



e-Newsletter



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE,
CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY

THIS ISSUE THEMES:



Women as Water Carriers in Indigenous Culture



NWAC's Water Carriers Project to empower Indigenous Women

This newsletter helps shine a light on the role of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals as Water Carriers. The articles in this issue depict a set of rich narratives that emerged from a series of Sharing Circles across 13 Canadian provinces and territories. The Sharing Circles were conducted as part of the engagement process for the Water Carriers Project.

“Water is the most life-sustaining gift on Mother Earth and is the interconnection among all living beings. Water sustains us, flows between us, within us, and replenishes us. Water is the blood of Mother Earth and, as such, cleanses not only herself, but all living things. Water comes in many forms, and all are needed for the health of Mother Earth and for our health.

— ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



WATER CARRIERS PROJECT PHASE 2:

The Water Carriers Project is intended to empower the voices of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals in discourses around water governance, especially, their role as the rightful protectors of Indigenous rights to potable and navigable¹ waters.

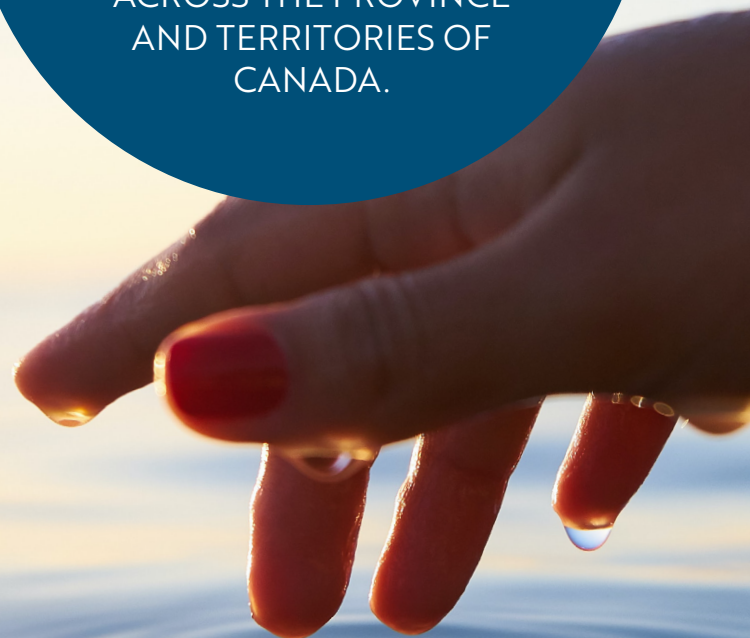
Phase 1 of the Water Carriers Project focused on obtaining knowledge from Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals regarding the importance of water in Indigenous culture. Phase 1 also focused on what it means to be a water carrier and how water is viewed through an Indigenous lens. The results of this Phase 1 can be found at watercarriersnwac.ca.

Phase Two of the Water Carriers Project focuses on expanding upon the perspectives of Indigenous women across the province and territories of Canada. The goal is to gain a better understanding of their role as water carriers through conversations about their experiences around traditional water teachings, water, and environmental stewardship and the impacts of climate change on water. These conversations will lead to recommendations for conservations and protection of water and the environment.

Knowledge from the Sharing Circles will be shared with a wider audience of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals so that it can be integrated into everyday conversations around water governance.

“ PHASE TWO OF THE WATER CARRIERS PROJECT

FOCUSES ON EXPANDING
UPON THE PERSPECTIVES
OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN
ACROSS THE PROVINCE
AND TERRITORIES OF
CANADA.



¹ **"Potable water"** is water that is safe to drink. Water is safe to drink when it meets the health-based guidelines set out in Health Canada's document Guidelines for Canadians Drinking Water Quality."

"Navigable water" includes a canal and any other body of water created or altered as a result of the construction of any work and are those waterways where the public has a right to navigate the water as a highway."



WOMEN AS WATER CARRIERS IN INDIGENOUS CULTURE

Water is of significance and cultural importance to Indigenous communities across Canada. Water is not only a source of income, transport, and food, it is also of cultural and spiritual importance².

Indigenous women and two-spirited persons are known to have a deeper and unique connection to water. Like earth, women have the ability to nurture and provide life through their womb and water and therefore are the ones with the closest connection to mother Earth³.

These connections were clearly evident in the contributions of the participants in our Sharing Circle Sessions:

"Water is the lifeblood of the land and the Indigenous peoples and cultures that rely upon it"

- NORTHWEST TERRITORIES SHARING CIRCLE.

"Water is sacred, it gives life. Our culture has taught us to respect water and take care of it, especially as women who really [participate in] activities revolving around water."

- NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR SESSION.

"As a water carrier, you are protector of water, keeper of knowledge, and have a responsibility to protect bodies of water. Especially as women, we have a deep spiritual relationship to water"

- NOVA SCOTIA SESSION.

The sentiments expressed by our Nova Scotia participants point to the essential duty of the Water Carrier to protect, respect and honour water. Expressing these emotions through water songs, ceremonies and prayer allows for the continuation of life. Water carriers also protect their water through cleansing rituals, praying and, in the modern world, through advocacy. Women also have an essential role as water carriers to share and pass down the traditional knowledge and teachings to their community and the younger generations so that they have the tools to protect the water³. The overwhelming sentiment of participants in our Sharing Circles from coast to coast is the essential duty of the Water Carrier to teach and share knowledge with their community on how they can collectively and safely protect and conserve waters.



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WATER IS WHAT SUSTAINS US. WATER IS WHAT BRINGS US INTO THIS WORLD, AND WATER IS WHAT KEEPS US IN THIS PHYSICAL WORLD. AND SO IT'S OUR LIFE.

JAN LONGBOAT

² [From Honouring Water](#), Angie Turner, Assembly of First Nations, 2020

³ [From Anderson, Kim](#). Aboriginal Women, Water and Health: Reflections from Eleven First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Grandmothers. Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, Oct. 2010.



HOW WOMEN AND 2SLGBTQQIA+ ARE AFFECTED BY WATER AND WATER GOVERNANCE ISSUES.

Water insecurity can have disastrous impacts on the most vulnerable population in any community. Women are often among this vulnerable group.

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GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESSES, SKIN DISEASES AND DEHYDRATION ARE A FEW OF THE ISSUES THAT CAN BE FACED BY INDIGENOUS WOMEN DUE TO WATER INSECURITY.

Indigenous women in both traditional roles and in roles as Water Carriers are often the first to be affected by water related issues that may arise in the household⁴. These issues may affect the social and economic wellbeing of the household, including access to safe potable water. Gastrointestinal illnesses, skin diseases and dehydration are a few of the issues that can be faced by Indigenous women due to water insecurity in the household⁵. Additionally, resources like food and shelter are disproportionately affected by climate change, which can further stress the household and families⁴. Climate stressors such as heat waves, natural disasters, and unclean energy can lead to a higher mortality rate among women⁶.



Stress from the inability to provide water for their families, and diminishing sources of spiritual healing can collectively worsen mental health for Indigenous women as well. Floods and droughts may also affect water availability. Responding to

concerns around water requires that Indigenous women have a seat at the table where decisions are made. However, despite being one of the groups most vulnerable to water insecurity, women have been largely excluded from water governance.

⁴ From [ECCCO, and NWAC](#). "Toolkit – Impact of Climate Change on Indigenous Women, Girls, Gender-Diverse, and Two-Spirit People." ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE OFFICE (ECCCO), 2022

⁵ From [Hanrahan, Maura, and Nicholas Mercer](#). "Gender and Water Insecurity in a Subarctic Indigenous Community." Wiley Online Library, Dec. 2018, .

⁶ [Dunne, Daisy](#). "Mapped: How Climate Change Disproportionately Affects Women's Health." Carbon Brief, 4 Jan. 2022



Hence: ***“There should be a platform created for our women to have a place to create awareness and increase involvement in issues that are impacting our waters”***

- New Brunswick Session

Indigenous women also need to be taken seriously with water related concerns. However, as one attendee shared, this isn't always the case:

“It seems as Indigenous people, whenever we voice our concerns we are treated like: “There’s those people getting rowdy about something.” It’s not like people actually hear our voices, because we have so many things to talk about. It’s like we are never going to be heard.”

- British Columbia Session

Although promises have been made by the Government of Canada, large scale removal of water advisories and provision of water to all native communities has not been achieved **(Taylor, 2022)**. To address these issues, the voices of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people need to be included in water governance. A stronger voice for Indigenous women and gender diverse people in academia and governance will provide opportunities for inclusion of their opinions and traditional knowledge that has been passed onto women for generations.





HOW INDIGENOUS WOMEN CAN LEAD WATER GOVERNANCE AS WATER CARRIERS

Resources:



[The Right to Water Nacosar and Indigenous Women](#)

Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010.

Water rights are necessary to the survival of our families, communities, cultures, languages – our space and place in the world, sacred and ordinary. We cannot sever the linkages that exist for Aboriginal Peoples between the natural environment, culture, legal orders, language, livelihood and life-ways. When we think of the complex web that ties us in so many different ways to water, we must ...



[Revitalizing Indigenous Women's Water Governance Roles](#)

Patricia Hania, June 17, 2019.

In the Canadian mining sector, the use of an impact and benefit agreement (IBA) is the dominant legal instrument that structures the legal relationship between a First Nation and a proponent. However, barriers to Indigenous women's participation in IBA law-making exist, which raises the question: How can IBA law-making ...



[Women Can Lead to a Water Secure World](#)

Water Canada, By Zafar Adeel. March 22, 2018.

More than 200 million women and girls walk over 30 minutes every day to fetch water for use by their families. While doing so, they are unable to engage in other productive enterprise; and girls are unable to attend school. Not having access to safe water and sanitation is a hefty burden. Women face health challenges related to unsafe water and inadequate sanitation, including ...



[Indigenous Women Participating in Water Management in Panama](#)

Sustainable Development Goals Fund (SDGF), United Nations Development Program

The intervention aimed to guarantee the provision and access to water and sanitation services for the most excluded populations in Ngäbe Buglé, giving men, women, girls and boys in the communities the opportunity to improve their living conditions and quality of life. On the one hand, it aimed to develop effective and democratic governance surrounding water, through training and skills development as a means of achieving more civil society participation in water management ...



COLLABORATING WITH INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA: How NWAC Is Trying to empower Indigenous Women through the Water Carriers Project.

As of November 2022, there are 31 long term drinking water advisories in effect in over 27 Indigenous communities on or off reserve. Similarly, over 28 Indigenous communities are under short-term drinking water advisories⁷.

Water insecurity might also be associated with some of the adverse health problems and socioeconomic disparities present in these communities as limited access to drinking water results in consumption of bottled water and sugar-sweetened beverages⁸. Contamination of water has been caused by improper infrastructural practices or spillages.

Through the Water Carriers Project, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) together in partnership with Indigenous Services Canada, hopes to empower the voices of Indigenous women from various communities and regions across Canada. Presenting the voices of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals on a national and regional scale will help push their agendas and issues to government

entities. The information gathered during the Water Carrier project can be used to establish better structures for the inclusion of Indigenous people in water management in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Communicating information on women's roles as Water Carriers in their community will allow for the sharing of traditional knowledge, encouraging more women to stand-up and advocate for their inclusion in decision making around water management. This could help to reduce inequalities in socio-economic and political structures overtime. Supporting Indigenous women in the protection of their waters through advocacy and knowledge-sharing is an important start to a life-time process of sustainable water governance.



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PRESENTING THE VOICES

OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN
AND 2SLGBTQQIA+
INDIVIDUALS ON
A NATIONAL AND
REGIONAL SCALE.





⁷ [Government of Canada; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.](#) "Ending Long-Term Drinking Water Advisories." Government of Canada; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 17 Oct. 2022


⁸ [Fehring, et al.](#) "Supporting Healthy Drink Choices in Remote ... - Wiley Online Library." Wiley Online Library, Oct. 2019




Resources on Impact of Climate Change on Indigenous Communities and Women:

 **Literature Review of Gender Differentiated Impacts of Climate Change.**
Goh, A.H.X. A literature review of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change on women's and men's assets and well-being in developing countries. CAPRI Working Paper No. 106. Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute.

 **Toolkit- Impacts of Climate Change on Indigenous Women, Girls, Gender-Diverse, and Two Spirit People.**
NWAC & ECCO. (2020). Toolkit - Impact of Climate Change on Indigenous Women, Girls, Gender-Diverse, and Two-Spirit People. Quebec; Native Women's Association of Canada.

 **Aboriginal Women, Water and Health: Reflections from Eleven First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Grandmothers.**
Kim Anderson, Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, October 2010.

 **Map of current Long-Term Drinking Water Advisories across Canada.**
Government of Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Water in First Nations Communities.

 **Story map of the Water Crisis in Canada's First Nations Communities.**
Carina Xue Luo, University of Windsor. November 14, 2021.

 **Indigenous communities to be hit with 'ecological grief, loss of land and traditional knowledge' because of climate crisis.**
Mark Blackburn, APTN National News, February 11, 2022.



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