

BCCFA Conference May 27 2025

Plenary Session: Forestry Rooted in Reciprocity: Building Community Resilience

Session description:

Dr. Jennifer Grenz will share a vision of forestry grounded in reciprocity—where land, people, and practice are deeply interconnected. Drawing on historical ecology and Indigenous land use traditions, she will explore how these foundations can transform the way we steward forests today.

Dr. Grenz will discuss how reciprocity can be practiced on the land not just as a metaphor, but as a tangible, relational ethic—one that integrates ecological care, climate resilience, and community well-being into a new era of forest management rooted in respect and responsibility.

Speaker: Dr. Jennifer Grenz

Moderator: Susan Mulkey

Notes compiled by: Sarah Dickson-Hoyle

Main Topics Discussed:

- The importance of forests for Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty – which are key aspects of resilience
- Forests as food systems with real relationships embedded in them – including non-Indigenous rural communities
 - Need to overcome the divide between food producing systems, and forest ecosystems, in order to restore and build resilience
 - Discussion of forest gardens, adjacent to village sites (e.g., on NW coast)
 - Need to know the cultural context of plants
- Fortress conservation – paradigm of keeping humans and ‘nature’ separate, prohibiting access
- Restoration as active human intervention as part of nature, restoring relationships as part of restoring ecosystems (eco-cultural systems)
 - Importance of looking back, having historical understanding – not necessarily to restore back to that state, but to understand historical processes and trajectories, and overcome shifting baseline phenomenon
 - *Reciprocal* relationship with the land – beyond transactional approach, to relational responsibility rooted in respect, gratitude and care

- The loss of active stewardship impacting ability to restore/revitalize these stewardship practices (e.g., to burn, to dig and harvest)

Important Details/Quotes:

- “I try and be a connector – to find communities find well-meaning, grounded researchers to help them with their work in ecological restoration”
- “Do you know the truth of the lands and waters where you work? What was there before? Have you ever asked?”
- Forests as more than trees and plants – they’re also places of Indigenous histories and uses, and where ancestors are resting
- “You can’t “patch in” Indigenous knowledges – we have to be there from the start”
- What is forestry? “Forestry is the practice of relating to and caring for forest systems in ways that honor their ecological, cultural and spiritual integrity – recognizing forests as living communities rather than collections of resources. Rooted in reciprocity, it involves stewarding the relationships among trees, lands, waters, animals, and people – with a responsibility to give back more than we take and sustain life for future generations”

Questions & Follow-Ups:

Mutual respect and reciprocity key to successful community forestry. How are CFs integrating these principles into their work?

Thoughts/Observations:

- Interesting reflection on ‘what is a forest’ – the separation of food systems/food production from forests
- Connecting nursery work, community outreach and education days, and restoration activities to ‘forestry’

Connections to Other Sessions:

- ‘Unplanting’ trees as part of forestry (reducing potential future commercial value) in order to manage for other values (e.g., berry producing area for both people and wildlife) – aligned with earlier discussions from Vancouver Island CF panel, about reducing AAC to manage for diverse values (e.g., biodiversity)