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THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

KCI-NIWESQ

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

VOL 16

THE ENVIRONMENT

critical issues facing Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people

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A MESSAGE FROM NWAC'S CEO

LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D. | CEO
NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

WELCOME TO THE 16TH EDITION OF KCI-NIWESQ, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA.

In this edition we take a deeper look at an issue that is critical to the Indigenous women and Two-Spirit, transgender and gender-diverse people who are served by our organization.

To many Canadians, the impact of climate change and environmental degradation is a debate that happens in the media or at national and international fora. Sometimes its effects hit them more directly, as the frequency of hurricanes, wildfires, and droughts increases. But, rarely (yet) is it a matter of life and death.

For the Indigenous people who live close to the land, however, this is an existential crisis. Food sources like caribou and seal are not where they used to be—or can no longer be reached as easily as they could in past years. Traditional medicines are becoming scarce. We see the world around us changing in ways our ancestors could not have contemplated.

Indigenous women have insight into these problems. We have ideas about steps that must be taken to find solutions. We are demanding to be part of the conversation.

In this issue, we tell you what happened 22 years ago when Carol McBride, who is now NWAC's President, demanded that the people of her region be part of the conversation around turning a local mine into a dump for Toronto's garbage.

We hear from Angela MacKinnon, a community engagement officer with Project Forest, who tells us how the Indigenous-based reintroduction of lost species is improving prospects for land-based living.

You will find out what Lisa Smith, NWAC's own senior director of governance, international and parliamentary relations, hoped to achieve when she and Madeleine Redfern, the President of NWAC's Nunavut chapter, attended the next world conference on climate change in Egypt.

We talk to the young Indigenous Guardians working out of Chapleau, Ontario, about the work they are doing to conserve and protect their lands and to reconnect with the Traditional Knowledge of their Elders.

Andrea Reid, a member of Nisga'a Nation and the principal investigator at the University of British Columbia's Centre for Indigenous Fisheries, tells us the salmon are our relatives and other things she has learned from Knowledge Keepers in 18 communities of salmon people along the west coast.

And we meet Marina Best, a Métis environmental and climate change Knowledge Keeper, who explains that, to achieve balanced environmental conservation and reconciliation, both Western science and Indigenous Knowledge need to agree to start fresh, on equal grounds.

So, thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the 16th edition of *Kci-Niwesq*. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at reception@nwac.ca.

MIIGWETCH.

MONTHLY MAGAZINE TO TELL OUR STORIES

The Guardians:

PROTECTING CULTURE THROUGH PROTECTING THE WATERS AND FORESTS

Young Indigenous people across Canada are becoming stewards of their lands through a Guardians program that is as much about protecting culture as it is about teaching the youth how to protect waters and forests.

One of the more recently created Indigenous Guardians programs is operating in Chapleau in Northern Ontario.

The area is the homeland of Chapleau Cree First Nation, Missanabie Cree First Nation, and Brunswick House First Nation. It encompasses a key land base known as the Chapleau Crown Game Preserve, one of the largest wildlife preserves in the world.

But it is also a place that survives economically off resource extraction, including large amounts of forestry.

Pictured: **The Guardians cataloguing vegetation,** *2022*

So, the three First Nations formed a company called Wahkohtowin Development GP Inc. to secure a share of the wealth and to ensure sustainable harvests by including the objectives of the First Nations in any forest management planning.

Three years ago, Wahkohtowin tasked David Flood, a member of Matachewan First Nation and the company's general manager, with giving young Indigenous people from the Chapleau area the opportunity to reconnect with their land in ways that rekindle the cultural and spiritual relationship needed to support the Natural Law knowledge system.

The Indigenous Guardians program was the natural fit. Its goal is to help Indigenous youth feel more aware of who they are, and to help them understand that they are responsible for their homeland. It's intended to teach them they each have gifts that must be strengthened and enriched and then brought back to their communities or the region.

"Our First Nations have been here since time immemorial and will be here for many generations to come," says Mr. Flood. "As our nations heal, the Guardians are well placed to help lead self-determination and self-sufficiency."

Pictured: **The Guardians Amberley Quakegesic and a team of Guardians harvesting bark,** *2022*

In 2015, he met with Amberly Quakegesic, a member of Brunswick House First Nation who was working summers at the Ministry of Natural Resources as she completed a number of degrees. He explained his plans for an Indigenous Guardians program.

"It was kind of going over my head," says Ms. Quakegesic. "But he shared this huge vision about youth and land and sovereignty."

Mr. Flood hired her the next summer to be the first Indigenous Guardian working for Wahkohtowin. The following year, there were two Guardians, Ms. Quakegesic and Jacy Jolivet.

They tapped birch for syrup, learned some of the basics of building a canoe, planted trees, and were taught other aspects of forest management from an Indigenous perspective.

Different Guardians programs focus on different issues, depending on the regions in which they operate. Around Chapleau, their emphasis is on forestry—"how it's done today, how Indigenous people used to do it, and how it can be done better," says Ms. Quakegesic. They are helping with moose recovery through the retention of late winter moose habitat and they are working with industry to find alternative methods to herbicide spraying.

In fact, the three First Nations that own Wahkohtowin recently launched a lawsuit against the Province of Ontario, premised on what they describe as 100 years of negative and cumulative impacts of forestry, including the spraying of the herbicide glyphosate, which is causing irreversible damage to the boreal forest.

"Whenever we do projects, we reach out to the three owner First Nations communities," says Ms. Quakegesic. "We have a couple of Elders from each community that we've become friends with and who have kind of joined the Wahkohtowin family. They'll put on ceremony whenever we request their support for it or they'll come in to share knowledge. And we've gone out to harvest medicines with Elders. They show us how to look at the forest differently."

For instance, she says, a forester might look at a tamarack tree, which is not good for lumber, and see it as a problem. But an Indigenous person would see that tree for the medicine that is in the bark or for its potential as material for crafts. Tamaracks can be used to create tamarack geese, which are great duck decoys.

"Diversifying the use of the forests and understanding the broader benefits of ecosystem services is so important for our Guardians to see, and witness, to be part of the solution going forward as we face climate change and its impacts," says Mr. Flood.

One of the projects that helps connect the young Guardians to the land and their culture is canoe building. This year, the group constructed its second canoe.

The first was built two years ago when Chuck Commanda, a master canoe builder, arrived to show them how it's done. Following his instructions, Ms. Quakegesic, Mr. Flood, and Ms. Jolivet harvested cedar, birch bark, spruce roots, and white spruce pitch. Mr. Commanda brought ironwood from the south. Then they built the canoe using those natural materials.

This past summer, they were able to do more on their own, though they still needed Mr. Commanda's help. And he will probably be called to assist again next year.

But the Guardians' expertise in canoe building is growing so that, eventually, they will be able to build canoes on their own and keep the tradition alive, says Ms. Quakegesic.

The Guardians program is really about raising awareness, she says. It's about opening the eyes of Indigenous youth to the career possibilities that await them when they finish school.

"The big dream is to build capacity and build skills," says Ms. Quakegesic. "It's to send youth away to school, but then to have them come back and serve their community, and to protect their land."

"WHENEVER WE DO PROJECTS, WE REACH OUT TO THE THREE OWNER FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES… TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE, TO HARVEST MEDICINES WITH ELDERS, TO SHOW US HOW TO LOOK AT THE FOREST DIFFERENTLY."

- AMBERLY QUAKEGESIC

Pictured: **Amberley Quakegesic (far right) with a group of Guardians building a canoe with the material they harvested**

Pictured: **Madeleine Redfern (far left), Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault, and Lisa. J Smith.**

COP27

THE VALUE OF THE INDIGENOUS WOMAN'S VOICE AT COP27

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was on hand to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard, and Indigenous rights are respected, when the world's environmental experts met in November to resume discussions about averting climate disaster.

Egypt hosted the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP27. The delegates, including those from Canada, were required to assess the past year's progress (or lack thereof) in combatting global warming, and to establish obligations going forward for reducing greenhouse gas emissions

NWAC was asked to join the Canadian delegation and nominated two Inuit lawyers to be our representatives.

Madeleine Redfern, an Inuk lawyer, is the President of the Nunavut Inuit Women's Association, NWAC's local Nunavut chapter. Lisa J. Smith, an Inuit lawyer and human rights expert from Newfoundland and Labrador, is NWAC's senior director of governance, international and parliamentary relations.

"Indigenous women's leadership is necessary in this fight. So, it was important, it was vital, for our voices to be at these tables," Ms. Smith said in a recent interview.

Ms. Smith and Ms. Redfern monitored negotiations to ensure they adhere to the tenets of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and other human rights declarations, and that the negotiations reflect the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples.

"I was in the room, eyes and ears, to make sure that our inherent rights, our minimum human rights, which are entrenched in UNDRIP, were upheld in every single negotiation," she says. "I was akin to a lighthouse keeper, to ensure that discussions were guided in a way that brought light and truth to every single discussion."

Pictured: **Lisa J. Smith (left) and Madeleine Redfern**

NWAC
GOES TO COP

"I WAS IN THE ROOM, EYES AND EARS, TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR INHERENT RIGHTS, OUR MINIMUM HUMAN RIGHTS, WHICH ARE ENTRENCHED IN UNDRIP, WERE UPHELD IN EVERY SINGLE NEGOTIATION. I WAS AKIN TO A LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER, TO ENSURE THAT DISCUSSIONS WERE GUIDED IN A WAY THAT BROUGHT LIGHT AND TRUTH TO EVERY SINGLE DISCUSSION."

- LISA SMITH

Indigenous perspectives are often left out on the global stage when it comes to the climate crisis. Indigenous people have played increasingly important roles at COP meetings in recent years. But, even at last year's COP, which was attended by 120 world leaders, the Indigenous attendees complained about being shunted to the sidelines.

Although the world recognizes that Indigenous Peoples must have a say in matters that affect them, Ms. Smith says consultations are often perfunctory and effort is not always made to act upon their counsel.

"I represent (NWAC at) federal-provincial-territorial meetings (FPT) all around the country and at meetings organized by all departments of government," she says. "Most times I feel like the Indigenous participants are there so the organizers can check the box. They can say 'OK, we talked to NWAC,' but they don't necessarily listen to us despite the fact that NWAC signed an Accord with the federal government that says that they will consider the distinct perspective of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people."

That was not the case, however, at the most recent FPT meeting of environment ministers, which was held in late summer in Yukon, says Ms. Smith. "I really felt heard. And the difference, I think, is that the political leadership from coast to coast to coast recognizes that Indigenous leadership is necessary in this common fight on climate."

In the Yukon, Ms. Smith met with federal Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault and other provincial and territorial ministers of environment. "We shared a delicious meal together around a table, which allowed us all to feel that human connectedness that was dearly missed during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Indigenous women, in particular, have a special, intimate knowledge of climate, says Ms. Smith. "As Life Carriers, we have a spiritual connection to Mother Earth and, within that, there's intimate knowledge that no one else carries but women—all women, but specifically Indigenous women."

That lens needs to be applied to environmental discussions, both in Canada and at international gatherings like COP27, she says.

Indigenous women are "on the front lines of climate change," says Ms. Smith. Being able to gather traditional medicines, and being able to harvest food from the land, is critical to their survival.

"Colonial governments don't get that. It's lost on them. And that's why it hasn't been working. Our knowledge is so integral to these discussions. So, I'm glad that Canada is finally recognizing that and wanted us to be a valued voice at these COP27 negotiations."

Canada is one of the few countries that allowed Indigenous people and other advocates to join the national delegation without requiring them to sign agreements that would water down their messaging. "So, we had a strong voice in these negotiations," says Ms. Smith.

In the end, she says, she and Ms. Redfern left Egypt feeling that their contributions were appreciated and taken seriously.

"Did people truly, with humility and an open heart, listen to us and our messaging. That would be success, in my mind," says Ms. Smith. "And, if there's some uptake within Canada, and in other countries, then that's also success, because it gets the ball rolling toward the discussions and/or the agenda for COP28."

Picture by **Clara Murcia** COP27 *Brussels, Belgium* **shutterstock.com**

"AS LIFE CARRIERS, WE HAVE A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION TO MOTHER EARTH AND, WITHIN THAT, THERE'S INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE THAT NO ONE ELSE CARRIES BUT WOMEN—ALL WOMEN, BUT SPECIFICALLY INDIGENOUS WOMEN."

- LISA SMITH

NEVER GIVE UP HOPE:

THE ADAM'S MINE GARBAGE FIGHT

CAROL MCBRIDE

Toronto's plan to send its garbage to an abandoned iron mine in Northern Ontario ended after Northerners showed up, en masse and angry, at a council meeting in Canada's largest city.

But the folks who were part of that 2000 protest, including Carol McBride, who is now the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), say their fight was actually won when people of wide-ranging backgrounds came together to work for a common cause.

"Nobody was listening, and Toronto was going to get its way. And that really upset the region around Temiscaming, Ontario, which includes the Temiscaming (Algonquin) First Nation and land on both sides of the Ontario-Quebec border," Ms. McBride said in a recent interview.

"The beauty is that we came together," she says. "We had French-speaking people from the Quebec side. We had Ontarians. We had farmers. We had Indigenous people. It was something that I don't know we'll see again, but it was wonderful. We came together and we managed to stop the biggest city in Canada, and this project."

The plan to turn the Adam's Mine into a landfill for Toronto's garbage was first conceived by Gordon McGuinty, a golfing buddy of former Conservative premier Mike Harris whose government was in power when the conflict came to a head. The scheme would have seen 20 million tonnes of waste dumped into the mine over a 20-year period.

It was apparent from the start that "this was a really bad idea, it was incredibly flawed," says New Democrat MP Charlie Angus. He and his wife, Brit Griffin, co-owned at the time a magazine called *HighGrader*, which is devoted to Northern life and culture. Mr. Angus has written a book about the protest called *Unlikely Radicals: The Story of the Adam's Mine Dump War*.

"This thing made no financial sense, and it was an environmental disaster," he says. "They were sending (the garbage) North because they thought nobody really lived there except basically poor blue-collar people, some farmers, and some Indigenous people. The North was going to be a sacrifice zone for urban waste."

What also became apparent to those protesting the project was that the people being paid to put the public interest first either failed in that duty or deliberately obstructed the release of the information that would have put an end to the dumping scheme, says Mr. Angus.

"We would cover these meetings, and really smart, simple questions would be asked," he says. "And the consultants not only had no answers, but they weren't intending on answering these questions because they cut to the very heart of their plan to take groundwater and wash garbage with it for ten thousand years."

The Temiscaming region was traditionally very fractured, says Mr. Angus. The rural Francophone community didn't speak to the rural Anglophone community. The blue-collar miners didn't speak to the environmentalist hippie community. And nobody spoke to the Algonquins.

"WE HAD FRENCH-SPEAKING PEOPLE FROM THE QUEBEC SIDE. WE HAD ONTARIANS. WE HAD FARMERS. WE HAD INDIGENOUS PEOPLE. IT WAS SOMETHING THAT I DON'T KNOW WE'LL SEE AGAIN..."

- CAROL MCBRIDE

"We realized early on that, if we were going to go up against the biggest waste company in North America, against members of the Harris government who were militant, and against the City of Toronto, that people had to park their differences and learn to work together," says Mr. Angus.

There was also a realization, at the beginning of 2000, that the conflict would likely end in confrontation and that people had to prepare for civil disobedience and for taking more militant steps "because we knew we were being completely sold down the river."

Ms. McBride was a member of the Temiskaming First Nation council when the dump concept was first floated in the 1990s. She says she didn't pay much attention at the outset. "This project was so ridiculous," she says. "I never ever thought it was gonna go that far."

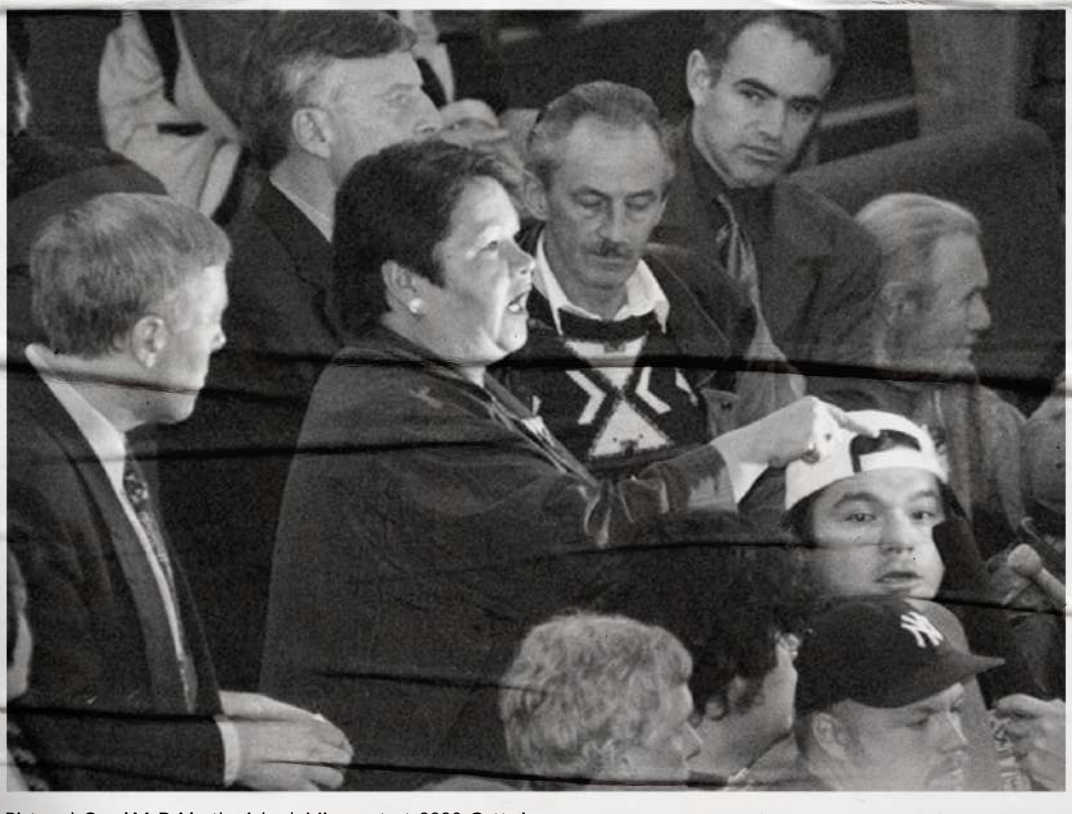
But concerns within the local non-Indigenous communities escalated, and their voices of protest grew louder when it became more likely that the project would be realized.

"There was a sense that the Algonquin community may be the one card to be played that could actually force government to back off because the Algonquins of Temiscaming are technically in Quebec, but they never signed a treaty," and the mine is on their traditional territory, says Mr. Angus.

So, the First Nation was again approached to join the fight.

By that time, Ms. McBride had been elected Chief of her community and then Grand Chief of the Algonquin Nation Secretariat. The Algonquin people, she says,

CAROL MCBRIDE
THE ADAM'S MINE GARBAGE FIGHT



Pictured: **Carol McBride,** the Adam's Mine protest, 2000 **Getty Images**

"were really scared that there was going to be seepage of toxins into our water. We really got involved because they were very close to signing the contract."

In August 2000, about 2,800 people gathered at a rally where the possibility of shutting down the railway or the highway as a protest measure was discussed. Ms. McBride spoke publicly about the landfill proposal for the first time at this rally.

"Carol wasn't all that forceful. But she quickly became the centre of the resistance," says Mr. Angus. "The determination that she had, and the calmness that she brought to it, really reassured people."

As the protests escalated and rail lines were blocked, Ms. McBride met with the police, who were wary about making arrests because they had seen the deadly crisis that had developed at Oka, Quebec, in 1990 during a land dispute with the Mohawk people. "These were very, very, very tense moments, but she never faltered, never wavered. She really knew what she needed to do," said Mr. Angus.

As a result of her negotiations with the police, the protesters agreed to move off the railway tracks but were allowed to continue to congregate at a camp they had established. That weekend, they held a huge outdoor Thanksgiving dinner, and people from all over brought food.

It was a festive occasion. But the organizers of the protest knew that Toronto City Council would be voting on the issue on the Tuesday, and they had to step up their game. So they called a meeting of all the opponents at a hall in the francophone village of Earlton.

"There were like 800 people there, just word of mouth," says Mr. Angus. "Carol got up and said 'you've got an hour to go home and get a sleeping bag and a toothbrush. There's going to be buses here and we're all going to Toronto.'"

The buses came and the people boarded. "It was this really fascinating mix between basically older farm women and really sort of radical young Indigenous people," says Mr. Angus. They had no idea where they would stay when they hit the road but, before they reached Toronto, Jack Layton, who was then a city councillor and went on to lead the federal NDP, invited them to stay in his campaign office.

As an opening salvo in the city, Ms. McBride issued a warning that opposition to the Adams Mine landfill was so strong in the North that the ensuing civil disobedience "will make Oka look like a Sunday picnic."

The televised council meeting was a raucous affair, with protestors being ejected partway through and then allowed back into the room.

At one point, Ms. McBride was permitted to address the chamber. "I remember being told, 'OK Carol, you give the speech of your life'," she says. "So, I stood up and I passed out a picture of a little girl who was wearing a tee-shirt that said 'Don't kill me'. I asked the council members to please look at that picture. Because that's what they were doing. They were killing our future generations."

When her speech ended, the phone lines at Toronto City Hall lit up with people demanding that the project be cancelled.

The council voted to proceed with the landfill, but political observers started predicting that it could never become a reality.

While she was in Toronto, Ms. McBride tried to visit Mayor Mel Lastman in his office, but he would not see her—a refusal that was caught on camera. "I said, 'I've come here, leader to leader, wanting to talk about this problem. And he won't talk, he won't come out.' So that didn't do him any good either."

The protesters returned to Temiskaming. And, on the following Friday, the phone rang at Ms. McBride's home. It was a reporter.

"I can't remember who the journalist was," she says. "But they said the deal is dead. I shouted, and I was just so happy."

The protesters flocked to the hall in Earlton. "Carol got up and sang with the band," says Mr. Angus. "She sang *Hit the Road Jack* but changed it to *Hit the Road Gordon McGuinty*."

In fact, the fight went on behind the scenes for another four years. "It was skullduggery and backroom stuff the whole way. It was wild, and at times dark," says Mr. Angus. But, eventually, the plan for the Adams Mine to take Toronto's garbage was abandoned entirely.

The lesson from it all, says Ms. McBride, is that, when you are "fighting wrong-headed ideas of big government, you have to come together with people who have the same concerns, and you have to educate those who are not immediately onside about the ways in which their lives will be impacted."

"WHEN YOU ARE FIGHTING WRONG-HEADED IDEAS OF BIG GOVERNMENT, YOU HAVE TO COME TOGETHER WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE SAME CONCERNS. AND YOU NEED TO NEVER GIVE UP HOPE."

- CAROL MCBRIDE

THE SALMON

PUTTING RESPECT FOR THE SALMON AT THE CENTRE OF POLICIES AND DECISIONS

The salmon are our relatives, and we must protect them. That's the message delivered by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers when fisheries scientist Andrea Reid asked them about threats facing the iconic species of the Pacific Northwest.

Dr. Reid, who was raised in Prince Edward Island, is a member of Nisga'a Nation and lives in the village of Gitlaxt'aamiks, British Columbia. She is also an assistant professor at the University of British Columbia, and the principal investigator at its Centre for Indigenous Fisheries.

"The moment I realized I could make fish and water the focus of my career, I jumped on that opportunity, and I got pulled into it because I just loved working with fishers," she said in a recent interview.

Her research has taken her to places like East Africa and the South Pacific.

But the Pacific Northwest and her father's people, the Nisga'a, who helped fund her studies, were always in the back of her mind. So, when she was given the chance to live in that area, and to learn about Nisga'a culture while continuing her work with fish, she went for it.

"I didn't get to grow up speaking Nisga'a or knowing the significance of Pacific salmon," says Dr. Reid. "But, through my PhD research, I got to focus on these wonderful beings, on how they migrate from their streams and creeks where they were born out to the oceans and back again. And, in tandem with that, I have been working with all kinds of Salmon Peoples within my nation and other neighbouring nations to learn about the significance of these fish, not only for food, but for culture, for everything that they're tied to."

Dr. Reid recently co-hosted an international gathering of Indigenous Salmon Peoples on the territory of the Musqueam Indian Band. The gathering brought together members of the Sámi People, including the president of the Sámi Parliament, along with people of Kamchatka, Alaska, Yukon, Mi'kma'ki, and, of course, British Columbia and Washington.

"It was so wonderful to see how all of these people hold salmon in such high regard and are so wanting to make positive change for these fish," says Dr. Reid.

In a paper published earlier this year, based on research conducted for her PhD, Dr. Reid reported the findings of interviews she conducted with 48 Knowledge Holders (Elders) in 18 communities of Salmon People along the three largest salmon-producing rivers in British Columbia—the Fraser, the Skeena, and the Nass (home of the Nisga'a).

The Elders, each of whom had spent decades actively engaged in salmon fishing and processing, told her they were observing significant declines in the fish. They said the modern salmon catches are about a sixth of the size they were 50 to 70 years ago. And they blamed a combination of factors, including aquaculture, climate change, contaminants, industrial developments, and infectious diseases.

The Elders told Dr. Reid that salmon are our relatives, a worldview shared by many Indigenous Peoples. That makes their dwindling numbers especially difficult to bear.

"We're seeing such rapid change in salmon systems, and the salmon are really in rough shape given the cumulative insults that they have to deal with," says Dr. Reid.

Photographs taken this fall show piles of dead salmon in Neekas, Heiltsuk Territory, that could not get back to their spawning grounds because the streams in which they were born had gone dry.

"We really see the effects of drought quite pervasively in B.C. And it just is so indicative of how everything is connected and how, when we see a change in one area, that's going to cause this cascade of impacts elsewhere," says Dr. Reid. "As we see glaciers receding, we're getting less and less cool water melting into the rivers throughout our summer seasons, and we see our rivers warming up due to that, we see flow changes due to that."

As a result, rivers and creeks are disappearing. "In my Nation, I'm told by my Elders that we once had over 500 spawning creeks and streams," she says. "We are now down to just over 300. We're losing critical salmon habitat."

Dr. Reid began her consultations with the Salmon People of British Columbia in 2018.

"I got to visit their communities and hear from the Elders who are considered the key salmon Knowledge Holders," she says. "I heard so much concern about the state of salmon, in particular because of what it means for the state of our knowledge systems. Salmon and salmon fishing are the ways that we pass on our teachings and our practices and our languages to the youth. And what happens to all of that as we lose the fish themselves?"

"THE MOMENT I REALIZED I COULD MAKE FISH AND WATER THE FOCUS OF MY CAREER, I JUMPED ON THAT OPPORTUNITY."

- DR. ANDREA REID

Pictured: **Andrea Reid and youth** from the Nisga'a Village of Gingolx testing out water quality monitoring tools on Ksi Gingolx. **Photo taken by Lauren Eckert in 2019.**

PUTTING RESPECT FOR THE SALMON
AT THE CENTRE OF POLICIES AND DECISIONS

The word *greed* was mentioned many times during those conversations.

"I was frequently reminded that we can't eat gold and how, ultimately, what we're seeing is a broken relationship with salmon," says Dr. Reid. "So many of them talked to me about the ethics of not taking more than we need. They said, 'we don't play with our food', 'we keep what we catch', 'we eat the fish whole', all of these practices that really embody respecting these organisms."

Instead of positioning salmon as relatives, she says dominant society considers the fish to be a commodity managed according to single-species approaches and concepts like maximum sustainable yield. That is a fisheries term that describes the highest possible catch in a fishery before tipping the scales into overexploitation. But it is a precarious plan, says Dr. Reid, and one that does not account for uncertainty or recognize that, by managing the environment for one species alone, the ecosystem to which it is attached can be neglected.

The same concerns she heard during her consultation in Canada were echoed by Indigenous people from other countries at the international salmon gathering earlier this year. There is a realization, she says, that many things threaten the salmon, and there is a need to improve conditions for the fish, whether that means reducing the numbers harvested or preventing massive developments that alter watersheds.

It is a matter of putting respect for the fish at the centre of all policies and decisions that affect them.

That is a huge challenge, and it can seem overwhelming from the point of view of a single community, she says. "That's why there's such power in uniting, and in recognizing that we're stronger by having many Nations work together and advocating for our collective rights."

Despite the horrific pictures of salmon killed by drought, this past season saw higher yields than in other recent years. Dr. Reid says that could demonstrate salmon's ability to come back. "If we stop abusing these systems on the scales that we have been, salmon could thrive."

The Knowledge Keepers consulted by Dr. Reid were gravely concerned about the future, but most were hopeful for change

"I THINK WE ARE UNDERGOING A PARADIGM SHIFT IN HOW INDIGENOUS RIGHTS ARE BEING RECOGNIZED AND HOW INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS ARE BEING TREATED. I THINK, IF WE STEP UP AND MAKE BETTER DECISIONS NOW, WE CAN START TO SEE POSITIVE CHANGES FOR THOSE FISH."

- DR. ANDREA REID

The Elders in salmon communities "have seen tremendous change in their lifetimes, be it in good or bad in different scenarios. They've seen the scale on which paradigms can shift," says Dr. Reid. "They also see the resilience of the salmon that we've been coexisting with for so long. And, I think, if we step up and make better decisions now, we can start to see positive changes for those fish."

KNOWLEDGE KEEPER SUGGESTS

'OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW'

TO SAFEGUARD THE ENVIRONMENT IN CANADA

Marina Best:

'OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW' TO SAFEGUARD THE ENVIRONMENT IN CANADA

Marina Best says environmental conservation and reconciliation cannot be balanced without both Western science and Indigenous Knowledge agreeing to start fresh from places of equal respect.

"I really think they can coexist by ensuring that they are on equal levels. That folks from both knowledge systems are coming to the table … on equal footing, and advance … in a manner that is really acknowledging them as equal," says Ms. Best, a Métis environmental and climate change Knowledge Keeper.

She describes land conservation as a "shared journey" and stresses the importance of "building relationships" based on "understanding, respect, and trust" among Western and Indigenous Ways of Being.

"Knowing that Indigenous Knowledge and Western science are two separate knowledge systems, it's important to create that space for folks to come together to really learn about each other and really try to create a space that is open for both systems," says Ms. Best, "… to have space for both Indigenous Knowledge and Western science, rather than kind of fitting one within an existing box."

The reality is that trying to "fit" within an existing system means that one of the two needs to accommodate the other. Unfortunately, Ms. Best says, Indigenous systems are more often than not forced to conform to fit within Western systems. It's for these reasons that she stresses the importance of developing an improved, collaborative, equal system for environmental conservation based solely on the goal of improving environmental welfare.

"In my opinion, the whole concept of integrating means that it's one thing fitting into something else; something that's already existing. That doesn't work. It is already creating an unequal basis for Indigenous Knowledge to be present in those," says Ms. Best. "I think that, really, the systems need to be completely changed or rebuilt, to ensure that we can be more holistic and inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge."

Though letting go of old systems to make way for new, balanced means of environmental protection and management can seem daunting and exhaustive, Ms. Best sees opportunity.

"It's an opportunity for people to listen and learn on a first-hand basis," says Ms. Best, adding that both parties can learn a lot from each other. In terms of living well with the land, and in equilibrium with nature, Ms. Best suggests turning to Indigenous Peoples for their expertise.

"Western science can learn a lot from the different holistic perspectives and land water management practices utilized by Indigenous Peoples. There are a lot of opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to provide a deeper understanding of the local context, the local ecosystem," says Ms. Best.

"Indigenous Knowledge and Practices emphasize a reciprocal relationship with nature and know that humans are a part of nature. I think changing the narrative and relationship with nature is critical for ensuring the health and conservation of ecosystems across Canada."

In the past, both systems have invested valuable time and resources into understanding the opposing systems beliefs or ways of doing things. However, Ms. Best says each system should rely upon each other, rather than work against one another. "The experts already exist."

Pictured: **Marina Best**

Project Forest

Project Forest: A concept of "rewilding" underdeveloped, non-productive agricultural land to bring it back to its fullest potential; providing habitat, food, and medicines through afforestation.

What started out as a conservation project has naturally evolved into an Indigenous-based, land rejuvenation partnership that involves restoring trees, plants, food, and medicines that were once plentiful for our ancestors.

"Our mission is to rewild Canada, one forest at a time," says Project Forest Executive Director Mike Toffan.

"Rewilding is an important concept. It's not just planting one, or two, or three different species. It's putting the right tree in the right place for the right reason, then ensuring that area transitions from field to forest," he added. "Very rarely are two pieces of land identical. So, each project location we work with has a specific rewilding program."

This process includes surveying the land, engaging with the community, forming partnerships, and establishing a "rewilding" plan that's based on the community's needs and wants.

> **"REWILDING IS AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT. IT'S NOT JUST PLANTING ONE, OR TWO, OR THREE DIFFERENT SPECIES. IT'S PUTTING THE RIGHT TREE IN THE RIGHT PLACE FOR THE RIGHT REASON, THEN ENSURING THAT AREA TRANSITIONS FROM FIELD TO FOREST."**
>
> **- MIKE TOFFAN**

Pictured: **Mike Toffan**

Pictured: *Top* **Mike Toffan** *Bottom* **Angela MacKinnon**

PROJECT FOREST

In just two years, Project Forest has restored agricultural lands in five regions throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan, planting over 246,000 trees, fruit-bearing plants, and medicines.

Throughout 2022 and into 2023, Project Forest is developing its first Food and Medicine Forest at Cumberland House Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. Here, Mr. Toffan says there are "no shortages of trees." In fact, he is faced with the opposite problem—an abundance of "over-mature trees," many of which are "too old." This happens as a result of nature not being exposed to natural land regeneration processes such as wildfires. Thus, Cumberland House Cree Nation is not in need of trees; it is in need of medicinal and fruit-bearing plants that have not grown there for generations.

"When we met with the Chief, I showed him pictures of raspberry and Wild Rose plants," says Mr. Toffan. "He said, 'Mike, I used to eat those as a kid. They're not here anymore.' So I said, 'let's fix that.'"

For Angela MacKinnon, Project Forest Community Engagement Officer, reintroducing lost species also means reintroducing opportunities and prospects for land-based living, which is the heart of what Project Forest seeks to accomplish.

"Knowing they have these memories of living off the land—having those experiences as a child [but losing them] and having them again now to pass on to future generations—and we're able to bring that back for them; it's just incredibly special," says Ms. MacKinnon.

"Oral history shares that these plants were there before, but they haven't seen them for years," she adds. "If a plant was there once, it could be there again."

A 15-hectare parcel of stagnant land, just minutes from the community, was identified as an opportune placement for their first Food and Medicine Forest. Project Forest narrowed down two hectares and planted saskatoons, Wild Rose, strawberries, blueberries, honeysuckle, and raspberry plants.

"KNOWING THEY HAVE THESE MEMORIES OF LIVING OFF THE LAND—HAVING THOSE EXPERIENCES AS A CHILD [BUT LOSING THEM] AND HAVING THEM AGAIN NOW TO PASS ON TO FUTURE GENERATIONS—AND WE'RE ABLE TO BRING THAT BACK FOR THEM; IT'S JUST INCREDIBLY SPECIAL."

- ANGELA MACKINNON

"Impacting community and impacting people is the number-one goal in our heart. And when we start talking about rewilding, this is still rewilding—we're reintroducing these plants that just aren't there anymore," Mr. Toffan says.

The best part, he says, was allowing the community to take the lead on the project. Project Forest took direction from the community regarding what to plant and where to plant it, and hired members of the community to build the project. Mr. Toffan said it was a privilege to see first-hand generations coming together to teach and transfer knowledge to younger generations. For example, an Elder planted shoulder to shoulder with his son and grandson.

"We were able to get the people of the community to plant these plants and pay them that day," says Mr. Toffan. "Climate Smart Services was out there with a chequebook ... everybody left with a cheque that day."

For Ms. MacKinnon, revitalizing land-based learning and living is exactly why she made the transition from the oil and gas industry to Project Forest a year ago.

"To be able to really connect with the land and the people is really special. Why wouldn't you want to be a part of Project Forest?" Ms. MacKinnon says.

Cultural and land-based teaching will continue to grow at Cumberland House Cree Nation. Next year, another seven hectares is being planted "in addition to another 40+ hectares of disturbance space," which will be rewilded to provide habitat for Traditional land use and learning opportunities.

"Food sovereignty is a huge part of the conversation," says Ms. MacKinnon. Implementing disturbance space for habitats to flourish will, in turn, increase food sovereignty for the community in terms of hunting, fishing, foraging, and trapping.

"Elders will be able to go out with the youth to transfer that knowledge without going for a five-hour drive or four-hour hike. There's a special place in their backyard. And that will help re-establish those Traditional land use opportunities," Mr. Toffan says. "This is going to create spaces for community members to practise ceremonies in the forest."

The goal is to plant another 100,000 trees in Saskatchewan in 2023, most of which will be planted in Cumberland House Cree Nation, Shoal Lake Cree Nation, and Red Earth Cree Nation. "We'll be creating additional Food and Medicine Forests in those communities. We'll be finishing the final seven hectares in Cumberland House Cree Nation, and we have identified another 40 hectares of new land scheduled for rewilding in 2023."

It's a win-win-win situation for everyone. Investors give back through meaningful partnerships, afforestation growth boasts food and sacred medicines for a community, and agricultural lands are restored to provide thriving habitats for animals.

Momentum is increasing for Project Forest. Almost as quickly as communities are reaching out for rewilding partnerships, funders are falling into place looking for ways to give back. Ms. MacKinnon and Mr. Toffan say, just like their rewilding projects, Project Forest is going through a lot of growth.

Mr. Toffan agreed, adding, "What grew before will grow there again."

"AS A SMALL NON-PROFIT, WE WANT TO DO BIG THINGS AND MAKE BIG CHANGES, BUT IT'S JUST GOING TO TAKE A LITTLE BIT OF TIME."

- ANGELA MACKINNON

LEARNING ABOUT INDIGENOUS PRINCIPLES FROM THE GROUND UP,

THE WABANAKI WAY

The 16 acres of land surrounding the New Brunswick healing lodge for Indigenous women need some love.

And Alma Brooks, the Elder who is in charge of the project, does not know the full range of plant species that grow on the property. The right ones could be used to make traditional medicines.

So Ms. Brooks engaged the help of the University of New Brunswick. During this school year, students from two different classes will get credits for the work they do to landscape and catalogue the land purchased by the Native Women's Association of Canada for the site of the Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge. In the process, they will be immersed in Indigenous culture.

"Indigenous Knowledge is something that's been more intertwined in our academics, which is great," says fourth-year student Rachel Aske. "But there's definitely still so much to learn."

The Indigenous components of the project contributed to Ms. Aske's decision to work at Wabanaki rather than any of the other options available to the forestry and environment students for their management-practicum credits.

"I knew, just by reading the description about how much emphasis would be placed on edible and medicinal plants, that I would be learning so much," says Ms. Aske. "From the first day we met online with some Elders at the property, I realized that was going to be the case."

The eight forestry and environment students are tasked with cataloguing the trees and shrubs on the property, and keeping an eye out for the medicinal species of special interest to Ms. Brooks and the other Elders. They are assessing the condition of the fauna and considering what is likely to stay healthy in a warming climate. They are testing the soil and determining which areas would be best for growing medicinal plants. And, they are pruning the apple orchard, which Ms. Aske says "needs a bit of love" after going a few years without maintenance.

"I KNEW, JUST BY READING THE DESCRIPTION ABOUT HOW MUCH EMPHASIS WOULD BE PLACED ON EDIBLE AND MEDICINAL PLANTS, THAT I WOULD BE LEARNING SO MUCH."

- RACHEL ASKE

In the meantime, about a hundred teaching students are also onsite, collectively taking on six projects that will spruce up the landscape.

Juan Rodriguez Camacho, an assistant professor of Indigenous studies, says the Wabanaki education course is intended to help the teachers-in-training understand their responsibilities for reconciliation, reconstruction, and Indigenous culture.

It is part of community service, says Dr. Rodriguez Camacho. "They are going to be the next leaders," he says. "That's why this course was designed for them, to understand their responsibilities in Indigenous education."

Among the landscaping projects the teaching students are undertaking are the planting

Pictured: **Alma Brooks and University of New Brunswick students (and one of their children)**

Pictured: **University of New Brunswick students working at Wabanaki**

of sweetgrass, creating raised beds and walking paths, cleaning areas, and removing weeds from laws and gardens. They also participate in Indigenous ceremony.

"They are making the place more friendly" with the goal of creating better spaces for sacred plants, says Dr. Rodriguez Camacho. "Instead of competition there will be collaboration, instead of exploitation there will be support and conservation—many principles of Indigenous views. So, this really is a practice of principles."

His colleague, Natasha Simon, who is the Director of the university's Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre, says the aim is to have the future teachers understand what it means to give back and what it means to be a treaty person.

Sophia Paoluzzi, one of the forestry students, says she remembers the first time she set foot on the Wabanaki property.

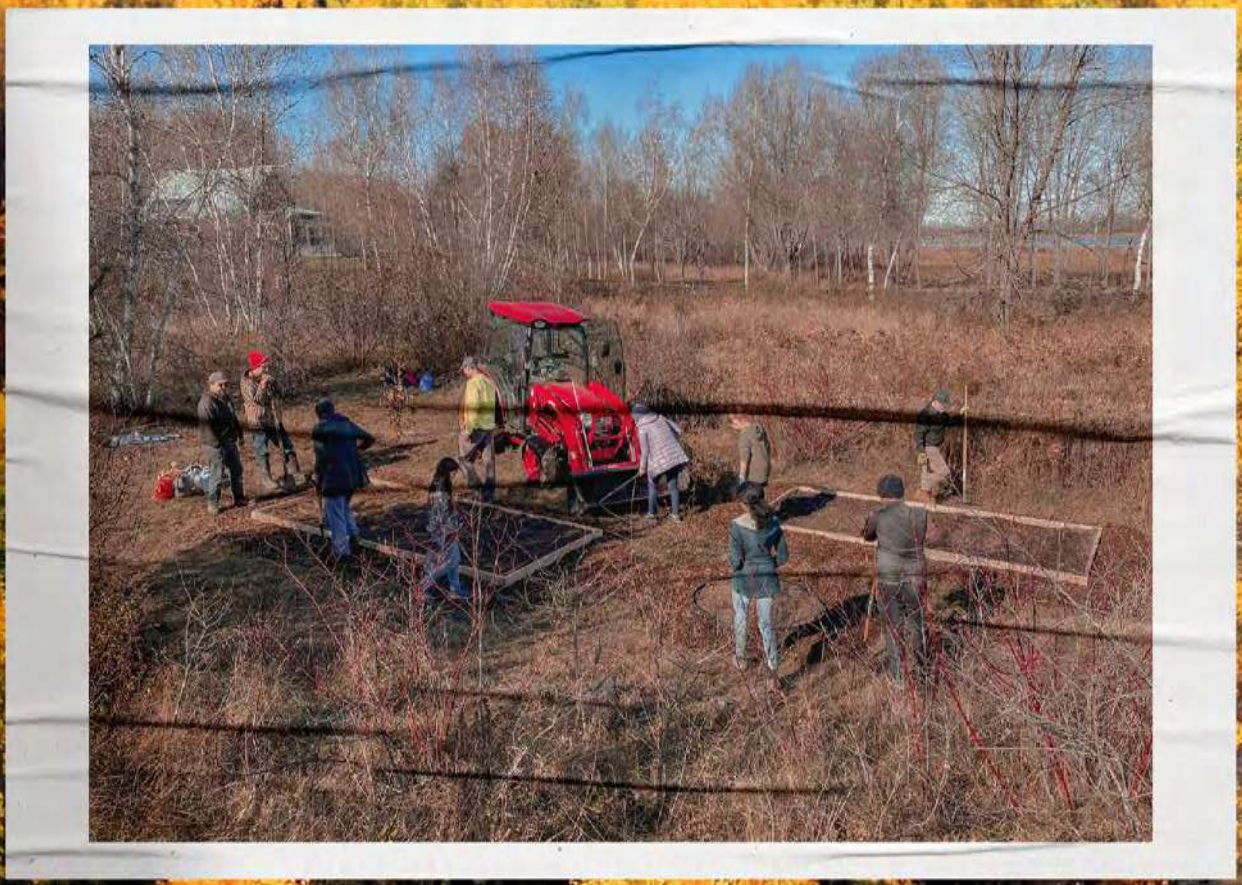
"When you pull into the driveway, you have a beautiful view of the Saint John River and Gagetown Creek. You just get this feeling of being at peace. You're with nature," says Ms. Paoluzzi. "This is such a beautiful place. It's a nice calming feeling being there. And knowing the direction the property is going is exciting."

Ms. Brooks has given the students a long list of plants that she would like to see on the grounds of the resiliency lodge. Lots of ideas have been flowing about how this information can be used and where the project will go next, says Ms. Paoluzzi. But, the first main goal was to get the inventory done before the first frost set in.

The Wabanaki project "spoke to me right away … just knowing that they want it to be a retreat, they want it to be for healing," says Ms. Paoluzzi. "They want people to go there just to feel safe and to be able to eat off the land, and use everything that they have there to heal themselves. I swear every time we go there, I just get more excited about it."

"INSTEAD OF COMPETITION THERE WILL BE COLLABORATION, INSTEAD OF EXPLOITATION THERE WILL BE SUPPORT AND CONSERVATION—MANY PRINCIPLES OF INDIGENOUS VIEWS. SO, THIS REALLY IS A PRACTICE OF PRINCIPLES."

- ANGELA MACKINNON



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NWAC, which was founded in 1974, is a national Indigenous organization representing First Nations (on and off reserve, with status and without), Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Its goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian society.

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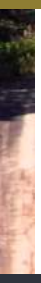

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