

# Manitoba Indigenous-led Conservation and Nationhood ICAN Gatherings 2017-2018

Summary Report of the Knowledge  
Keepers of Nine Manitoba First Nations



**INDIGENOUS  
LEADERSHIP  
INITIATIVE**



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# Manitoba Indigenous-led Conservation and Nationhood Gatherings 2017-2018

## Executive Summary

Two four-day regional meetings with representatives from 9 Manitoba First Nations, and one two-day meeting with 7 Manitoba First Nations, of the Ininiwak/Nehetho (Cree), Anishinabe (Ojibway) and Oji-Cree Nations, took place in Manitoba, to provide Indigenous-led mentoring and support to Indigenous communities wishing to pursue and exercise cultural responsibilities regarding stewardship.

Respected community Elders and Knowledge Keepers were chosen as the community representatives, as they are considered by the communities as the true experts in Indigenous knowledge-based approaches to stewardship, and because of Indigenous traditions of Elder leadership. Most of the Knowledge Keepers were fluent in their languages, and respected within their communities as being knowledgeable in their land-based and spiritual ways of life and traditional teachings and practices. Following community protocols, the discussions included daily Pipe and water ceremonies, which began and set a ceremonial context for all discussions. The ceremonies are ancient practices of nationhood that acknowledge Indigenous identity, demonstrate gratitude, and reflect a commitment to duties and responsibilities made on behalf of all participants to the Spirit, to the land, and to all of life.

“Practicing our nationhood must reflect our way of life, never overstepping the Spirit. The purpose of lifting the Pipe is to invoke the Spirit, to remember our dreams, to remember that feeling of being on the land, and to be inspired to find our own memory of our duties and responsibilities as a people. Our duties and responsibilities are to lead human beings in how to take care of the land, and how to take care of life.”

The goal of the meetings, held in December 2017, January 2018 and April 2018, were to support Indigenous communities in Manitoba regarding Guardian programs, conservation planning, and the potential to create a regional stewardship network. Indigenous Knowledge Keepers shared traditional, land-based, and ceremonial perspectives on:

Manitoba Indigenous-led Conservation and Nationhood Gatherings 2017-2018:

- Indigenous nationhood;
- Earth guardianship; and
- An approach to guardianship of the moose.



The first meeting, which took place December 11 to 13, 2017 at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng First Nation, resulted in recommendations to pursue:

1. A regional ancestral school of knowledge. A first step in the pursuit of community-based Indigenous Guardians programs would to pursue a regional approach to training youth in natural laws and traditional culturally-based teachings and approaches, the first step of which would be rites of passage and spiritual connection to the land. Scientific approaches were welcomed as a part of the training that could occur. Indigenous language was seen as a foundational element of training, as the values and understanding of relationship with the land is embedded within language. Communities discussed how to potentially share different aspects of that teaching that could occur within a regional network. The Turtle Lodge was seen as a central location for where Indigenous knowledge-based training could begin.
2. Discussions on moose conservation from a traditional perspective, incorporating traditional values and practices around taking care of moose. Discussion points raised included:
  - a. The moose are disappearing.
  - b. We have a responsibility to come up with a plan to protect the moose.
  - c. The moose has a right to survive that overrides the treaty right to hunt.
  - d. Sports hunters, industry, mining and farming are an issue.
  - e. We have traditional laws we are supposed to follow when taking a moose.
  - f. We need to develop our spiritual relationship with the moose. We need to ask the moose what he needs using our ceremonies.
  - g. We used to know how to name and use, like the buffalo, all the parts of the moose.
  - h. We need to live the values of kindness and respect when it comes to the moose.

The second meeting, which took place January 22 to 24, 2018 in Misipawistik Cree Nation, resulted in:

1. Indigenous knowledge-based elements important in a training Manitoba Indigenous-led Conservation and Nationhood Gatherings 2017-2018 curriculum for Indigenous Guardians were fleshed out, in terms of what would be important to teach within a regional community-based network ancestral school of knowledge. These included:
  - a. Spiritual connection – ceremonies, songs, building identity and spiritual connection to the land
  - b. Vision
  - c. Nationhood from an Indigenous context
  - d. The Gift of Leadership
  - e. Elders – Role of Leadership
  - f. How to Access Indigenous Knowledge
  - g. Language
  - h. Duties and Responsibilities – including responsibilities as related to our nationhood, family roles and responsibilities, roles and responsibilities to water, land, to community, to Youth and Elders
  - i. Spiritual and Natural Laws, including the Seven Sacred Laws
  - j. Anishinabe and Cree Way of Life Before Contact – Atsookan Ezhijigaywin
  - k. Rites of Passage
  - l. Storytelling
  - m. Drum
  - n. Ongomiziwin – Be Careful
  - o. Gardens
  - p. On the Land – Feeling the Land, Healing on the Land, Learning about the Animals and Medicines the Land has to Offer, Learning about the Moose
  - q. Providing for our Communities
  - r. Paid Internships
  - s. Elders and Youth involved in Planning
2. Different options for community governance structures to support Indigenous Guardians programs were discussed, along with more in-depth planning discussions on the part of

individual communities how their programs could look. These included options that worked both with and independently from Chief and Councils, with concentric leadership at whose core were the Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

The third meeting, which took place April 22 to 24, 2018 at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng, resulted in agreement to:

1. Take a traditional Indigenous approach to strengthening nationhood, connections and unity amongst Indigenous communities at a Manitoba Indigenous-led Conservation and Nationhood Gatherings 2017-2018 regional level. This included approaches in which:
  - a. Ceremonies take the lead, including synchronizing the time and types of ceremonies that honour the land taking place in different communities at the same time, with a number of synchronous ceremonies planned and later implemented by the communities;
  - b. Creating infrastructure within each community to support Elder and Knowledge Keeper leadership and education of Youth Guardians. Specifically the communities agreed in concept to build Turtle Lodges in each community, following the example and model of the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng.
2. Agreement to respect the diversity of approaches of different communities, and local autonomy in the development of their Guardians programs, that additionally included land use plans, and alternative models of Indigenous governance. Following the three gatherings, agreement was also reached between the ICAN Co-Chairs, Ovide Mercredi (ILI Senior Advisor), Dave Courchene (ILI Spiritual Advisor) and Stephen Kakfwi (ILI Senior Advisor), in both Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (NWT), to further develop the Manitoba community-based network and NWT regional network, and create a new North-South network of the NWT communities and Manitoba communities, that would work together in both training and implementation

aspects of Guardians programs, achieving a larger network of unity and nationhood. For the Manitoba area, the core challenge is to rebuild relationships and trust between communities, which have been eroded due to colonization, the imposition of governance and the lack of their influence on development in their territories (e.g. Manitoba Hydro). There is also very little existing institutional capacity in taking an Indigenous-led approach to land stewardship and survival based on nationhood. The communities are anxious to begin developing their infrastructure and training their youth right away. The Manitoba ICAN meetings were highly successful in strengthening connections between Indigenous communities undertaking stewardship initiatives at a regional level, and in creating the conditions for success for Manitoba Indigenous communities to protect ecological and cultural values, pursue conservation planning and Guardian programs, through mentorship by seasoned Indigenous leaders and Knowledge Keepers.





# Editorial Comments on Manitoba Indigenous Conservation and Nationhood (ICAN) Process



## Dave Courchene, Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper and Founder of Turtle Lodge

The three ICAN gatherings were held to allow for engagement of an active participation of community-level participants. This was to ensure whatever we do would be grounded and connected to the communities choosing to be involved in the initiative of earth guardianship. There was a strong ceremonial context to the process. This was in respect of the ancestral ways of doing things. The sacred fires, the pipe ceremonies and water ceremonies acted as the foundation of our discussions. The approach was to seek guidance and direction spiritually through ceremony. As a result of the discussion, it became very clear what is that the communities wanted to talk to about and for them to be the ones deciding, having faith in the ceremonial process.

There was total agreement that our participation as a People is very needed to address the current issues we are facing in regards to climate change and land destruction. It was agreed that the values – the teachings left to us by our ancestors, can act as a foundation and our relationship to each other and our relationship to the land. The impacts of Manitoba Hydro have had a devastating effect on the lives, and the way of life of our People, including traditions practiced that allowed us to maintain connection to and live in balance with the land. The waters have been poisoned. The land has been poisoned. Restoration of our way of life – our ceremonially-based traditions – must become a priority in our endeavours in order for these elements to be restored to their fullness, and maintained. The education of the youth is of primary importance if they are going to return to the land to act as guardians. The elders agreed that the training must begin in the lodges with the spiritual teachings, preparing them spiritually and with the teachings to go the land. It was proposed that they undergo the rites of passage to prepare them properly. The communities were in support of creating the infrastructure in each community to build sacred lodges where this education and training could happen.

The resources needed at the beginning would be the training required, the infrastructure for the lodges, the equipment to record the whole process, especially the Elders and Knowledge Keepers who are still with us as they share their knowledge and deliver the training, and the equipment needed to go onto the land, such as the boats, motors, canoes, camping equipment, four wheelers, scooters, etc.

The communities do not want another government-run program. They want to take full ownership of their initiatives. All they are requesting is respect: first of all, respect for their autonomy and leadership; and secondly, respect in the form of resources to carry out their initiative of guardianship.

Also proposed is the development of a regional model that would work in collaboration with the North and Manitoba leadership, a totally land-based model, led by our own People.



## Ovide Mercredi, Senior Advisor, ILI ICAN Co-Chair

Historically, Manitoba Hydro has had a great impact on a number of the First Nations that participated in the meetings. The three participating Cree Nations of Norway House, Misipawistik and Nisichawayisihk have all suffered a loss of their traditional way of life, jurisdiction over their territory and a loss of their jurisdiction over the resources they managed – hunting, fishing and other foods. They didn't think their way of life would be disturbed by their loss of authority. Sagkeeng First Nation, an Anishinabe community, is also dealing with the effects of large-scale hydro. The corporation controls the levels of the river they have always relied on which results in erosion, loss of land, safety issues and loss of access to foods and medicines.

The three Cree Nations are all at different stages of developing their own source revenue, which will allow a degree of independence from the provincial and federal governments. Nisichawayisihk and Norway

House each have agreements with Manitoba for co-managed Resource Management Areas



(RMA) and associated Resource Management Boards (RMB), while Misipawistik does not have an RMA or RMB. The RMA and RMB structure allows more control over the province. Furthermore, Nisichawayisihk has partnered with Manitoba in the development of the Wuskwatim Generating Station, a 200-megawatt, hydroelectric generating station constructed in their RMA. The Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation provided resources for the First Nations to collaborate amongst themselves and with others. It has also helped to build upon existing initiatives that have been developing as several of the First Nations were moving towards developing their own Guardians program prior to this initiative to develop a regional network. For example, Gord Walker of Norway House has been on a personal mission for some time now to stand up for the land and to educate the youth in their responsibilities to do so. For all three of the MB ICAN meetings he took the initiative to bring a small group of youth with him to the meetings to participate, learn and help to guide the development of the network. The traditional way of caring for the land is the practice of non-violence a valuable lesson for youth to learn. The historical Indigenous knowledge combined with Western tools will help these Nations to protect their lands. They must negotiate with the larger society and other First Nations. We must negotiate a peace between First Nations and the Canadian society. The next financial needs are to go towards resourcing government relations towards creating the civil structures and First Nations structures needed for better relations. For instance, the First Nations need the appropriate structure to negotiate with the provincial and federal governments. Transparency and accountability will be important pieces of this structure. Additionally, resources are needed to start gathering the tools necessary for the Guardians to get to work such as uniforms, vehicles, etc.

Healing will be an essential factor to First Nations reclaiming their jurisdiction. Progress as individuals will be required because the individual must be well first in order to help heal the land. Before the flooding caused by Manitoba Hydro the people were well. Few have survived from the time before the flooding. Those left behind were often re-victimized by lateral violence. It will be important to secure resources for the next steps to get agreements with the federal and provincial governments. My dream is for Nisichawayisihk, Norway House and Misipawistik to create a network or umbrella group and begin rebuilding the Cree nation.



## Shaunna Morgan Siegers, Operations Manager, ILI

The First Nations participating in our Manitoba Indigenous Conservation and Nationhood meetings are signatories to Treaty 1 (1871) and Treaty 5 (1875). I've worked with First Nations right across Turtle Island and it has been my personal observation that some of the greatest poverty, the longest outstanding elements of treaty implementation and some of the greatest injustices related to treaties are found here in Manitoba (such as outstanding treaty land entitlements and the discrepancy in per capita provisions – 32 acres per person for Treaties 1 and 5 versus 128 acres per person for Treaties 3, 4, 6 and 10). And I have to ask myself, why is that? Did the Chiefs and First Nations negotiators speak English when these documents were negotiated? Or did the federal government and corporations (Hudson's Bay Company, etc.) who held the pen, provide the translations? Clearly, neither the federal government nor the corporations were neutral parties in the negotiations. Why do First Nations oral histories tell of promises that never made it into the written

documents? If the "Treaties were negotiated and entered into to define, among other things, the respective rights of First Nation people and governments to use and enjoy lands that First Nations people traditionally occupied," why are there these outstanding issues and problems? Why did the Canadian government create the restrictive policies of the Indian Act (in 1876, which still exists today) and the pass system (1885 which restricted First Nation movement off reserve land, enforced into the 1940s and repealed in 1951)?

In those places where the historical numbered treaties never existed like British Columbia, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Quebec and elsewhere (see map) and the so called modern treaties were negotiated we see a very different situation. My knowledge of the modern treaties comes from my ancestral territory, which is now governed by the Cree Nation Government (CNG). In November 1975, the first so-called modern treaty, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) was signed. Our people spoke Cree and English fluently; we negotiated and translated for our Elders on our own. Our Elders planned it that way. Since 1975, the JBNQA has been opened up and renegotiated to create 28 amendments to the treaty and there have been 170 supplementary agreements implementing specific provisions in the JBNQA (P.J. Murdoch - Cree lawyer for CNG, personal communication June 27, 2018). Why is the standard of living on Manitoba reserves in Treaty 1 and Treaty 5 so vastly different than the Canadian standard of living (e.g. compare average annual total income levels on Fort Alexander \$14,986 or Wasagamack \$11,307 with the Manitoba provincial average \$36,696)? Compare the average annual total income levels under the JBNQA treaty with the historic treaties in Manitoba (The Crees of Waskaganish First Nation \$ 28,388 or Cree Nation of Nemaska \$36,461; Quebec provincial average \$ 36,352). And how does poverty affect the level of racism in Manitoba? How does the racism experienced

by First Nations affect self-esteem? How does self-esteem affect views of what you can and can't do? Do people turn that kind of hatred in on themselves or do they turn it out against those around them or those who hate them? How do poverty and racism affect child apprehension and the incarceration of minors? Why are 90% of the 11,000 children in care in Manitoba Indigenous? And why are more than 80% of the minors incarcerated in Manitoba Indigenous when they make up 3.6% of the population of Manitoba? Why such over representation? And "who really profits from the dying (R. LaMontagne, 2004)?" Because that is the result, directly or indirectly, of being apprehended as child. And do those who profit from these institutions want to change this? How do these things affect First Nations views on nationhood in Manitoba? Do First Nations see each other as allies or competitors for limited resources?

These are all things I've wondered about for a long time. At writing, the MB ICAN project has highlighted some of the negative things I've observed regarding competition for limited resources, competition for control over decision making and in other cases it has helped to build bridges over some of these historic barriers. The Indian Act governance structures and the continued enactment of the Indian Act present in Manitoba continue to cause harm. And yet the power of the Spirit, the power and sheer tenacity of the people and their inherent responsibilities to the lands, waters, plants and animals, passed down with their own Natural Law, continue to thrive. And the diverse nations participating in the MB ICAN meetings, share these strengths in common. In a recent co-presentation by the Coastal Guardian Stewardship Network, Colin Richardson of the Haida Nation was retelling the story of the development of their guardian network that included their mortal enemies, the Heiltsuk Nation – represented by his co-presenter, Ross Wilson. Colin said at the first meeting of their budding Network the Heiltsuk said, "There's too many damn

Haida in this room!" He continued, "We used to war with each other! We used to kill each other!" And Colin went on to say that for the Haida and the Heiltsuk, building a guardians network was a reconciliation process. At the same meeting, ILI Senior Advisor, Miles Richardson also commented, "You're never going to resolve the differences 100% - but resolve them enough to get along! We have a lot to learn and share from each other."

In the case of the Coastal Guardian Stewardship Network, their collaboration, and strength in numbers, led to a legislative land use process. Consequently, the development of the Haida land use plan resulted in giving voice to the ancient Haida narrative, rather than being ruled by the Canadian and British Columbian "crown" narrative. These stories of the Haida and Heiltsuk guardian network give me great hope for what the participating First Nations in the MB ICAN will achieve in their own reconciliation process. I wonder how self-esteem, poverty, racism and child apprehension in Manitoba will be different when they are ruled by their own narratives rather than the crown narrative. Post MB ICAN meetings, the dialogue and beginnings of plans for a stronger, brighter future are in motion. The vision for that future is one of empowerment of the ancient peoples of these lands and waters. Several of the participating nations have committed financial resources to their own guardian programs in addition to the other commitments described in the meeting report. Finally, there is talk of reinvigorating their own mighty nations and Natural Laws, working together to protect the lands and waters to address the scientific predictions and their own prophecies of climate change impacts and address the effects of the continued unabated consumption of resources and related pollution in their territories. They do this for their children, grandchildren and those yet to be born – and for all peoples, present and future, who now share this land. The catalyst has been the MB ICAN project. I'm excited to see what happens next.

# First Regional Meeting on Indigenous-Led Conservation and Nationhood (ICAN) Summary

Chairs: Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) Spiritual Advisor Dave Courchene & Senior Advisor Ovide Mercredi

Turtle Lodge, Sagkeeng First Nation  
December 11 to 13, 2017

## Purpose of Meeting

From December 11 to 13, 2017, the Turtle Lodge hosted a regional meeting of 12–14 Indigenous Knowledge Holders to support Indigenous communities in Manitoba regarding Guardian programs, conservation planning, and the potential to create a regional stewardship network. Indigenous Knowledge Holders from eight Manitoba First Nation communities of the Anishinabe (Ojibway), Ininu/Nehetho (Cree) and Oji-Cree Nations, shared traditional, land-based, and ceremonial perspectives on:

- Indigenous nationhood
- Earth guardianship
- An approach to guardianship of the moose

## Goals of the Regional Meeting

The goals of the regional meeting were to:

- Initiate the creation of a model to train young Indigenous People to become guardians of the land;
- Further understand traditional Indigenous roles and responsibilities related to taking care of the land, in particular, the moose; and
- To understand how enhancing Indigenous youth's guardianship of the lands, waters and moose can help to advance Indigenous nationhood.

## Meeting Venue

The meeting took place at the Turtle Lodge, an international center for Indigenous education and wellness, located in Sagkeeng First Nation, Manitoba, 100 km north of

Winnipeg. Over the past 15 years, Turtle Lodge has been a center for sharing Indigenous knowledge through events, ceremonies, conferences, and summits that include people from around the world.

## Setting a Ceremonial Context

The Turtle Lodge was chosen as the meeting venue to highlight the importance of setting a ceremonial context for discussions on Indigenous nationhood, consistent with direction given by Knowledge Holders. Part of the protocol of the Turtle Lodge includes daily Pipe and water ceremonies, which begin and set the context for all discussions. The ceremonies are ancient practices of nationhood that acknowledge Indigenous identity, demonstrate gratitude, and reflect a commitment to duties and responsibilities made on behalf of all participants to the Spirit, to the land, and to all of life.

*“Practicing our nationhood must reflect our way of life, never overstepping the Spirit. The purpose of lifting the Pipe is to invoke the Spirit, to remember our dreams, to remember that feeling of being on the land, and to be inspired to find our own memory of our duties and responsibilities as a people. Our duties and responsibilities are to lead human beings in how to take care of the land, and how to take care of life.”*

— Dave Courchene, Anishinabe Knowledge Holder and Founder of Turtle Lodge



## Meeting Sponsors

The meeting was sponsored by two non-profit and non-governmental organizations: the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation and the Indigenous Leadership Initiative.

## Summary of Discussion

The first meeting, which took place December 11 to 13, 2017 at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng First Nation, resulted in recommendations to pursue:

**A regional ancestral school of knowledge.** A first step in the pursuit of community-based Indigenous Guardians programs would be to pursue a regional approach to training youth in natural laws and traditional culturally-based teachings and approaches, the first step of which would be rites of passage and spiritual connection to the land. Scientific approaches were welcomed as a part of the training that could occur. Indigenous language was seen as a foundational element of training, as the values and understanding of relationship with the land is embedded within language. Communities discussed how to potentially share different aspects of that teaching that could occur within a regional network. The Turtle Lodge was seen as a central location

for where Indigenous knowledge-based training could begin.

**Discussions on moose conservation from a traditional perspective,** incorporating traditional values and practices around taking care of moose. Discussion points raised included:

- The moose are disappearing.
- We have a responsibility to come up with a plan to protect the moose.
- The moose has a right to survive that overrides the treaty right to hunt.
- Sports hunters, industry, mining and farming are an issue.
- We have traditional laws we are supposed to follow when taking a moose.
- We need to develop our spiritual relationship with the moose. We need to ask the moose what he needs using our ceremonies.
- We used to know how to name and use, like the buffalo, all the parts of the moose.
- We need to live the values of kindness and respect when it comes to the moose.





# Summary of Discussion

## 1. The Concept of Nationhood

Knowledge Keepers agreed that nationhood needs to be viewed from an Indigenous context, and defined outside of western thought. From an Indigenous perspective, a definition of Nationhood is based on and includes:

- A union with Spirit and Land
- A spiritual movement based on relationship with *Kizhay Manitou/Kise Manitoo*, Mother Earth and all living beings.
- Being led and represented by the Sacred Pipe, the rattle and the drum, sacred ceremonial items that have the power to establish a relationship with the spiritual and natural world, uplift and unify the people.
- *Atsookan Ezhijigaywin* – an ancestral way of life.
- Values, duties and responsibilities
- Living by Spiritual and Natural Laws including the cycles of the animals – “we were governed by these things”
- The sacredness of all life.
- Our positive values and teachings including the Seven Sacred Teachings, *Kiizhay Ottiziwin* (kindness), sharing, helping each other, taking responsibility, fun, laughter, balance, cleaning your surroundings/cleaning your spirit, confidence, conviction
- Autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency
- Looking after the Earth and ourselves.
- Reflected in the original languages.
- Implemented through the practice of our ceremonies.
- Rising up to embrace our identity as a People.
- Elders, Youth, Women and Men coming together.

## 2. Finding a Name in the Language

Using the original languages was felt to be very important in the process of embracing nationhood.

Discussion was held to come to agreement regionally on a name for the concept of guardians/those who take care of the land, which reflected nationhood. It was agreed that “guardians” was an inappropriate term for a number of reasons, one of them being that Mother Earth is the true guardian of life. Consensus was not yet reached, and further discussion was felt to be needed in order to come to agreement both on what needed to be described for the purposes of the group, as well as what language terms to use.

The following language terms were offered by Knowledge Holders and language speakers, for further discussion:

**Atsookan Ezhijigaywin** (The ancestral ceremonial way of life)

**Mikinakay** (Walking the trail of the Turtle)

**Kiyapic Kawahkohtahkik Kikawinaw Aski** (The ones that are still related to our Mother the Earth)

**Kiyapic Ka Ahcahko Wahkohtakik Kikawinaw Aski** (Belief in the spiritual relationship to Mother Earth)

**Nanakatawenimayahkok Moswak** (Watching/Caring for Moose)

**Pisiskiwake Nanakaciyayahkok** (Caring for Animals)

**Aski e manacihtayahk** (Preservation of Earth)

**Kikanaw Aski e Manacihtayahk** (Preserve/ care for Mother Earth)

**Oke-te-the-mo-win/ Oke-te-the-che-kew/ Oke-ta-pa-cha-kew** (Guardianship: someone who takes care of another person or another person’s property - custodian-guard - keeper - lookout - watchman - guardianship)

**Mamawe-depethemisowin** (Nationhood - the state of being an independent nation)

**Achako-wakotowin Kikawenow Aski**  
(Spiritual relationship with Mother Earth)

For now, until consensus is reached, the term used in the document will be **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin**, meaning the ancestral ceremonial way of life.

**3. Consensus on Developing Atsookan Ezhijigaywin - A Regional Community-Based Ancestral School of Knowledge**

Knowledge Holders discussed how to put nationhood into action. There was consensus that this could best be done by educating the youth to become guardians/stewards of the land, learning self-sustaining teachings and skills in conservation based on respect for the land, that would highlight and grow the identity and strength of the nation, while creating a paradigm for economic survival on Indigenous terms.

Coming to agreement that the approach requires unity and the communities working together, Knowledge Holders deliberated the question:

*How do we come together to centralize our approach to educating young people and support them in returning to the land?*

A consensus was reached that a model based on **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin** – the ancestral way of life - should be developed. This would consist of developing a regional community-based ancestral “school” of knowledge as a means to educate young people in the ceremonial and land-based ways and teachings that reflect and strengthen nationhood.

**Places of learning** – the “school” settings – would be within the traditional lodges, the sacred sites, and on the land and water itself, and teaching sites would be located within different communities, such as the Turtle Lodge, which has gained much respect as a place where ceremonies, rites of passage and teachings are shared, various sacred sites within the traditional territories of the communities, as well as the trap lines, waterways, bush camps and areas, and hunting grounds.

**Curriculum** would be based on providing a spiritual grounding of ceremony, teachings, rites of passage, and an understanding of personal and cultural identity, original instructions, roles and responsibilities to oneself, one’s family, one’s community and the land itself, before youth would be taken to the land to learn how to survive and engage in self-sustaining stewardship activities. A two-year curriculum was proposed.

The main **teachers** would be the Knowledge Holders themselves, and could be extended to anyone who could provide knowledge deemed to be useful.

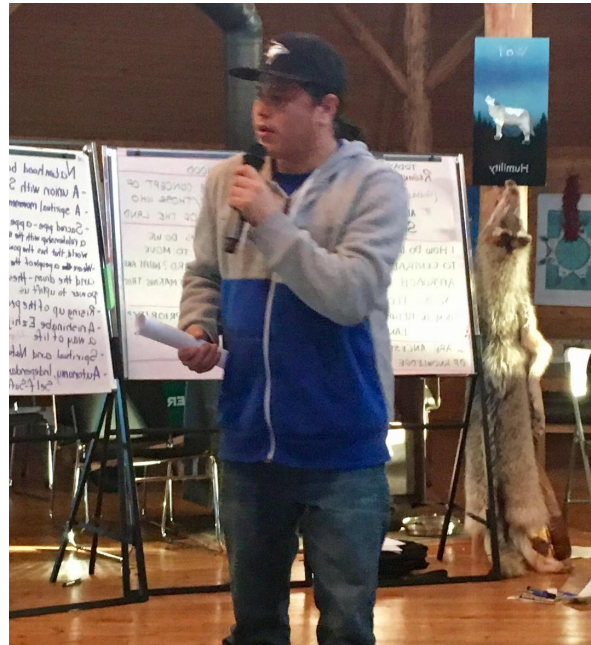
It was suggested that **resources** initially be sought from within the communities themselves. Each Knowledge Holder and participant agreed to go back home to request resourcing support for the model from their home communities, such as a sponsorship for tuition and living expenses for up to 2 to 10 youth from each community.

It was agreed that further discussion was needed to flesh out the model. It was agreed that a second Regional Gathering should be held, to develop this concept in greater detail.

**4. Actions Required to Develop Atsookan Ezhijigaywin**

Knowledge Holders discussed actions to focus on to move the idea of **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin** forward. They talked about the next steps to making a regional community-based school of ancestral knowledge a reality:

- Second Regional Indigenous-Led Conservation and Nationhood Gathering – The group agreed that another gathering was necessary to further develop the concept, proposed structure and curriculum of the community-based regional school of ancestral knowledge.
- Location – Misipawistik Cree Nation (MCN) was chosen as the host location of the next gathering. Both MCN and Norway House Cree Nation (NHCN) made an offer to host, and NHCN



agreed to withdraw in favour of MCN's offer, with a request that NCHN could be a site for a future gathering.

- Date – A date for the second community gathering was set for January 22-24, 2018. The group was keen to meet as soon as possible to keep a strong momentum of community unity and shared excitement going, to propel forward a shared process of developing youth education around taking care of the land.
- Participants – It was agreed that the same Knowledge Holders would be invited to the second gathering.
- Discussion of Vision and Curriculum – What would the concept of a community-based regional school of ancestral knowledge look like in practical terms?
- Discussion of Resourcing – How do the communities go about securing resources to support **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin**?
- Name – Further discussion is needed to come to agreement on a name for the regional approach being taken, reflecting the languages of the territory.

## 5. Discussion on Moose

A great deal of discussion was devoted to moose the first day, which will be summarized in a larger document.

Discussion points raised included:

- The moose are disappearing.
- We have a responsibility to come up with a plan to protect the moose.
- The moose has a right to survive that overrides the treaty right to hunt.
- Sports hunters, industry, mining and farming are an issue.
- We have traditional laws we are supposed to follow when taking a moose.
- We need to develop our spiritual relationship with the moose. We need to ask the moose what he needs using our ceremonies.
- We used to know how to name and use, like the buffalo, all the parts of the moose.
- We need to live the values of kindness and respect when it comes to the moose.

It was decided to defer the discussion on moose to the next meeting, to give it the appropriate time and thought investment required.

# Second Regional Meeting on Indigenous-Led Conservation and Nationhood (ICAN) Summary

Chair: Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI)  
Senior Advisor Ovide Mercredi

Misipawistik Cree Nation (Grand Rapids),  
MB, January 22-24, 2018

## Purpose of Meeting

From January 22 to 24, 2018, Misipawistik Cree Nation hosted a regional meeting of 12–14 Indigenous Knowledge Holders to support Indigenous communities in Manitoba regarding Guardian programs, conservation planning, and the potential to create a regional stewardship network.

This meeting was in follow up to a first meeting held at Turtle Lodge from December 11-13, 2017, in which agreement was reached to develop the concept of Atsookan Ezhijigaywin – a regional community-based ancestral school of knowledge, as a means of implementing nationhood, by educating the youth to become guardians/stewards of the land, learning self-sustaining teachings and skills in conservation based on respect for the land, that would highlight and grow the identity and strength of the nation, while creating a paradigm for economic survival on Indigenous terms.

Indigenous Knowledge Holders from eight Manitoba First Nation communities of the Anishinabe (Ojibway), Ininu/Nehetho (Cree) and Oji-Cree Nations, shared traditional, land-based, and ceremonial perspectives on:

- Indigenous nationhood
- Earth guardianship
- How do we come together to centralize our approach to educating young people and support them in returning to the land?

## Goals of the Regional Meeting

The goals of the regional meeting were to have more discussion around:

- What would the concept of a community-based regional school of ancestral knowledge look like in practical terms?
- What essential elements were important to the curriculum in training young guardians?
- How do the communities go about securing resources to support **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin**?
- Initiate the creation of a model to train young Indigenous People to become guardians of the land;
- Further understand traditional Indigenous roles and responsibilities related to taking care of the land; and
- To understand how enhancing Indigenous youth's guardianship of the lands, waters and moose can help to advance Indigenous nationhood.

## Meeting Venue

The meeting was hosted by Misipawistik Cree Nation (MCN), Manitoba, 435 km north of Winnipeg.



## Setting a Ceremonial Context

As with the 1st ICAN Meeting, discussions began with ceremony.

*In the ancestral ways of our Nations, acknowledging the Spirit was never overstepped. Gatherings were always begun in ceremony. Our teachings were received through having a relationship with Spirit. It is within the spiritual realm that we believe the higher intelligence exists. That relationship with the Spirit was always honoured in the ceremonies of our People. If we are ever to find ourselves, we must return to the beginning. The beginning is the Spirit we find in ceremony and on the land.*

— Nii Gaani Aki Inini – Leading Earth Man (Dave Courchene, Spiritual Advisor, Indigenous Leadership Initiative)

A sweat lodge was conducted by Misipawistik Cree Nation Elder Skipper Cook, and each day began with a Pipe ceremony. A sacred fire was lit and tobacco offerings were continually made during the discussions, following Indigenous ceremonial protocols.

## Summary of Discussions

The community representatives split up into two breakout sessions, focusing on either:

- Core elements to include within a training curriculum for Indigenous Guardians
- Governance models for community-based Guardians programs

The second meeting, which took place January 22 to 24, 2018 in Misipawistik Cree Nation, resulted in:

**1. Indigenous knowledge-based elements important in a training curriculum for Indigenous Guardians were fleshed out**, in terms of what would be important to teach within a regional community-based network ancestral school of knowledge. These included:

- Spiritual connection – ceremonies, songs, building identity and spiritual connection to the land
- Vision
- Nationhood from an Indigenous context
- The Gift of Leadership





- Elders – Role of Leadership
- How to Access Indigenous Knowledge Language
- Duties and Responsibilities – including responsibilities as related to our nationhood, family roles and responsibilities, roles and responsibilities to water, land, to community, to Youth and Elders
- Spiritual and Natural Laws, including the Seven Sacred Laws
- Anishinabe and Cree Way of Life Before Contact – **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin**
- Rites of Passage
- Storytelling
- Drum
- **Ongomiziwin** – Be Careful
- Gardens
- On the Land – Feeling the Land, Healing on the Land, Learning about the Animals and Medicines the Land has to Offer, Learning about the Moose
- Providing for our Communities
- Paid Internships
- Elders and Youth involved in Planning

**2. Different options for community governance structures to support Indigenous Guardians programs** were discussed, along with more in-depth planning discussions on the part of individual communities how their programs could look. These included options that worked both with and independently from Chief and Councils, with concentric leadership at whose core were the Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

### **A. Core Elements to include within a Training Curriculum for Indigenous Guardians**

Knowledge Keepers discussed taking a regional approach to Indigenous knowledge-based training that all the communities would be welcomed to be a part of, based on offering youth an understanding of spiritual and natural law. The following elements were considered important in the training of youth to be Guardians of the land:



## **Spiritual connection**

If we are going to send our youth to the land to act as caretakers, then we must prepare them spiritually to learn the ways that they will be able to hear the voice of the land, spoken through nature itself. Nature has an abundance of knowledge. Young people need to be spiritually connected to the land and with their own identity before they even go to the land.

Ceremonies, Songs, Building identity and spiritual connection to land

- Before going out on land young people need to know their identity, spiritual connection, values, teachings, responsibilities
- Each person should know their name, awaken the spirit, and be provided those ceremonies
- There is a song in each ceremony for each and everything we do. There's a song before you go moose hunting. We need to give the children the songs to have respect for the animal. Ceremonies and songs are important for all that we do.

## **Vision**

Having a vision is paramount. A vision derived from the spiritual realm is critical to frame the communities' common purpose. Rites of passage, such as going to the land to fast in order to receive one's vision and purpose in life, are traditional approaches to receiving one's personal vision, as well as a vision for the collective.

## **Nationhood**

Nationhood needs to be viewed from an Indigenous context, and defined outside of western thought. An Indigenous definition of Nationhood is based on:

- A union with Spirit and Land.
- A spiritual movement based on relationship with Kizhay Manitou/Kise Manitou, Mother Earth and all living beings.
- Being led and represented by the Sacred Pipe, the rattle and the drum, sacred ceremonial items that have the power to establish a relationship with the spiritual and natural world, uplift and unify the people.

- **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin** – an ancestral way of life.
- Values, duties and responsibilities.
- Living by Spiritual and Natural Laws including the cycles of the animals – “we were governed by these things”
- The sacredness of all life.
- Our positive values and teachings including the Seven Sacred Teachings, Kiizhay Ottiziwin (kindness), sharing, helping each other, taking responsibility, fun, laughter, balance, cleaning your surroundings/cleaning your spirit, confidence, conviction
- Autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency.
- Looking after the Earth and ourselves.
- Reflected in the original languages.
- Implemented through the practice of our ceremonies.
- Rising up to embrace our identity as a People.
- Elders, Youth, Women and Men coming together.

## **The Gift of Leadership**

Leadership is a gift from the Creator that is given to some. The Original People have the gift of leadership in our homeland, which is based on duties and responsibilities to each other and the land.

As the Original free and independent People of our homeland, we have been entrusted with a way of life, and ancestral values – values that inspire our conduct as human beings, and bring us back to a relationship with the Earth. As leaders of our homeland, it is our responsibility to live our duties and responsibilities to the land and to each other, and also, to share our teachings with our brothers and sisters who have arrived on our homelands.

## **Elders – Role of Leadership**

Elders, specifically those who are rooted in their traditions, guided by the ceremonies, fluent in their original languages, and knowledgeable of their teachings, are key figures in leading communities and mentoring the younger generations. They are not to be overstepped in decision-making, as they bring not only knowledge based on

their experience of life, but also the voice of Spirit and the land through their spiritual connection, into the discussions.

### **How to Access Indigenous Knowledge**

Our ancestral knowledge is still very accessible. It can be accessed in the following ways:

- Through dialogue with the Elders
- At the sacred fire and in ceremony
- Through taking the young people to the land where they fast for the knowledge
- Using the sacred asema – tobacco – the first medicine – to say thank you for what we are about to receive
- Using our languages
- We can never say our knowledge is lost because it is in the land; it is always there.

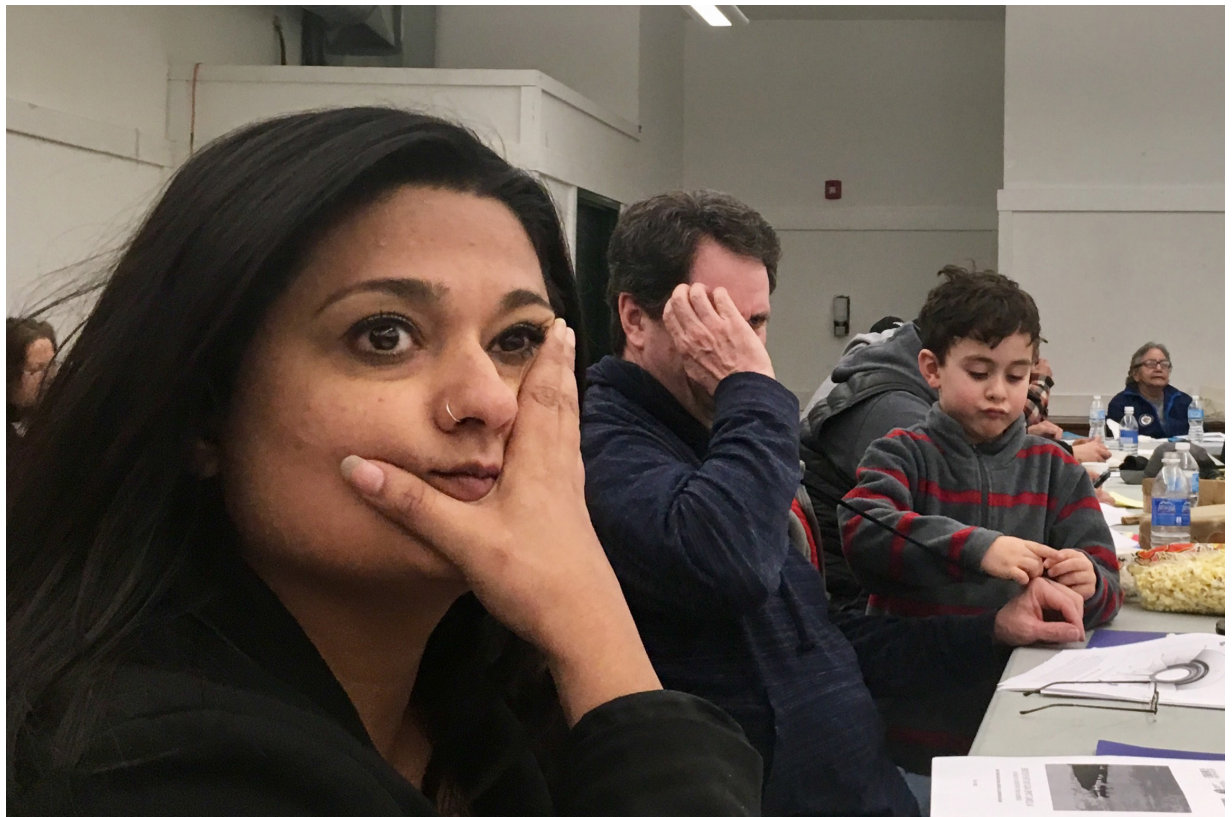
### **Language**

All of our languages come from Mother Earth. In the Ininimowin (Cree) language, the word for language talks about a dance

that has been lowered down to us from the Creator. Speaking our language is about dancing your heart on your tongue. Our languages contain all our teachings and greater understanding of the spiritual and natural laws that govern us. Using our original languages allows us to develop deeper relationships with the Spirit, the land, and with each other.

### **Duties and Responsibilities**

Atsookan Ezhijigaywin is our way of life that deals with everything. Duties and responsibilities defined as part of the Atsookan Ezhijigaywin. Our duties and responsibilities are to lead human beings in how to take care of the land, and take care of life. We take care of the land and take care of ourselves using our gifts – the pipe, the rattle, and the drum that come from the land. We have been given a duty and responsibility as a people to lead a movement, to share with the people who have arrived why we love the land so much, and to help us all survive.





## **Responsibilities as related to our Nationhood**

When we focus on nationhood, it's about taking responsibility. Living our values, duties and responsibilities is the key to our nationhood. Nationhood should capture how the ancestors lived in the duties and responsibilities to take care of the child, each other and the land. Everyone in the community has a responsibility to take care of the child.

Men are not men anymore. We need them to become men. They need to be initiated by woman – the land, the grandmothers, and the mothers. Many women have been abused, both by men and by other women. There are rites of passage we need to bring the young men and women through. We need to teach them values of being a good human being.

## **Family Roles and Responsibilities**

We have to be teaching our young people to be responsible. If we just tell them what to do, we are treating them like young kids. We have to teach the young people the roles and responsibilities they have in the family, for example, the roles and responsibilities of the oldest brother and sister, etc.

## **Roles and responsibilities to Water and Land, to Community, to Youth and Elders**

We have to talk about and teach our responsibilities to the water, to the land, the community, to the Youth and to the Elders.

## **Spiritual and Natural Laws, Seven Sacred Laws**

The most important things we can teach our children are about values and spirit. We are bound by the same law – spiritual law and natural law. Following these laws will lead to physical survival on the land.

We have adopted another value system of greed and disrespect.

The Seven Sacred Laws, represented by the animals, are the foundation of our nationhood.

## **Anishinabe and Cree Way of Life before Contact**

Youth need to learn our oral and ceremonial teachings and have experiences to help them understand the beautiful way of life of our ancestors. Understanding our way of life as a people will guide them to make good decisions for the future.

## **Rites of Passage**

Rites of passage are so important. The children have to be taught from the womb. In the tikinagan, children were already in school as babies, training because they observed. Their mothers talked to them while they were picking medicines and berries. Young men had to prove to be a man. When they brought a moose to feed their families, to feed the community, to be a warrior.

Knowing your purpose and identity is the most important thing a young person can learn and feel proud of. For a young man, going to the land to be initiated by Mother Earth on his vision quest, as he fasts for his dream and life's purpose, is the puberty rite for many of our Nations. Girls had to learn how to be a mother. The Grandmothers would take them into a lodge. The young women need to learn the rites of passage and their sacred role as lifegivers and water carriers.

Once the young people go through their rites of passage, the pride will come back, as well as the language.

## **Storytelling**

The history and the art of storytelling are important. It is one of the ways our ancestors have always passed their knowledge on to us. Our stories carry our beliefs. Our knowledge is embedded in our stories and in our languages. It is so important that we keep these stories, particularly when told in the language, as the language reflects a much deeper understanding.

## **Drum**

In addition to the gifts of the Pipe and the Rattle, we were given the gift of the Drum. The Drum carries the voice and prayers of the People, and helps connect us to the

heartbeat of Mother Earth. We need to use the Drum to call the children. When we sound these Drums, the first ones that come running are the kids.

### **Be Careful**

There is a word in the Anishinabe language, Ongomiziwn – be careful, consider everything, look in all four directions, before we act. We have to be careful what we are going to pass on to our children. There is another word – Onjinaywin. Whatever we put into our circle returns to us.

### **Gardens**

Not so long ago, almost all the families had gardens. We were doing well. We need to bring back gardens into our communities. Gardens will help us rely on ourselves and make us healthy again.

### **On the Land**

#### **Feeling the Land**

We would like to take some youth on the land. We would like to teach them to feel, and to love the land.

#### **Healing on the Land**

The land is a place for healing. When we took some kids who are grieving camping, they were grinning ear to ear. We are working on having a youth and elder gathering for the kids.

#### **Learning about the Animals and Medicines the Land has to Offer**

We are trying to protect the land, to learn the medicines the land has to offer, the animals the land has to offer, and to share these medicines with others. It comes down to our survival as a Nation. Accessing medicines is part of what we need to do as part of the health and wellness of our People, as these medicines are there to help us deal with some of our challenges – how do we do this?

#### **Learning about the Moose**

We would like young people to learn about how our people view the moose, how we respected the moose for feeding us and clothing us, the ceremonies and songs of the moose, the biology of the moose, hunting, butchering, and preparing the moose.

Most importantly, we would like to have a relationship with the moose and ask the spirit of the moose directly how to help live together in balance on the land.

### **Providing for our Communities**

We could set up a process where the Guardians could go out on a hunt, go moose hunting, on the land track, on the lake. They bring home their moose, they are taught how to clean it, butcher it, take the meat to each family, to the sick and to the elders. We would have our own hunters providing for our communities. We have the same land base around Lake Winnipeg. We still have our hunters and fishermen who can go and teach. We could offset the 80% welfare rates in our communities. We could have these young men going out hunting, providing real food to elders, not only moose, but fish and ducks, and using our dog teams. In the springtime they could have nets out on the lake. Each community has that kind of land base. Each community has the same type of problems, and the same needs.

#### **Paid internships**

How do we get paid positions that students are actively working while they are learning?

#### **Elders and Youth involved in Planning**

Both Elders and Youth need to be equally involved in the planning of how we begin providing for and setting up Guardians programs in our communities. How this happens is an question for further discussion.

### **B. Governance Models for Community-Based Guardians Programs**

A breakout session within the meeting focused on how to establish a local Guardians program, and what elements of a governance model and other issues were felt to be of importance.

This discussion started out by identifying issues that need to be addressed. Lake Winnipeg and moose were seen as two areas that the communities wished to focus on in common. For each, community representatives listed programs, activities, and existing opportunities that could be



helpful in the establishment of a Guardians program. Governance structure options were discussed, which included a committee appointed by Chief & Council to direct Guardians programs and priorities, with a particular role for a coordinator or manager to champion, find funds, etc. Circles of leadership were proposed, including a core team that would lead planning and discussion, then another circle with

important people or organizations that have knowledge or programs that would support the core, then a wider circle with other partners that Guardians engage with, for example industry partners that can provide training on a specific skill (e.g. Tolko – forest survey).



# Third Regional Meeting on Indigenous-Led Conservation and Nationhood (ICAN) Summary

Chair: Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI)  
Spiritual Advisor Dave Courchene

Turtle Lodge, Sagkeeng First Nation, MB,  
April 22-24, 2018

## Purpose of Meeting

The third ICAN meeting, which took place April 22 to 24, 2018 at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng, resulted in agreement to:

1. Take a traditional Indigenous approach to strengthening nationhood, connections and unity amongst Indigenous communities at a regional level. This included approaches in which:

- Ceremonies take the lead, including synchronizing the time and types of ceremonies that honour the land taking place in different communities at the same time, with a number of synchronous ceremonies planned and later implemented by the communities;
- Creating infrastructure within each community to support Elder and Knowledge Keeper leadership and education of Youth Guardians. Specifically the communities agreed in concept to build Turtle Lodges in each community, following the example and model of the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng.

2. Agreement to respect the diversity of approaches of different communities, and local autonomy in the development of their Guardians programs, that additionally included land use plans, and alternative models of Indigenous governance.

## Details of Discussion

### Ceremonial Context

A ceremonial context formed the basis of discussions, which began with a sweat lodge the night before discussions began, and a Pipe and water ceremony each morning to ask for guidance and direction from the Spirit. A sacred fire burned throughout. The sacred drum was used to carry the prayers of the people in song.

### We Are a People of the Land

As a People we have a richness of knowledge and understanding that keeps us close to the land. We have also been a People who modeled a sacred relationship with the land. Our strength and resilience has always been our close connection to the land.

We have a sacred duty to reflect a model of true stewardship. We have to take the lead in defining that stewardship.

### Passing Responsibilities of Stewardship and Leadership to the Youth

This responsibility must now be passed on to the Young People. This will require extensive training that we must design, and create the models of that stewardship.

The Youth of our Nations are in the best position to take the lead in stewardship. We must also position the Knowledge Keepers to initiate the training the Youth will need as they are sent onto the land.

## **Spiritually Connecting the Young People to the Land**

Before they go out on the land, the Young People must be spiritually connected to the land, through ceremony. There are ceremonies specifically done during the seasons. It is all done to acknowledge what the universe has to offer. It is imperative that those ceremonies be done to ensure receiving abundance from the land.

The Young People must learn about their own identity and find their own healing, through rites of passage on the land. They must learn the protocols and laws of the Spirit and the land.

With the design and implementation of our models of stewardship, we will be taking a lead and being true caretakers of the land. Our Guardians will be on the land to act as the eyes and ears and voice of the land itself.

## **In the Spirit of Nationhood**

As we move forward in this initiative, it must be based upon the spirit of nationhood. Our nationhood is tied into our close relationship with the land.

We must accept our duties and responsibilities that define our nationhood. We need no one to validate or legitimize our nationhood except ourselves.

Our sovereignty is defined about our relationship with the Great Spirit and our alliance with the Earth and her laws. Living

the spiritual ways of our nations does not require a political validation or interference. This will be the basis of our stewardship to the land. We must not define our stewardship limited to a colonial context.

In today's world we continue to struggle to gain recognition for our full rights as a People. As we make our way back to the land, we will find our freedom. It is our alliance with the land that will ensure our survival and will give full support of our nationhood.

## **Actions Moving Forward**

The Knowledge Keepers came to agreement to initiate actions based on taking a traditional approach to Indigenous-led conservation and nationhood.

Knowledge Keepers emphasized the importance of synchronizing ceremony in order to strengthen their appeal to the Spirit and to create unity. The following represents the first of what is hoped to be many future synchronized ceremonial initiatives.

### **1. Lighting Sacred Fires in the Communities**

Lighting the Sacred Fire  
May 27, 2018 at High Noon (2 pm)  
LOCAL TIME

Indigenous Elders from 8 Manitoba First Nations\* are making a call to Communities across the Nation to light Sacred Fires to:

- Support youth in connecting with their identity and the land in order to become







future role models and leaders in caring for the Earth;

- Honouring our cultural responsibility to seek the protection of our brothers and sisters – the animals, as well as the waters and land; and
- Other priority areas identified by the Communities.

Our way of life is very powerful.  
Synchronizing our ceremonies will help bring unity and lead us into the future.

\*Manitoba Elders met at the 3rd Indigenous-led Conservation and Nationhood (ICAN) Gathering at Turtle Lodge in April 2018, and agreed to jointly issue this Call for unity and prayers.

Agreement was reached to widen the call beyond the original 8 ICAN Manitoba communities.

## 2. Seeking a Vision for the Next Generation

This initiative reflects a desire by the Knowledge Keepers to put in action their words that the youth are our future leaders. The Knowledge Keepers want to empower the youth by entrusting them with the role and responsibility of seeking a vision regarding how to move forward in the development of future Indigenous-led conservation and nationhood, and stewardship/guardianship initiatives.

### Seeking a Vision for the Next Generation

Bannock Point | Manitou Api Sacred Site | Manitoba  
June 27 to July 1, 2018

Following traditional protocols, Young Men are being asked to seek a vision for the next generation, at the sacred site of Manitou Api, from June 28-July 1. All will meet on June 27 at Turtle Lodge for a Potluck Feast, ceremony



and direction from the Elders before making their way to the sacred site.

This call is in response to a call for leadership made by Elders from 6 Manitoba First Nation communities at the 3rd Indigenous-led Conservation & Nationhood (ICAN) meeting at Turtle Lodge) in April 2018.

**Young Men:** Please bring a potluck dish to share for your going-in Feast, and have someone from your community be prepared to support you with another dish to share when you come out of your fast on July 1. Also bring items for your giveaway on July 1.

Community members and families of the Young Men are invited to support them by offering prayers in their own communities.

All are welcome to join the Young Men at their Feast at Turtle Lodge on June 27 (6 pm) and Feast and Giveaway July 1 (2 pm). Other boys and men are invited to help support the Young Men as firekeepers at the sacred site for the duration of their fast.

### **3. Building Turtle Lodges**

Agreement moving forward was that communities were interested in establishing their own community-based Turtle Lodges to teach their people their ways, based on the uniqueness of their own ceremonies, languages, and traditions, with a common spirit of unity in working with the spiritual Grandmother Turtle to access spiritual knowledge. This was seen as an important step in communities establishing and implementing nationhood, which would set a foundation from which Indigenous-led conservation and nationhood related initiatives, including Guardians initiatives, could flow.

Agreement was made for the Knowledge Keepers to go back to their communities to determine the readiness of communities in building a lodge.

Gordon Walker from Norway House, who has made a commitment to build a Turtle Lodge, recommended that if communities are ready to make a commitment, they are invited to follow the protocol of presenting a pipe to the Grandmother Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng First Nation, to make a pledge and share the intent of their community before the Spirit, and to receive teachings including the shared experience of what has been learned by the first Turtle Lodge, which was received in a vision from the Grandmother Turtle many years ago.

Turtle Lodge in partnership with the Indigenous Leadership Initiative

# JOIN MANITOBA FIRST NATIONS IN LIGHTING THE SACRED FIRE

MAY 27, 2018 | HIGH NOON (2 PM) LOCAL TIME

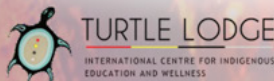
Indigenous Elders from 8 Manitoba First Nations\*  
are making a call to communities across the  
Nation to light Sacred Fires to:

- 1) Support youth in connecting with their identity  
and the land in order to become future role models  
and leaders in caring for the Earth;
- 2) Honouring our cultural responsibility to seek  
the protection of our brothers and sisters – the animals,  
as well as the waters and land; and
- 3) Other priority areas identified by the Communities.

Our way of life is very powerful. Synchronizing  
our ceremonies will help bring unity  
and lead us into the future.

\*Sagkeeng, Misipawistik, Nelson House, Norway House,  
Island Lake, Hollow Water, and others.

[www.turtlelodge.org](http://www.turtlelodge.org) | [www.ilinationhood.ca](http://www.ilinationhood.ca)



INDIGENOUS  
LEADERSHIP  
INITIATIVE



Turtle Lodge in partnership with  
Indigenous Leadership Initiative presents

# SEEKING A VISION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

JUNE 27 - JULY 1, 2018

**BANNOCK POINT | MANITOU API SACRED SITE | MANITOBA**

Following traditional protocols, Young Men are being asked by the Elders to go to the sacred petroform site to ask the Spirit to bring them a Vision for the People.

Community members and families of the Young Men are invited to support them by offering prayers in their own communities from June 27 to July 1 at the Turtle Lodge.

All are welcome to join the Young Men at their Feast at Turtle Lodge on June 27 (6 pm), and Feast & Giveaway July 1 (2 pm). Other boys and men are invited to help support the Young Men as firekeepers at the sacred site for the duration of their fast.



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# APPENDICES

## KEY QUOTES FROM MANITOBA ICAN GATHERINGS



### **Indigenous-Led Conservation and Nationhood (ICAN) Gatherings – Manitoba**

#### **Questions generated by the Manitoba Knowledge Keepers**

***We develop a framework and regional  
model for guardianship.***

***It all begins with Spirit.***

What can we do in our province that would address the question that has been asked?

How are we going to access what we are going to need to establish our way of taking care of the land?

How do we access medicines of the land? As part of the health and wellness of our people, there are medicines on the land that can help us deal with some of these challenges.

What does Nationhood mean to us?

What is Nationhood and what is a Nation-to-Nation relationship?

What is our name for the concept of “guardians/those who take care of the land”

How do we come together to centralize our approach to educate young people and support them in returning to the land?

Are ancestral schools of knowledge the way to educate our young people?

What do we need to focus on actions on how to move this idea forward? What are the next steps to making this a reality?

Are moose a priority? If so, how do we focus on them?



## Summary of Discussion

See \*Executive Summary Document

### Description of the Current Situation

#### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

One of the biggest issues are people are feeling is grief – for the land. The heaviest grief they are feeling is loneliness for the land.

During the time of prohibition, the Drum was not permitted to be used. The Drum was central to many of our ceremonies.

#### **Cree Leader Ovide Mercredi (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

An Elder, Black Elk, of the Oglala Nation, used to live around the Black Hills. He was involved in battle with Americans, a relative of Crazy Horse, contemporary to great Chiefs, trying to protect their land, with Americans trying to encroach on their land and put him outside. This was after a treaty was signed. After that another treaty was done, and he said, ‘They gave up the Black Hills, but they never really gave up anything.’

I did a speech at Grand Rapids high school where this young person said, “Chief, you don’t understand – we are not the problem; our parents are the problem. They are taking the drugs.” There is a vicious circle of passing blame.

#### **Councillor Ron Spence, Nisichawayasihk (Nelson House) Cree Nation**

The time came, that our community got flooded and affected by Manitoba Hydro. Our families were forced to move to higher ground. [As a result] the families were not as close physically and also not as close as they once were.

Our Elders are passing away.

#### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper Burma Bushie (Hollow Water First Nation)**

At my birth I was fortunate to witness the flavour of that nationhood. We lived on a trap line from October to May.

We went hunting for moose, and there would be racks and racks of dry meat.

Those days the people had so much kindness that they were able to share their food.

Their activity for the summer was to dry meat. They never hunted to excess, they knew exactly how much to save for winter. Dried meat would be stashed, berries would be dried. in the fall time people would move to shallow waters to harvest wild rice. They would prepare the wild rice and store it for the winter.

What marked that time was how kind the people were to each other, how much honour and respect people showed towards each other.

That way, everyone prospered. That was only 70 years ago. It was so simple and yet so complex at the same time, to show our children how to interact with each other from every day living – to show kindness



not only to ourselves but to everyone in the community.

**Councillor Loretta Bayer, Norway House Cree Nation**

We have a lot of deformed fish coming into our area.

**Ed Azure, University of Manitoba, originally from Norway House Cree Nation**

I regard this jurisdiction, Manitoba, as northern Alabama. It is the worst jurisdiction for our people in the country. Winnipeg is noted by Maclean's magazine as the most racist city in Canada. Over 10,000 of our children are in care.

'Northern Alabama' is approaching us and asking how we have survived all these generations. Everything they've thrown at us, we have survived. I looked around my reserve, and they are poor, and there are no ceremonies. My own mother, God rest her soul, did not teach me the language as is the case with many of us born in the 1950s.

I am especially happy that I brought my granddaughter here, because it is important

I think for the young people to be exposed, because we are not going to live forever.

What has sustained us as a people is what is being sought.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Stella Neff (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

All the kids left in a big red plane to go to residential school

Once two thousand white people came into Grand Rapids, to a little reserve of three hundred, we became the minority. When they flooded our land, they put that gate up at the spillway to start flooding the land.

The moose – twenty of them, I saw – were swimming in circles looking for the land. Eventually they drowned. All the other small animals drowned too. The pelicans and other birds fed for days on animals that had died in the log jam. That's how they think of conservation.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

For young people and for those who are incarcerated, we are filling up jails, simply giving them what they want.

## **Nationhood**

### **Spiritual Root and Movement**

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

It is a spiritual movement, as we return to our identity.

The spirit is giving us dreams, people are witnessing the Sabe - the Bigfoot. The spiritual beings are coming to walk with us.

Our people used to work with the spirit, the



Atsookan – we used to walk hand-in-hand with the spirit. We need to bring that back – walking hand-in-hand with the spirit.

Nationhood is taking care of ourselves, bringing back the spirit of taking care of our children, and giving them the tools to go back to the land.

We have to connect with the animals spiritually - the moose, ducks, etc.

**Cree Leader Ovide Mercredi  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

What happens to a people, their spirit goes down, they lose their land, they are no longer able to support and sustain themselves and their families?

Black Elk saw that the people were declining in their spirit, the hoop of the Nation having been broken.

This has happened everywhere – the spirit has been broken. There is a powerlessness in our communities. Dependency is there, no jobs, people have to live with meager means, the fish are declining and the moose are disappearing.

The spirit of the people is down. When a young man doesn't have things to do to find meaning in life.

The more we ignore that, the more suicides we will see, the more young people get lost, when your neighbour has no respect for you, homes get broken into. All derives from a broken spirit, both as an individual and as a collective.

There is in my view a desire to change, but... Where we derive our nationhood comes from our land; our language defines who we are, and gives our identity.

We are becoming more and more like citizens of Canada, from the clothing we wear to the guns we use. There is nothing we do that

does not come from them. We say we are different, unique, but the reality is that we are more part of that other society.

It is creating for us an identity crisis - we don't know who we are anymore. That's why many people are turning to traditional ways to try to understand their identity. We need to be able to look after ourselves. We need our own economy. This is what nationhood is – self-determination and independence.

I am one of the former leaders who has said, "I am not a Canadian. I am a Cree person. I am fortunate enough to speak the language.

We have so many problems and issues that if we focus on these things, that is where we will end up – with those problems and those issues.

What we need is a spiritual path – something that will give us hope, that will lead us to do something better for ourselves.

**Ed Azure, University of Manitoba,  
originally from Norway House Cree  
Nation**

I do appreciate the acknowledgment of spirit. It has been missing from our works. It is when we work with the spirit that things work for us. It is when we think we are in control that we run into trouble.

**Councillor Ron Spence,  
Nisichawayasihk (Nelson House)  
Cree Nation**

The missing part of my youth's teachings is spirituality.

We have a humongous territory with five cabins where we take our people to learn the medicines. We take our people out on the land to heal from addictions. What is missing is our spirituality.

## Setting a Ceremonial Context

### Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)

We want to begin by never overstepping the Spirit, as we lift the Pipe. Ask in the Pipe Ceremony how you take part in the model itself. In prayer ask for guidance for the work we are doing.

Go back to the beginning – ceremony is the beginning. If we are to find our way back home again we have to go back to ceremony – the Pipe, the lifting of the water, the songs that are sung that invoke the Spirit to come within our presence.

We have the alliance with the Spirit, through the ceremonies, that will help us. The Thunderbirds will help us to take care of the land. What is important is being in union with the Spirit, being in union with the Thunderbird. The Thunderbird has the power to clean the Earth. The grandmothers create that union with the Thunderbird. We strengthen our nationhood when women are honoured, the women that carry these gifts faithfully. We carry these gifts on behalf of the people.

What better way to take care of the land and take care of ourselves than using our gifts – the Pipe, the Rattle, the Drum that come from the land?

Our gifts are the Pipe, the Rattle and the Drum. Some are gifted with the dreams, some with the ceremonies. Using our language is part of understanding and using our spiritual gifts. The singers keep the Spirit high. The grandmother praying for the water is part of defining that way of life.

We have to have the faith that we have whatever we need to restore what we have as a people.

I have faith in this Pipe. The ancestors never gave up the language and the way of life, the sacred fires to help receive the fullness of the

help of our ancestors, especially during these dark times.

Recently, a group of Elders from the four directions met in Ottawa – I chaired this historical meeting. It was at this time that the Elders commissioned a Pipe to be carved – with a tipi, representing our way of life, and the seven Grandfathers. This Pipe was to become a symbol of a way of life. It would also represent all the Pipes that were removed from our People during Prohibition. This would bring our ancestors to rest and come to our aid in these current times. It is a Pipe that has the power to unify us, to bring the people together, to reach the level of sharing one voice to bring us together. The Pipe has to be invited by a community. It cannot force itself, as our way of life is not to be evangelized. It represents that need to find our way back to that way of life.

Since then, the Pipe has traveled to the North, to the East, the South, and will be going to the West. It has also opened many events at the Turtle Lodge. It was during these times that the dream of setting up our own schools of ancestral knowledge was endorsed. There was total agreement in establishing these schools; that it must be based on the spirit of our nationhood.

What about our people who are Christian and to believe in the Christian way? They are also welcome in that tipi, but that Pipe leads, connected to the Spirit and the land.

To understand the Pipe and respect the Pipe, you show your understanding of the relationship to that Pipe. It's up to you as an individual to touch or smoke it.

What I have learned is that if everyone contributes to that circle in some way, how strong that circle can become.

Power is not something we can control. It's only with humbleness that we can receive these gifts from the Spirit. When we use those gifts with humility, we can be and we are a very powerful people.





Why is it taking you so long to embrace those gifts? Why do you ignore those gifts, put them on the side, follow someone else's way of life.

We need to find our rightful place, through the great power of the Earth and the Great power of the Spirit.

**Cree Leader Ovide Mercredi  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

I went to a shake tent ceremony and the Spirit was talking to me in Cree.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Martina Fisher (Bloodvein  
First Nation)**

In our family and in our community, we had ceremonies. People used to put us down.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Burma  
Bushie (Hollow Water First Nation)**

What was a common practice was to connect with Black River and Sagkeeng with that Mide Lodge on Black Island. It was put up in

the spring time, summertime, and fall time – the communities were brought together three times a year for ceremony.

It was a real milestone for these for communities to come together and re-light that sacred fire on Black Island [in September 2017]. It is really key for our communities to look at nationhood in those terms.

**Ed Azure, University of Manitoba,  
originally from Norway House Cree  
Nation**

It is only through ceremony that I have been able to reclaim parts of my language.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay  
First Nation)**

I acknowledge that we are alive and still walking on Earth, and that the helpers that have been placed here for us, that they will answer [our call].

We acknowledge all the helpers night and day who do their work, and Mother Earth for all

she does to look after us. She sustains us with the animals that we feed upon, all that she provides with the food supply.

We ask the four directions that come and help us as we sit together and reflect on the gifts given to us as Anishinabe and also the actions beyond our control done by other people, the damage that has been done.

We can ask for the courage and strength to reclaim our gifts and strength as a people, the knowledge to be able to take care of the water.

We ask for the survival of our people.

People were governed by those things [values, ceremonies, knowledge of the cycles of birth of the animals, spiritual and natural laws]. That was our nationhood. We will continue to use prayer. Those are the teachings that were passed to us, and that is what we will continue to pass to the young people that believe in the Creator.

## **Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

The turtle is covered with a shell. She leads us in here in the Turtle Lodge, and guides us.

When I come into your territory, I come with respect. When you go and sit down with other people, you don't say "my way is the best way," you sit down and shut your mouth.

Our old people respected Creator so much that they didn't speak about him outside the Lodges. That made us refrain from fighting.

We are all the same.

Our environment dictates Ceremonies.

No one is going to take your spirit away. Nobody. It's not going to happen.

We always say it's the Drums that bring the young people together. We should let the young people sing once in a while so they feel part of it.



We don't guard the Earth because the Earth gives us life.

When we first came here we were us a spirit having a human experience. First it is as we come through the placenta that we come here in spirit to be born as flesh. Our people, they put it under the tree of life, *Egoma wagogamin*. It's all about ceremony, about the relationship we have with the land

*Wagogamagay* means relationship.

We have a Walking Out Ceremony, where are ancestors first took first steps to put a child on the ground.

When they come with that spirit, *Egoma pigopan* or *moneypan* when it hardens - the soft spot. You want to do that so another spirit does not enter the child through the ground. It shows the young woman not to just leave that kid anywhere, for that bonding.

### **Councillor Heidi Cook (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

Quite a few years ago, there was a Shake tent ceremony and we asked the Spirit what to do with our river, as there are no more rapids in Grand Rapids.

The question was asked, "Will the river come back?"

The answer came, "Our river lives in heaven now. Our people have to grieve. There is a song that used to be sung which has been lost now." Through this ceremony they gave the song back to us, to help us grieve. Sipi Eotapitay Keesikuk – 'the river that flows from the sky'.

I was at University of Winnipeg for one year, and learned a Mide story. I apologize if I tell it wrong:

The Cree and Anishinabe people came from the East, and were told to travel until they

found a white mountain and place where a river flowed from the sky. Melting glaciers. The geology around our area has a ridge where the glaciers stopped.

This tells me we are exactly where we are supposed to be. It is our home, the place that was given to us to take care of. We do have a sacred place in our area too.

### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Mary Maytwayashing (Lake Manitoba First Nation)**

I wanted to share the power of prayer. A week ago, I got a call from a friend. "My son is not doing good, he is in the hospital." They were told he needed to have surgery asap; he was being flown to Toronto because his liver was declining. They did not know if he would survive. At that time they didn't have a donor. His father went with him as a possible donor. I thought, "Does he have a spiritual name?" Running Black Horse. I said, "You need to acknowledge his name and pray." He survived. A donor came. He is on his way to recovery. A lot of people came together to pray.

We were being taught something – how important it is that we have knowledge of who we are and where we get our name.

As we take and use our gifts, we become much stronger – the Spirit is hearing us.

I had a dream: We are going to get our answers from the Sacred Fire.

### **Atsookan Ezhijigaywin**

#### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

*Atsookan Ezhijigaywin* is our way of life that deals with everything. Duties and responsibilities defined as part of the *Atsookan Ezhijigaywin*.



**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Norbert Hardisty (Hollow Water  
First Nation)**

Spoke at length in the language about *Anishinabe Ezhichigaywin* (the ancestral way of life) and the importance of *Anishinabemowin* (the language).

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave  
Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

I want to thank everyone for asking for words in prayer, and asking for Creator's blessing to be inspired to find our own memory of our duties and responsibilities as a people.

Our duties and responsibilities are to lead human beings in how to take care of the land, and take care of life.

We have an opportunity and the next four days to find out how we take care of the land.

How do we come together collectively to centralize our approach to educate young people and support them in returning to the land?

What better way to take care of the land and take care of ourselves than using our gifts – the pipe, the rattle, the drum that come from the land?

We have been given a duty and responsibility as a people to lead a movement, to share with the people who have arrived why we love the land so much, and to help us all survive.

Our ancestors went through horrific times. Despite that, we still have the memory of a beautiful way of life and a memory of our duties and responsibilities.

How do we implement our duties and responsibilities in a way that the world that doesn't understand us can come to learn who we are?

Unless we as men understand the rules, duties and responsibilities, we are going to see the same thing in our communities.

When we focus on nationhood, it's about taking responsibility.

Nationhood should capture how the ancestors lived in the duties and responsibilities to take care of the child, each other and the land.

Everyone in the community had a responsibility to take care of the child.

Taking responsibility is key.

Men are not men anymore. We need them to become men. They need to be initiated by woman – the land, the grandmothers, and the mothers.

Many women have been abused, both my men and by other women. There are rites of passage we need to bring the young men and women through. We need to teach them values of being a good human being.

**Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

Nationhood for us is not going to happen if we don't deal with these problems. We will simply become Canadians. We will still have reserves – that is not what gives us our identity; they were created by the Canadian government. Our identity cannot be reserve-based. What has happened to us is we have been conditioned to think community; reserve.

It still confounds me when these Chiefs make a great speech about freedom, and then turn around and get re-elected under the Indian Act.

There is a movement right now to get rid of the Indian Act. I support that; the question is what to do to replace it.

“Act Indian, not Indian Act.”

Our people complied with those laws, believed in those laws, someone else instead of us is deciding who gives his identity.

Part of it is occupying the field making our own laws and programs, where we take the initiative, not waiting for the province or feds to come up with a new job training program.

A nation can never become great by waiting for another nation to become great.

These young men have to say, “I am a man “what does a man do? When a man sees a problem, does he ignore it? Or does he create the problem? Our men have fallen. The women are strong. Part of the solution to have nationhood is men have to be men. That means taking charge, taking action.

We don’t need a program to create non-violence is a way of life and our families.

The only way we are going to accomplish restoration of our nations is for everyone to come together – women and the men, young and the elders. It will not be easy. We cannot expect our people to drop everything. Some of our people will be Christians for life, some will be evangelists. We have to bring everyone together. We have to have a religious tolerance and you have to work together. We have to begin with the young people. We are sending our kids to school. We are leaving their knowledge and understanding in the hands of other people, but we are not taking responsibility for their education.

A man does his share to make that happen.

I acknowledge the young women here. They need to be the voice of the rising up of our people, but not the voice of grievance.

We as men had to take on the voice of grievance.



Africa Rising is a movement empowering people to fight the corruption within their own countries, as they seek justice, fight for fairness, and are honourable to themselves in how they transform their communities.

Young people of today: do not go to grievance, but rather build our people up in a positive way!

We are not alone. My friend Ron is in the government. We have to work with the people who were there.

I am tired of being a leader. I am getting old, I am 72 years old. I don’t want to be a leader anymore. I don’t want to follow a grievance leader. I want to support a positive leader, that young children will go up to and hug.

The key is the Elders and the Youth.



**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Burma Bushie (Hollow Water First Nation)**

It was your job to check on elders every day, especially those who didn't have family, and children who were orphaned. We didn't need child welfare. We took in children. Today there are a lot of blended families because of this.

Our children need to know where they come from, who they are related to.

**Ojicree Knowledge Keeper, Byron Beardy (Island Lake First Nation)**

Food security is everything. When you are born, we feast. When you die, we feast. Everything we do involves food.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay First Nation)**

I want to acknowledge the tobacco that has been given and also the Pipe that has been lifted for us, in fulfillment of our duties and responsibilities as a people.

I wanted to talk about the water that is being passed around.

In our Creation story, when the Creator sent out his thoughts, he was in total darkness, and his thoughts bounced back. He created all of life, the sky realm, Mother Earth. He put his helpers in all the directions, the four winds. It is in that realm we live in.

There is a Water story. There are four levels in the sky realm and four into the earth. In the sky realm at the third level, there is a big body of water. In our Creation Story, four grandmothers came forward. One said, "I will look after the salt water." Another said, "I will look after the ice." Another said, "Wherever there are rivers and streams that flow, and bodies of fresh water all over the world, I will look after them." A fourth grandmother came forward to say, "I will look after the woman and that life that comes forth on the physical earth through the sacred birth waters."

It is because of that birth water that women were given the responsibility to take care of that life, when the water breaks, and that little life comes in. The woman who takes care of the waters also takes care of women on their moon time helping that cleansing force, so that we can continue to live in this physical realm.



## Rites of passage

### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Mary Maytwayashing (Lake Manitoba First Nation)**

Wherever I go, I make sure I speak strongly about our way of life – how important it is that the young women start to learn about who they are, their sacred water, their blood. That's the reason that we are in a crisis, because they don't know who they are.

Mental illness is occurring within our young people.

In the I-gen because of the iPhones, there is more depression now, because youth are not visiting with friends.

Over the years since I have been part of the Turtle Lodge, part of teaching and helping at the Turtle Lodge during the coming of age ceremonies and rites of passage, I have found that it has been very instrumental in youth finding out who they are.

In the Mother Earth Lodge, conducted by all the women together, we talk about what it means to be a woman.

Young people need to go on that fast or Vision Quest. The men have been helped through that. When they sit on the Earth, they sit on the original Mother for all of us. They start to learn how to respect the water and the land.

We have been doing this for six or seven years, making a call out to young women. Older women come too. They asked, "Can we come too?" It is really growing.

Through the rites of passage, men have come to understand and respect women because they sit on the land and don't drink the water.

I have been to Gordie's area; it is paradise; I go there two times a year. They have the water, the land, the moose. I have been to Heidi's area and their cultural place.

For me what has helped first and foremost is the Vision Quest, putting them on the land, fasting for the young women. It has helped me to learn my responsibilities as a woman.

### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Burma Bushie (Hollow Water First Nation)**

I have a question: We talk about doing those ceremonies for young people but what about those who are beyond a certain age?

### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay First Nation)**

Because many of us are residential school survivors and missed out or were punished for participating in things like that, we were totally isolated and condemned, so people who want to participate in rites of passage which are based on developmental stages of life would be welcomed.

When a woman becomes a certain age, there are body changes in mood changes. When it starts to flow, they have the potential to become a mother.

If an older woman did not have that opportunity, which is the case for many of us, through no fault of our own, to help ourselves and the young women in our family, the older women are welcomed to participate in the rites of passage as well.

We were kept from doing the things we were supposed to be doing in life.

When you start to be in a position not to have anymore babies, things start to happen to your body – profuse sweats, etc. – you can go and sit on the land.

When you are towards the end of the moon cycle, and menses are starting to get very sporadic, you can sit on Mother Earth and give your blood of whatever is left to her.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

Men are not men anymore. We need them to become men. They need to be initiated by woman – the land, the grandmothers, and the mothers.

Many women have been abused, both my men and by other women. There are rites of passage we need to bring the young men and women through. We need to teach them the values of being a good human being.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

Many of the youth didn't have fathers. I first did a ceremony with them that their father would do for them – a rite of passage for them.

**Natural Laws and Values**

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

What is the most important thing you can teach your child? Values and Spirit.

This will lead to physical survival on the land.

We know that nature has laws. If we do not support these natural laws, how are we going to survive?

We have adopted another value system of greed and disrespect.

Our autonomy under Treaty is to define our duties and responsibilities when it comes to education, individual, family, community, nation, related to the land.

Living our values, duties and responsibilities is the key to our nationhood.

What has not been considered is the values of the people that came on our homeland. The



problem is greed. The value and concept of greed brought by a people.

The Seven Teachings, that are represented by the animals, are the foundation of our nationhood.

Ask the Buffalo – teach me about respect again, because I've lost it.

Accessing medicines is part of what we need to do.

There is a medicine that brings respect.

We have to be very strong. If we are going to be successful in what we are doing, *Kiizhay ottiziwin*, The spirit of kindness has to be central.

What is lacking in the academic institutions is that they don't prioritize the values and teachings on how to have a good life.

You will be successful when you follow your heart, move forward in kindness, and being positive.

How do we treat the Earth to receive her abundance?

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Martina Fisher (Bloodvein First Nation)**

I remember the teachings when we were kids; our parents said how to respect the animals, for women not to walk over a man's shoes,

etc. My brother and sister have the sweat lodge. I was so impressed that young people are coming to the sweat lodge. We sent out permission slips and everyone signed them, even the Christians – they see that their children need help.

We are the ones who are gifted to take care of the land, and to give the teachings. It is happening already, through Justice, Health, etc.: we are the ones who are teaching. The people are coming to us.

They are spraying everything. And Elder told me, “Don’t let them come and cut your trees down.” There is a reason they told us that, because we are the ones that need to speak for Mother Earth.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Jimmy Hunter-Spence (Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation)**

One time, wherever we could, we cleaned up everything. Clean your surroundings, pray: that means you clean your spirit, your soul.

It is up to us to carry on these teachings, to respect the four-legged, ourselves, how to work together – we have to think about our children. We sit around here; we have to disseminate this information to our children, youth, grassroots. Once we give them that information, they will go where we want them to go. We have to bring them, and teach them respect.

**Ed Azure, University of Manitoba, originally from Norway House Cree Nation**

When you follow the teachings of our people, it’s good, but [an Elder] said, there’s something coming that was foretold. It is a snake that goes back and forth over those two roads: “\$”. It’s going to make it really hard in the future to follow these laws. When I hear talk especially about money that comes from government, they are always strings attached. They are trying to take a circle and trying to force it into a box, and it is

squishing the hell out of it. We cannot allow this to happen.

We are sitting in a place made without government money [Turtle Lodge]. That’s a good thing. So many good things have happened here. It wouldn’t have been so beautiful if conditional government money had been out into this place.

**Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

We can use kindness as a power to change people’s minds.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Stella Neff (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

There is a concept we have called Onjinay. Onjinay are the things that happen when we disrespect our Earth. We suffer for it.

We need values of respect, humility, kindness and courage. We need to do these things for the animals. There are many flowers that only thrive when they are under a tree.

Greed for money is the problem. For 800 years we were here. Did we ever need a dollar? We still don’t. Who is profiting from all those trees? They leave one tree so they can say, “we don’t clear-cut.”





**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay  
First Nation)**

We do have so much to be grateful for.

## **Medicines**

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave  
Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

Accessing medicines is part of what we need to do.

There is a medicine that brings respect.  
How do we access medicines of the land?  
Part of the health and wellness of our people,  
there are medicines on the land that can help  
us deal with some of these challenges.

## **Full Autonomy**

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave  
Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

The issue of nationhood – under the full  
autonomy of our people – reflects our right to  
take care of our homeland.

Manitoba can take a lead in guardianship,  
based on the belief in our nationhood – to be  
autonomous

We do not need government to validate what  
we decide as a people. We just need to decide  
what to do, and to go out and do it.  
We can offer our view and understanding of  
what nationhood is.

We are under a rule of law, currently under  
the Indian Act, the colonizer and we keep  
going to [the Canadian] government. I  
propose we stop that, and just do what we  
have to do.

How do we break free from the oppressor  
and the Indian Act? We decide when we want  
to be free.

We have the right to determine our own  
leadership in our own homeland.

We have been conditioned in these little  
boxes called reserves. We are not waiting  
anymore. We are going to take full control of  
the education of our people in our homeland.  
No one is going to come and save us.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon  
Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

We need to follow our own way, not have  
interference from western society.

We have always been told about what is right  
for us, but nothing has seemed to work for us.

Nobody is going to come and save you.  
Nobody has the right to tell you how to live.  
It's us that have wrapped our heads around  
a concept to be like them, to kill everything.  
It's sad.

I am starting to feel lonesome for the land. In  
the city, I have no power at all, no freedom.  
On the land, I have the freedom to be who I  
am, human being.

**Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

We need a new thinking that it's up to us.  
You don't have to be a chief to be a leader. You  
don't have to wait until the Indian Act gives  
us permission. We have been waiting too long  
for something to happen.

On a practical level we have to show how  
this works in our communities. For example,  
focus on the moose population and how we  
care for it.

The other issue is nationhood – giving  
respect and authority to help and support the  
people that are going to move forward and  
work together.

We need to break down community barriers  
and tribalism.

ILI is a group of “former “leaders who are trying to use their influence to impress upon our people why they need to rise up, not talking about uprising, rather rising up to take care of ourselves and look after the land and water.

I really believe the connection between the young people and the Elders is going to make the difference.

**Shaunna Morgan-Siegers,  
Operations Manager, Indigenous  
Leadership Initiative**

The Leonardo DiCaprio foundation is funding this work. To us, by us, for us. No one is judging what comes out of this. This is for and by the people in this room.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
William Young (Bloodvein First  
Nation)**

We cannot wait for the government to be our saviours; we have to help ourselves. We need people who are committed and willing to work for communities.



I own a fishing lodge. In the communities I have seen kids being left alone. I want to set up a cultural camp for them. I talked to Poplar River to see if they have a template for their cultural camp proposal. They told me, “Ee don’t have a proposal, we just went into our traditional territory.” And that’s what I plan to do, set up a cultural camp for kids, just go in and get her done. We have these Christian camps for a couple of weeks, then their kids having nothing left to do with the rest of the summer. The kids need to know who they are. They need their identity.

The government is not going to come and help us, as First Nations have to help ourselves, to find the resources to help ourselves. I am a firm believer that the resources are within our communities.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Martina Fisher (Bloodvein  
First Nation)**

I went and prayed outside, and asked the Spirit to be the ones to talk through me. I was amazed by the things I was saying – about the first colonizers who came and then went back and talked to their queen. They had found land and told her there were inhabitants, but that they were less than human, “savages”. That way they could take the land. I said, “If we could prove that we are human, we could take back our land.”

**Ojicree Knowledge Keeper, Byron  
Beardy (Island Lake First Nation)**

We have to do it by us, to us, for us.

## Identity

**Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

Nationhood for us is not going to happen if we don’t deal with these problems. We will simply become Canadians. We will still have reserves – that is not what gives us our identity – they were created by the Canadian



government. Our identity cannot be reserve-based. What has happened to us is we have been conditioned to think community; reserve.

It still confounds me when these Chiefs make a great speech about freedom, and then turn around and get re-elected under the Indian Act.

There is a movement right now to get rid of the Indian Act. I support that; the question is what to do to replace it.

“Act Indian, not Indian Act.”

Our people complied with those laws, believed in those laws, someone else instead of us is deciding who gives his identity.

Part of it is occupying the field making our own laws and programs, where we take the initiative, not waiting for the province or feds to come up with a new job training program.

A nation can never become great by waiting for another nation to become great.

### **Ojicree Knowledge Keeper, Byron Beardy (Island Lake First Nation)**

It makes a huge impact on our people, if you truly believe who you are and where you are from. Your identity is your mother. Your identity is your language. Speak it, live it. You cannot fight the white man with his tools; he will win. Use your tools. Use your language, don't use English. Language is key.

## **Concept of Guardians**

### **Shaunna Morgan-Siegers, Operations Manager, Indigenous Leadership Initiative**

Indigenous guardians are the eyes and the ears of the land. They are trying to go out on the water, monitor the land and the water. In some areas they asked to maintain cultural sites, as stewards of those sites. They act to support sensitive sites. They help interpret culture and heritage for visitors. They help create plans and decision-making over land use, for example, is it okay for ecotourism for an area, or is another site better? They are available to stimulate knowledge for younger people. They provide a cultural response to the land, protect biodiversity and species at risk, monitor water, climate change, forest fires and engage and forest fire management.

As an example, if you looked at impact of low level flying, mining and hydro and asked, “What can we do as Indigenous people, that if these activities happen, that they cause the least amount of harm?”

ILI has been working towards a national guardians network, and working to train a program coordinator, develop community programs, and establish regional and national networks.

For every one dollar invested, \$2.50 is saved which could grow to \$3.70 in savings.

There is social, economic, cultural and environmental value to guardians. ILI has been encouraging communities to think about programs. Here in Manitoba, we have begun by asking the Spirit to come and help us, through the knowledge keepers. There are some emerging programs in Manitoba.

### **Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

We don't guard the Earth because the Earth gives us life.



## **A Regional Approach**

### **Taking Young People to the Land**

#### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

We all have the same concerns and the same love for our children. Taking young people to the land is their best chance of healing.

The concern is that we are losing a lot of the Elders, and not taking the time to pass the knowledge onto the young people.

We should create environments, and teach through our teachings and rites of passage. The youth cannot go to the land before going into the sweat lodge and learning the teachings and rites of passage.

We begin with our young people. We create environments for young people for kids to learn. We will educate our young people, accredit these young people ourselves to be teachers of other young people.

We need to put our young people through the rites of passage. You cannot take them to the land until they have gone through the coming of age, rites of passage beforehand.

Everyone in the community had a responsibility to take care of the child.

Time is running out.

Prepare for what's coming. All the basic survival things that are people knew.

Whatever little things that we know we have to share with the young people.

These youth will learn even more through their dreams, through the Vision Quest.

We need to decide what we are going to do to teach the young people. Our words have to lead into action.

#### **Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

We need to consider how our own people looked after everything, not only the land, with the young people.

*Napeyo* - to sit down and think where you are going to take your life and future.

*Nahapi* - to look to be able to see where we are going to take this, to take your family.

*Napeyuk* - Warriors that protected everything, the land, the water, the women and the children.

#### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, William Young (Bloodvein First Nation)**

And that's what I plan to do – set up a cultural camp for kids, just go in and get her done. We have these Christian camps for a couple of weeks, then their kids having nothing left to do with the rest of the summer. The kids need to know who they are. They need their identity.

#### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay First Nation)**

Youth, I really appreciate you being here. I have a grandson that has adopted me to be his grandma.

What Communities are already doing that could help move us toward a Regional Plan

#### **Councillor Ron Spence (Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation)**

Our community already had that vision of guardianship.

I went through Natural Resource Management training. We were trained as game wardens, conservation officers, passing to the youth. We were given regulations and policies to follow and of course, it didn't work.

We need to create our own policies and teach our traditional ways.

We developed a curriculum for hunting, fishing and trapping.

We created a granny and grandpa program. Teachers brought a list of 10 to 11 students who couldn't be handled in the schools. Elders have a unique way of approaching the youth without getting mad. They took the students out on the land to peel the logs, and build a granny and grandpa cabin. Then they expanded the program for grades 1 to 12.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

We met with Minister Squires. We are willing to create a real partnership. We are looking at creating some round tables with her to reinforce our discussions of nationhood. How do we offer our perspective to the Climate approach of the province?

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Mary Maytwayashing (Lake Manitoba First Nation)**

Over the years since I have been part of the Turtle Lodge, part of teaching and helping at the Turtle Lodge during the coming of age ceremonies and rites of passage, I have found that it has been very instrumental in youth finding out who they are.

In the Mother Earth Lodge, conducted by all the women together, we talk about what it means to be a woman.

Young people need to go on that fast or Vision Quest. The men have been helped through

that. When they sit on the Earth, they sit on the original Mother for all of us. They start to learn how to respect the water and the land.

We have been doing this for six or seven years, making a call out to young women. Older women come too. They asked, "Can we come too?" It is really growing.

Through the rites of passage, men have come to understand and respect women because they sit on the land and don't drink the water.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, William Young (Bloodvein First Nation)**

Poplar River, Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids, Pikangikum, in 2002, started to protect their trap lines. There is between 33,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land in our five communities' traditional territories. Manitoba and the Ontario governments joined us as partners, which made it very unique. Our proposal was sent to Paris to the UNESCO committee. They wanted to know how we intertwined the two, culture and nature. We proposed women's forums, youth forms, economic development and lands guardians.

Four first Nations on the east side of Lake Winnipeg have been working on a project – *Pimachowin Aki*. We are working on a curriculum being developed for our local schools [that includes] all the history of our First Peoples in our area. The long-term plan over the next few years will be that we will be able to share with the rest of the world about *Pimachowin Aki* and the process we undertook. We have a common theme – that is our children, Elders, youth, parents, and the social issues we face. Everyone is concerned and wants to share and help. Everyone has committed to helping with these challenges and making it better for our communities.

I own a fishing lodge. I have seen in the communities with kids being made left alone.

I want to set up a cultural camp for them. And that's what I plan to do, set up a cultural camp for kids, just go in and get her done. We have these Christian camps for a couple of weeks, then their kids having nothing left to do with the rest of the summer. The kids need to know who they are. They need their identity. We as First Nations people need to support one another to support working on a cultural camp. We need to get our kids back onto the land.

### **Councillor Heidi Cook (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

We have a program that Stella [Neff] is an advisor on, that my sister is helping with. Ovide found funders to develop an alternative for young people who drop out of high school. This is a land-based program. We are focusing on learning our local history, some elements of what you would learn in high school, but on the land – land-based science. Fifteen youth went through, mostly young men. We have lots of young people who dropped out of high school. There are sweats every week, and different ceremonies. They learned things about our community and our history that they didn't learn in school. We can see the difference in their confidence. The idea that they could go back to traditional schools or train as guardians are an excellent next step to learn.

### **Coming Together to build a Regional School of Ancestral Knowledge**

#### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

The only way our people will become unified is spiritually.

What is the most important thing you can teach your child is about values and Spirit. This will lead to physical survival on the land.

We have to be able to take advantage of everyone's gifts. No one should feel excluded in the movement.

If we are going to move forward as a people and a Nation, we have got to start acting like it, living it. Establishing that nationhood begins by restoring that knowledge.

We cannot overstep the Spirit.

For the model, I propose that we establish a central place to bring forward the spiritual knowledge. Equal to that young people have to be taken to the land. We have people here. We have Norbert, who is very in tune with Black Island. My friend from Bloodvein took me to those rocks and sacred sites. When you see them it does something to your spirit. In Pauingassi, where Namaywin walked, the chief took me to all those sites but no white man has ever seen. Namaywin died from a broken heart because the missionaries had the biggest bonfire, and burn their pipes. Alcohol came in. And yet they are surrounded by sacred sites. In Norway House, Gordie loves the land so much he has been fired because of what he believes. They could start here, spend 3 to 4 weeks, then they go to Black Island, then to Bloodvein...

If we agree let's develop this higher place of learning. They have the University College of the North, Red River College, University of Winnipeg. What about us? Why can't we do it? I know we can do it.





We can go to the communities and learn what each has to offer. There is a wealth of information-language and experience, a tremendous amount of knowledge in here right now.

Each of us need to go to our communities, meet our leaders, and ask are you prepared to support a unified effort by a number of communities? We need resources. We have to go within our communities for resources. I will go to Sagkeeng to ask if they could support five young people, to take care of their tuition and living costs. If each community says I will support two people...

We are in a transitional time. When people give us tobacco, the store will not take tobacco to put gas in our cars, or food on our tables.

We accredit it ourselves. We establish it ourselves. We will develop at least a minimum two-year program. There are provincial education standards. What about our standards? They are based on our values and the sacredness of life.

The young people are going to lead the way. We need to train them spiritually before they go out on the land. We need to teach them how to fish, to fillet, to cut water to haul water. We have to find a way to pass that along to the young people. There are individuals willing to make the commitment to take young people onto the land. There are also those willing to make a spiritual commitment. I am prepared to make a commitment to use this place, the Turtle Lodge. When we train is young people, they are going to have a place to come where they can restore their spirit.

We need to be taking care of our own children. There was no foster care. If every family takes responsibility, if one part is having trouble, another part of the family takes care of the kids until the parents get some help.

Will we start the ancestral schools of

knowledge that extends to those who can take our young people to the land?

*Mikinakay* means “walking the trail of the turtle”. Kiizhay Manitou left us a trail to follow, that will lead to a balanced and happy life. We need to set up a school that is totally reflective of our identity, duties and responsibilities, to set up an environment that is guided by the Spirit and nature. We need to follow up on youth with they’ve asked for, we need to gather soon. We have to get more into the substance of defined actions. We don’t need to get into the problems anymore. We have to find the solutions now. If you say you’re going to do something then do it.

The language is triggering that spirit in us

Florence’s dream showed us something is coming. I’ve been dreaming a lot about flooding. We were told to get ready. Getting ready begins with returning back to that way of life that will help us survive

50-50 in both languages, bring in Cree and Ojibwe teacher.

At the end of the day the teachings are all the same.

We can bring in Ojibway (or Cree) linguist to do Translation.

### **Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

I would like my community to hear, to get along, to think outside of Grand Rapids, to work together with other communities to protect the land.

If we came together, we still have authority over this land. We can say as a Cree people, we are going to allow hunting at this time, we will not allow it to happen here or at these times. Ojibway and Crees can come together and make joint decisions about their territories.

We can make these choices to – we can if we want to. There is no nationhood until we change our thinking.

When I was a little boy, we lived in poverty, but we didn't know because we were pretty content. We were speaking our language, as young men we were making bows and arrows, cutting wood and getting water, making our own play and toys. We didn't go to Toys-R-Us for our toys; we were making things on our own. A little boy slowly becoming a man by doing things. Those young people still have to be helpful, and do things. [Western] school is not enough.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay  
First Nation)**

It is very important that we come together, because it has been shown over and over how much we have as a people. We can come together like this in our sacred places, building this rug, piece by piece, doing our part to make ourselves strong again, through reclamation of our spiritual way of life.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Stella Neff  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

This is the time to pass it onto the young people. We have lost a lot of us already. We have to teach the students, and reclaim our history. After this generation it will be a second-hand.

It has to be us, this generation, because the one after us will not have the first-hand knowledge.

This is the time. We have to develop this. We have to teach our young people to have respect.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Mary Maytwayashing (Lake Manitoba  
First Nation)**

I support this idea.



I have seen so many success stories coming out of the Turtle Lodge. I have brought many young people from my community and they have been helped.

I have been sitting down with my Council. We need to go into our communities to see how we can support.

The first time I heard ancestral school of knowledge I got really excited.

The only way to go is that we have to teach our young people. I would really love to see the rites of passage and coming-of-age ceremonies become a part of whatever we do today.

There are people out there that can help with the hunting, fishing and trapping.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

That relationship is *Kiyabits Kawahotamagh Aski* – the ones that are still related to the Earth.

The otter represents family; it is time to teach Oneygeego because the kids are running around.

In the [western] classrooms it's not going to happen, to teach our way of life, our language.

It is something we have done for a while back home. It is still going to go on no matter what. It is about the responsibilities, the laws.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Jimmy Hunter-Spence, Nisichawayasihk (Nelson House) Cree Nation**

The government has sent us up a creek in a leaky boat with no paddles. We have to come together to fix our boat, make our paddles, and get those paddles ready to go to our

destination. We cannot do it by ourselves, but we need each other's gifts.

I truly believe we can do this. Working together with respect, we can accomplish a lot. This is how we show our youth. This is our job, sitting here. We have to direct our youth. I think this is one way.

I went to University College of the North one summer, where there were over 90 students who wanted to come there and learn about our traditional way. They said after one week that, "This is the best thing that has ever happened to us."

I think this is the way we have to go. We need to bring our speakers on history, language, those who know about our culture and beliefs.

**Councillor Heidi Cook (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

I like the idea of traveling around to different places to learn so we could share those teachings. We have similar teachings as





Anishinabe, we can share with each other.

**Councillor Ron Spence,  
Nisichawayasihk (Nelson House)  
Cree Nation**

My parents are bush people and their kids don't know how to light a fire or set up a prospector attend.

The youth are really hungry for that information.

We need to develop these programs not only for our youth, but also our people.

We should continue to meet annually or seasonally.

The missing part of my youth's teachings is spirituality. They are either for Christianity or for culture. Many are totally against it because they are not being taught our way of life. How do we approach the perceived conflict between Christianity and the traditional way? So many youth are getting mixed up between the two. So many of us want to learn.

We need to develop a curriculum.

We need to attach a ceremonial building to each of our schools and our nursing stations.

We have a humongous territory with five cabins where we take our people to learn the medicines. We take our people out on the land to heal from addictions. What is missing is our spirituality.

There is funding out there-we got \$720,000 this year for language and culture.

There are a lot of programs I would like to share in our community. I like the idea of guardians/keepers of the land in our own communities, but not implementing the government's conservation laws.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Martina Fisher (Bloodvein  
First Nation)**

Regarding the Moose, I have a brother that hunts moose. We use everything, the moose nose, tongue, liver, marrow, intestines. The young people and children learn by watching and hands-on. Next time we get a moose, I want my brother to show how he prepares it - teach the young people how to prepare food - dry meat, dry fish, what kind of wood to heat our homes, to cook, singe ducks, singe the moose nose.

When my Mum and Dad were preparing the moose, scraping the hide, my mom spread grease or water all over the moose hide. I'm learning along with them.

The way you will learn is to participate and go and listen, and share it in the future.

**Garven McKay, Youth (Norway House  
Cree Nation)**

The Elders teaching us of the land through ceremony is beautiful. We would love to learn more. We as youth are not usually listened to.

Language is what I'm good at. I am really good at making people laugh.

Culture, language, and identity – that is the gift the Creator gave us, and that is an honour to accept.

Us youth we speak Cree but we understand most of what you were saying in Anishinabe.

I thank you for providing this. I would be honoured to receive this. Let's do this. Let's do it now!

## More that We Have to Do

### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

We are being told in our lodges is to get out of the cities.

Some are not going to hear, they will have gone too far. But some will hear.

Time is running out. Prepare for what's coming. Whatever little things that we know we have to share with the young people, all the basic survival things that our people knew.

There is no doubt there will be resistance as we establish our true right of leadership in our homeland, but we need to go forward. We have our ceremonies. We need to educate them, we need to teach them, the Elders have said many times that they are our younger brothers. We are the older brothers. The reason that they would resist is that they're ignorant.

### **Names/Language**

\*See more in Executive Summary

### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

The language is triggering that spirit in us.

We have to be very strong. If we are going to be successful in what we are doing, *Kiizhay ottiziwin*, the spirit of kindness, has to be central.

*Abogiwandoanishinabe* means "he was really gifted".

*Mikinakay* means "walking the trail of the turtle". *Kiizhay* Manitou left us a trail to follow, that will lead to a balanced and happy life. We need to set up a school that is totally reflective of our identity, duties and

responsibilities, to set up an environment that is guided by the Spirit and Nature.

### **Ojicree Knowledge Keeper, Byron Beardy (Island Lake First Nation)**

You cannot fight the white man with his tools; he will win. Use your tools. Use your language, don't use English. Language is key.

### **Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

We have a word for "the wind that moves the water on the land." It shows the root of where life comes from.

*Kee-ya-bits Ka-Wa-ho-ta-Magh ki-kaa-wee-no Aski* is that relationship - the ones that are still related to the Earth.

We call our belly button *Nitisii, Nitisiyawin* - the way I am. I was born from my mother, I was tied to her. That's how I honour my mother, through the language I learn, the way you are tied to this land you came from. Cree people have different dialects because of our environments we live in.

### **Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi (Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

Moosa. We have our own names for all these places. We have to reclaim our names, for not only our communities but all over. One way of reoccupying these places is asserting our authority.

## Resources

### **Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

Why are we waiting, we can go within our own communities. There are resources.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
William Young (Bloodvein  
First Nation)**

The government is not going to come and help us, as First Nations have to help ourselves, to find the resources to help ourselves. I am a firm believer that the resources are within our communities.

**Discussion on Moosa (Moose)**

**Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

If we are to be a real Nation, we have to be concerned about the animals, we cannot wait for Pallister and the feds. We should be making our own plans to make sure that the Moose survives.

We hear, “I have a hunting right. “What are you going to do with that hunting right when that Moose is gone? We have to have the courage to say don’t hunt here for a while.

Do you think the treaty right is about exploiting everything? It is about protecting a way of life. Our responsibility is maintaining a way of life and that land for future generations.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper, Dave  
Courchene (Sagkeeng First Nation)**

We have to connect with the animals spiritually – the moose, ducks, etc. If you don’t know the moose, you can’t respect the moose. We need to know the moose on a spiritual level. Ask the Moose, “What do you want, our brother, the Moose?” We need to develop our relationship with the Moose. We learn how to take care of the Moose by becoming the Moose. We learn how to take care of the land by learning how to become the land itself, like nature itself.

All those animals will come back if we re-establish our sacred relationship with the



land. We need to re-establish the spiritual relationship with the Moose. Take tobacco, the Pipe, and talk to the Moose. Ask him what he needs.

The Seven Teachings, that are represented by the animals, are the foundation of our nationhood. We need to ask the Buffalo – teach me about respect again because I’ve lost it.

I don’t want to the Moose to be mad at me because the water is not safe to drink. I don’t want the Moose to come to me in my dream to tell me he is upset with me.

How come they have not taken away moose hunter licenses, but zero in on us?

Some talk about a “Treaty right” to take that moose or deer, never considering the right of the animal, or asking to come into our territory, or working together to share what was on the land. There is a big education





process that needs to happen. There are young people taking 4 to 5 deer, without doing a ceremony to honour the spirit of that animal. How can nature reciprocate if we are disrespecting the laws of the land?

We have to take responsibility.

A great many of our young people are adopting those attitudes now, "I have a right to fish." Yes, everyone was born with rights, and that also applies to the Earth – her right to be protected.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Jimmy Hunter-Spence, Nisichawayasihk (Nelson House) Cree Nation**

They introduced Moose into Ontario and Labrador. There is now an overpopulation. Can we breed Moose?

Our traditional foods are much healthier than market-based foods. One exception is Fish. There would be advisories in an area, e.g. Grassy Narrows for mercury.

We need to listen to the Elders and resource users – if they are seeing signs, we need to trust their knowledge of what not to eat. Chemicals accumulate in the fat of animals, we need to exercise caution.

**Shaunna Morgan-Siegers (Operations Manager, Indigenous Leadership Initiative)**

Seven different Nations have come together and said we are not going to wait for the Quebec government; we know from our own history, the relationship with and responsibility for the Caribou.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Gordon Walker (Norway House Cree Nation)**

In the language, we say *Moosa*.

I would like to talk a little bit about the Moose as told to me by the elders. These are the stories that I tell these young men that travel with me.

Maiingan, Wolf, teaches us about grief, he cried out so loud that he started to howl. His parents were running away from something that was chasing them. They put him aside, under a tree, to come back for him after. They didn't come back which is why the wolf started to cry and howl. The Sky took pity on him, and covered him with a cloud, which is why you see a cloud on his body. The Moose looked after him, that Little Wolf child. He will always feed you, close you, pick up leaves and twigs off the branches. The Moose started looking after this wolf child.

He started getting Willows. The dog is called *Achimoosis*. Pussy willow is good for the lungs, for stamina of the wolf. This is how our people came to respect things – these are the stories that are lost. If you do not hear the stories, the Young people will not respect right life and will kill themselves.

You don't put pictures of dead moose on Facebook. They are Mother Earth's children. How would you feel if someone did that to your children?

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
William Young (Bloodvein  
First Nation)**

I was born and grew up all my life in Bloodvein. It will be your generation that will have to look after the land. I want to talk about the Moose concerns in our area. We hunt, we fish, we have fun. You have to have fun, you gotta balance things out.

Our parents taught us sustainable hunting.

We heard about Grass River where there was a slaughter of Moose.

In the southwest of the province they are closing the moose hunt down. Why?

Because they're over hunting. If they shut down, the moose and the most hunters will come to our area. They have been coming, hunting, poaching and night-lighting. The hunters presently coming to our area are on quads, carry rifles, and are often under the influence. This is very dangerous, an accident waiting to happen. It has been brought forward to our leadership but it is taking awhile. I have taken it upon myself to create a group of concerned citizens. We call ourselves 'Moose Matters', and include members from Poplar River, Bloodvein, Pauingassi, Black River, Berens River, and a member from Sagkeeng is pending. We bring forward concerns raised by the communities about moose matters. We need to educate our youth about safe hunting practices and hunting sustainability.

Poplar River, Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids, Pikangikum – in 2002 – started to protect their trap lines. There is between 33,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land in our five communities traditional territories. Manitoba and the Ontario governments joined us as partners, which made it very unique. Our proposal was sent to Paris to the UNESCO committee. They wanted to know how we intertwined the two, culture and nature. We proposed women's forums, youth forms, economic development and lands guardians.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Martina Fisher (Bloodvein First  
Nation)**

When they were doing the lands management plan in our area, there was a woman who interviewed me, Melba. She asked me, "Have you ever seen or heard of Moose?" I said, "there is no such thing as a herd of moose. They come in two or three, mother and two cubs, not in a herd like cows, etc.

I have a brother that hunts moose. We use everything, the moose nose, tongue, liver, marrow, intestines. The young people and children learn by watching and hands-on.

Next time we get a moose, I want my brother to show how he prepares it - teach the young people how to prepare food - dry meat, dry fish, what kind of wood to heat our homes, to cook, singe ducks, singe moose nose. I'm learning along with them. When my mum and Dad were preparing the moose, scraping the hide, my mom spread grease or water all over the moose hide. The way you will learn is to participate and go and listen, and share it in the future.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Norbert Hardisty (Hollow Water  
First Nation)**

When we teach our children using the western system, we teach them from nursery and go to university. In our original ways, we taught them from higher up, and go to low, because of the way the language works. That's where we need to begin with Moose management to nationhood, and the teachings that go with moose management. There was moose management in our traditions. There were calving grounds on Black Island and in another place close by to our communities because there was so much trust.

**Councillor Loretta Bayer (Norway  
House Cree Nation)**

Regarding The moose, we wanted to see a management plan and aerial surveys. Why are all these Manitoba hunters coming to Saskatchewan to get Moose? Now I see from that map you showed us, we are all covered in red. Too many licenses are being given out. People are shooting cows and calves. They are spotlighting, and they are hunting off the side of the road. They cut across migration lines of original habitats in our area.

**Knowledge Keeper, Byron Beardy  
(Island Lake First Nation)**

We have to, like the Buffalo, learn every use of that Moose, from hooves to crown. Everything is used. Parts are used for

medicine, ceremony, food and clothing. We have to go back to show our children and grandchildren.

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Stella Neff  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

I was thinking about what I considered the moose to be. The spirit of the moose – I know when my uncle and grandfather talked about it. They said, “the moose gave his life to me.” They knelt in front of it and thanked him for his life. There is a spirit within them. They don't talk about killing the moose.

My uncle was tracking a moose and he turned around – there was a moose behind him, and he realized the moose was tracking him for days. He said, “I laughed, and then the moose gave his life to me.”

People don't think anymore, they are not just animals to kill for sport.

There was one young man from Easterville who said, “Everything in that moose has to be used.” We have lost the vocabulary. He started naming the parts of the Moose. We are losing the vocabulary because we are not using all the parts.

The respect, the beliefs we have about hunting – that is what is important. They are giving their life for us.

When I see a post on Facebook holding a moose up as a trophy, I get upset. They are not trophies; they are there for our life. They are there to feed us.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay  
First Nation)**

I learned so much from my Dad, remembering the log cabin we were raised in, when I would hold some parts of the animal so he could do the cutting.

To have Gordie here was such a blessing.



My husband was a good hunter. One day he witnessed what you witnessed [to Stella Neff]. He saw the Elk, set his sight, and all of a sudden it turned into a man. He blinked again, and the man was dressed in camouflage colors. His body went so weak he couldn't bring himself to kill. He saw some form going up into the sky. He doesn't go to kill Elk, he won't eat Elk meat now.

When the kill comes back, the first meat is always the offering so that it will continue to feed us and feed our spirits. We know that they have a spirit.

I think of the man in the California fires that wanted to save a rabbit. Maybe we could hook up with the saving the animals idea.

I think it is important that youth are taught the birthing cycles of the animals. It was part of what was taught to the young men going out to hunt. It was so important to know when those births and conceptions would happen.

**Councillor Ron Spence,  
Nisichawayasihk (Nelson House)  
Cree Nation**

The moose population is going down. Our people blame industry, farming, mining, sports hunting. Our own people are shooting cows. If you shoot a cow with two calves, it takes three years to start reproducing. You have shot seven moose and their offspring because each cow who has twins would produce twins every year.

## **Jokes**

**Cree Leader, Ovide Mercredi  
(Misipawistik Cree Nation)**

Thanks for the Pipe, reminds me of a story.

There was a man talking in a meeting with the Chiefs, Elder Ermine. He said, "Before white people came we had our own

government, our own language and our own ceremonies. When we prayed we used to look up at the Creator. Missionaries came and taught us a new way of praying, we went down on our knees, and when we looked up, our land was gone."

**Cree Knowledge Keeper, Jimmy  
Hunter-Spence, Nisichawayasihk  
(Nelson House) Cree Nation**

In Norway House my friend told me a Moose chased him up that tree. Every once in a while he would bounce the tree. Just as he was on his way down, there came the Moose. This time he was with his friend the Beaver.

**Anishinabe Knowledge Keeper,  
William Young (Bloodvein  
First Nation)**

We have our annual moose hunt. We got into trouble because we called it a moose derby. Male and female hunters are part of this. There were two, both their names were Delbert, a male and a female, we called them 'the two Delberts'. They didn't know too much about hunting, and we tease them, "Do you even know what a moose looks like?" But they take a book with them and check that book! They saw an animal, and said, "I think that's a Moose." They looked it up in the book and by the time they looked up, the moose was gone.

**Ed Azure, University of Manitoba,  
originally from Norway House  
Cree Nation**

I found out I was a lousy hunter, but I am a conversationalist. I am frightening them away so this guy [Gordie Walker] gets them.



## ON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

### BURMA BUSHIE, Hollow Water

#### **2nd Regional ICAN (Indigenous-led Conservation and Nationhood) Gathering**

**Grand Rapids, MB – Jan. 22-24, 2018**

Back in the 1980s, as a worker in my community, we designed a justice program. We called it restorative justice. We saw it as a way of decolonizing, finding our way back to our traditional ceremonies, both for our families and at a community level, nationally and internationally.

The model we designed can be applied in any situation, any First Nation. We knew as children how we suffered as a community, how we were silenced. For years we couldn't talk. When we decided to work inside our community, we had to find a way that would work, not only with our families, but also with the abusers. This was the only way we could bring balance to our communities.

When we gave our children the message of trust that it was safe to talk, they trusted us and began to disclose what was happening to them. We worked very hard to safeguard our children from those outside laws which could be applied within our community. We convinced the police to stop applying their laws within our jurisdiction. They were waiting to hear from us when we would bring the abuser to their doors.

When a child disclosed, we set up two teams, one to look after the child and their family, and one to look after the abuser and their

family. We concentrated on the child, to help them. Most times all we had to do was tell mom and dad. If mom and dad could listen, we could tell the child mom and dad could protect them. Most times, the abuser was within the family. We had to ensure the child was safeguarded.

I was CFS supervisor at the time, and was able to set safeguards in place and convince the director that we didn't need to bring the children into care.

For the abuser, we would ask the abuser if what was said was true. Some could admit it right away, and some had trouble admitting and taking responsibility. We would sit with them, two or three of us, and bring them to the point that they could take responsibility. We told him, this is what you can expect from the justice system. And this is what you can expect from us. Everything was based on truth, openness and honesty. Once we were able to get them to admit to it, we took him to the police in Pine Falls. The magistrate was able to give the order with conditions, to refrain from drugs and alcohol, participate in whatever the team wanted them to do, and not contact their victim.

Our work came from kindness, doing everything in our power to help that person change. Many circles we would sit with them. We brought two teams of psychologists to the community, one for the victim and one for the abuser. We also had to inform the teacher, so they were aware of the dynamics of the child in their classroom. There were ongoing

conferences with the whole network.

Every two weeks we would pull the whole network together to ensure everyone was informed. This was over a two-year period. We had a protocol in place with the province and justice system, which was applied to basically any youth from our territory.

In the late 1980s, early 1990s to 2004 we had 86 cases through the courts. Not all of them reached conviction because lawyers and the Crown attorneys determined if they had enough to take the case all the way.

One of the things is a person has to do is take responsibility in court so that the child does not have to go through a cross-examination. We had an attorney that really listened to the community. These people are really critical to the work. If you have a Crown attorney that's on board, that's half the work. Justice Murray Sinclair was supportive and decided the first case from our community. There were about 40 people including the court party, offenders and victim on one side, and on the other side the judge, the Crown attorney and police. Judge Murray Sinclair used the feather to get the process going. The first time the feather traveled around the circle was for the victims. It is very important for the child victims to hear from their community, to praise and celebrate their courage. This is a very hard thing for a community to deal with. The community spoke to the victims, celebrating their courage.

The second time the feather went around was for the abusers, for the community to speak directly to the abusers. When we grew up, when you hurt a child, the whole community feels it. We were talking to the offenders even though these were their children; these were all our children. If they changed their lives, they could regain their rights to be around children, and for them to regain their rights to be a family again.

The third time the feather went around was to talk about the issue of abuse.

The fourth time, the judge spoke on the judgment.

Do you come from love and kindness or are we coming from hate? It was a very hard thing to do in our community but we will prevail. There were two men in our community who admitted what they had done to women. A young man stood up, he was only 14 years old, he already had seven victims, he was in the court system as a juvenile. His young cousins had disclosed what he was doing. The abuser himself admitted to abusing her when she used to drink and she passed out. These are the kinds of things that come out when you work with love and kindness, when you ask the Spirit to work with you, when you ask the Creator to work with you. I'm telling you this because I have to believe in my heart that we can heal from anything in our communities. We have been given kindness, honesty and sharing, and we know how to put those things into practice. We think of the whole picture.

The system is not concerned with people getting healed, they are concerned with punishing. We have been giving them the tools to do it.

There are too many of our young Anishinabe in the justice system. If we could do it in Hollow Water, you could do it too. No one else is going to help Anishinabe Youth, we have to do that. We have a step-by-step process that you can have.

We got \$120,000 from the federal justice system and \$120,000 from the provincial justice system and we got all those people out of jail. How much does it cost to get one person out of jail - \$80-\$90,000. The government wants to save every cent, we can demonstrate it is much cheaper just sent us these people to us.

We have our land that we can take them to where they can find the healing that they need.





## WHAT NATIONHOOD MEANS

Ovide Mercredi

**Presented at the ICAN 2 Meeting in Misipawistik Cree Nation, (Grand Rapids), Manitoba  
January 22, 2018**

ILI [Indigenous Leadership Initiative] is a group of dedicated past leaders interested in supporting our communities and exercising authority over our land. Environmental issues and climate change are also of concern: we are interested in looking after the animals, the moose, for example. ILI is comprised of Steve Kakfwi, Dave Porter and elected member of the legislative assembly, Dave Courchene who chose the road prior to Christianity and established the Turtle Lodge, a meeting place for many, a safe place to talk about important issues. He is a leader.

Recently in Lac Seul I was interviewing people who went to residential schools, about their experience with lawyers. An old lady raised pre-contact said, “We can do anything! You have to believe in the Great Spirit,” she said. “You also have to have faith in the power to do things, and the power you have is the power you have to make a choice.”

Here in Grand Rapids we haven’t forgotten the beliefs. We may have lost some of the ceremonies, but we still have the beliefs – Minopimatiziwin, kindness, love, help yourself, help your fellow beings, help the earth – these are the values we have grown up with. Wiicheessawin [means] to help

yourself; to take care of yourself, to grow of yourself; not to be dependent on someone else. Wiicheetawin [means] to help each other. Dipayneesawin [means] to help others.

The elder shared with me, “Be kind to yourself and to each other. You can’t be kind to anyone if you can’t be honest with yourself and with others. And you have to share that kindness and honesty with others.”

An academic from the University of Iowa was given a pipe from the elders, and was offered tobacco. The tobacco and pipe were here long before, but disappeared by the time I was born.

The missionaries told the government, “We can’t convert these heathens. Their faith in their own system is too strong.” So they worked with government to pass

a law to stop or people from practicing our ceremonies. The law existed from 1825 to 1896: Indians can’t do their Potlatch, their Sundance. Attacking the Sundance, they were attacking everything – the drum, the rattle and the pipe.

When I was born in 1946, I was born into a family with a mixed belief system. My mother was Anglican and my father was Catholic. I wondered about that because there wasn’t very much difference.

By 1926, in many parts of Canada including

BC, it was the policy of the government if anyone wanted to practice their traditional practices, that they would be convicted in the courts. For the Indian agents, their job was to police the law.

This is described in the book, “Breaking the Ties that Bind” by Catherine Pettipass.

There is religious choice – not one religion superior or better than another. Grand Rapids has gone through a lot of returns. The Pipe has returned. The sweat lodge has returned. The Sundance has returned.

My mother converted to Catholicism when I was 10 years old. She died that way, believing that way. We don’t want our elders to change; they have already made a commitment. But for the young people, they don’t have a belief system, a faith system. I say to them, “Believe in something. It doesn’t matter if your Buddhist or Muslim.”

I am sharing this because of what Dave [previous speaker] said; he’s incredibly lucky to be given the vision he was given. Peter [O’Chiese] said, “Not everybody will have a vision.”

Gordie [Walker] is one of the best speakers of our language. For the generation after me, language has to a large extent been lost. We cannot blame the school system; we have to blame ourselves. Many young people are trying to learn the language. It is a part of their identity.

The Guardians idea is what is bringing us together. We had asked for \$500 million and the federal government gave \$25 million, which has not yet been released.

What is nationhood? What is a country? What is a nation state?

Right now across the country our people are waking up, and realizing it is their responsibility to bring back the language,

the authority of our land, our people’s right to make a livelihood, for their children and family.

Right now we are looking away from colonization. We have gone from being masters of our land and settings to a minority in the Canadian nation state, where they have taken away our authority over our laws and territories, and also taking the liberty of instructing us in these things.

A nation is a body or a group of people, that have a common language but live in a common area, that exercise power over the territory in an exclusive area, and that if another nation comes in, that they have to have permission to come into it.

A nation is reflected by language, identity, territory; to exercise authority over others. Any solution to issues with the territory will require the cooperation of others.

The Anishinabe are a nation of people. So are the Nisgaa. When the Nisgaa meet, all their people come together, not just Chief and Council.

A nation takes care of a vision.

*Minopimatiziwin* [means] finding that good life and sustaining that good life as a people.

In my mind, Nisgaa is a model of how the Crees have to come together, or the Ojibway, or otherwise we will be stuck under the laws of Canada.

*Panimistonsin* [means] fundamental freedoms that all people have. Two distinct peoples, the Palestinian people and the Jewish people, are seeking peace they’ve never been able to find since World War II when the Jews reclaimed their land. Nationhood is about homeland. It is that home when shared with other nations, with overlapping claims over homeland territory.

A nation is independent, in other words, they

don't need another nation to tell them what to do. A nation does not need the consent of another nation to use their resources.

What has happened to our people? The Cree Nation is now made up of reserves.

Canada is a country, not a nation, originally formed by combining two nations, through English and French decisions. They simply asserted their jurisdiction. They did not ask consent. The way they dealt with Indians is: "We will make treaties with them," but they were not honest with the treaty negotiations. They claimed that we gave up everything, which was not true.

Their intent was not to recognize our nation, but to create a country on our traditional lands.

A modern country is synonymous with a nation-state. It is not a nation. It can be made up of lots of nations, for example Irish, Black, etc.

Canada is a nation-state made up of a very different people; today 17 to 20% of those people are White people. There is now a changing face.

They claimed that we gave up everything, which was not true.

Here in Grand Rapids, they spent less than a day meeting with our people. How was it possible that our people gave up our land in less than a day?

We have historical record: our chief said to the surveyor, "What are you doing here?"

The surveyor said, "I'm here to survey your land; our people made a treaty."

The chief said, "We never made a treaty."

They started making laws. The Migratory Birds Convention Act of 1919 because of the convention they made with the US and

Mexico. No one can hunt migratory birds out of season. But by making this law, they were violating the treaty right to food, to hunt for food – that violated the treaty.

Canada organized itself as a nation-state, where different parts have different authority over different areas. For example there is provincial authority over education. There is federal authority over the military, post office, and health. They gave themselves the power to make laws for Indians and Indian lands in 1867. The federal government retained the power to make laws for Indians.

They encouraged Ukrainians, Mennonites, etc. to come and settle and make a livelihood, to be farmers. Mennonites were given reservations in southern Manitoba, but with a difference – they had absolute authority over that land, their own governance structure, and were promised they could freely practice their religion and language. They were promised they would never have to fight in the military.

This is incomplete opposition to what happened to us. The Indian Act was created with the complete intent to destroy us. They passed a law to prohibit our people from practicing our spirituality. They understood that if we maintained the strength of our spiritual identity, they would have more trouble taking our land from us.

There was no title for our nations, for example, the Cree Nation has no land. The federal government owns land and we only have the right to use it, occupying our land under the Indian Act.

As a Nation of people we have no land or homeland, no power to make our own lives. Canada did not want us to be self-governing, so they implanted their idea of leadership and introduced the chief and council system. They use the Indian Act to suppress our people on different fronts like membership. A nation decides its own membership!



They imposed an idea of assimilation and an idea of superiority. They thought the only way an Indian is going to advance is to become a Canadian. Our Indian status is a symbol of their power, not ours. The Cree Nation should be able to decide their own membership, not Canada.

The chief of a reserve became the enforcer of the Indian Act, instead of the Indian agent.

When my mother married George Mercredi, who was non-status, they robbed my mother of her Indian status and her ability to live on the reserve. I am not a Canadian. I cannot for the life of me identify as Canadian.

Right now we do not have the Cree Nation, we just have colonial governments. One of the impacts is they have removed us from the idea of nationhood.

The language will bind our people because language is a part of the definition of how people live.

Our common territory will bind our people. Our territory will create our nation.

Taking care of our families, without the Child Welfare Act, will bind our nation.

First Nations people are fearful, they think, "What am I going to lose?" instead of "What am I going to gain?" If we get rid of the Indian Act, then we can decide how we are going to govern. We don't have to be limited to the chief and council system.

We could do what Cross Lake did. The Youth, Women, Men, and Elder Councils form their own government. It was not recognized by the Canadian governments, but we do not need the recognition.

The Mennonites were given the best land, the Ukrainians were given the worst land in the Interlake were nothing grows but rock. Do Ukrainians feel aggrieved too? They were not treated the same as the Mennonites were.

The Indian Act is also used to destroy families. We have a treaty right to education with Treaties 1 to 11. Canada removed them from our homes to be taught that they were inferior to white people. If Canada wanted to preserve our nationhood, they could have built those schools right on our reserves instead of outside the communities.

I am working for the Law Society of Upper Canada-in Kenora and Sioux Lookout, and meeting with people to gauge their experience with lawyers and the residential schools. They were not getting an education. They were being indoctrinated and forced to participate in evil sexual acts.

If the schools have been on our reserves, we would have been teaching what we have been taught since the beginning of time.

When they listen to our speakers, they may say, "Ovide makes a good point," but nothing changes.

They are ignoring our people completely, running the country for themselves.

We have an opportunity right now.

I have dealt with six Ministers of Indian Affairs, and have never seen anything as progressive as this one. Some families in Pikangikum have to take shifts to sleep. She wants to end that. She wants to make sure their issues are dealt with. I want to work with these people.

I was 44 years old before I had a status card. I was a Cree person, have always been a Cree person. When I ran for National Chief, I did not have Indian status. Someone complained. They use the White law against me. I didn't want to apply first for that, but I was lucky, my brother Norbert applied and he got it. My sisters married into status. I belong to the Cree Nation. I swallowed my pride. I swallowed my principle. I applied and had it in two or three days. The whole idea of membership was to reduce the number of

people on reserve. I didn't need to be a Treaty Indian [to be equal]. I'm equal now [I was already equal].

The disenfranchisement idea was that in order for us to be equal people, we needed to stop being who we are. They used the pass system to make sure that some of our people who are doing well in farming would become uncomfortable, particularly in Lethbridge, Alberta. They excelled in farming. Mormons moved there and the government started suppressing the First Nations, and they succeeded. The pass system was used as an instrument to frustrate Indian people who were doing well making their livelihood as farmers.

Some of the work we are doing as ILI is raising the consciousness of Indian nationhood, to make decisions about their land.

In order to build the grocery store [here in Misipawistik] we had to surrender that piece of land.

Rebuilding our nations is going to be a real challenge. After 150 years as a country, assimilation has happened. If people insist we make our own laws, people get scared.

If we are to reestablish our own nationhood, we cannot do it alone. Cree People have to come together, the same as Anishinabe, and then we have to come together as distinct Nations.

We live on Lake Winnipeg. We could develop a strategy to protect all these fresh waters. If we want to protect the moose in our area, we can do that too, for example, voluntarily [we can decide that] we don't hunt as a Nation. As a nation we have a treaty right and as a nation we can decide voluntarily not to hunt. That is exercising our nationhood.

In the work I am doing now in Thunder Bay with 49 communities, people have moved

away from traditional foods. Diabetes is rampant. People are losing limbs. Our people need to be at home for health treatment.

In Thunder Bay, since there is no dialysis in the home communities, people have effectively left their communities for their life.

For me when it comes to health transformation, it can only happen if our own people return to their health conditions. We can bring more doctors in our communities if we begin to make our own laws.

My agenda is to have every community in Manitoba as part of the Guardians program. This is how we exercise our nationhood, by tying our communities to the land.

There is only \$25 million; it is not going to go very far.

We have to pay attention to the communities that are less well off – e.g. Shammattawa – they are not here. Absent from our group are two Nations – the Dene and the Dakota. I agree with the sentiment – we have to create a unity – equality, where everyone has access to the same opportunities.

I think we have enough political clout to help the government release the money. We can create guidelines for a model. Guidelines for a community-based model on guardianship.

Who is going to train them? What kind of training are they going to get? That is where the concept of schools of ancestral knowledge comes in.

We have an opportunity right now. Together we can do this.

# PUTTING OUR NATIONHOOD INTO PRACTICE

Nii Gaani Aki Inini,  
Leading Earth Man,  
Dave Courchene

**Presented at ICAN 2 Gathering at  
Misipiwastik Cree Nation  
January 23, 2018**

The root cause of our current dilemma has been our unwillingness to put full efforts in rebuilding the spirit of our Nations. This will take faith, strength and courage to make a commitment which will require sacrifice, and a lot of effort and work.

We cannot continue to hold onto this mentality of victimization. We are much more courageous. To dwell on the past will not move us forward. It is time to call upon the spirit of our ancestors to lead us out of this darkness, the insanity – we have been given the gifts to invoke the spirit to come into our presence. This is where we must begin. Through the sacred lodge of our Nations, guidance has been given, that evolves to more direction as needed.

Recently, a group of Elders from the four directions met in Ottawa – I chaired this historical meeting. It was at this time that the Elders commissioned a Pipe to be carried – with a tipi and the seven Grandfathers. This Pipe was to become a symbol of a way of life. It would also represent all the Pipes that were removed from our People during Prohibition. This would bring our ancestors to rest and come to our aid in these current times.

Since then, the Pipe has travelled to the North, to the East, the South, and will be going to the West. It has also opened many events at the Turtle Lodge. It was during these times that the dream of setting up our own schools of ancestral knowledge was endorsed. There was total agreement in establishing these schools; that it must be based on the spirit of our nationhood.

Unless we find ourselves as a People, we cannot move forward. These schools of ancestral knowledge, it was agreed, would be set up and led by the Knowledge Keepers without the interference of politics or secular impositions.

The priority would be to revitalize the spirit of our youth by giving them the traditional knowledge to act as a strong foundation as they fulfilled their own visions.

Connected to the knowledge would be land-based initiatives on how to survive, how to act as true partners to the laws of nature, as stewards in watching over the land, and seeing the signs of change that will affect the future for future generations.

Climate change is upon us, and as a People we should be in the forefront in a leadership capacity, sharing, creating defined initiatives to treat the Earth much more respectfully.

In discussing this one current challenge we all face, and in acknowledging our



current reality, the impact of the boarding schools, imposition of the Indian Act, under the complete control and imposition of government, and child and family services replacing the same system of the boarding school. These are all symptoms that have led us to where we are now.

The question that needs an immediate answer is this: How do we move forward? How do we get out of this mess, this darkness?

The Elders say, "Go back to the Beginning." This is what I want to talk to you about today. Everything begins with Spirit. We connect with Spirit in prayer and in ceremony. Unless we make that step to return to the beginning, we will always fall short.

As human beings we all have shortcomings and mistakes that we have made as we learn, and we have to be careful not to judge one another. Remember we have all been impacted by cultural genocide – and we have adopted some of those ways that were not good for us or anyone. That is all part of what we have to move beyond.

When I speak of spirituality, I am not speaking of secular religion. That is not reflective of our nationhood. The Creator gave us a full way of life. To think otherwise is to demean our Creator, and to demean our ancestors who believed in the Creator, the Great Spirit. It was in close connection to the land that they honoured the great Creation. The Earth was understood as the face of the Great Spirit. There was no greater way to show appreciation and gratitude to the Creator than by loving the land, and returning the love the land was giving to us. The land was giving us everything we needed to live and survive; all we had to do was take care of it.

The best chance we have now is to rescue what is left of the knowledge that is still being held by the few, that hold the real hope for

all of us. They are holding the flame in the sacred fires that act as a doorway to the Spirit and our ancestors.

It is said that the new way brought to our people opened the door to the underworld, releasing a darkness that went after the minds of the people. It was through the mind that he would drive the people crazy with alcohol, and now today with drugs added to alcohol. It also filled our minds with anger, bitterness, jealousy and judgement.

This is the door we have to close and open the door of the Spirit that will help deflect that darkness. Once again we must have faith and courage. It means letting go of what holds onto our minds, to keep us in its control. It is called decolonizing. We do this by replacing this colonial thinking with the traditional knowledge of our ancestors.

Our long-term vision is to unite and bring our people back together again, north and south, east and west. We can start at the centre where the sacred Pipe of unity is being held.

We need to affirm our nationhood. We need to join the spirit of our ancestors and together we will join to live our true nationhood as a People. There will be much ceremony, much celebrating, and much healing – lifting the spirit that we all need so badly. We will reach consensus on defined initiatives and actions that will rebuild our nations.

We become a unified voice to take direct action to implementing our nationhood without protest or violence, but in peace, affirming our acceptance to live our duties and responsibilities, beginning with ourselves as individuals, then our families, protecting our children with the greatest protection called love.

We can set up these schools to teach them the language and the laws of our People. We can take them to the land, and take them to the ceremonies of our Nations. We would support them in their rites of passage.

We can set up a school of ancestral knowledge complete with a curriculum designed by the knowledge keepers and the land-based teachers of our Nations – those that know the land, hunters, trappers, fishermen, gatherers of the foods and medicines.

We have to come to realize the values we are holding in our knowledge of spirit and the land. Our survival depends upon it. Our future rests in our own hands. Our own oppression continues simply because we have accepted it without any resistance. So we continue to feel victimized.

It is only through forgiveness that we can free ourselves.

Real change never begins at the top; it must be planted in the ground to rise to the change expected. The power is in the hands of the people, who ultimately create the change. The current institutions are not going to help us. They are not going to help us reclaim our nationhood. We need to do that ourselves.

At the same time, we need to find a way to establish our nationhood in balance with the secular world. We have to coexist. We need each other.

The thing is to believe in ourselves. Stop being afraid people are going to condemn us for who we are. As a people our greatest struggle is to believe in ourselves again. Belief begins with knowing our identity, knowing who we are. We have to have faith in ourselves to achieve our own dreams.

If we are even to get well as the people we begin with spirit. Spirit is best felt in ceremony. That is the reason why we all agreed the sacred fires be lit in our communities. The sacred fire represents a doorway to the spiritual world. It is the door we must enter to receive the guidance, the inspiration and the courage to do what we need to do, to restore our well-being as a

people. Ultimately it will be determined by going back to the land.

It is the youth that we must focus on, to give them the best tools to educate them on how to survive the change that is upon us.

We have to pull in our own teachers who carry the knowledge of ceremony, and the skills on how to survive on the land - the hunters, the trappers, fisherman, medicine pickers. How to process and preserve our foods. All the basics to survival.

We must prepare for the future with our youth. The youth today need a lot of help. They will not find that help in the current system that has failed us. We have to set the path, a trail led by spirit and supported by the love of the land.

Let us continue to work together and agree to set up an ancestral school of knowledge, based on our terms, our dreams, our knowledge. That to me is nationhood - taking responsibility for ourselves, living the original instructions our great Creator has bestowed upon us to love each other, to take care of the land and to be a voice of the land. Let us make this a priority to set up this school in our own places of learning, which are the lodges and the land.

The Turtle Lodge is offering to be one of those sites to initiate the process. As a people we are in a unique position because of our knowledge. We can help the rest of humanity, as we live the spirit of loving ourselves and following the legacy of our ancestors.

## MEDIA RELEASES



### Manitoba First Nations call on youth to seek a vision for the next generation

**June 25, 2018**

On June 27, young men from a number of Manitoba First Nations will gather at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng, Manitoba, to begin a spiritual journey that will lead them to Manitou Api, an Indigenous sacred petroform site at the heart of the continent. There, in response to a call made by elders and knowledge keepers from six Manitoba First Nations, the young men will fast, humbling themselves to receive a dream or vision to help guide the people into the next generation.

“Instead of focusing on protest, the Elders of our Nations are calling upon our Young People to go to the land, to fast and seek vision and direction for the people from the highest power of Spirit itself,” said Elders in a statement from Turtle Lodge, who initiated the call to the youth.

Manitoba First Nation knowledge keepers who made the call included Dave Courchene (Sagkeeng), Burma Bushie (Hollow Water), Gordon Walker (Norway House), Byron Beardy (Island Lake), Florence Paynter (Sandy Bay), Becky Cook (Misipawistik) and Ed Primrose (Nelson House).

The communities have been gathering at the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng and in Misipawistik Cree Nation a number of times over the past year to discuss Indigenous-led conservation and nationhood, in a process initiated by the Indigenous Leadership Initiative and partially sponsored by the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation. This initiative by the youth is completely led and orchestrated by the communities.

“I’m just happy to do this for the people, to help out,” said Roy Ettawacappo, 25, from Norway House, who wants to keep learning from the elders to help keep the teachings going.

Scott Paupanekis, 23, also from Norway House, is doing this first and foremost for his family. “I’m also honoured to be an example to people who are watching, who I might not even know are watching,” he added. “The language is what is missing in our



people and our communities,” said Cody Courchene, 24, from Sagkeeng, who just passed his one year anniversary of being alcohol-free. Cody wants to fast for the language, which he believes is needed to ensure the survival of the people.

At the Turtle Lodge the young men will receive guidance and direction through an inspirational address by the elders, go into a sweat lodge for purification and cleansing, and share in a traditional feast, their last meal before they begin a spiritual journey with no food and water for four days.

The young men will travel 100 km from the Turtle Lodge to the geographic centre of North America, entering into their ancestral sacred site of Manitou Api, located within Manitoba’s Whiteshell Provincial Park. Once they complete their fast, the youth will call on their elders to help interpret the dreams and visions they receive, and to support them as they put their dreams into positive action.

Elder Gordon Walker is already en route from Norway House, bringing four young men from his community who have committed to fast.

“I’m just thankful that there are young men that are still willing to sacrifice for the betterment of our people,” said Walker. “Aho!”

## Seeking direction from the heart of the land

**June 29, 2018**

On June 27, young men from a number of Manitoba First Nations began fasting with no food or water. With the blessing and sanction of their elders, and after being prepared through an ancient sweat lodge ceremony of purification and cleansing, they entered into the sacred site at Manitou Api on Wednesday. Located within the Whiteshell Provincial Park in Manitoba, and from whence the province gets its name, Manitou Api means “Where the Great Spirit Sat” in the Anishinabe language.

The young men have been at the sacred site now for two days and two nights, in the sweltering heat, in fasting lodges they constructed themselves out of willow poles. Their mission - to seek vision and direction for the people. Last night the lightning and thunder came, along with high winds, and the rain has been falling steadily this morning.

The vision quest has for thousands of years been the rite of passage to manhood for young Indigenous boys following their traditional way of life. Boys become men by being initiated by woman in a process that was started by their own mothers – and now, by going to the land, to Mother Earth, the first woman, the first mother, and the source of life for us all. There they reach out in humbleness to the Great Spirit - the highest power of all - to bring them a vision or dream that will help guide them; that will bring meaning and purpose to their life as men.

Without a vision a boy never enters manhood. He remains immature, uninitiated, without a vision. The elders say that many men today are still boys. They argue, lack value and reverence, and they

play with life. They are missing the deep-seated passion that drives a man to follow the responsibilities of fulfilling his purpose on Earth.

This vision quest is different. It is bigger than a vision quest for one man to know himself. It is for the nation – for all of us.

Inspired by a call made by the elders of their First Nations, these young men responded to the great challenge of seeking a way forward not just for themselves as individuals, but for all people. The old ones who have gone through this tell us that it is much harder to fast when you are doing it for your people; the struggle is greater, as you carry the burden of your people in the journey. It is not a mission for the faint of heart, and only the strong make it through.

These young men are the strong ones. They have come forward as our men leaders of tomorrow.

We are supporting them now through our thoughts and prayers, and preparing for their arrival on Sunday July 1, when they emerge from the sacred site at first light. They will journey first thing in the morning to the Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng First Nation, where they will enter back into the sweat lodge, and be given a special soup made from the heart of the moose.

All are welcome to join us in welcoming them back on Sunday morning at the Turtle Lodge, with a breakfast feast and ceremony of honour, to acknowledge them for their great sacrifice on all our behalf. All are invited to bring a dish to share for the morning feast, and any gifts for the young men.

We wait for them, humbled by their sacrifice, their act of service for all people. Their whole life up to this point has been in preparation for these four days, that will make all the difference.

## Three young men humble themselves for a vision for the people

**July 2, 2018**

Earlier this week, three young men answered the call made by Elders from six Manitoba First Nations. Their mission – to fast for four days at the sacred site of Manitou Api to seek direction on a way forward, on behalf of the people, from the Spirit and the land.

This mission also represented the beginning of their training to become true guardians of the Earth.

This act of seeking vision from the spirit and the land was part of the fulfilment of a prophecy of the First Peoples, that a small group of people would retrace the steps of their ancestors to seek knowledge and understanding of a good and peaceful way of life.

As they embarked on this spiritual journey, many people from across the country made efforts to support them. Many prayed for them. There were Chiefs and leaders who sent messages of support, and some sent donations that could help with their Feast. After preparation through the sweat lodge and being counselled by the Elders, the young men went into the sacred site, where they built a sacred fire, and each constructed his fasting lodge made up of eight willow poles. The lodges looked a little bit like sweat lodges.

When the three young men – Cody Courchene (Sagkeeng), Roy Ettawacappo (Norway House), Scott Paupanekis (Norway House) – had completed their mission, they came back into the sweat lodge for cleansing, thanksgiving and purification. They were then welcomed and honoured at the Turtle Lodge by the Elders, families, friends and

supporters. They were given the opportunity to share their experience.

They shared visions and dreams they had received, visions that belong to the people, to all of us. The Elders have begun to help interpret these visions.

### **Working Together**

Each of them recalled what the Elders had said to them before they began – that this was not going to be easy; that this was going to be one of the hardest things they would ever do, as they would be giving of themselves on behalf of all people. They each acknowledged how hard this had been for them – there were times they felt so weak that they thought they would not have the strength to make it.

By relying on each others' strengths they were able to encourage each other and make it through till the end. Through this experience the young men learned how to work together, to take care of the fire, to encourage each other, and to share what they were each going through.

Then they shared their dreams and experiences, what they had seen...

### **A Dream of People Gathering**

One shared that he had a dream of many people gathering: they were getting ready to go somewhere; they were packing their bags, and he kept asking, "Where are you going? Why is everybody packing?"

The young man heard the reply from one of the people that had gathered: "We are going back. We are going back to the sacred site." And then the dream ended.

The young man understood this to mean that was the direction that was coming from the Spirit: that the ancestors wanted the people to go back to their way of life, and go back to the sacred site. They understood that the sacred site called Manitou Api – 'Where the Creator Sat' – held the knowledge of a

way of life. According to the Creation story it was where the Great Spirit had given the teachings and the original instructions to the Original People of Turtle Island.

### **A Vision of the Ancestors**

Another young man saw an ancestor, a Grandfather, sitting there at the sacred fire, watching them. At first he thought it was one of the other fasters, and he began speaking to the figure as he put wood on the fire, but when he turned around, the person had disappeared. The ancestor appeared to be watching over them.

A little while later, in the mist in the fog in the east, two Grandmothers appeared. Once again, he was seeing again in vision the presence of the ancestors.

All of that represented the clear evidence of the presence of the ancestors at the sacred site.

### **A Vision of Life in the Land**

One of the fasters said he saw the land like he had never seen it before. All three of the young men expressed that they felt like they had become a part of the land, and that they were fully accepted by the animals and all of nature as being a part of the land.

### **A Vision of a Grandmother Giving them Water in Copper Cups**

One young man shared that he saw there were three copper cups laying in front of them, and all he could see was the wrinkled hand of an ancient Grandmother handing them those three copper cups filled with water. He could see the water glistening and dripping out of those copper cups.

Spiritually they were being given water in their time of thirst; somehow the Grandmothers came to give them water to quench their thirst.

The Elders are telling them they need to each get a copper cup to bring to ceremony each time there is a water ceremony for the



Grandmothers to give them water that has been lifted for blessing in ceremony. This direction also applies to all of us – that everyone should get a copper cup to drink water that has been blessed by the women.

**Becoming Part of the Land... The Appearance of a Beaver, Deer, Eagles, White Butterfly and Mosquitoes**

The young men had just finished smoking their Pipes, when suddenly a large muscular beaver appeared and walked right in front of them as if he didn't notice them. They could feel the strength of that beaver as he walked amongst them. Then these deer appeared, not afraid of their presence as humans, even though the young men were moving around. This is when they truly felt that they were a part of the land; the animal world was showing them they were not afraid of them but accepted them fully.

A white butterfly sat on the nose of one of the young men. Another young man was startled out of his sleep hearing a voice coming from a mosquito, that was physically buzzing by his ear. The voice said, "The fire is almost out!" Sure enough, there were only a couple of coals smouldering and he quickly put wood on the fire.

The first day three bald eagles appeared as if to acknowledge their arrival, and to encourage them. "There's us!", said one young man to the other two. "That's going to be us when we get out of here! We're going to feel really great," he said. "They're trying to show us we can be free like them, if we live our way of life."

On the final day eight eagles appeared in the sky. The Elders said that those eagles represented the eight paths, or eight tipis of life, found on the symbol of the eight-pointed star.

When they saw those eagles, they felt they were being told, "You are now going to be free, free to live!"

**A Dream of a Drunk Man and a Sober Man**

One young man had a dream of a drunk man and a sober man. The drunk man was fighting the sober man, accusing him of many things, while it was the drunk man who was producing many children, but not taking care of them.

The message was clear – that alcohol and drugs destroy and attack the people, and make them turn against each other.

In the dream, the sober man did not budge or get angry, even when the drunk man was yelling at him. That message was also clear – to take the higher road even when one is being criticized or unfairly persecuted; that higher road is one of peace and following the sacred laws of the people.

**A Dream of a Dark Tunnel**

Another dream a young man was being led into a dark tunnel; it scared him in his dream. He was doing everything he could in the tunnel to wake up, and he understood deeply that the people who were not walking that good way of life were living in the darkness.

He felt the meaning of the Anishinabe word, Ohnishkak... "we all need to wake up".

KIIZHAY MANITOU, KINANAKOMIN!

These words, "Kiizhay Manitou, Kinanakomin!" kept coming into the mind of one of the young men. They are translated from Anishinabemowin as "Great Spirit, the Greatest Being of Kindness, I feel the greatest fullness of appreciation for you!"

It was a message that kept coming, a reminder to all of us to live in gratitude.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE...  
MIITOOSH ZINI GAYWIN

"THE WAY OF THE POPLAR TREE...  
DANCING TO THE TREE OF LIFE IN  
CELEBRATION OF LIFE"

There were many other visions and dreams the young men experienced, which they shared with the Elders. The Elders tried to piece them together to bring a direction of action for the people. It was felt that the instructions came to go back to the sacred site of their people – that would be how the people would get out of that darkness.

It was then decided that through their journey, the visions, the dreams, the presence of the animals and the coming of the ancestors, that there had to be something that had to be done to support the call that was being made to the people to come back to the sacred site.

It was agreed together with the ones who had gone to seek the vision and the Elders who had supported them, that a special dance be called to celebrate life.

The Elder named the dance that will be done “Miitoosh zini gaywin” – which means “The way of the poplar tree – dancing to the tree of life in celebration of life” in the Ininimowin (Cree) language. The young men will help lead the gathering with the help of the Elders. They will call upon the many different dancers that participate in ceremony. A call will be made to the Sundancers, the Warrior Dancers, the Ghost Dancers, Grass Dancers, Jingle Dress Dancers, Traditional Dancers, the Windigokon Dancers, and other dancers who dance in ceremony.

The time that was selected was around the Full Moon in late September (September 22-25) in acknowledgment of the late Robin Greene telling the people that autumn is a time of thanksgiving and appreciation, the time that the ancestors are best able to support the people, and also a time for the people to dance in honour of the ancestors. The people have to celebrate and dance for life. All those dancers are there to reflect a way of life that has many beautiful colours, like the leaves of autumn – the Ghost Dance where we honour the ancestors, the Sundance where we to honour the Creator through the sun, the Warrior Dance where

we learn to become true leaders of the people, and the other Dances that will be explained at the gathering. All that will be shared but the call is being made.

The people will begin by dancing at the Turtle Lodge – Miitoosh zini gaywin – the way of the poplar tree – dancing to the tree of life, preparing for their journey to the sacred site by dancing at the Lodge. The dancers will be prepared to go and fulfill the dream of the young people to go back to the land. We will celebrate by bringing back the sacredness of the Dances the people were given.

After our preparation at the Turtle Lodge, we will take a full day to make a journey of a caravan to the sacred site of Manitou Api, where we will dance and feast the ancestors, confirming our return to our place of beginning.

### **Honouring the Young Men as Warriors**

The Elders have always had a way to honour those that have sacrificed themselves for the people. Each of the young men who had fasted was given a Warrior Staff, representing their leadership as they came forward to answer the call to sacrifice of themselves for the people. The Elders told them, “This is the beginning of your training to become spiritual leaders of the people.”

The Elders felt their spirit as young men being humble in asking for a vision. One of them had prayed for the language to be brought back to the people. The Elders knew that the sacred site holds the memory of the original language.

The young men were honoured with blankets, and ribbon shirts were given to them, in acknowledgment of their identity. They were also gifted with knives that would address physical survival, such as being able to skin a rabbit, moose, deer, and other animals needed for our survival.

They were given painted shields, which represented the spiritual protection that they would receive from the Grandfathers. They were told those shields would only work when

they reflected kindness for all of life. The shields would not work if they were angry or used force. It would be their acts of kindness and humbleness that would activate those shields to protect them.

Through a ceremony done by the Elders, they also received the knowledge of the Warrior that they are – Roy Ettawacappo became a Brown Buffalo Warrior, Scott Paupanekis a Black Bear Warrior and Cody Courchene a White Spotted Horse Warrior. They will come dressed like those Warriors at the dance that they will help lead in September with the help of the Elders.

The first thing they ate at their Feast on July 1 was a special soup prepared from the moose heart and the moose tongue. They would become like the spirit of the moose on

the land by eating this medicine, shared the Elders. The moose would recognize them as their brothers. They must teach the people how to show respect for the animals that give their life to the people.

Finally the Elders asked the three young men to come to a special national gathering of Elders and Knowledge Keepers called Zuguswediwin – A Lifting of the Pipe – taking place July 19-22 at the Turtle Lodge – to share with the people what they were told. They all agreed that they would be there.

And so it begins with the next generation taking up their responsibilities of our beautiful way of life.

Kiizhay Manitou, Kinanakomin!



# KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS



## **Co-Chair**

**Nii Gaani Aki Inini (Leading Earth Man) – Dave Courchene**

Sagkeeng Anicinabe Nation  
Spiritual Advisor, Indigenous Leadership Initiative

## **Co-Chair**

**Ovide Mercredi**

Misipawistik Cree Nation  
Senior Advisor, Indigenous Leadership Initiative

**Martina Fisher**

Bloodvein First Nation (Anishinabe)

**John Young**

Bloodvein First Nation (Anishinabe)

**William Young**

Bloodvein First Nation (Anishinabe)

**Burma Bushie**

Hollow Water First Nation (Anishinabe)

**Norbert Hardisty**

Hollow Water First Nation (Anishinabe)

**Byron Beardy**

Island Lake First Nation (Oji-Cree)

**Mary Maytwayshing**

Lake Manitoba First Nation

**Stella Neff**

Misipawistik Cree Nation

**Heidi Cook, Councillor**

Misipawistik Cree Nation

**Becky Cook**

Misipawistik Cree Nation

**Jimmy Hunter Spence**

Nisichawayasikh (Nelson House) Cree Nation

**Ed Primrose**

Nisichawayasikh Cree Nation

**Ron Spence, Councillor**

Nisichawayasikh Cree Nation

**Florence Paynter**

Sandy Bay First Nation (Anishinabe)

**Gordon Walker**

Kinosao Sipi (Norway House) Cree Nation

**Loretta Bayer, Councillor**

Kinosao Sipi (Norway House) Cree Nation



This summary report was prepared by Sabina Ijaz, Turtle Lodge, for the International Boreal Conservation Campaign and Indigenous Leadership Initiative.  
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INTERNATIONAL  
**BOREAL**  
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LA CAMPAGNE  
INTERNATIONALE  
— POUR LA —  
CONSERVATION  
**BOREALE**



Mikinaᓂ Kinamakamik  
**TURTLE LODGE**  
Central House of Knowledge

**INDIGENOUS  
LEADERSHIP  
INITIATIVE**







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LA CAMPAGNE  
INTERNATIONALE  
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Mikinak Kinamakamik  
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