

BUILDING A COMMUNITY ATLAS

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Summary

This fact sheet explains what a community atlas are, how they are used, and why they are helpful in for an Indigenous community planning process.

Keywords: community engagement, communication tools, collecting data, mapping, oral tradition, building capacity

What is a Community Atlas?

A community atlas is a collection of maps. The maps included in a community atlas show things that are important to your community. This might include traditional food sources, environmental issues, animal migration patterns, housing locations, and much more. This way, your community can show local traditional knowledge along with technical data to provide meaningful insights into the landscape. A community atlas can be made up of hand-drawn maps, interactive online maps, or any other format that works for you. When combined, these maps can tell a story, inform a report, and be used

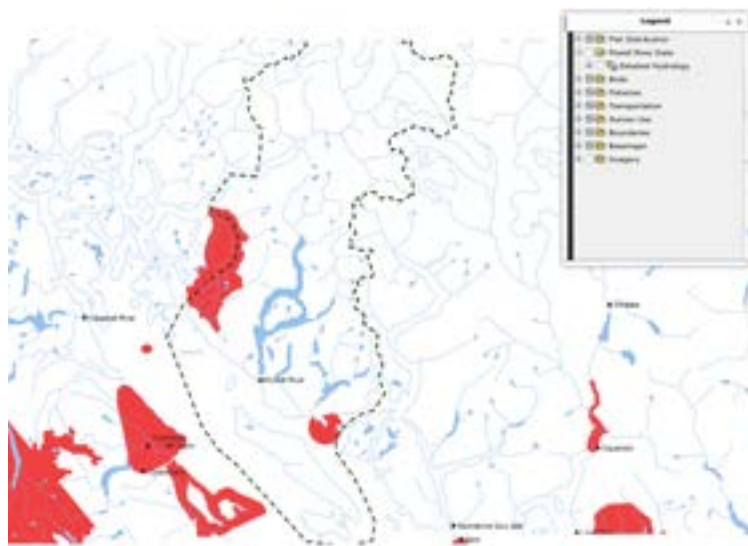


Figure 1 | An interactive online map of fish and bird habitats in the Powell River Watershed.

Source (Digital image. Community Mapping Network. 2015. <http://cmnmaps.ca/POWELLRIVER/>) Used with permission.

when engaging with your community. This guide outlines typical a community atlas' purpose, process, management. Even though this is a collection of technical documents, they should be presented in a manner that is easy to read and use by everyone.¹

Why Make a Community Atlas?

A community atlas is useful during the beginning stages of your community planning process to refer to and build on. Maps are used to record and show information when making planning decisions. An organized community atlas shows data and community knowledge visually. The maps are often used in planning documents and as a way to spark conversations with community members about their space.

A community atlas can also be useful when speaking with outside groups like Environment Canada, engineers, and planners. Community atlases are one way to make a simple and organized information package to help make decisions.

"The atlas should be used as a jumping off place for decision making about the future. From the holistic image of place that the maps collectively communicate, what actions could be adopted to achieve sustainable prosperity? What priorities emerge from a survey of damaged lands and unsolved social ills? What underutilized potentials can be put to work to help achieve sustainability? The atlas can become a focus for discussions setting a proactive plan for positive change."³

Doug Aberley

Community atlases are also a way to learn more about your community by combining, organizing, and styling maps. For example, the Gulf Islands Ecosystem Community Atlas combined community knowledge, land elevations, and soil make-up. In the end, the map showed both human and environmental interests.²

Who Makes a Community Atlas?

Community involvement is an essential part of the process. Many groups of people can help with a community atlas at different times. Band leadership, government, and others may also be involved with your community atlas depending on your collection of maps. Table 1 outlines who is involved depending on what stage the atlas is in.

How do you Create a Community Atlas?

Before you make your community atlas, clearly lay out its purpose. The purpose will help you decide the style, use, and contents of the community atlas. It is helpful to look at

existing maps and mapping resources. Are there already GIS maps? Has the community already created maps?

Once the purpose of the atlas is decided, select the best data and style for the map’s purpose. Extra information or maps can be added as an appendix to larger planning documents.

Many communities like to use traditional knowledge and practice as part of their maps. To do this, discuss the structure and contents of the atlas with community members. Community members can improve maps using their local and traditional knowledge. This can also create a sense of ownership and relevance within the community.

When do you use a Community Atlas?

Community atlases can be made and re-made to work for different uses that come up. They can be used to start discussion with community members, band leaders, or consultants. They can be used as data in technical reports.

Table 1 | Common tasks and people involved in each stage of building a community atlas.

	Tasks	People Involved
Preparing to Build Your Community Atlas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> decide the atlas’ purpose and think about how it will be used decide what information you will need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve experts in mapping and land use planning if needed involve community members to ensure they help define the purpose of the atlas and provide locally relevant guidance
Creating Your Community Atlas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> collect the data and community input you need organize the data you collected What information is missing or incomplete? How will you want to display this information on maps? How will you analyze and display the data? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depending on the purpose and use of your community atlas you will need input from different people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> land use planners mapping technicians local politicians community members
Using Your Community Atlas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> if your community made a map for a specific reason, you already know how it will be used. other uses can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a large community display existing reports or planning documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> your band office may want to include maps from your atlas in reports, plans, and documents land use planners, consultants, and local government may include your atlas in their work your atlas can be used with the broader community as an interactive learning, engagement, and communication tool.

Further Reading

Aboriginal Mapping Network by Ecotrust

This site focuses on the Aboriginal Mapping Network and hosts resources for mapping Indigenous communities. The link to Chief Kerry's Moose: A Guidebook to Land Use and Occupancy Mapping, Research Design and Data Collection, Terry N. Tobias has mapping tools for Land Use Planning.

<http://ecotrust.ca/project/aboriginal-mapping-network/>

<http://nativemaps.org/taxonomy/term/72>

Community Mapping Network

This website has over 60 examples of community atlases. It was created to share natural resource information with communities in British Columbia.

http://www.cmnbc.ca/atlas_gallery

An example of an interactive online Community Atlas:

<http://cmnmaps.ca/POWELLRIVER/http://cmnmaps.ca/POWELLRIVER/>

Endnotes

- 1 Community Mapping Network, "About CMN | Community Mapping Network," *Community Mapping Network*, n.d., Accessed October 25 2016, <http://www.cmnbc.ca/about-cmn>
- 2 Tara Sharma, "Southern Gulf Islands | Community Mapping Network," *Community Mapping Network*, 2016, Accessed October 25 2016, http://www.cmnbc.ca/atlas_gallery/southern-gulf-islands
- 3 Sheila Harrington & Doug Aberley, *Giving the Land a Voice: Mapping our Home Places* (Salt Spring Island, BC: Salt Spring Island Community Services Society, 1995).