

Indigenous Conservation Engagement

Year 2 Progress Report



January 2021



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Cover image: Species at Risk mural completed as part of [Learning the Land](#) Project with the Treaty Education Alliance. Artwork completed by Saini Koski Education Campus and Elder Michael Lonechild.

Introduction

By engaging in Indigenous-led conservation, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is committing to building on our existing experience, as well as working with and learning from Indigenous Peoples. We recognize the opportunity to develop new conservation relationships with Indigenous communities to support quality conservation projects and the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous Peoples wherever NCC works. We acknowledge and support Indigenous-led conservation and seek to create opportunities for collaborative capacity building while purposefully advancing respectful reconciliation.

NCC's [Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework](#)¹ articulates:

- NCC's vision for working with Indigenous communities and Nations in a meaningful, respectful and supportive manner. Together, we will work to achieve mutually beneficial conservation goals;
- How NCC could work with Indigenous communities and Nations on conservation and stewardship projects; and
- How NCC might support Indigenous-led conservation and/or co-management opportunities.

The Framework identifies five areas of focus to advance our collaborative work with Indigenous Peoples, where we have committed to:

- 1) Further develop and formally integrate Indigenous advisory capacity at NCC.
- 2) Work with Indigenous advisors and institutions to develop staff training that provides a foundation focused on Indigenous histories, traditions and culture to help foster better relationships.
- 3) Develop site-specific approaches to manage and preserve Indigenous cultural heritage while simultaneously respecting access to culturally important places by members of Indigenous communities.
- 4) Use our experience to support Indigenous communities interested in exploring the land trust model to advance reconciliation through land conservation.
- 5) Share our technical skills and expertise to support Indigenous conservation initiatives that facilitate the establishment of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) across Canada.

The second year of our work to act on these commitments has seen a significant increase in NCC's activity and overall engagement with Indigenous allies, partners, advisors and neighbours. NCC staff and senior volunteers are committed to supporting Indigenous-led conservation across Canada.

In this report, you will read about our Year 2 activities under the Framework as well as reflections on our work and anticipated next steps. This work has been grouped into two broad priorities:

- Enhancing NCC's Indigenous Capacity, and
- Supporting Indigenous-led Conservation.

¹ 2019. *Walking Together to Care for the Land and Water – NCC's Indigenous Conservation Framework*. Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Enhancing NCC's Cultural Capacity

In Year 2, we made considerable progress in advancing our Indigenous cultural competency and training. Our objective is to provide all NCC staff with a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous history, culture and reconciliation so that we may more effectively engage with Indigenous Peoples and reflect this understanding through our conservation work. This improved understanding has helped foster a significant shift in our organizational culture. Over the course of this year, NCC has achieved the following:

Formal targeted Indigenous cultural competency training

- Kevin Lamoureux, from the University of Winnipeg's Indigenous Insights program, facilitated two one-day Indigenous cultural competency training sessions for 47 NCC staff. In total, 74 staff have now received in-person training over two years.
- A session for conservation, communications and engagement staff, scheduled for March 2020, was postponed due to COVID-19 and will be rescheduled in 2021.

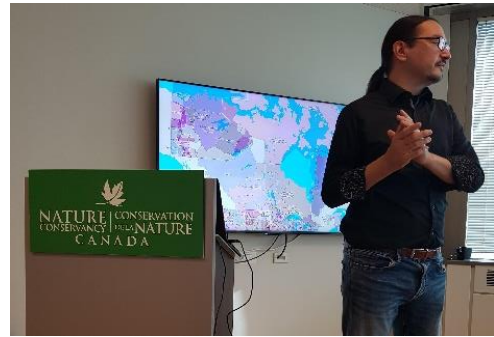


Figure 1: Kevin Lamoureux. Photo credit: NCC

Online training

- Online training for the Indigenous Insights program was being developed with the University of Winnipeg prior to the pandemic. Finalizing the training content and licensing its use was delayed because of COVID-19.

Governance

- As part of the ongoing engagement of our senior volunteers, staff briefed NCC board members about Indigenous conservation engagement, informing discussions about how this work can be advanced across Canada and within their respective regions.
- We have begun reviewing NCC's internal policies, procedures, standards and guidelines to ensure they support the vision of working in the spirit of reconciliation.

Staff learning

- The NCC All-staff Conference *Transformations: Conservation in a Changing World* was held in Ottawa in January 2020 and featured several topics on engaging with Indigenous conservation partners. Staff attended sessions on ethical space, Indigenous reconciliation, Indigenous communities' perspectives of NCC, and IPCAs. A highlight for many was the plenary session "Walking in a Good Way – Reconciliation and the Living World" by Kevin Lamoureux.

New tools for staff

- NCC is developing new tools, including guidelines and best practices, to assist staff engaging with Indigenous Nations and communities, partners, and allies.
- As an example, to help staff understand the circumstances in which a land acknowledgement statement should be used, the purpose of the acknowledgement and how to develop an appropriate statement, NCC prepared the Indigenous Territorial Acknowledgement Guide. This guide is intended to be an evolving document, based on feedback from Indigenous communities and supporters.



Figure 2. Métis history presentation, Weston Family Tallgrass Prairie Interpretive Centre, Manitoba.
Photo credit: NCC

Advisors

- Indigenous advisors provide critical insight and perspectives to guide NCC's work at all levels. NCC is currently working to identify and formally collaborate with Indigenous advisors at all levels of our organization.
- As a first step to support NCC's engagement framework, through a secondment arrangement with Parks Canada, NCC welcomed Nathan Cardinal to the organization as Senior Advisor of Indigenous Relations. Nathan has extensive experience advancing and supporting Indigenous leadership in resource conservation and now leads NCC's Indigenous engagement work. Nathan is Métis with roots in the Fort McMurray area.
- NCC has begun working with Indigenous advisors in both BC and Saskatchewan, and will continue to increase its Indigenous advisor capacity across the country.

Communicating with external audiences

- This past year, NCC established new ways to share our work in support of Indigenous-led conservation efforts.
- For the first time, NCC created a landing page on our corporate website dedicated to Indigenous conservation. The "[Working Together on the Land](#)" section includes a link to NCC's *Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework*, and highlights several projects we are working on. It includes an interactive map with links to other sources of information in support of Indigenous-led conservation. In the 12 months leading up to September 2020, this page received more than 3,700 views. Stories have also been shared through NCC's [Land Lines](#) blog.
- The *Nature Conservancy of Canada Magazine* continues to highlight Indigenous-led conservation across Canada. Articles such as "Connecting Nature" in the winter 2020 issue reflect the importance of large-scale conservation to the protection of biodiversity, as well as the Indigenous (Inuit) way of life. This issue, as well as others with similar features, have received positive reviews from NCC supporters, with requests for more Indigenous-focused stories.
- Similarly, our supporters have shown support for Indigenous-related social media posts and requested more content. These efforts are helping NCC to communicate broadly about our work on the land with Indigenous communities and inspiring conversations about this work.

Lisa Jackson, Anishinaabe artist and filmmaker, spoke at NCC's *NatureTalks* speaker series in Toronto (2020). These *NatureTalks* events are intended to engage audiences about conservation in Canada and include Indigenous perspectives.

Summary

Efforts to advance the cultural competency of NCC staff have been important for individuals and the organization as a whole. The Indigenous cultural competency training continues to receive extremely positive reviews. In every session, staff report learning something they didn't know about Indigenous Peoples history in Canada and, in many cases, have come to understand the history they do know from a new perspective. Discussions between colleagues has made this training something that staff are asking to join, and there are increasing requests for additional and more specialized training.

Overall, the Indigenous session at the NCC All-staff conference deserves special mention. The gathering had a profound impact on staff's understanding of NCC's commitment to Indigenous engagement. Many shared that it was the highlight of the conference and felt that it was truly transformational.

Next steps

- Continuing in 2021, the Indigenous Insights program will be used for facilitated and self-guided online training. The program will be extended as an on-boarding tool for new staff and as a supplementary resource for existing staff.
- Additional regionally focused training will be offered to existing staff. For example, NCC conservation staff have identified the need to better understand the role of historic and modern-day treaties and their influence on land use, rights, and responsibilities.
- We will finalize updates to several internal policies related to securement and stewardship.
- Build on first steps to develop and integrate Indigenous advisory capacity at both the national and regional levels within NCC.
- Continue developing a plan to manage Indigenous cultural heritage resources on NCC properties.
- We will continue to reflect intentionally on NCC's policies and actions in engaging with First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada and how to better support their leadership in conservation, including increasing and improving NCC's Indigenous advisory capacity.
- Continue to engage NCC's board members and other senior volunteers in all the foregoing through regular briefings.

Supporting Indigenous-led Conservation

NCC has developed many successful approaches to land securement and stewardship for the benefit of conservation. We will continue to use our experience to support Indigenous communities that are working to establish protected and conserved areas in their traditional territories.

Indigenous land trust model

- NCC was asked by the federal government's *Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas Working Group* to share the land trust model for conservation and provide our insights on the benefits, challenges, and considerations that should be understood by groups exploring this model.
- Indigenous Nations in Ontario and Atlantic Canada have approached NCC requesting more detailed information on the establishment and operations of a land trust.

Technical support for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas

As defined in the [One with Nature](#)² and [We Rise Together](#)³ reports, IPCAs are lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance, and knowledge systems. NCC has specialized skills in conservation management and applies them to achieve community-driven conservation solutions. We are committed to sharing our skills where needed to support Indigenous conservation initiatives and designation of new IPCAs.



Figure 3. Northern Quebec Cree Project.
Photo credit: Chantal Otter-Tetreault

Since 2015, NCC has been assisting the Cree Nation Government to help implement the Cree Regional Conservation Strategy. The vision of the strategy is to maintain Cree culture, heritage, way of life, and food security. In 2019 and 2020, the Cree Nation Government, with NCC's assistance, finished conservation planning and mapping by bringing Cree knowledge and values together with NCC's conservation planning tools. This enabled the Cree Nation Government to propose 23 Cree-led protected and conserved areas in their traditional territory. NCC also assisted the Cree Nation Government with preparing their successful proposal to access funds from the Government of Canada's [Canada Nature Fund](#) (Pathway to Canada Target 1 Challenge), which will see work completed in three main areas:

- Establish at least 28,000 square kilometres of new biodiversity reserves under Quebec legislation (co-designated as IPCAs);⁴
- Develop Cree-led management plans for new and existing protected areas; and

² 2018. *One with Nature: A Renewed Approach to Land and Freshwater Conservation in Canada - A report of Canada's Federal Provincial and Territorial Departments Responsible for Parks, Protected Areas, Conservation, Wildlife and Biodiversity.*

³ 2018. *We Rise Together: Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 through the creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the spirit and practice of reconciliation.* The Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE).

⁴ In December 2020, the Cree Nation Government and the Government of Quebec announced the protection of more than 20% of the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory.

- Establish a Cree Guardians program to implement monitoring, management, on-the-land education, and eco-tourism activities within protected areas.

Land securement & stewardship

NCC helped facilitate several significant land acquisitions in the past year. The first was in support of the collaborative establishment of Thaidene Nënë National Park Reserve, a part of the broader Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area established by Łutsël K’é Dene Nation in the Northwest Territories. NCC acquired and subsequently transferred the only private land parcel within the proposed boundary for the national park reserve to Parks Canada. The Łutsël K’é Dene Nation was awarded the United Nations Equator prize in June 2020 for this work. This award recognizes innovative solutions for biodiversity protection, climate change, and economic diversity. They were one of 10 Indigenous organizations in the world to receive the award and the first ever in Canada.

The second project concluded in January 2020 when NCC joined the Ktunaxa Nation, Province of BC, Government of Canada, and private funding partners to purchase development rights in BC’s Jumbo Valley. This project protected an area known as [Qat’muk](#) that is culturally significant and sacred to the Ktunaxa. After 30 years of uncertainty about the future of these traditional lands, the Ktunaxa Nation Council are now able to move forward with community consultation to ensure stewardship and conservation of this area in the Central Purcell Mountains through the creation of an IPCA.



Figure 4. Glacier lilies in the Jumbo Pass.
Photo credit: Bruce Kirkby

NCC secured two other properties (Tidal Flats and “Ryan River) in British Columbia, which are within the territories of the Nuxalk Nation and the Lilwat Nation, respectively. We are developing relationships in the spirit of respect and collaboration with each of these Nations to encourage and support Indigenous-led stewardship activities on these properties.

NCC supported 21 different stewardship activities in 2019 and 2020. These ranged from Council of the Haida Nation staff conducting annual property monitoring for NCC at the [Gamdis Tlagee Conservation Area](#) and Kumdis River Conservation Area in BC to hosting an event with members of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation for the Lower Maitland River Valley Property in Ontario.

Project design and funding support

- NCC participated in the development of more than 15 other Indigenous-led conservation projects through the Canada Nature Fund. Our roles included assisting with proposal writing, budgeting and planning, as well as undertaking strategic conservation land acquisition initiatives in support of these projects.
- In addition to advancing Indigenous-led conservation and reconciliation, these projects will create or enhance protected and conserved



Figure 5. Piping plover at Cascumpec Sandhills, where NCC is collaborating with the Mi’kmaq Confederacy of PEI on shared conservation objectives.
Photo credit: Sean Landsman

areas in key geographies, improve connectivity, benefit species at risk, and improve carbon storage.

Summary

Indigenous Nations have shown significant leadership in establishing effective protection measures for lands and waters in their traditional territories and NCC is learning how it can best support those efforts. Through our work in support of the Cree Nation Government leadership and staff, we gained considerable insight into not only the technical aspects of collaborative planning, but also the unique personal and historical contexts Indigenous Nations bring to knowing and conserving the land. Given the diversity of cultures, histories, and perspectives across Canada, many Nations are taking their own unique approaches to conservation and we will continue to learn from them.

Next steps

- We will continue to work with our project partners to support the development of Canada Nature Fund and other grant proposals.
- We will continue to advance the Indigenous land trust model and seek to undertake collaborative research to inform future NCC guidance and actions.
- We will continue to offer support for capacity building efforts by Indigenous Nations as it pertains to their conservation efforts, including planning and development of IPCAs.
- We will seek further opportunities to provide technical support for existing and emerging Indigenous-led conservation efforts. Lessons learned will inform how NCC can best support Indigenous communities leading conservation efforts in areas where we do not have a role in land ownership.

Conclusion

During the second year of activities under NCC's Indigenous Conservation Engagement Framework, our staff have embraced the opportunity to work more closely with Indigenous people and collaborate on shared objectives.

The world of conservation is changing and NCC is committed to building meaningful relationships with Indigenous People to support their leadership in that changing dynamic. During this second year of focused efforts to advance our collaboration and engagement with Indigenous Nations and communities, our staff have continued to embrace this initiative and have been able to support advancement of Indigenous-led efforts to conserve and steward their traditional territories. There is still much to do and much to learn. As we enter Year 3, we look forward to continuing to collaborate with Indigenous communities and allies to advance conservation projects, increase opportunities for engagement with Indigenous communities and make meaningful contributions to reconciliation.