



A Guide to Management of Wild Berry Patches: Cultural Preservation of the Apsaalooke Tribe

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Figure 1. Site chosen for "Lets Go Berry Picking"
Courtesy of fellow AGSC465 student Monica Gray

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



Figure 2. High School Student during "Lets Go Berry Picking".
Courtesy of fellow AGSC465 student Monica Gray

Introduction:

Through westernization, loss of Apsaalooke culture is felt throughout the tribe. Tracie Small researched in Spring semester 2013 the connection between berry picking and culture. Tribal council members as well as elders were regarding their quality of life and berry picking. Finally in September of 2013, a berry picking outing was arranged with 15 high school students, called "Lets Go Berry Picking", (Small,2013) After this trip, we interviewed children asking them about their overall perception and experience with berry picking and Apsaalooke traditions.

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 define quality 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."



Recommendations:

- Maintain berry patches on tribal property for use by tribe members only.
- Incorporate the plant management, history of berries and their use as well as Apsaalooke history, traditions, ritual and language into the curriculum at elementary, middle and high school and college level.
- Encourage adult members of the tribe to utilize the berry patches as a form of recreation and for food gathering
- Empower the people the Apsaalooke tribe to determine and create the resources required to maintain their quality of life

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, 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.



Figure 1: (Left) June berries are high in protein, healthy fat, fiber and calcium.
Photo: chestofbooks.com



Figure 1: (Right) Buffalo berries are used as a Ceremonial food, and is high in vitamin C.
Photo: deol.blogspot.com



Figure 5.(Left) Wild Plums used in jams, jellies and eaten fresh.
Photo: www.nap.edu



Figure 6. (Right) Chokecherry vegetation was used traditionally in medicine. The berries are used in jams, wine, and syrup.
Photo: www.gutenberg.org

Literature:

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- Ruelle, M., Kassam, K. (2011). Diversity of plant knowledge as an Adaptive asset: a case study. Economic Botany, 65, 295-307.
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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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