Hypothesis Tested: Apsaalooke culture can be preserved through the utilization of wild berry patches.

Materials and Methods

A literature review was conducted concerning the management of wild berry plants in Montana including buffalo berry, June berry, chokecherry and wild plum. Afterward, we conducted interviews with 3 of the 15 high school participants of the berry picking activity. This provided understanding of the youth perspective on the implementation of berry picking into scholarly activity. I also attended meetings arranged with tribe elders to determine the desired quality of life, as defined by Savory and Butterfield (1999), who described part of life as “a reflection of peoples values... the things people live for, the things that make them want to do anything...what is most important to you.”

Results

After talking with tribe elders, council members and youth it was determined that the quality of life involves, “living their culture and revitalizing it for others... with respects to culture, education, language, family, food and faith,” (Smalls, 2013). After the berry picking activity took place. It was reported by the high school participants that the activity increased their interest in native practices regarding berry picking. One girl reported “I liked learning about the way different tribes picked the berries,” interview #1. Another girl said, “I would have liked to hear more stories about the past and the Apsaalooke culture. I appreciated the opportunity to experience this. I think it would be really good for the reservation to do more stuff like this. It could help with suicide prevention and connecting the community. Colleges could make programs to take out the younger kids and provide positive role models,” interview #3. All three children interviewed would like to participate in more activities like this, and see a more thorough incorporation of Apsaalooke history, traditions and culture incorporated into their school system.

Managing wild berry patches in one way to revive Apsaalooke culture. Maintaining a source of berries will improve health, create jobs, and reconnect with the mother earth spirit. The specific plant needs are greatest during the time of establishment, with concern to weed management and water availability. After that, careful attention must be paid to ensure the young plants are not damaged. Most importantly, throughout their lifespan, old wood should be removed to stimulate new growth, and ensure the plant is able to concentrate its energy where it needs it most; the berries.

Discussion:

To make the case stronger regarding the importance of berry picking and Apsaalooke culture, interviewing all the students who participated is critical. It would be of importance to also interview the teachers of the schools, as well as the tribe elders who encouraged and participated this activity. Sadly, due to limited time availability, these opportunities were not presented to the author at this time. One strength of this research is that it is unique in nature. From the vast literature reviewed for this project, there were no other studies involving evaluation of culturally appropriate activities. The author suggests an increase in related studies to gain further understanding regarding this issue.

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Literature: