



NEWSLETTER

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, CONSERVATION, AND BIODIVERSITY NEWSLETTER

Bridging Global and Local

COP 16 and the First Annual Indigenous Forestry Conference

**Aanii, Kwey, Tansi, Tunngasugitti,
Hello, Bonjour,**

My name is Aiyana Louis, I am an Afro-Indigenous woman of the Anishinaabe nation and the Project Lead for Engaging Indigenous Peoples in Climate Change Policy at NWAC. These newsletters share news, resources, and stories to encourage Indigenous participation in national climate dialogue, focusing on Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs). In this issue, we'll look into NWAC's engagement with global and local conservation & biodiversity-centered conferences.

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Author Aiyana Louis pictured beside COP 16 welcome sign in Cali, Colombia



This fall, I attended two significant conferences that, though geographically distant, shared a common theme: the intersection of environmental policy, Indigenous rights, and sustainable futures.

In September, I travelled to British Columbia for the Indigenous Forestry Conference.

In October, I was in Cali, Colombia, for the Sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16).

These events highlighted the global dialogue on climate change and Indigenous communities' critical role in environmental stewardship.



Lush landscape on Vancouver Island.

Indigenous Forestry Conference - British Columbia



Wood carving of an eagle at the Malahat Skywalk on Vancouver Island, BC.

[The First Annual Indigenous Forestry Conference](#) brought together community leaders, forestry experts, and policymakers to discuss sustainable and inclusive forest management and conservation, focusing on integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with modern forestry practices. Indigenous communities from the region shared how their cultural histories and ancestral wisdom shape their resource stewardship, advocating for strategies that prioritize environmental health and community well-being. A central discussion was about land rights and the pressures of corporate development.



Old growth forest trees on Vancouver Island.

Fostering Meaningful Collaboration

A key theme was fostering meaningful collaborations with local Indigenous communities. Representatives from the surrounding First Nations emphasized the need for strategic partnerships and economic empowerment to bridge gaps in the forestry sector. They focused on [including Indigenous communities in decision-making processes](#) and collaborating with governments and industries to solve sector challenges.

Emerging issues included gaps in knowledge around carbon capture and sustainable forestry practices. The conference was largely male dominated, reflecting broader trends in the forestry industry. I saw the potential for NWAC to help bridge gaps in this sector for the communities we represent.

Overall, the experience was enriching, offering valuable networking opportunities and sparking ideas for future collaboration for NWAC within the forestry sector toward a more inclusive and sustainable industry.



COP 16 - Cali, Colombia

In October, I attended [COP 16 in Cali, Colombia](#), along with my colleague Hannah Patrie, project lead for the [Water Carriers Project](#) also at NWAC. This conference gathered global leaders to discuss their countries' progress with implementing the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework, along with establishing future steps for preserving biodiversity. Hannah and I attended a section called The People's Cop. The People's COP carried a vibrant atmosphere where thousands of peoples celebrated Colombian culture and biodiversity through music, art, and empowering discussions.



A workshop we attended moved us deeply when women speakers broke into a powerful song, creating a spirit of unity.

This moment encapsulated COP 16's essence: community, culture, and connection through music, dance, and emotion.

The public art exhibits were also memorable, blending science and visual storytelling to communicate complex environmental issues. One mural, created by a female artist, evolved throughout the week, symbolizing the interconnectedness between nature, culture, and climate. Another striking installation, the "animal cemetery," displayed extinct species from the region on hexagonal "tombstones," connected like a hive.

Top: Art installation at The People's Cop displaying a 'cemetery' of species who have gone extinct.

Left: Local woman painting a mural of different tropical animals during The People's COP.





While I did not attend the official delegates zone, I stayed informed about the negotiations. After 12 days of discussions, COP 16 concluded with significant achievements for Indigenous peoples.

It marked the **first-ever agreement recognizing Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent as vital stewards in biodiversity conservation.** This historic decision solidified their central role in global conservation efforts.

A breakthrough was creating a subsidiary body under article **8J of the Convention, directly involving Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity decisions.**

This body mandates signatory countries to respect, preserve, and maintain Indigenous and local communities' traditional knowledge and practices essential for sustainable biodiversity conservation.

Although the negotiations also focused on the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), key decisions on biodiversity monitoring and new funding stalled.

Many countries missed deadlines to update biodiversity plans, with these issues slated for further discussion in upcoming intersessional meetings.



Top: Art installation at The People's COP of plastic bottle in the shape of flowers.

Bottom: Beautiful mural painting of an Indigenous Colombian woman.





Connecting Conferences

Despite their different contexts, the Indigenous Forestry Conference and COP 16 underscored the inseparable link between environmental sustainability and Indigenous rights. Both events highlighted the urgent need for policy changes that recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge and empower communities to lead in shaping their environmental futures.

At the Indigenous Forestry Conference, the theme of

collaboration was prominent, with the growing global recognition of Indigenous-led conservation efforts, such as [Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas \(IPCAs\)](#). Both conferences emphasized the integration of TEK with modern practices as essential for effective climate action and biodiversity conservation.

These experiences have deepened NWAC's commitment to supporting Indigenous communities in protecting

the planet while amplifying the importance of fostering collaborations across cultures and communities.

I am hopeful that Indigenous involvement will continue to grow in global policy discussions, paving the way for a more inclusive and practical approach to environmental challenges faced by us all.

Large Colombian tree.



We encourage readers to explore Indigenous-led conservation initiatives and consider how we can all contribute to building a more sustainable, equitable future for our planet.

Want to get more engaged? Visit our [Biodiversity & Climate Change Toolkit](#) here! Stay tuned for new updates!

Left: Carpets resembling the land and waters, handmade by a local Colombian couple.

Bottom: Market at The People's COP.

