



Where I work Jennifer Grenz

Before I began a PhD in Indigenous knowledge and the biology of invasive species at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in 2015, I had an existential crisis. I worked for an agency that managed invasive plant species – but despite our efforts, some invasive species would inevitably come back, or a new invader would take over. For me, it was a moment to question the point of eradicating such species without a holistic land-management plan in place.

Since then, my scientific journey has been about connecting my Western science to the Indigenous world view I've inherited as a Nlaka'pamux woman of mixed ancestry. Now, when I go out into the field as a researcher, I involve archaeologists, elders, soil scientists, plant scientists and historical ecologists so that we can use their knowledge – to understand how this land was managed in the past and how it should be managed in the future. Instead of saying, "How do we get rid of this invasive plant?", we ask, "What do culturally important local plant species need to flourish?".

In this image, taken last August, I'm standing on land that's being restored by the Cowichan Estuary Restoration Project, the largest of its type ever to occur on Vancouver Island. Two kilometres of dikes have been removed from the estuary to reconnect it to wetlands. In 2022, camas, a bright purple flower and an important fibre source for coastal Indigenous peoples, bloomed throughout the estuary. The Cowichan Tribes' land staff and I then realized that this estuary had been an important food source for the local Indigenous peoples. We had to rethink the restoration project.

Now, community-based researchers, elders and knowledge keepers are informing what we do next. Instead of adhering to a post-colonial baseline of restoration, we combine remote-sensing technologies with oral histories to purposefully shape lands, guided by community values and needs.

Jennifer Grenz is an Indigenous ecologist in forestry at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. **Interview by Virginia Gewin.**

Photographed for *Nature* by
Chad Hipolito.