

An Indigenous Ontology of Water Resilience: Muskoka Summit on the Environment 2024

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For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have created and passed on knowledge resulting in sustainable relationships with all of Creation. Along with knowledge comes the responsibility to maintain our relationships with water.

We have always been here



- First Nations peoples have developed laws, governance and knowledge systems, practices and protocols that enabled sustainable relationships with all of Creation (ancestors, future generations, spirit world).

Water is Life

Concern for water is not new to our communities. Water has always been, and continues to be, recognized as a life-giving force.



Acknowledging Colonialism



every child



An Act

respecting First Nations,
Inuit and Métis children,
youth and families

Context for Disconnection from the Natural World



- The Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and **gain control over their land and resources**

TRC 2015 (p.8)

Earth Based Reconciliation

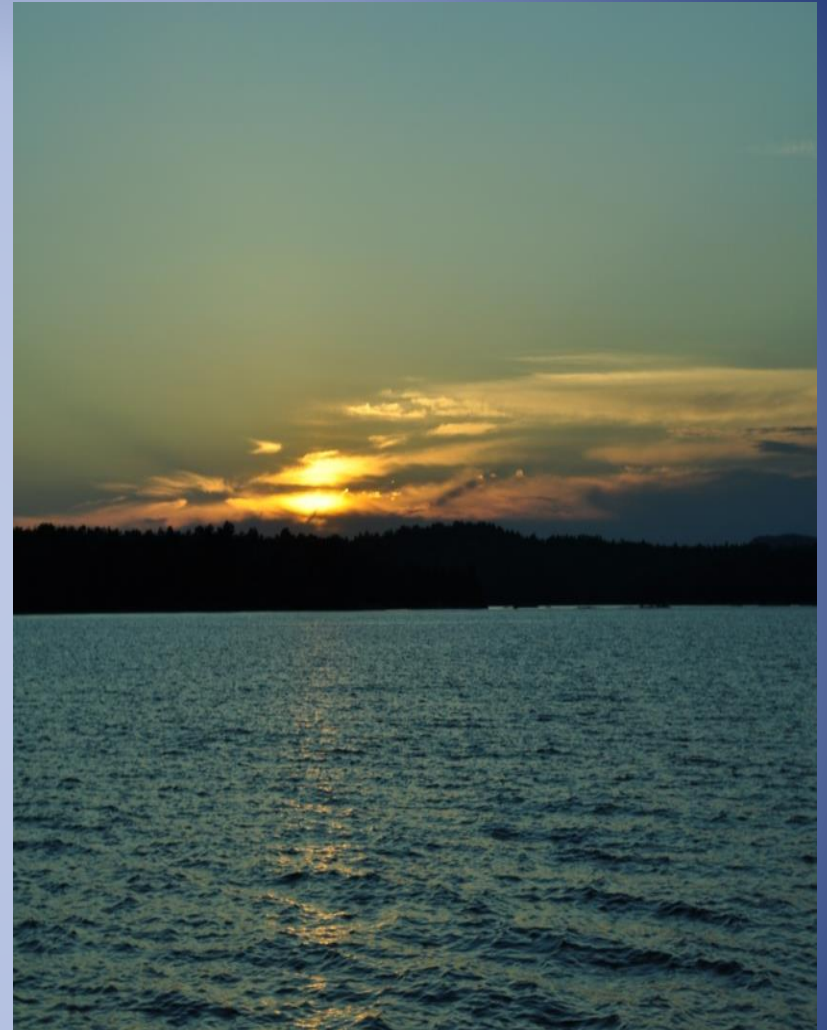
- Elder Crowshoe explains “if human beings resolve problems among themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete” (Honouring the Truth 2015)



The Water Crisis

First Nation communities do not enjoy the same water quality as their non-Indigenous counterparts

Gross mismanagement of lands and waters has caused widespread and on-going detrimental impacts to all aspects of lives and livelihoods of First Nations



Water Governance Crisis



- Historical and ongoing relationships with the waters
- Lack of Environmental Protection regimes in First Nations
- Federal and Provincial Environmental Protections regimes are failing
- Exclusion of Traditional Knowledge

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

- Provides protection for special relationship with water
- Recognizes Indigenous legal traditions as sources of law (think, act, protect ahead to future generations)
- Inherent right of Indigenous peoples to govern as self-determined peoples in accordance with Indigenous law

Roles and Responsibilities



We begin with Nibi and spirit



First Nation Realities

- Water as a relative
- TK of Indigenous Peoples
- An 'ethic of responsibility'
- TK of women



Offering/Giving



Waterscape in Canada

- Water and Waste Water Assessments
- First Nations Water Management Strategy (FNWMS) 2003-2008
- Expert Panel to Advise on a Regulatory Framework to Ensure Safe Drinking Water in First Nation Communities (2006)
- The Protocol for Safe Drinking Water in First Nations (2006 & 2014)
- First Nations Water and Waste Water Action Plan (2008)

- Senate Report on Safe Drinking Water for First Nations (2007)
- Bill S-31, An Act Respecting the Safety of Drinking Water on First Nation Lands
- Bill S3-8 Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act (2012)
- Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act (2013)
- Bill C-61 First Nation Clean Water Act

Four Elements

- Fire
- Water
- Earth
- Wind (Air).



What is water?

- A colourless, transparent, odourless liquid that forms the seas, lakes, rivers, and rain and is the basis of the fluids of living organisms
- a transparent, odorless, tasteless liquid, a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, H_2O , freezing at $32^\circ F$ or $0^\circ C$ and boiling at $212^\circ F$ or $100^\circ C$, that in a more or less impure state constitutes rain, oceans, lakes, rivers, etc.: it contains 11.188 percent hydrogen and 88.812 percent oxygen, by weight. A special form or variety of this liquid, as rain

Water

- In Western legal traditions, water is treated as a subject or object, often to owned or used .
 - Legal relationships between beings are structured on the basis of spirit
 - Spiritual law is the first form of law from which we derive all other legal understanding
- (Craft 2018, 58)

Nibi Ontologies

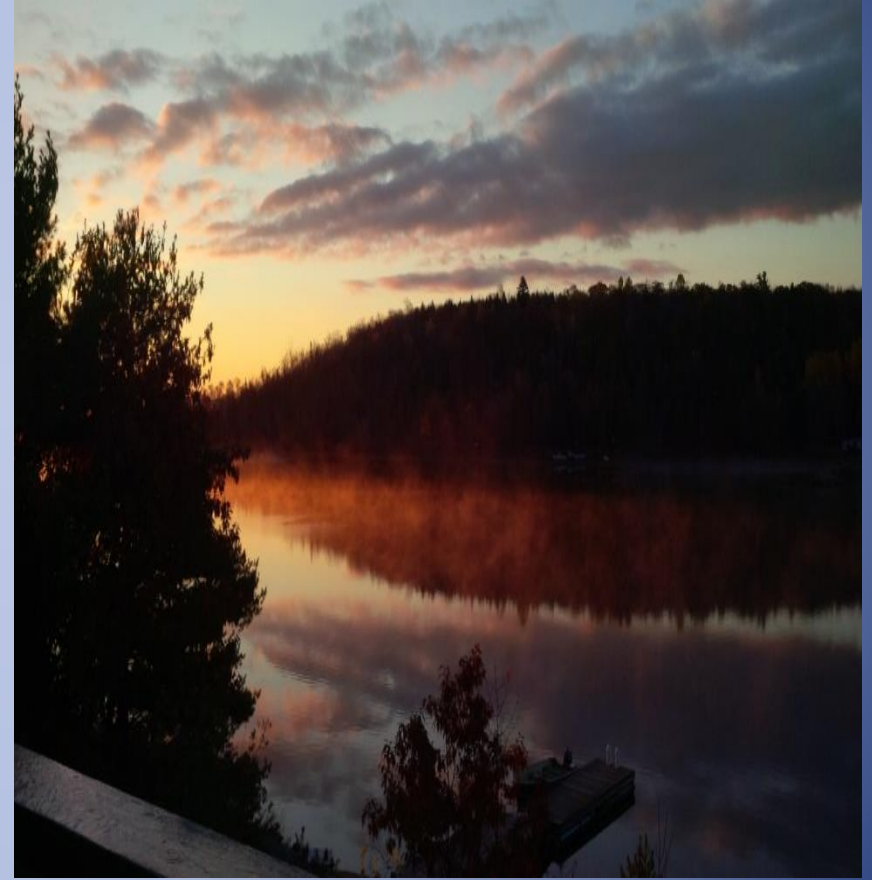
- Water as a relative
- We need to care for water
- Women/girls have a special connection to water
- Have to be safe with water as well



Water



Nibi as a teacher



Anishinaabek Water Law

- *Anishinaabe inaakonigewin (Craft 2014)*
- Water has spirit
- We do not own water
- Water is life
- Women are responsible for water
- We must respect water
- Water can suffer
- Water needs a voice
- Water must flow

Decolonization

- .We see our waters increasingly governed by imposed economic, foreign and colonial domination, as well as trade agreements and commercial practices that disconnects as peoples from the ecosystem.



- As we humans **co-exist with the water** , we have to care for the water in order for water to be clean. The presence and sanctity of water infuses all aspects of our existence.
- **Water is alive, and is life itself.** All life on this earth depends on healthy water for survival. Water is a relation, and it connects us to all other living things in the 'web' of life



Reconciliation, Well Being and Water

- Healing the relationships
- Support the Retention and Revitalization of TK and language in support of well being
- Respect the water as a relative and key to well being
- Engage in planning (SWP) that includes First Nation (knowledge, governance, laws, etc.).



Miigwech!

