



EIPCCP

ENGAGEMENT  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

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# NEWSLETTER

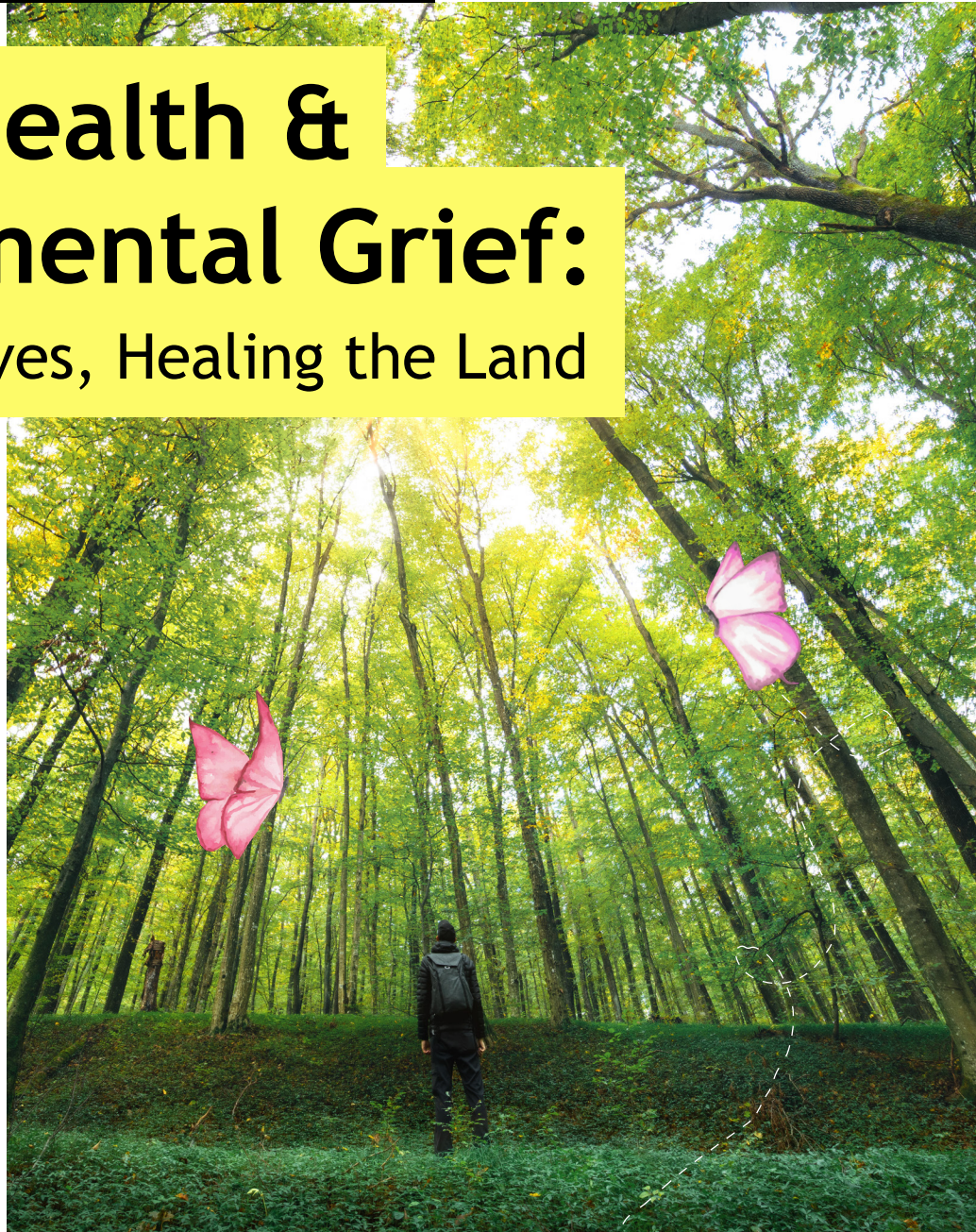
ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, CONSERVATION, AND BIODIVERSITY NEWSLETTER

## Mental Health & Environmental Grief: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Land

For Indigenous women and Two-Spirit peoples, the land is more than just a place we live—it is a relative, a teacher, and a healer. When the land is hurting, we feel it too. Whether through slow-onset changes like shifting animal populations or rapid climate disasters like wildfires and floods, our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being [is deeply connected](#) to the health of our homelands.

But even without direct exposure, just hearing about these events—through news or social media—can bring stress, grief, and anxiety. These emotions are natural responses to the changes we are witnessing and recognizing them is the first step toward healing.

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Man looking up at the sunlight in a spring forest, Getty Photos





# The Rise of Ecological Grief & Anxiety

Hundreds of studies have [linked](#) ecological hazards with PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Many Indigenous peoples experience heightened ecological grief because our identities, cultures, and ways of living are interwoven with the land. As landscapes change and species disappear, we mourn the physical loss and the cultural and spiritual connections they carry.

## ECOLOGICAL ANXIETY (ECO-ANXIETY):

Feelings of extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change.

## ECOLOGICAL GRIEF (ECO-GRIEF):

Mourning the loss of ecosystems, landscapes, species, and ways of life due to climate change.



*Top: A female polar bear sits in a snow bank with her two cubs. Manitoba, Canada, Getty Photos.*

*Bottom: A Polar bear surrounded by arctic wilderness, Getty Photos.*

## What does eco-anxiety and eco-grief look like?

- Obsessive thoughts about climate change.
- Existential dread and uncertainty about the future.
- Guilt over not doing enough.
- Anger and frustration toward government inaction.
- Mourning lost landscapes, animals, and traditional practices.
- Feelings of sadness, melancholy, or solastalgia (a deep sense of loss tied to environmental change).

“Many Indigenous peoples experience much more ecological grief because of physical, cultural, and social losses, which arise from a changing environment.”

[Panu Pihkala, PHD.](#)

Those most closely connected to the land—harvesters, hunters, fishers, and knowledge keepers—are often the [most affected](#). Even first responders and land defenders witnessing environmental destruction firsthand carry this weight.







A woman stands in a sunlit forest, eyes closed in serenity. Getty Photos.

## Nature as Kin: Healing with the Land

Indigenous knowledge has long recognized the land as a source of healing. Across cultures, traditional practices [emphasize](#) the power of nature to restore balance, just as the land itself regenerates after a fire or storm.

One practice that has gained recognition worldwide is [Forest Bathing](#) or the intentional act of immersing oneself in nature through all the senses. Indigenous Peoples have always understood the healing power of being on the land, and now scientific research backs it up:

- Reduces stress (lowers cortisol levels).
- Decreases blood pressure and heart rate.
- Boosts the immune system.
- Increases feelings of calm and well-being.
- Helps manage depression, anger, and anxiety.



Fields like Health Geography and Ecopsychology explore the deep links between mental health and nature. Indigenous knowledge systems have always held this wisdom, seeing land as kin and healing as reciprocal—we care for the land, and the land cares for us.





# Moving Forward: Individual and Collective Action

Healing eco-anxiety and grief is not just about personal coping—it's about community, connection, and action.

## What can we do?

- Strengthen community ties. Talk with others who share your concerns. Join online groups and community circles or gather with kin to share stories and support.
- Practice land-based healing. Spend time on the land, whether that's walking in the bush, touching the water, or sitting with a tree. If accessible, seek opportunities to reconnect with traditional teachings and ceremonies.
- Take action where you can. Engage in land-based practices, advocacy, restoration efforts, and climate-conscious initiatives that feel right to you. Even small steps matter.
- Seek culturally relevant support. Look for Indigenous-led mental health resources or climate-conscious therapists. Spaces that honour Indigenous ways of knowing can offer healing perspectives.



These strategies, and more, can [help us cope](#) with eco-anxiety and eco-grief in a way that is productive for our own healing while simultaneously protecting the land.

Top: A woman and a girl plant a tree together in a forest, Unsplash.

Bottom: A smiling volunteer leads a group discussion outdoors with teammates, Getty Photos.





## A Call for Systemic Change

On a larger scale, we need action from policymakers, health professionals, and educators to [address eco-anxiety and grief](#). Solutions can include:

- Training health professionals on eco-anxiety and land-based healing approaches.
- Supporting Indigenous-led climate solutions and land restoration projects.
- Urban tree planting, land-based education, and ensuring access to green spaces.
- Addressing disparities in mental health care, particularly for those most impacted by climate change.



Top: Two Indigenous dancers in traditional regalia perform at an outdoor event, Getty Photos.

Bottom: A pair of hands gently cradling soil, Unsplash.



A metal bridge leads into a lush, green forest, Unsplash.







# You Are Not Alone

Eco-anxiety and ecological grief are signs of deep love and connection to the land. They remind us of our responsibilities as caretakers and our ability to create change. While these emotions can be heavy, they can also fuel action, resilience, and healing.



For more resources, visit the [Climate Psychology Alliance North America website](#).

Together, we can care for the land and each other—just as our ancestors have always done.

*Top: Two Indigenous women in traditional attire stand at the edge of a lake, Getty Photos.*

*Bottom: A young Indigenous dancer in colorful traditional clothing performs at a cultural event, Getty Photos.*