indicate that "…they [Indians] used to travel overland, about five miles in a straight line" (Hayman 1989:133). I suggest that the route of this traditional trail to Comox Lake is approximated same route later followed by Lake Trail road. Exploration of the Puntledge River (that drains into Comox Lake) and Cruikshank River by Brown's party encountered numerous beaver dams, and signs of wolf, elk and marmot, and they successfully hunted several beavers there (Brown 1864:75, 80; Hayman 1989:133).

The historical record describing Comox Lake after the Vancouver Island Exploration Expedition is silent for 20 years. Then in AD 1884, two settlers witnessed an Indigenous man (presumably K'ómoks or Pentlatch) kill five elk at Comox Lake (Mackie 1995:171). Aside from this brief account, I am not aware of other historical records describing Indigenous use of Comox Lake in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

These limited first-hand accounts of Comox Lake and immediate environs highlight several key aspects of Indigenous use. First, beavers were very abundant on Comox Lake and associated watersheds, and in earlier times Pentlatch people regularly hunted or trapped them. Second, elk were seasonally abundant around Comox Lake, and were hunted by K'ómoks/Pentlatch people. Third, there were signs of Indigenous use of the area, in terms of CMTs, and an old canoe. This evidence suggests that the Comox Lake area was used on a seasonal basis by resident Pentlatch people whose villages were around Comox Harbour.

The Name of Comox Lake

It is important to note the earlier Indigenous name for Comox Lake appears to be the equivalent of Pentlatch Lake, derived from the Pentlatch people, their language, and home. It is not clear when the name Comox Lake became established, but early historic and ethnographic accounts

invariably describe it as Pentlatch Lake. For example, in AD 1864, members of the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition travelled up the Puntledge River and across Comox Lake (Hayman 1989:132-134). In their journals, Robert Brown (Brown 1864:80) and Fred Whymper (Whymper 1864, cited in Isenor et al. 1987:253) both described Comox Lake as "Puntledge Lake". It is likely that Brown and Whymper were told this was the name of the lake by the K'ómoks or Pentlatch guides they hired earlier at KFN IR No.1 (Hayman 1989:115). Later, in AD 1886, anthropologist and linguist Franz Boas spent a few weeks in Comox recording texts and word lists from K'ómoks and Pentlatch people (Boas 1886; Yampolsky 1958). In the Pentlatch oral history describing the flood and the white whale (see discussion below), Boas recorded the name of the lake under the glacier (i.e., Comox Lake), as Pentlatch Lake (Bouchard and Kennedy 2006:236-237; Kinkade 2008:100). Again, Boas was presumably told that the lake was called Pentlatch because that was its proper name.

While the Pentlatch language has been extinct since about AD 1940 (Barnett 1955:6; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:443), Boas (1886:16) recorded a considerable corpus of Pentlatch words and texts in AD 1886. This includes the Pentlatch name for lake as *sĕl'al'* (Boas 1886:16). Thus, the earlier Indigenous name for Comox Lake would have been something like "*Pentlatch sĕl'al'*" or "*sĕl'al' Pentlatch*". When the name 'Comox Lake' began to be used as name to what was formerly *Pentlatch sĕl'al'* or *sĕl'al' Pentlatch* in the late 19th century, it was because of the affiliation of the region with the K'ómoks people (Scott 2009:129). Recall from above that the K'ómoks people had only relocated to the Comox Valley area around AD 1850, but because they were far more numerous than the original Pentlatch people, Eurocanadians described the Baynes Sound and Comox Valley area as the "…country of the Comoucs Indians" (Hayman 1989:111).

Thus the name Comox, Comox Lake, the Comox Glacier etc. are all derived from one of the tribal names of the K'ómoks people (Scott 2009:129).

Recorded Oral Histories Regarding Comox Lake

There is a limited amount of information on traditional KFN land and resource use around Comox Lake from ethnographic and historic references, but existing sources identify it as a highly significant place in Pentlatch history, an important resource harvesting area, and a route to the west coast of Vancouver Island. The following sections briefly describe recorded oral histories that describe or are affiliated with Comox Lake.

One version of the oral history describing the origin of the Pentlatch people locates the origin of their First Ancestors at a lake that, from the context of the story, can only be Comox Lake (Arnett 2007:247-249). According to that oral history: "In the beginning, long ago, there were no people living at Punt-Lutz [Pentlatch]. Then a long way back in the woods where there was a lake, a man was made" (Arnett 2007:247). This oral history describes how the children of this man travelled down-river, discovered the sea and abundant beach food, then returned to their parents and told them of the abundant food there. Then, "…the little houses were taken down, the skins and all that the people had were packed, and together they all started down the river to the sea. There they formed the Punt-Lutz [Pentlatch] tribe, which grew to be a tribe of many hundreds…" (Arnett 2007:249-250). Although Comox Lake is not specifically named in this account, it is the only notable lake that drains into Comox Harbour, is almost certainly the lake described therein.

Comox Lake is also described in a well-known Pentlatch oral history describing the great flood and the origin of the Comox Glacier. In this oral history, after a great flood that covered the land, "a whale remained stranded high up on the mountain near Pe'ntlatc Lake. The water up there froze and the whale was unable to get away again. The whale can still be seen there today and that is why the glacier in the Pe'ntlatc Valley is called K·onē'is" (K·onē'is = whale, 'Queneesh') (Bouchard and Kennedy 2006:238). K·onē'is, the white whale is currently understood to be a profoundly spiritual being, a protector of the Pentlatch people (W. Speck, pers. Comm. 2016), and remains an important symbol of KFN identity to this day (**Figure *1***).

Note that the Comox Glacier drains into the Puntledge River, into Comox Lake, into the other Puntledge River, into the Courtenay River and finally into Comox Harbour. Thus, this spiritual being literally feeds the watershed of the Comox Valley, and provides the means by which salmon can ascend the Courtenay River, enabling Pentlatch and later K'ómoks people to harvest these fish when they return. In light of this, K·onē'is the Comox Glacier should be understood as spiritually and physically nourishing the Pentlatch people since the time of the great flood.

Another recorded oral history, set around AD 1820-40 also describes a group of Cowichan people travelling through Comox Lake, after a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Lekwiltok near Salmon River (Arnett 2007:73-75, 335). In this account, the retreating Cowichan find a recently used campsite at Comox Lake, and then find a raft and travel down-river on it to the home of the Pentlatch. There, the Pentlatch chief Kom-Quil-Ache ('Down Dancer') supplied them with chum salmon and a canoe to return home (Arnett 2007:74). Comox Lake is really incidental to this oral history, but it demonstrates that Pentlatch people actively used the area in

the early 19th century, as evidenced by the recent campsite and raft that the Cowichan found there.

Figure 1. The K'ómoks Big House with white whale painted on front.

K'ómoks First Nation Traditional and Ongoing Use of the Comox Lake Area

KFN holds a large body of confidential traditional use study (TUS) information describing recent and on-going use of the territory by KFN people. The range of TUS information includes locations where: people have undertaken harvesting activities (hunting, fishing, gathering), people have camped when undertaking those activities, people have undertaken cultural or spiritual activities, and other cultural or historical information about the landscape, including Indigenous place names and historical sites.

This TUS information was collected in four large research projects: 1) a TUS undertaken by the Hamatla Treaty Society (~AD 2003 when KFN was still a member of the Hamatla Treaty

Society), 2) a TUS undertaken under the name the Galgalis Project (~AD 2008 when KFN was still a member of the Laich-Kwil-Tach Treaty Society), 3) a dual study focussing on the Campbell River area and Baynes Sound area (Kwusen 2013), and 4) a study focussing on the Campbell River watershed and secondarily the rest of KFN territory (Kwusen 2020). These latter two research projects used traditional TUS interviews, mapping techniques and field verification. Additionally, two other ethnohistoric research projects undertaken by Bouchard et al. (1999, 2004) include considerable information on KFN land use that is equivalent to TUS data, although this was not the specific purpose of those interviews. These traditional land use studies identified a range of KFN land use activities from historic, ethnographic, and oral history records, including a number of earlier interviews with knowledgeable KFN elders. Kwusen's (2013) KFN TUS project digitized and georeferenced much of the earlier TUS data, integrating it into a GoogleEarth linked database allowing for rapid place-based querying, the Community Knowledge Keeper (CKK). Kwusen's (2020) KFN TUS data has been similarly digitized and linked to the CKK, and combined, this database holds approximately 937 individual TUS values across KFN territory.

Cumulatively, the TUS projects described above have collected and documented a wide range of KFN land use activities spanning from about AD 1900 to 2020, across the breadth of KFN territory. This TUS information is considered confidential, and is not generally shared. For this reason, I have not included maps of the KFN TUS data. To evaluate recent and ongoing KFN use of the CVRD Comox Lake properties, I have queried the KFN TUS database (CKK) by a polygon consisting of the CVRD Comox Lake properties and the adjacent portion of Comox Lake and Black Lake (not all of Comox Lake) as illustrated in **Figure *3***. Eleven KFN TUS values were identified within this polygon and are discussed below.

KFN TUS data indicates that there are considerable recent and on-going harvesting activities undertaken by KFN members in the study area (Table 1). Hunting (n = 5) and fishing (n =5) activities are well-represented, and gathering activities are less well represented (n =1). The species hunted include deer, grouse and elk, and the species fished include trout, kokanee and salmon (Table 1). A range of species of berries were harvested in this area. These TUS data are important because they document ongoing traditional KFN harvesting activities in the study area. Any planned or proposed developments in this study area could have the potential to impact KFN's Aboriginal rights (i.e., the right to fish and hunt), and should therefore include consultation with KFN at the earliest feasible planning stages.

Table 1. KFN TUS data within the study area.

TUS Value/Activity	Number of Cases	Species of Interest
Fishing	5	Trout, Kokanee, Salmon
Hunting	5	Deer, Grouse, Elk
Gathering	1	Berries (various)
Total	11	

Archaeological Background

The history of archaeological investigation of eastern Vancouver Island has been strongly oriented towards coastal areas, where the remains of past indigenous settlements and camps in the form of highly visible shell middens are abundant (Capes 1964; Mitchell 1974, 1988; Monks 1987). Considerably less archaeological investigation of inland portions of Vancouver Island has been undertaken, but surveys of Comox Lake and other regional lakes have identified culturally modified trees (CMTs), lithic sites, and rock art (O. Grant, pers. Comm. 2020; Maxwell et al.

2001; Maxwell et al. 2002). Previous archaeological surveys of Comox Lake is are of direct relevance to the current study area, and archaeological surveys of the inundation zones of other lakes in central Vancouver Island are of general relevance to the study area.

In AD 2002, Baseline Archaeological Services undertook a boat-based survey of parts of the Comox Lake inundation zone which they assessed to have high archaeological potential. The Baseline survey identified six archaeological sites, all of which were CMTs sites (commercially logged standing CMT stump remnants), and identified a ground stone point held at the Cumberland Museum that was collected from one of these CMT sites at the mouth of the Cruikshank River (Baseline 2002). These CMT sites dated from the early 18th century to the late 19th century. Also in AD 2002, Millennia Research Limited undertook an archaeological impact assessment of a forestry block adjacent to Comox Lake and identified five CMT sites (Millennia 2002). These surveys indicate that archaeological sites exist around Comox Lake and should be anticipated in un-surveyed areas.

South of Comox Lake, archaeological surveys have also been undertaken of the inundation zones of Sproat Lake, Great Central Lake, and Elsie Lake (Maxwell et al. 2001, 2002). These surveys have identified approximately 50 archaeological sites, consisting of lithic sites, rock art sites and CMTs in the inundation zones. Elsie Lake, about half the size of Comox Lake, has 37 recorded archaeological sites around it.

Recent and ongoing archaeological surveys of the inundation zones at Lower Campbell Lake, Upper Campbell Lake, and Buttle Lake have identified a high density of archaeological sites in these inundation zones (O. Grant, pers. Comm. 2020). A near-total survey of the inundation zone of Upper Campbell Lake identified 18 archaeological sites, 17 lithic sites and one rock art site. Surveys of Upper Campbell Lake and Buttle Lake have covered about 10% of

the inundation zones and identified 50 lithic sites, indicating very high site densities around these lakes. The fact that earlier surveys of Comox Lake and other regional archaeological surveys of lake reservoirs have been very successful in identifying archaeological sites suggests that there is a high probability of similar sites occurring within the CVRD lands around eastern Comox Lake.

Recorded Archaeological Sites Around Comox Lake

Archaeological survey and chance finds of artifacts prior to AD 2020 have identified 12 archaeological sites around Comox Lake (Table 2) (**Figure *2***). More generally, Capes (1960:9) describes local finds of flaked stone projectile points around the shores of Comox Lake before its flooding, but provides no indication as to where these finds occurred. Aside for two cases, these are CMT sites consisting of all bark-stripped CMTs. Analysis of samples taken from these CMT sites indicates that bark harvesting activities were undertaken continuously around Comox Lake from the early 18th to the late 19th centuries (Baseline 2002; Millennia 2002). One very large CMT site (DjSh-1) at the mouth of the Cruikshank River also had a ground stone point associated with it (collected in the 1970's by a local logger during low water levels), indicating that hunting activities were also undertaken in this area, in addition to bark harvesting (Table 2) (**Figure *2***). Another site (DjSg-11) is defined by an isolated ground slate point which was found eroding out of a local hiking trail (Queso Grande Trail) located 2 km south of Comox Lake on the Hancock Forestry Management Property (Table 2) (**Figure *2***). The nature of this site/find suggests that it was lost while hunting game, rather than being part of a regularly used camp site.

This should not be considered a complete archaeological inventory of anything but a few very small portions of Comox Lake, and it is important to note that the Baseline (2002) inundation zone survey could not access natural or historic shoreline. The mouths of the

Cruikshank and Puntledge rivers especially have considerable potential to have additional archaeological sites in the inundation zone.

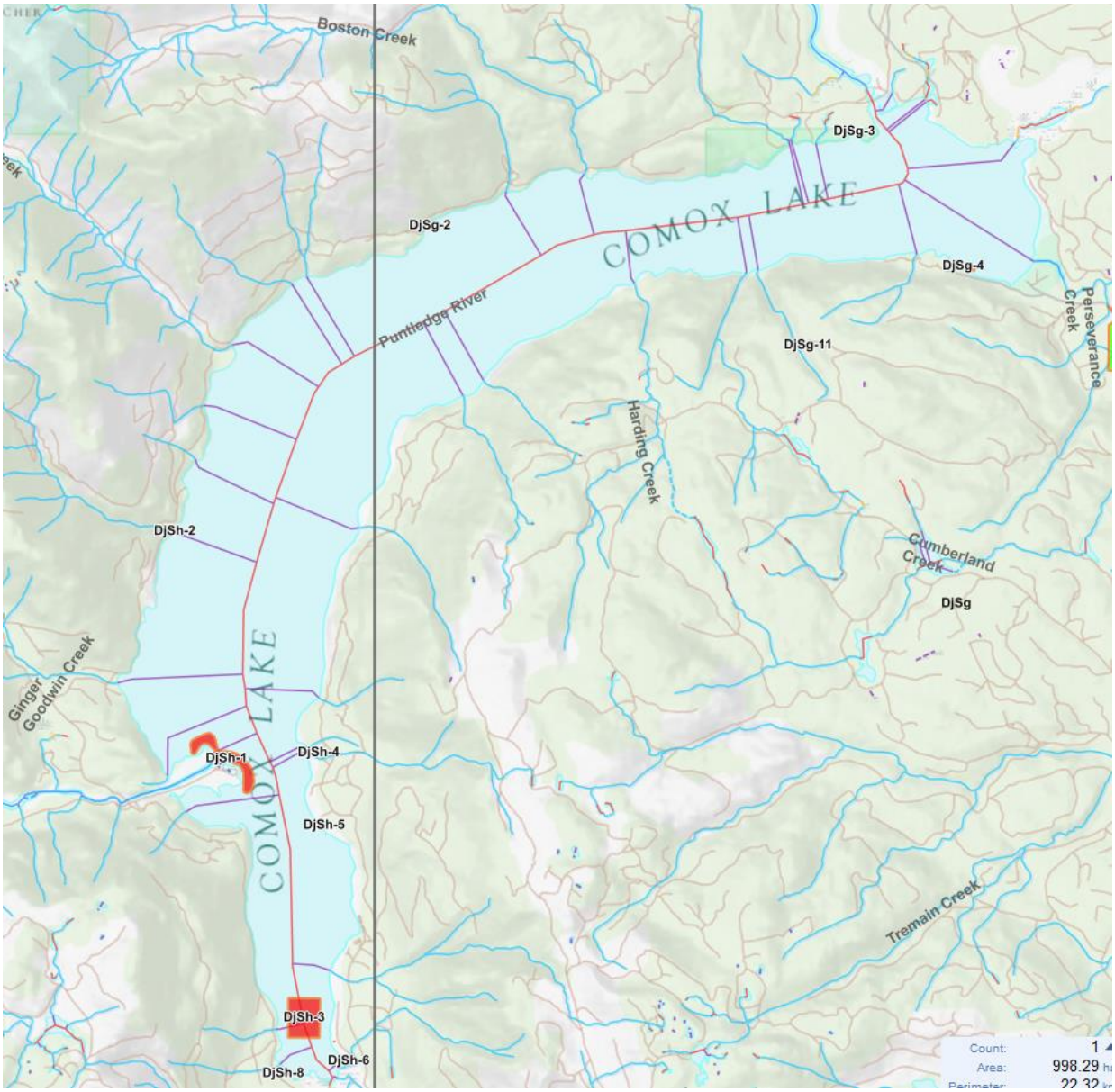

Figure 2. Recorded archaeological sites around Comox Lake prior to this PFR/survey.

Table 2. Recorded Archaeological Sites Around Comox Lake.

Borden Number	Area	Type	Reference
DjSh-1	Mouth of Cruikshank River	CMT, lithic (ground slate point)	Baseline 2002
DjSh-2	West Shore Comox Lake	CMT	Baseline 2002
DjSh-3	Mouth of Puntledge River	CMT	Baseline 2002
DjSh-4	East Shore Comox Lake	CMT	Millennia 2002
DjSh-5	East Shore Comox Lake	CMT	Millennia 2002
DjSh-6	Mouth of Puntledge River	CMT	Millennia 2002
DjSh-7	Mouth of Puntledge River	CMT	Millennia 2002
DjSh-8	Mouth of Puntledge River	CMT	Baseline 2002/Millennia 2002
DjSg-2	North Shore Comox Lake	CMT	Baseline 2002
DjSg-3	North Shore Comox Lake	CMT	Baseline 2002
DjSg-4	Cumberland Lake Park Boat Launch	CMT	Baseline 2002
DjSg-11	Queso Grande trail	lithic (ground slate point)	DjSg-11 site form

Anticipated Archaeological Sites Around Comox Lake

Given our understanding of pre-contact Pentlatch settlement patterns, recorded archaeological sites around Comox Lake, and historic descriptions of Indigenous use of the area, several types of archaeological sites should be anticipated in the CVRD lands study area. These include lithic sites, including lithic scatters and isolated finds, CMT sites, and rock art sites. The lithic sites would include the remains of camps, butchery sites and kill sites. CMT sites should be expected in the vicinity of camps and trails. Such camps and butchery sites would have been used on a seasonal basis by Pentlatch people who resided in villages around Comox Harbour or along the Puntledge River.

Archaeological Survey of Comox Lake East Beach

Survey Overview

On February 26th, 2020, Jesse Morin and Krissy Brown (K'ómoks First Nation Guardian Watchmen) undertook a non-permitted pedestrian archaeological survey of the shoreline area of the Comox Valley Regional District's (CVRD's) recently acquired property at the east end of Comox Lake. The archaeological survey area of the PFR (preliminary field reconnaissance consists of the strip of shoreline along the eastern shore of Comox Lake, from the mouth of Perseverance Creek in the south, to the CVRD property boundary with the Courtenay Rod and Gun Club to the north. This area was investigated because it holds the highest archaeological potential of the CVRD Comox Lake East property. On the day of the archaeological survey, the weather was fair (no rain, light wind) and visibility excellent. The water levels of Comox Lake were recorded as 133.09 m asl on the day of the survey (https://wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/report/real_time_e.html?stn=08HB082), perhaps one meter lower than average, but perhaps two meters short of the lowest levels that are usually registered in late fall.

Given the historic flooding of Comox Lake associated with the dam on the Puntledge River, water levels at the time of survey (133.09 masl) were likely 3 to 4 m higher than historic pre-dam levels at the time of this survey. BC Hydro indicates that the original pre-AD 1912 lake levels are unknown, but the new Comox Dam is 10 m high, and the modern reservoir operates between 130.75-135.33 masl (E. Whichmann April 2020). Baseline's AD 2002 (Baseline 2002:iv, 3-4) archaeological survey of Comox Lake was undertaken with lake levels at 134 masl estimates that water levels were about 4 m above natural levels at the time of their survey. Based on this limited information, the natural, pre-dam water levels of Comox Lake are probably

around 129-130 masl. Because the gradient of the shoreline is quite low in most of the survey area, a decrease in water levels of 3 to 4 m (approaching pre-dam historic conditions) would extend the shoreline up to 100 m west near Perseverance Creek and Black Lake (***Figure 3***). Stumps protruding above the water located well offshore provide clear evidence of this flooding and alteration of the shoreline (**Figure *4***).

Given the results of Baseline's earlier archaeological survey of Comox Lake, and comparable archaeological surveys around Lower Campbell, Upper Campbell and Buttle Lake, the vast majority of archaeological sites are clustered very close to historic, pre-dam lake levels, and are inundated most of the time. This means that our survey of East Comox Lake could not access most of the historic shoreline of the area, the area with the greatest potential to contain archaeological materials.

The February 26 2020 archaeological survey can be divided into four segments (***Figure 3***):

1. Segment #1, from the mouth of Perseverance Creek in the south, to the northern edge of the coal slag and historic debris associated with Mine #4 (APEC 1) (~500 m).
2. Segment #2, from the northern edge of the coal slag and historic debris associated with Mine #4 (APEC 1) to the cliffs at the cabins at the entrance to Whytes Bay (~300 m).
3. Segment #3, from the cliffs and cabins at the southern edge of Whytes Bay to the outlet of Black Lake (~ 650 m).
4. Segment #4, extending from the outlet of Black Lake in the east to the CVRD/Rod and Gun Club property boundary in the west (~600 m).

The results of the survey and associated observations are described below for each segment.

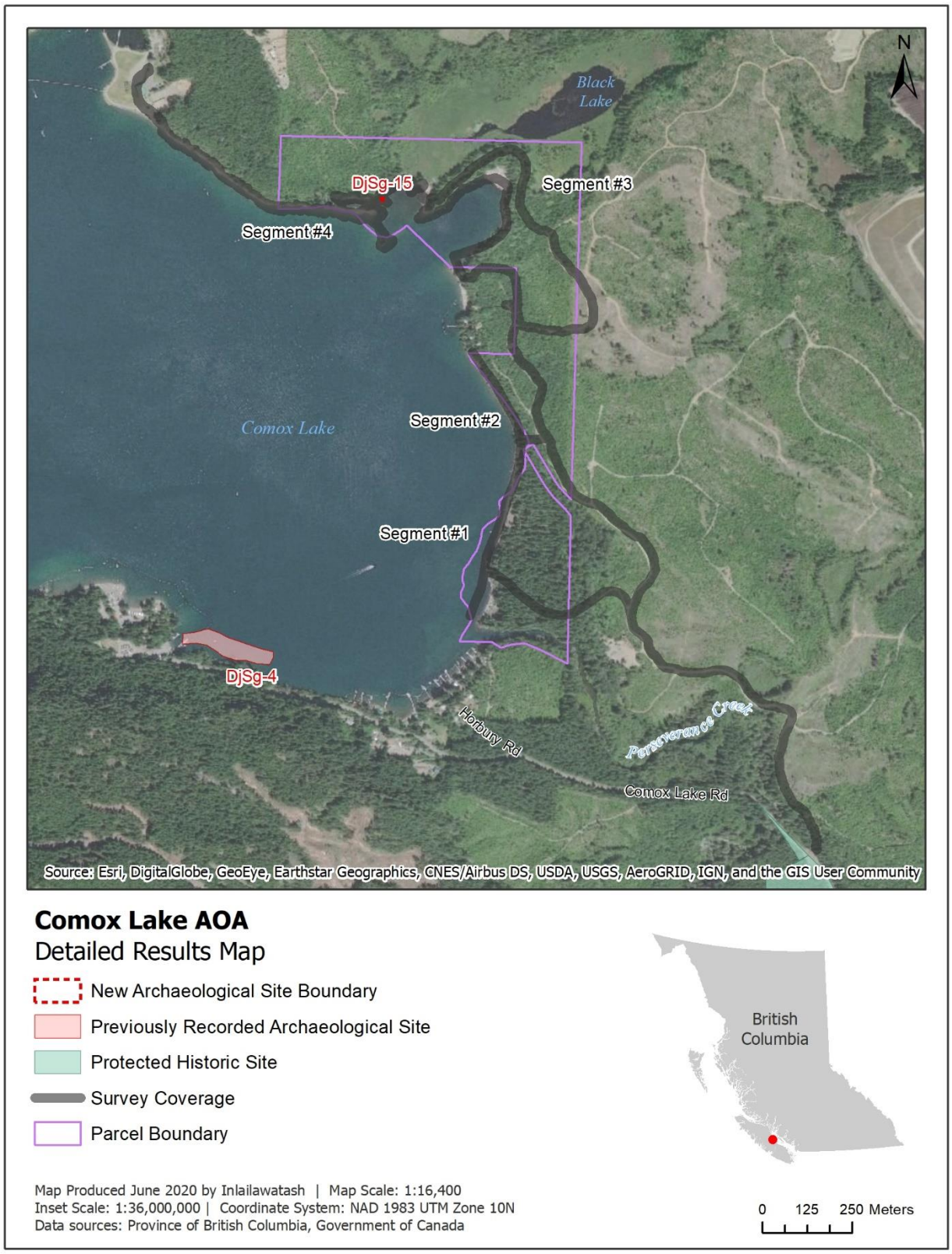

Figure 3. AOA survey coverage.

Figure 4. Stumps protruding above the water offshore near Perseverance Creek.

Segment #1 – Perseverance Creek and Mine #4

Beginning at the mouth of Perseverance Creek in the south, the shoreline of Comox Lake is completely blanketed with coal slag, eroding from the extensive mounds of coal tailings derived from Mine #4, extending about 200 m to the north (***Figure 5***). This area is locally known as Coal Beach. There is no visibility of natural rocky/pebbly substrate here, and it is not clear how deep these historic coal slag deposits are here. Beginning about 200 m north of Perseverance Creek, a long beach is largely covered with fine deposits of coal/coal slag, likely derived from tailings

deposits to the south (***Figure 6***). The only portions of the natural shoreline surface not covered by fine coal deposits visible here were the areas closest to the lake shore. It appears that during storms, waves drive the lighter coal further up the shore, leaving the natural substrate exposed. No archaeological materials were observed in this area.

Figure 5. Extensive coal slag/tailings at the mouth of Perseverance Creek, looking north. Note partially inundated stumps in the distance indicating that water levels at the time of the survey were higher than natural/historic pre-dam levels.

Figure 6. Coal Beach located ~ 200 m north of Perseverance Creek, looking south. Fine coal tailings deposit covering most of the natural shoreline sediments here.

Segment #2 – Mine #4 Tailings to the cliffs at the entrance to Whytes Bay

Moving north from the Mine #4 area, the beach is much more natural in appearance, but also includes coal tailings, historic debris (railway ties and other iron objects) and the remains of the trestle linking the Scott's Slope Mine with Mine #4 (***Figure 7***) (Isenor et al. 1987:275). More of the natural beach surface was exposed here than in Segment #1, and someone appears to be constructing mounds and features with the large pieces of coal slag here, and gathering up piles of iron debris (***Figure 8***). In addition to surveying the beach surface here, we also inspected the

adjacent sandstone cliff for rock art (***Figure 8***). Our survey of this segment terminated at a sheer sandstone cliff where there is no beach shore, near the property line between the CVRD lot and several cabins (the north cabins) (***Figure 9***). No archaeological materials were observed along this segment.

Figure 7. Segment #2 beach, looking north towards Whytes Bay. Note low quantities of coal slag/tailings and the remains of a wooden railway trestle, probably the "Scott's Slope" narrow gauge trestle mapped in Isenor et al. (1987:275).

Figure 8. Recently constructed feature of coal slag and iron debris, right.

Figure 9. Steep sandstone bluffs at cabins at entrance to Whytes Bay.

Segment #3 – Whytes Bay

The third segment of the pedestrian shoreline survey commenced at the beach immediately north of the sheer sandstone cliffs at the southern edge of Whytes Bay, and continued north and west around the bay. The cobble and pebble beach here appeared to be entirely unmodified by historic activities, and very stable, with very little erosion or natural redeposition of materials (***Figure 10***). For these reasons, the Whytes Bay area appears to have the highest archaeological potential

of all the areas investigated in this survey[1]. The head of Whytes Bay is completely and thickly covered with driftwood, driven into the bay by the wind, and the ground surface is not visible. This segment of the survey terminated at the marshy, stream-like outlet of Whytes Bay (***Figure 11***). No archaeological materials were observed along this segment.

Figure 10. Whytes Bay looking southwest. Remains of wooden trestle, probably the "Scott's Slope" narrow gauge trestle mapped in Isenor et al. (1987:275), visible top right.

[1] The exception to this generalization is the location of the artifact find location in Segment #4 – DjSg-15. The presence of an artifact there enhances the archaeological potential of that locality.

Figure 11. The outlet of Black Lake into Comox Lake.

Segment #4 – Black Lake to Courtenay Rod and Gun Club

The final segment of the survey, Segment #4, was undertaken by traversing the beach from the west, beginning at the Courtenay and District Fish and Game Protective Association (locally called the Courtenay Rod and Gun Club). Aside from trestle remains and occasional large iron debris, the cobble and pebble beach here, on the north shore of Comox Lake, appears to be largely free of historic impacts (***Figure 12***, ***Figure 13***). However, the steep glacial till scarps to the north appear to be rapidly eroding and depositing gravels on the current beach (***Figure 12***). If archaeological materials did occur on the pre-dam beach surface here, such materials would

likely now be buried with recently deposited gravels. Toward the east, this erosion is less severe. The eastern end of Segment #4 has a distinctive gravel bar extending to what, under typical water levels, would be a very small island with two trees growing on it. It is possible that this gravel bar is relatively recent in age, likely forming after the dam was constructed, and erosion of the till scarps here greatly accelerated. Just north of here, Black Lake empties into Comox Lake via two stream-like outlets. These outlets are extensively and deeply buried in driftwood and afford no visibility of the ground surface. There is a small gravel beach between the two outlets of Black Lake.

A single artifact was recovered at 350045 E, 5500500 N (***Figure 14***, ***Figure 15***, ***Figure 16***). This site was registered as DjSg-15 by the Archaeology Branch. The artifact find spot is located in a natural shallow hollow or basin, inland from a notable gravel bar to the southwest, and about 100 m west of the current outlet of Black Lake. With slightly higher water levels (~ 50 cm), this location would be under water, while in pre-dam times it would have been much drier than it presently is. The dimensions of this site were defined as a 2.5 m radius from the artifact find spot (i.e., a 5 m diameter circle, as per Archaeology Branch standards). While other surface artifacts were not observed here during our survey, it is very likely that additional artifacts are located here both on the surface and sub-surface, and current site boundaries should be taken as provisional until further examination of this site can be undertaken at lower water levels, including sub-surface testing.

This artifact is an unmodified flake made of dacite or fine-grained basalt that measures about 5 cm by 4 cm. The striking platform is not present on this flake, but its former location is interpretable because of the presence of a distinctive bulb of percussion on its ventral surface, and the direction of the flake scars on its dorsal surface (***Figure 15***, ***Figure 16***). This flake

removed from a larger core or biface, either at the find spot/site location, or at a different location. This flake would have been usable as a cutting tool (outdoor unmagnified viewing of this flake did not allow for examination for use-wear), or it could have been discarded in the process of resharpening or modifying a larger stone tool. Because this survey was not undertaken under a Heritage Conservation Act permit, the artifact was left in place, and a nearby rock was marked with flagging tape. The survey of Segment #4 terminated at the eastern outlet of Black Lake.

Figure 12. Beach at Segment #4, looking east towards Whytes Bay. Eroding scarp visible on left.

Figure 13. Trestle remains near the mouth of Whytes Bay, probably the "Scott's Slope" narrow gauge trestle mapped in Isenor et al. (1987:275). The artifact was recovered at DjSg-15 about 50 m northeast of this location, or left in this photo.

Figure 14. Location of the artifact find spot (DjSg-15) on Segment #4. probably the "Scott's Slope" narrow gauge trestle mapped in Isenor et al. (1987:275).

Figure 15. Dacite flake identified in Segment #4 (DjSg-15) during the beach survey. Ventral surface of flake, bulb of percussion at top.

Figure 16. Dacite flake identified on beach survey of Segment #4 (DjSg-15:1). Dorsal surface of flake, platform not present but would have been located at the bottom of the artifact.

Figure 17. View towards DjSg-15 site from the gravel beach between the two outlets of Black Lake.

Summary of Archaeological Survey

The archaeological survey of the shoreline of CVRD's recently acquired lands at the east end of Comox Lake was successful in identifying a new archaeological site (DjSg-15) and in assessing the archaeological potential of the various parts of this shoreline. However, relatively high water levels, compared to historic pre-dam levels, precluded most of the historic shoreline of Comox Lake, shoreline that is now 10 to 100 m offshore. It is strongly recommended that additional archaeological survey is undertaken during the lowest possible water levels in advance of any

ground disturbance or construction activities in the area. The results of this assessment must be understood in light of these inundated high potential areas.

1. Segment #1. The current shoreline is either completely or largely blanketed in historic coal slag/tailings. No archaeological materials observed here and the area has low archaeological potential. The pre-dam shore is located up to 100 m from present shore here, and this inundated pre-dam shore holds high archaeological potential (**Figure *18***).

2. Segment #2. The current shoreline has extensive coal slag/tailings, iron debris and trestle remains. No archaeological materials observed here and the area has moderate archaeological potential. The pre-dam shore here is located about 20 m from the present shore and this inundated pre-dam shore holds high archaeological potential (**Figure *18***).

3. Segment #3. The current shoreline appears entirely unmodified by historic activities and undergoes little or no erosion and redeposition of beach sediments. No archaeological materials observed here and the area has high archaeological potential. The pre-dam shore here is located about 25 to 80 m from the present shore and this inundated pre-dam shore holds high archaeological potential (**Figure *18***).

4. Segment #4. The current shoreline appears relatively unmodified by historic activities, but the western part of this shore has clear evidence of rapid erosion of till scarps, and the eastern part of this shore has clear evidence of relatively recent (i.e., post-dam) deposition of fine gravels. These parts of Segment #4 have low archaeological potential. The identification of a new archaeological site consisting of one artifact near the outlet of

Black Lake (DjSg-15) suggests that the shoreline here should be considered to have high archaeological potential. This newly identified site (DjSg-15) is registered as extending a 2.5 m radius from the artifact (as per Archaeology Branch standards), but it is likely that additional surface and subsurface artifacts exist here, well beyond current site boundaries. The pre-dam shore here is located about 40 m from the present shore and this inundated pre-dam shore holds high archaeological potential (**Figure *18***).

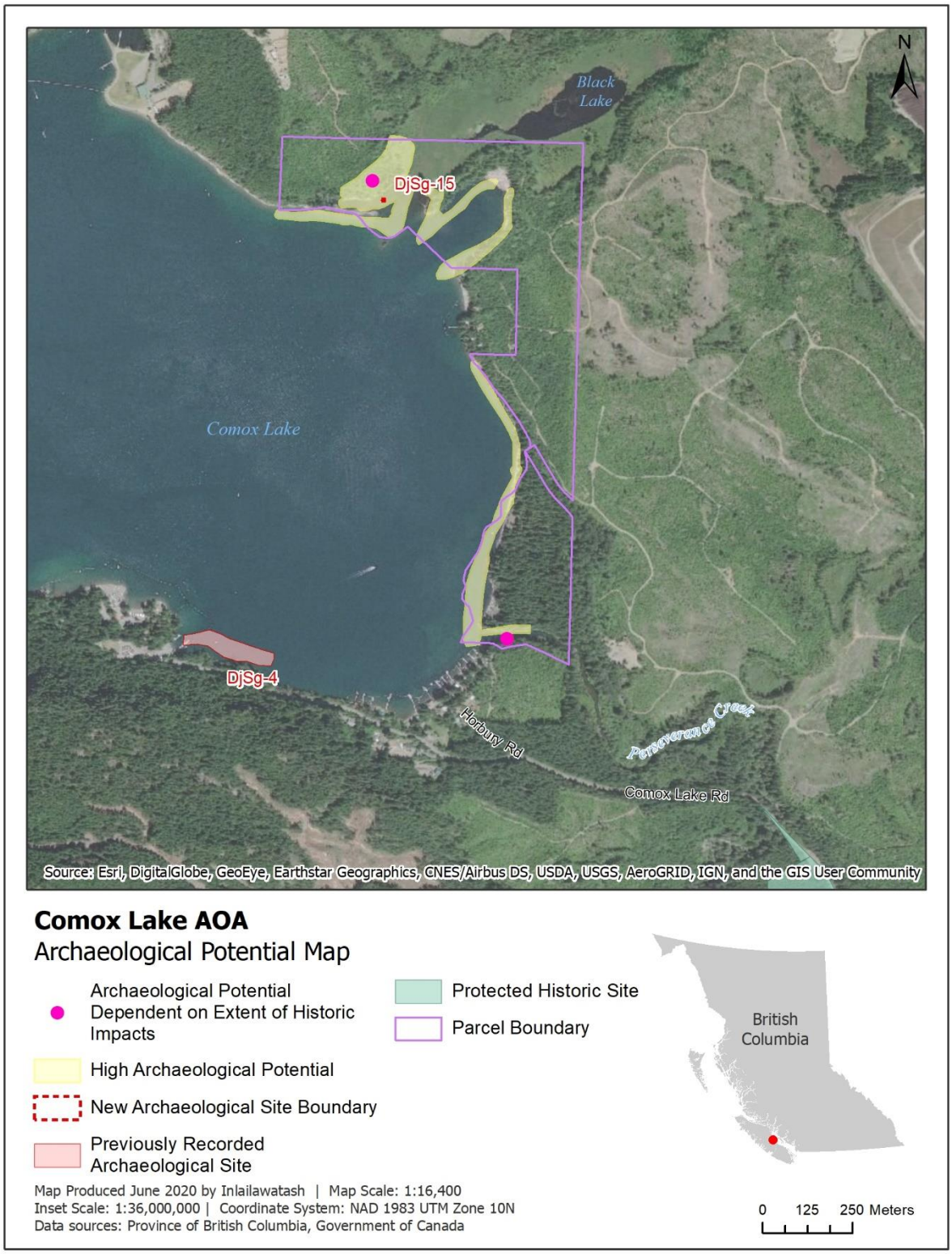

Figure 18. Identification of areas of high archaeological potential within the CVRD Comox Lake lands.

Assessment of Archaeological Potential of Adjacent Inland CVRD Lands

The inland CVRD lands at Comox Lake all have much lower archaeological potential than the shoreline and inundation zone. If the lands in question were pristine or unmodified by modern forestry and mining, they would have considerable potential for CMT sites and lithic scatters. However, there has been profound historic alteration of these lands.

There is no old growth within these lands, and most of the property has been recently commercially logged for the second time. Indeed, the oldest standing timber is less than 100 years old, and is growing on the coal tailings from Mine #4 (**Figure *19***). This intensive modification means there is no chance for pre-AD 1846 CMTs to be present on the inland portion of the property (CMTs may exist in the inundation zone). These extensive logging operations may have impacted small lithic sites if any had existed in the area.

As discussed in relation to the shoreline survey, early 20th century coal mining activities have considerably modified the landscape at this part of Comox Lake. The coal tailings from Mine #4 cover approximately one-quarter to one-third of the of the CVRD lands, and while there may be pre-contact sites or artifacts beneath these materials, there is no chance of finding pre-AD 1846 materials on top of this extensive coal slag. The original lands adjacent to Perseverance Creek under all the coal tailings should be considered to have high archaeological potential if they have been otherwise unmodified.

The landscape modifications at Scott's Slope Mine do not appear to have been as intensive as at Mine #4, but may have disturbed or destroyed pre-AD 1846 materials in the vicinity (**Figure *18***, **Figure *19***). However, these lands were not surveyed and extent of the land disturbance here is unknown (to the author). The location of Scott's Slope Mine generally, given its context adjacent to the small drainage between Black Lake and Comox Lake and the newly

identified site (**Figure *3***), should be considered to have high archaeological potential, but this potential must be somewhat reduced because of the mining activities here (**Figure *18***, **Figure *19***).

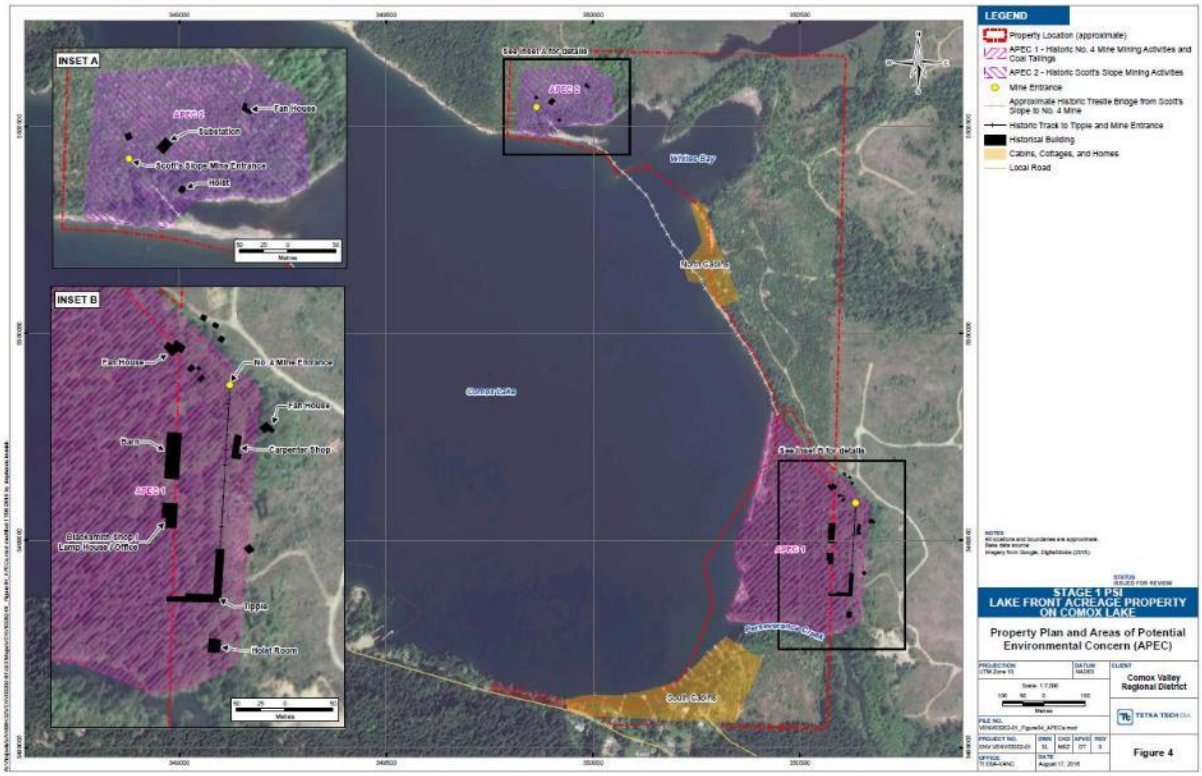

Figure 19. Map of historic coal mining activities on CVRD lands at Comox Lake.

Conclusion

The CVRD lands at the eastern end of Comox Lake have been heavily impacted by historic mining and forestry activities, but despite these impacts, some of these lands hold high archaeological potential and continue to be used by KFN members for traditional harvesting activities. In pre-contact times, the Comox Lake area was an important resource harvesting area and travelling route for the Pentlatch people. Beaver and elk appear to be the primary hunted species, but bark gathering and a number of other subsistence activities were also undertaken

here as well. The Comox Glacier or K·onē'is, which feeds Comox Lake, is understood to be an important spiritual being, protector of the Pentlatch people, and a symbol of identity for modern KFN people.

The PFR of the shoreline portion of the CVRD lands allowed for a more detailed assessment of the archaeological potential of that area. Much of the modern shore was found to be blanketed with coal tailings and provided no visibility of the natural beach surface. The natural or historic pre-dam shoreline is assessed as having high archaeological potential. A single artifact, a flake, was identified in the inundation zone near the outlet of Black Lake and was recorded with the Provincial Archaeological Registry under the temporary site number DjSg-15. The other areas assessed as having high archaeological potential – lands adjacent to Perseverance Creek and Black Lake – assuming that the mining debris there may have capped, rather than destroyed archaeological sites that may have existed there. The rest of the inland portions of the CVRD lands at Comox Lake were assessed as having low archaeological potential, based on the fact that the area has been commercially logged twice and impacted by road and railway construction.

It is recommended that if any land altering activities are undertaken in the areas identified herein as having high archaeological potential, that they are preceded by archaeological investigation in the form of an Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA), undertaken with appropriate Heritage Conservation Act permits. The boundaries of site DjSg-15 should be taken as provisional until subsurface testing can be undertaken to assess site boundaries. Finally, it is critical that such investigations are undertaken at times when water levels are below 133 masl, preferably about 131 masl to ensure coverage of inundated areas of high archaeological potential.

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