Archaeology Branch
Ministry of Forests

Informed Contributors Layer

Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge to Improve Archaeological Tools

Updated April 23, 2024

Introduction

The Archaeology Branch ("the Branch") maintains an extensive inventory of archaeological information (e.g., archaeological site records, maps, overview assessments) to support archaeological site protection, land-use planning, decision-making, and research in BC. The inventory consists mostly of data collected by archaeologists and often does not reflect additional Indigenous knowledge about the land where archaeological sites and culturally sensitive areas are located, leaving these more susceptible to harm when development or other activities occur in the area.

To address this knowledge gap, the Branch is updating policies, processes, and tools to better incorporate shared Indigenous knowledge. One new tool is the **Informed Contributors Layer (ICL)**, a digital map layer displaying areas that Indigenous knowledge-keepers or other parties ("informed contributors") wish to identify as culturally or archaeologically significant in the Province's records. Provision of information for inclusion in the ICL is voluntary, and the informed contributor decides which information will remain confidential and which information can be shared with the Provincial government and beyond.

This document provides an overview of the ICL and the technical specifications to manage data.

How Does the ICL Work?

Informed contributors wishing to have sensitive locations represented in the ICL can submit their information to the Branch in the form of shapefiles (spatial data) along with related attribute data describing what each location represents. Once the Branch adds the data to the ICL, it can be viewed and downloaded (along with other map layers) in the Remote Access to Archaeological Data (RAAD) application (Figure 1). RAAD access is restricted to Branch-authorized users, including Indigenous governments, archaeologists, accredited academic researchers, and federal, provincial, or local government resource and land use planning agencies. Each individual RAAD user must enter into a data sharing agreement with the Province that imposes conditions on use and disclosure of the information. The general public is not authorized to access RAAD.

Data layers available in RAAD include:

- Known archaeological sites and historic places;
- Culturally modified tree high potential areas;
- Regional AOAs;
- Informed Contributors Layer (ICL);
- Archaeological study areas investigated under permit (compiled since 2008);
- Subsurface tested areas (STAs) (compiled since 2017);
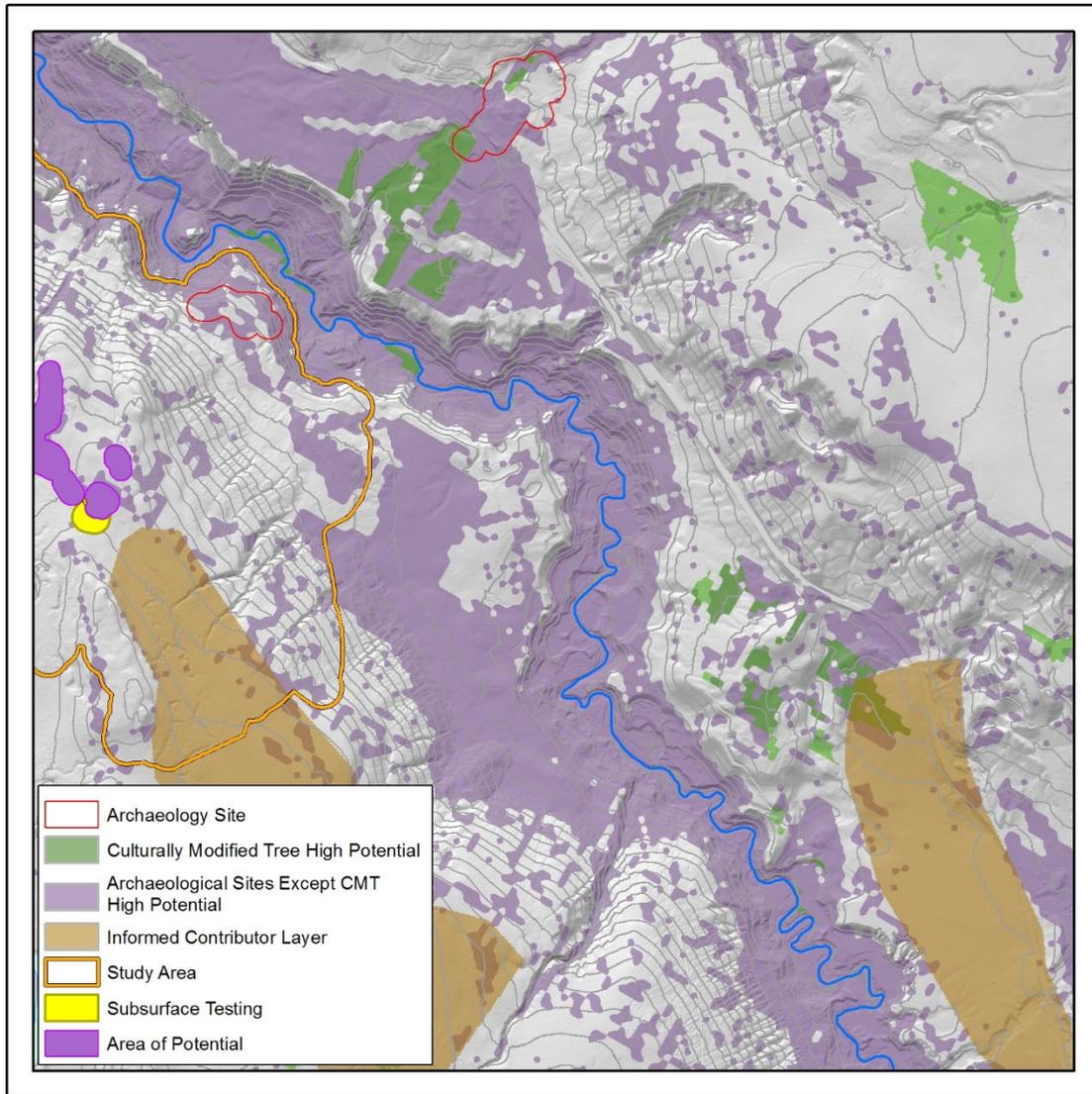- Local areas of (archaeological) potential (AOPs) (compiled since 2019).

Figure 1: Example of map layers available in RAAD.

GIS-Based Archaeological Overview Assessments (AOA)

Archaeological sites on private and public land, whether known or as-yet unrecorded, are protected under Section 12.1 of the *Heritage Conservation Act* (HCA). Regional GIS (Geographic Information Systems) based Archaeological Overview Assessment predictive models help identify the likelihood of the presence of archaeological sites to support land-use planning and assist developers to determine next steps to ensure compliance with the HCA. Given AOAs provide an important tool for BC Wildfire Service and other government agencies, the Branch is developing a strategy to develop and review models for various areas of the province.

The ICL addresses a knowledge gap by indicating cultural areas or areas of high potential identified by informed groups or individuals that otherwise would not be captured in AOAs.

Confidentiality of ICL Information

The Province acknowledges that Indigenous information may be sensitive. Informed contributors control access to the information they provide by identifying it according to the following three levels of confidentiality (Figure 2;
Table 1):

1. **Secure: RAAD users.** This information will be visible to all authorized RAAD users. For example, the informed contributor may elect to provide a precise location and detailed site type information for RAAD users to access; or, they may provide a buffered shape to obscure the exact location, along with generic text requesting that RAAD users contact the Branch for more information.
2. **Most secure: Archaeology Branch.** This information is visible to the Branch only. The informed contributor may elect to provide additional details to the Branch that cannot be shared externally, or that can be shared with specific users upon request.
3. **Withheld by Indigenous Communities.** Informed contributors may withhold some information from the Branch and instead provide text directing the Branch and RAAD users to contact a First Nation directly for more information.
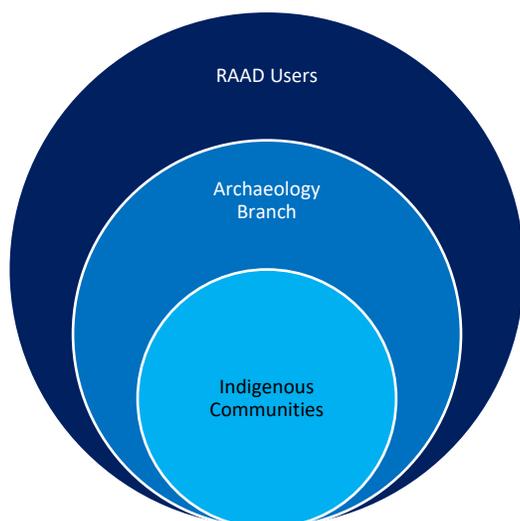

Figure 2. Rings of Permission for Informed Contributors Layer

Table 1. Summary of levels of ICL confidentiality

Audience	Parties who can access this	What information is available
Secure: **RAAD Users**	Authorized RAAD users (Indigenous governments, archaeologists, researchers, federal/provincial/local government agencies	Contributors will determine the level of detail available in the ICL for RAAD users (*e.g.*, site information vs. a generic statement to contact XYZ for more information).
Most Secure: **Archaeology Branch**	Archaeology Branch staff	Contributors may provide additional details and advise whether these can be shared with specific external parties (*e.g.*, archaeologists, government agencies) to support land-use planning or research. Information to supplement RAAD may include photographs of ancestral remains or aboriginal rock art not available via RAAD.
Held by Indigenous Communities	Determined by Indigenous communities	Information the Nation decides to keep confidential.

Table 2 illustrates how an informed contributor will convey what audience they will approve for each area of interest.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of the Informed Contributors Layer?

The ICL provides an opportunity for Indigenous communities and other parties to identify areas of cultural importance and areas with high potential for archaeological sites, complementing existing provincial tools and informing future AOAs.

What are the limitations of the Informed Contributors Layer?

Information within the ICL is limited to what has been provided to the Branch by Indigenous communities or other parties for inclusion in the ICL; it is not an exhaustive resource for areas of cultural importance.

Including an area in the ICL does not provide automatic protection under the HCA. However, identifying an area of cultural importance informs research and decision-making and may assist in avoiding harm to these areas.

Who can provide data for the Informed Contributors Layer?

The ICL is primarily intended to collect data from Indigenous communities. However, archaeologists, researchers, and other informed parties (*e.g.*, hunters identifying organic materials eroding from ice patches) may have information that is useful to include.

Is it mandatory to participate or contribute data?

<u>Participation is not mandatory</u>. To encourage contributions, the Branch will accept information on an ongoing basis, whenever information becomes available. The Branch is open to entering Data Sharing and Use Agreements with contributors and may seek funding opportunities to enhance a contributing organization's capacity.

How can I submit information for the Informed Contributors Layer?

Geographic Information System (GIS) (digital mapping) capability is required in order to prepare and submit multiple areas for the ICL. If your organization lacks capacity to engage a GIS specialist, or if you wish to submit only a single small area, please contact the Branch so we can assist in finding an alternative solution.

Following the BC Archaeology Branch Site Form and Mapping Requirements, all spatial data submitted to the Archaeology Branch must be in provincial standard NAD 1983 BC Environment Albers projection (EPSG: 3005). ESRI shapefile format is preferred, to provide the most precise information to identify the locations of areas of concern. ESRI shapefiles must include all the composite files (*e.g.*, .dbf, .shp, .prj and .shx). Other formats (*e.g.*, KML, hand-drawn lines on existing maps) may be accepted through discussion with the Branch.

Table 2 provides database headers required by the Branch to import information into the ICL. The attribute table must contain the following fields:

NAME: a unique reference name (especially where confidential "Not Shared" information exists)

DESCR: a meaningful description of the area (no more than 100 characters)
                    visible to Archaeology Branch and RAAD users
DESCRRBRNCH: a meaningful description of the area only visible to Archaeology Branch
CONTACT: an organization name (*e.g.*, the resource department of a First Nation) who can provide
                    additional information
DATES: when data was last added/updated
REFERENCE: data type (*e.g.*, shapefile, red circle on map)
INPUT: data collection information (*e.g.*, GIS, hand drawn)
SOURCE: How information was gathered (*e.g.*, Interview)
INSTRUCT: Additional instructions to the Branch

A RAAD User has noticed an area in the ICL. What happens next?

Proposed development within areas of high potential may have an increased risk to impact resources that may be subject to protection under the HCA. High potential may require further archaeological review (i.e., as mandated by the *Mines Act*; following BC Energy Regulator processes authorised by the *Oil and Gas Activities Act*; to address legal commitments in a Forest Stewardship Plan; to comply with municipal by-laws).

Between legal commitments, following best practises, or to minimise risk that development could impact protected sites, developers may seek further information from Indigenous governments, the Branch[1], or may obtain the services of an eligible, qualified archaeologist to determine what HCA permits and/or studies are appropriate. Identifying an area within ICL does not result in automatic protection under the HCA, but it identifies to a developer that there are areas of concern.

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[1] Information Requests can be submitted online via https://www.archdatarequest.nrs.gov.bc.ca/; users may also email the Branch at archaeology@gov.bc.ca or call the office at 250-953-3334.

Table 2. Database headers with example entries

Reference	Input	Source: *How information was gathered*	Desc: *Description text visible to user group*			Instruct: *Additional instructions*
			Desc: **Description for RAAD users (Determined by contributor)**	**DescrBrnch:** **Description Held by Branch (Determined by contributor)**	**Indigenous Communities**	
Red circle on map 7	Hand-drawn map Description (*e.g.,* confluence of rivers X and Y"	Ethnographic, historic references held by XYZ Indigenous Community	This is an area known to contain rock art; contact XYZ Indigenous Community for more information	Puberty caves and rock art located in this area	(Not shared with Archaeology Branch but available for your own records)	Obfuscate 50 m buffer. Photographs available from XYZ, following field visit in 2015. Photographs may only be shared with archaeologists eligible and qualified to work within XYZ territory.
Shapefile 123	GIS	2006 Interviews with Elder Sam Jones	Historic records of land use date to 1870, making arch sites extremely likely. Contact XYZ Indigenous Community for more information	Fishing area used exclusively by the Jones family.	(Not shared with Archaeology Branch but available for your own records)	Please apply 100 m buffer to ensure fishing resources are not identifiable. In addition, HBC records from 1870 reference this fishing spot

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