

Indigenous Conservation Engagement

Year 1 Progress Report



November 2019

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Cultural Heritage Resources Management..... 3

Cultural Competency, Knowledge and Training 4

Indigenous Land Trust Model 6

Technical Support for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas 7

Conclusion..... 9

Cover photography: Martina Shovar of the Ktunaxa Nation dances at the celebration of the conservation of Columbia Lake – Lot 48. Photo by Cole Lord-May.

Introduction

We are very proud of the work completed over the past year by Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) staff and senior volunteers, including National and Regional directors, in implementing NCC's Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework. Our shared accomplishments are a testament to the commitment we made to work more purposefully with Indigenous communities and nations, in the spirit of reconciliation, to achieve more long-term conservation.

In this report, you'll read about our Year 1 activities, broken out by focus area, as well as some reflections on our work and anticipated next steps.

Cultural Heritage Resources Management

NCC recognizes that our lands lie within Indigenous traditional territories across Canada. As a result, we commit to respect, honour and facilitate access to cultural heritage resources (such as objects, sites and locations) for cultural and spiritual activities as an important form of reconciliation.

Achievements

NCC staff worked collaboratively with Elder Larry McDermott from Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation (and staff at Plenty Canada) to explore the cultural past of NCC lands and how Indigenous Peoples might use those lands for the purposes of reconnecting with their culture.

Our broad-ranging discussions with Elder McDermott touched on many issues, all of which are complex and require careful consideration, including:

- Some Indigenous Peoples' mistrust of divulging culturally important information, how NCC staff can develop trust among communities, how information can or should be stored to protect Indigenous intellectual property, who should access that information, and how it may be used;
- How overlapping Indigenous traditional territories may affect decisions regarding access and use of cultural heritage resources; and
- How non-Indigenous users and their uses of the lands might interact with Indigenous Peoples who may want to access the land for cultural purposes.

Reflections

Elder McDermott is very knowledgeable and has a good understanding of the issues and considerations NCC faces. His preference for oral transfer of information over written transfer provided for meaningful and nuanced discussions. NCC staff learned a lot through the process, but it required more time than expected. This style of communication is preferred by some Indigenous Elders, and NCC staff will adjust our future timelines and expectations accordingly.

Next steps

In 2020, NCC will develop a guidance document for staff that captures the advice and expertise of Elder McDermott. Once the document is complete, staff will select and develop work plans to pilot, and refine recommended approaches to cultural heritage resource management and access with Indigenous communities on one to three properties in different regions.

Cultural Competency, Knowledge and Training

Like most Canadians, NCC senior volunteers and staff have differing understandings of Indigenous history in Canada. The work NCC has undertaken this year to improve that understanding marks the start of a significant shift in our organizational culture. The history of a country cannot be learned in one sitting; there is much more to be learned and explore. But this is necessary work so that staff can engage with Indigenous Peoples from a place of understanding and awareness.

Achievements

Formal Indigenous Cultural Competency training:

- Kevin Lamoureux, from the University of Winnipeg's Indigenous Insights program, provided a one-day Indigenous Cultural Competency training session in April 2019 for 25 senior staff, including NCC's Executive Management Group, all regional vice-presidents and at least one senior member from each National department.
- A second session was held in September 2019 for 25 more staff, mainly regional directors of conservation and director-level staff from the National office.
- Both sessions were received very positively by all participants.



*Kevin Lamoureux, Indigenous Insights
(Photo: University of Winnipeg)*

Governance:

- During NCC's spring board meeting in Yellowknife, which coincided with National Indigenous Day, NCC director Chloe Dragon-Smith led the Board through a discussion about ethical space. Board members visited Thaidene Nënë, which was announced on August 21 as Canada's first National Park Reserve/Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA).
- In April 2019, NCC's Conservation Committee and selected staff met with senior counsel from Justice Canada to learn about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and how UNDRIP relates to the private and non-profit sectors.

Staff learning:

- NCC's internal Indigenous Working Group continues to meet as needed to discuss issues, policy positions, and regional and national needs on advancing NCC's Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework.
- Many of our conservation staff are developing relationships with Indigenous expert advisors, who are helping us navigate relationships within communities. The advisors are providing input on land securement projects, insights into provincial and federal government interests, and generally helping NCC understand how best to support Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship. All involved staff have found these advisors to be extremely helpful, and it is clear that having more trusted Indigenous advisors is critical to achieving success.

Communicating with external audiences:

- NCC wrote and published *Walking Together to Care for the Land: NCC's Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework* to share with interested parties, including potential partners and donors.
- We also developed an Indigenous Territorial/Land Acknowledgement statement procedure and guidance to help staff understand under what circumstances we should be using territorial/land acknowledgement statements.
- A dedicated section on the NCC website¹ has been created to discuss our role in support of Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship. *Walking Together to Care for the Land: NCC's Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework* is available for download from this space.
- The fall 2018 issue of the *Nature Conservancy of Canada Magazine* focused on Indigenous content, highlighting Indigenous-led conservation across Canada.
- Indigenous perspectives were featured in NCC's NatureTalks speaker series. The 2018–2019 program featured Indigenous speakers in four provinces. The 2019–2020 program will also include Indigenous speakers.

Reflections

There have been no major challenges in integrating Indigenous cultural awareness and competency within NCC. Staff have been eager to receive information and training, especially relating to land negotiations and securement projects. They are welcoming the opportunity to learn about Canada's history through an Indigenous lens and considering how conservation can be a tool for reconciliation.

Next steps

At NCC's upcoming Staff Rally in January 2020, all staff will have the opportunity to participate in breakout sessions covering a variety of topics, such as ethical space, reconciliation and IPCAs, to help advance internal discussion about Indigenous-led conservation in Canada and NCC's roles in support of that work.

In early 2020, Kevin Lamoureux, from the University of Winnipeg's Indigenous Insights program, will facilitate two additional Indigenous Cultural Competency training sessions for 50 of NCC's conservation staff. These sessions will be regionally focused, with one session taking place in Western Canada and the other in Eastern Canada.

¹ <http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/what-we-do/indigenous-conservation/>

NCC will hire an Indigenous conservation lead staff person to help advise and advance NCC's work in this area. The position is expected to be posted in early 2020.

NCC will work to ensure that our hiring practices are supportive of Indigenous candidates, and onboarding for all new staff will include foundational training on the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

NCC will build on the information gathered about UNDRIP and propose a position statement on the declaration.

NCC will continue to seek out ways to integrate more Indigenous-related content into our external communications, including on our website, in the magazine and at public events.

Indigenous Land Trust Model

NCC has developed many successful approaches to land securement and stewardship for the benefit of conservation. We will use our knowledge and experience to support Indigenous communities interested in exploring the land trust model to achieve their conservation objectives. While there is currently only one Indigenous land trust in Canada (Walpole Island), the model is more advanced in the United States and Australia and offers opportunities to provide another option in the Indigenous conservation tool kit.

Achievements

NCC is a partner in the Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership (CRP) — a collaboration based out of the University of Guelph, of more than 30 Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations and organizations, conservation researchers and practitioners from across Canada. The CRP is aimed at “ensuring Indigenous laws and knowledge systems play a significant part in helping Canada meet its international obligations for the increased protection of biodiversity, including the establishment of IPCAs, and the stewardship of culturally significant plants and animals.”

NCC has proposed to contribute in-kind support over the seven-year life of the project (e.g., staff time, travel, accommodations and meeting venues if/where appropriate).

The partnership has hired a program manager and is beginning to organize its members. In May 2019, NCC participated in the ceremonial launch in Montreal, and attended a workshop on IPCA and carbon landscapes in Guelph. NCC has developed a draft outline of the steps to advance the work of the Indigenous land trust model, which was shared with partners in October.

The project envisions four parts:

- Establishing a common understanding: Summarizing the land trust model and its current application in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada and abroad.
- Legal and policy review: Summarizing the legal and policy constraints (if any) that would limit or prevent the use of the Indigenous land trust model on private lands and on reserve lands.
- Ethical space: Designing the features of an Indigenous land trust model rooted in ethical space.

- Application: Working with one to two Indigenous communities to test the limitations and utility of the Indigenous land trust model in Canada.

It is anticipated that the CRP will evolve as members provide input and identify areas where they will contribute.

Reflections

It is simultaneously exciting, humbling and encouraging to participate in this initiative with prominent academics, Indigenous leaders and key government staff, but we also realize that NCC brings a unique and essential skill set to the partnership. NCC's component of this project will not only serve us and the lands we have conserved but will also be a model for other land trusts.



*Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership ceremonial launch, May 2019.
(Photo: Jeremy Williams, RiverVoice Productions)*

Next steps

NCC is seeking to meet with Indigenous communities, partners and allies to learn more about Indigenous land trust models in Canada.

Technical Support for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas

NCC has specialized skills in conservation and management planning and applies these skills to achieve community-driven conservation solutions. NCC is committed to sharing our skills where needed to support Indigenous conservation initiatives in facilitating the designation of new IPCAs across Canada.

Achievements

Land acquisition/securement:

- In the winter of 2018–2019, the Government of Canada launched the Quick Start and Challenge funds. Both funding streams are intended to support ready-to-launch projects that could quickly add to Canada's protected and conserved areas in key geographies. These projects are expected to improve connectivity, advance Indigenous-led conservation and reconciliation, or have co-benefits for species at risk or carbon storage. NCC participated in the development of 17 Indigenous conservation project proposals with communities in nine provinces.
- In support of the Thaidene Nëné National Park Reserve/Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area, NCC acquired and subsequently transferred to Parks Canada the only private land parcel within its boundary.

Conservation planning:

With technical planning and mapping support from NCC, the Cree Nation Government (CNG) submitted protected area proposals to the Government of Quebec in November 2018.

- NCC is working with the CNG and Cree communities to apply the best available cultural and scientific information to finalize the boundaries of proposed protected areas, with the goal of establishing at least 28,000 square kilometres of new biodiversity or aquatic reserves under Quebec's *Natural Heritage Conservation Act* by 2020.
- NCC has initiated work with Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario to finalize a land use plan for their traditional territory (approximately 100,000 square kilometres, including the western portion of James Bay and inland areas). This work may evolve to include the identification of potential IPCAs.
- Several NCC conservation planners participated in a Healthy Country Planning (HCP) workshop in May 2019. HCP is an adaptation of the Open Standards, developed in Australia, to create management plans for Indigenous Protected Areas with Indigenous communities. HCP ensures that culture, people and their knowledge are central to the participatory planning process and uses language, facilitation approaches and tools tailored to community needs.



*Tallymen and land users accompanied by their children and other family members discuss cultural values and protected areas planning approaches at meetings in Eastmain. This work being led by CNG and supported by NCC has facilitated the exchange of important information across organizations and generations.
(Photo: Cree Nation Government)*

Reflections

Quick Start and Challenge Fund applications developed with Indigenous partners required a significant amount of work by NCC. This was, in part, because of the process set up by the federal government and, in part, because many of the Indigenous partners lacked the organizational capacity and experience in application development. NCC has provided feedback to streamline the process for future rounds.

Recent feedback provided by the CNG to a project funder: “We enjoy working with NCC because of their genuine passion for the work and light-hearted approach that allows work to be accomplished smoothly even when operating under tight timelines. NCC does not try to take credit for any of the work being led by CNG. NCC’s approach has been to elevate CNG as leaders in this project, rather than trying to garner public support by positioning CNG as victims, which we feel is an insulting approach. Additionally, NCC staff have proved to be respectful listeners when attending community meetings, which is an important element of working with Cree communities. Demonstrating respect through listening has helped facilitate the advancement and open exchange of information.”

Next steps

As the Government of Canada finalizes its Quick Start and Challenge Fund contribution agreements with the successful applicants, NCC will work with our project partners to develop implementation plans and discuss our level of participation in each respective project.

Additionally, NCC will continue to work with Indigenous governments and allies to advance the protected areas planning and land use planning work.

Conclusion

This first year of work affirms NCC's commitment to reconciliation through conservation. While this effort represents the first stage of our work, the specific initiatives we've embarked upon create genuine and meaningful progress toward our vision of working more intentionally with Indigenous Peoples, leading to durable conservation outcomes.

Over the past year, we learned a lot and created multiple opportunities to share our existing expertise and new knowledge, both internally and externally. As much as we accomplished in Year 1, this is only the first step in our three-year work plan to implement NCC's Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework. We look forward to creating future learning opportunities, developing new relationships and partnerships, and expanding our ability to support Indigenous-led conservation.