

EVERYONE TOGETHER

Global Water Futures Mistawasis Nêhiyawak

Water Gathering Statement & Backgrounder

April 14, 2023



Context

"Indigenous People have always done research, always searched for understanding, ways of being and knowing the world around us in order to survive. We just didn't call it 'research'"

Chief Norman Bone of Keeseekoowenin First Nation, University of Manitoba, 2014

Water is essential for life and underpins our physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological health. It is also important for ceremony, recreation, ecosystem function, and economic activity.

Rates of climate change in Canada are already almost double global averages. In Canada's north, these rates are tripled. Canada is being affected by climate change more quickly than any other region in the world. Nowhere is this more obvious than in our water resources. We are experiencing rapid melting of sea ice and mountain glaciers, reduced snowfall amounts and increased rainfall amounts, melting permafrost, and greater extremes, resulting in droughts, wildfires, floods, and landslides. This is made worse by urbanisation, changes in land use, and our water management decisions. Colonialism, and the view of water as a commodity or trade good rather than an essential component of our environment, has created our water crises. This is a particular reality with respect to drinking water access in Indigenous communities and on reserves. These conditions undermine the ability of communities to respond to challenges, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which at least one First Nation community was forced to evacuate because it didn't have enough water to prevent spread of disease during an outbreak event. On one hand we have increasing water-related crises. On the other hand, we have centuries and generations of water and land stewardship based on Indigenous science and a concept of wholism or interconnectedness that Indigenous Peoples have used to maintain balance between people and nature.

Research can be used to better understand a particular problem, to find solutions, or to explore whether these solutions work and whether they need to change over time.

By combining research with changes in our policies and practices, we are able to create better systems to manage our water resources more fairly and sustainably and to ensure that everyone's rights to water are met. Research comes in many different forms and is undertaken by all kinds of people. Colonialism and colonial governance and management systems have systemically excluded Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge systems and science, including from water research. As a result, modern science has dominated the solution space despite a long Indigenous legacy of living in harmony with the land.

For a long time, research has been undertaken "on", rather than with and for, Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples have not been given opportunities to direct research based in modern science systems, to be included in the research, or to be informed about the results of such investigations. This is in spite of Indigenous-led research and experiences with ongoing water-related challenges that affect them more compared to non-Indigenous people living in Canada (Chiblow 2020; Day et al. 2020; Kovach 2021; Latchmore et al. 2018; Latulippe and Klenk 2020; University of Saskatchewan 2019; Yua et al. 2022).

"As embodied practice embedded within a worldview, Indigenous knowledge is inseparable from the socio-cultural, political, legal and other grounded, largely place-based relations and obligations that give rise to holistic knowledge systems."

Latulippe and Klenk, 2020

Purpose

This protocol, approved and endorsed at the Global Water Futures Indigenous Water Gathering hosted by Mistawasis Nêhiyawak in April 2023, is a guide for non-Indigenous water researchers. It provides core principles and practices for engaging with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, communities, governments, and organisations in ways that acknowledge and value the stewardship, observations, and understanding of those who live closest with the lands and waters.

This protocol provides background for understanding traditional cultural relationships to water among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, some examples of misguided, unproductive, or damaging research practices of the past, and a checklist for co-productive approaches and activities that support collaborative and Indigenous-led research.

"Research as sacred. Indigenous peoples have engaged in forms of research since time immemorial. Research begins with humility and respectful relationships, then engaging appropriate protocols, active listening and astute observation, oracy and storytelling. The sacredness and tremendous responsibility embedded in research is ever present."

University of Saskatchewan Indigenous Research Strategy





NIBI

DECLARATION OF TREATY #3

NIBI (WATER) IS ALIVE AND HAS A SPIRIT. IT IS THE LIFE BLOOD OF OUR MOTHER (AKI) AND CONNECTS EVERYTHING. IT CAN GIVE, SUSTAIN AND TAKE LIFE.

NIBI CAN TAKE MANY FORMS INCLUDING SNOW, ICE, SPRING WATER, SALT WATER, RAIN, FRESH WATER, SWAMP WATER, AQUIFERS AND BIRTH WATER. EACH TYPE OF WATER HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN OUR WELLNESS AND HEALING. NIBI IS CONNECTED TO OUR GRANDMOTHER, THE MOON.

EVEN THOUGH IT HAS SUFFERED, NIBI CONTINUES TO BRING FORWARD LIFE AND WE MUST WORK TO HEAL THE WATER AND OURSELVES.

NIBI HAS A SPIRIT AND SHARES ITS GIFT OF LIFE WITH ALL OF CREATION

Nibi has its own spirit. It cannot be owned or controlled. Nibi is shared across lands and territories, between people, with other nations and all other beings that are part of creation. Spirits and other beings in creation look after nibi and its wellbeing. Nibi and all beings and spirits that look after nibi must be feasted. All creation expresses love and respect for nibi through gestures of gratitude.

WE NEED NIBI IN ORDER TO LIVE A GOOD LIFE

All beings, including Anishinaabe, are born of nibi. We depend on nibi to live and our bodies are made of it. Nibi is the source of our wellbeing. It nourishes us, spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally and provides cleansing and healing. Clean nibi for drinking is important to our health. We must respect our sacred relationship with nibi and all beings in creation to help protect nibi for our children and future generations.

WE ALL HAVE A SACRED RELATIONSHIP WITH NIBI

Anishinaabe have been responsible for the care of the aki (land) and nibi since time immemorial. Women have a sacred relationship with nibi and a special responsibility to look after nibi because they carry birth water and have the ability to bring life into this world. Men have a role to play to protect the land and support the wellbeing of nibi and ikwewag. Our relationship with nibi is preserved through ceremony, teachings, education and knowledge shared through generations.

NIBI UNITES US

Through its flow and movement, nibi cleanses itself and connects us all. It brings us together as families, communities and as a nation. Traditional governance and law, including the Manito Aki Inakonigaawin and Treaty #3 confirm our collective responsibility to take action, give back and protect nibi and the environment for our children and future generations.



NIBI HAS A SPIRIT • NIBI IS LIFE • NIBI IS SACRED • WE HONOUR RESPECT AND LOVE NIBI

Indigenous Relationships with Water

Water has a living spirit and is an essential element that connects all other living beings. The deep cultural and spiritual significance of water needs to be recognised and understood as more than a resource to be exploited (Latchmore et al. 2018). Our rights to water are integrally linked to our responsibilities as stewards of this precious resource.

In Canada, Indigenous peoples' relationships with water have been negatively affected by colonial political systems and decisions that underscore the view of water as a commercial or economic good. Large dams and irrigation projects have been set up in territories traditionally occupied by Indigenous Peoples, and changed the nature of the water bodies there (Matsui 2009). Settlement of First Nations on reserves by the Government of Canada has, over time, created many challenges to drinking water supply and disconnected people from their traditional natural water sources. Lack of Indigenous autonomy over water governance and a fragmented, multi-jurisdictional legal structure that is solely based in colonial systems further increases the inequities faced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Unsafe drinking water and aging or inadequate treatment systems have caused longstanding problems on First Nation reserves, in particular (Duignan, Moffat, and Martin-Hill 2020). In 2022 a legal settlement to compensate these communities was reached, and plans for improved systems put in place (Government of Canada 2021). However, the commitments made have yet to be fully realised.

Indigenous Experiences with Western Science Research in Canada

Historically, Indigenous peoples in Canada have been exploited in research through a lack of engagement in the research and a view of people solely as research subjects. In this manner, Indigenous people have been researched 'on' rather than as equal in or leading research projects. This reduces individual people to a line of data and perpetuates the deficit-based view of Indigenous peoples and communities as only experiencing challenges, rather than as people and communities with great strengths and resources in spite of colonialism and its associated intergenerational traumas.

This type of extractive research carries data and other codified knowledge away from its originators, with the intention of using it only for purposes not identified or prioritized by the originators. This means that learnings from the research are not accessible to those who own it. Natural scientists have perhaps found this easier to do because the subjects of their study – rocks, wild animals, plants, and the contaminants in water, for example – have no say in the process. This has resulted in misappropriation of, for example, traditional medicines, with large profits gained by pharmaceutical companies. Researchers in the social, health, and humanities have also undertaken this type of exploitative work, but as political awareness and advocacy have increased in communities, many of these researchers have had to change their practices.

A challenge to Western-trained scientists who are embedded in a deliberately competitive work environment, is the importance of collective – as opposed to individual – thinking and production of knowledge. Another, related, challenge is understanding that Indigenous worldviews influence both perceptions of the natural world that are expressed in the form of observations and in a broader set of beliefs and behaviours that underpin an understanding of these phenomena as sets of complex – often spiritual – relationships. While it may be possible to align the first with modern science categories allowing for comparison, grasping the expression of worldviews can take considerable time and learning on the part of non-Indigenous researchers; time that must be invested by all non-Indigenous researchers. Barriers to appropriate engagement include shortage of time, resources, and funding, and an acknowledged lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity training (Bozhkov et al. 2020). It is noteworthy that these are challenges that are easily overcome through early engagement and sufficient lead time for collaborative development of proposals with the appropriate Indigenous communities, governments, and organizations.

"The "two-eyed seeing" framework, proposed by Mi'kmaw Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall, is a means to bridge Western science and Indigenous knowledge. This approach to research recognizes the benefits of seeing from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing and finally to use both of these ways of seeing simultaneously"

Iwama et al., 2009

"One of the greatest challenges in decolonizing research is to prevent that research from reproducing the very categories it is seeking to critique and dismantle."

Castleden et al., 2017

In the context of growing nation-wide awareness of past injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada and the need for reconciliation, there has been growing attention paid to ethical considerations related to research with Indigenous peoples and in traditional territories. Transforming harmful research practices requires balancing individual and collective rights, upholding culturally-grounded ethical principles, and promoting self-determined research processes, methods, and knowledge translation (Hayward et al. 2021). Perhaps the most difficult of these to implement is upholding culturally-grounded ethical principles. This requires transformation and collaborative creation not only of the research process, but also of the ethics approval processes themselves.

While ethical research guidelines developed by Western science-based institutions can mandate respect for Traditional Knowledge and beliefs, they often cannot adequately reflect a way of thinking that is completely different and that is not easily expressed through Western philosophies. For example, in their study of wild rice in Manitoba's Anishinaabe territory, researchers Luby and colleagues found that the water-based interspecies relations fundamentally important to community members were not recognised by the Canada's Tri-council Policy Statement for Ethical Research Involving Humans (Luby et al. 2021). These differences can be overcome (Ludwig and Poliseli 2018) with intentional work and Indigenous leadership.

To address such challenges, the Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health (IIPH) within the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) developed a set of 15 Articles for health researchers working with Indigenous communities in Canada (Canadian Institutes of Health Research 2007). The following principles and practices have been informed by this document, along with the GWF Guiding Principles for Indigenous Community Water Research (Global Water Futures 2010), the experiences of Indigenous communities, governments, and organisations within the Global Water Futures Program, and the article, 10 Calls to Action to natural scientists working in Canada (Wong et al. 2020).



Nothing About Us Without Us

Research must meaningfully engage community members, governments, or organisations and include local and Traditional knowledge about the nature and use of water.

In practice this requires:

- Self-assessment of readiness to engage in research with Indigenous peoples.
- Self-education on Indigenous context in Canada, specific protocols and ceremonies of the Nations that you will work with.
- Sufficient time allotted for a priori conversations to establish relationships, trust, respect, and reciprocity that are critical foundations for a research relationship before development of research projects, including discussion of externally identified research topics to assess applicability, priority, and interest.
- Promotion of Indigenous leadership in research projects.
- Identification of potential collaborations and research applications for the benefit of Indigenous people, communities, and decision-makers.
- Incorporation of community-driven questions in research project proposal development.

"... there are two questions that the researcher must ask: Do I have a relationship with the Indigenous community with whom I seek to conduct research, the community I seek to represent through my researcher's voice? Am I trusted by that community?"

Margaret Kovach



GWF Mistawasis Nêhiyawak Statement

We have a responsibility to design research as stewards of our land, waters, and peoples.

We envision a future where research is led by Indigenous communities and is responsive to their needs, centres Indigenous Knowledge, and helps to grow healthy waters, relationships, and communities.

In order to achieve this vision, when conducting research with Indigenous communities in Canada:

1. Wellness of community is a primary objective

- It is not sufficient to just 'do no harm' but do better and do good for the people
- Community priorities will be integrated into research projects from the start

3. Equity is needed in supporting and funding knowledge

- Centre Indigenous Knowledge in research
- Western science will accommodate our ways of knowing and being
- Equal funding distribution
- Frame the work balance evenly
- Provide accreditation of local experts
- Build university infrastructure to support, enhance, and elevate Traditional Knowledge (e.g., accredit monitors, nominate individuals for honorary doctorates, provide resources and funding beyond honoraria)
- Engage in outreach with schools for training and capacity building to ensure sustainability and youth development

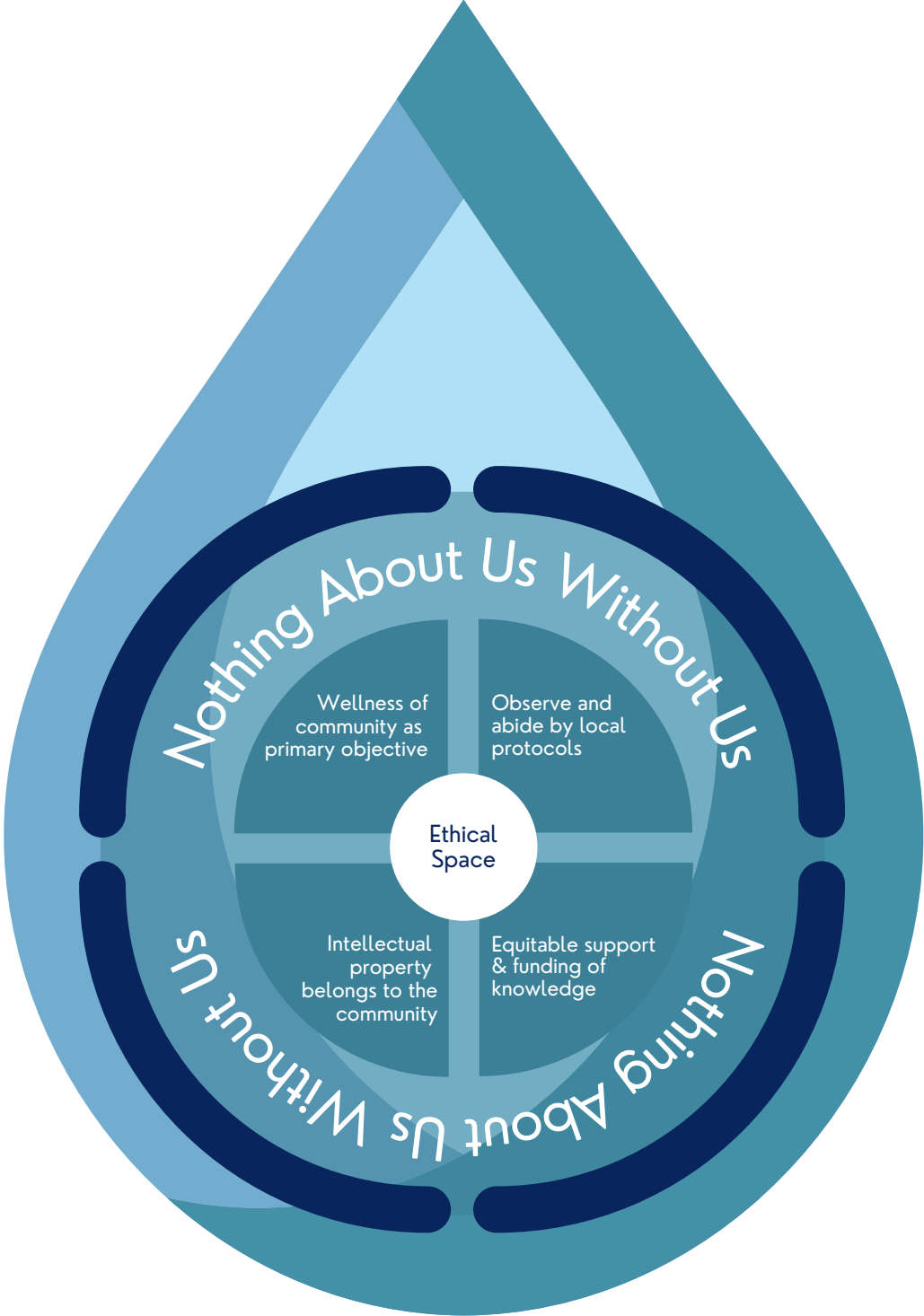
2. Observe and abide by local protocols

- Every First Nation, Inuit, and Métis community is different; you will not impose a 'one size fits all' approach
- Guidance of Elders will be respected at all times throughout the research process
- Spirituality will be acknowledged and recognized as sacred
- Abide by seasonal harvesting and ceremonial calendar

4. Intellectual property will remain with the community and they will determine what can be shared

- Communities will nominate Knowledge Holders and community youth (individuals under 30) and not the researchers
- Knowledge will be visual and culturally relevant; western science charts and graphs could be verbally or visually presented
- Create an ethical space within which different knowledge systems are acknowledged and respected and research findings are established (analysis)
- Encompasses all our knowledge
- Research will be flexible with timelines
- Pair community members for research and share knowledge on research instruments

Finally, we request that Global Water Futures leadership support the acquisition of additional funding to continue the Indigenous network that has been established.



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Appendix 1: Water Gathering Participants

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File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council/Sask First Nations

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Max Kotokak Sr.

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Makaśa Looking Horse

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Michelle Watson

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