



BC First Nations Spiritual Knowledge Keepers Gathering on Climate Change

Hosted by the BC Assembly of First Nations and Chief Darrell Bob on Tsleil-Waututh Territory with the generous support of the Government of Canada, the First Nations Health Authority and the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions

NOVEMBER 17TH TO 19TH, 2023

REPORT PREPARED BY NAQSMIST WITH THE SUPPORT OF BCAFN

Prologue

Imagine as you read these words the sound of rushing water, of wind gusting through tree tops. Words compress experience into a single moment in time and space, yet life is boundless. As you think of the water and the Land, look inward – ask yourself what it feels like in your body.

Energy. We are of this Land. The Land is of us. Our Knowledge lies in the Land, with our Ancestors, among the spirits, all around. Our medicines come from these Lands. Our Elders said if we abuse these medicines, we will get sick. The environment we are living in is disrupted; medicine was stripped from its native Land.

We've been called Natives, savages, Indians, First Nations, aboriginals and now Indigenous. What will they call us next? **We are the people of this Land.** We've been through pain and suffering. We need to get clarity and focus and become aware of the medicines, the waters and the mountains – go to the spiritual places, cleanse our bodies and minds. We have to go to sacred ground.

An Elder was sitting by the headwaters, observing the salmon as they bobbed their heads above water – they were looking for something. He asked: “What are you looking for?” “They changed the river”, the salmon said.

With our vibrations, the energy, the drum, the people will dance with you. Our old ones knew: we are made of water. We are **part** of the water, the mountains.

The word is not the same as the drum¹.

¹ Prologue adapted from the words of Robert Nahanee (p. 20).

Paintings on canvas by Michelyn Lepage, Naqsmist
Pictograph designs by Evelyn Alec, Naqsmist
Report design by Jade Chow, Naqsmist

Prologue	ii
Executive Summary	1
Knowledge Keepers' Mandate	2
Background	4
Introduction	5
Ceremony	8
Conclusion.....	31
Detailed Knowledge Keepers' Mandate	32
Acknowledgements	40



**British Columbia
Assembly of First Nations**



NAQSMIST

Executive Summary

From November 17th to 19th, 2023, Spiritual Knowledge Keepers from what is known as British Columbia came together in Ceremony on Tsleil-Waututh Territory, sharing stories, songs and healing around the current climate crisis, its underlying causes and its profound impacts on the Land and all living beings. These leaders provided insight for First Nations, communities, governments, and society to care for the Lands and Waters for future generations.

For the first time, a Ceremonial gathering in BC welcomed observers. They were asked to share the dreams that the Elders, Chiefs and knowledge-keepers have for this land, a shared vision for what this country could be: as human beings, we have been given the gift of voice on behalf of those beings who do not have one; it is all of our shared responsibility to carry that forward.

The Ceremony opened and closed with a sweat lodge for the Knowledge Keepers. Sweat lodges are used in Ceremony to ensure governance happens from the right mindset, one of connection to spirit, soul, and Creation. We are not just logical beings, we are emotional, spiritual, and interconnected and sweats ground us so that we make good decisions.

As the Knowledge Keepers gathered for discussion, the energy in the room was palpable. They shared that what many of us call climate change is just a tiny aspect of a larger problem: the problem of our separation from the teachings of Natural Law. Environmental degradation, species extinction, changes to weather and the environment around us – this is not just climate change. Humans were never supposed to be above the rest of Creation. We are supposed to live in balance with reverence for all other beings. When humans placed themselves above the animal people in a hierarchy of being, the world suffered.

Now, as prophesied, it is the responsibility of the Red People to share their wisdom and guide Little Brother and the other races into an awareness of the interconnectedness of things, of humans' sacred responsibility to the rest of Creation. We don't have rights unless we claim responsibility. To claim responsibility, we have to look inward, and first claim responsibility for our own wellbeing. When each of us heals, everything out there heals too. Society today is individualistic, but we need collective healing – people of all races and the Land. It is time the Red people shared their worldview.

On this path, there are many obstacles. There is trauma and there is work to do. When you pick up a rock, treat it well, for that rock has a spirit. Trauma has a spirit, just like love does. We must tap into this awareness and see the relationships between things as the priority, not the things themselves. This means breaking down silos in government and ways of thinking. It also means revitalizing culture, language, and Ceremony and restoring First Nations' responsibility for the Land through self-determination, jurisdiction, and self-governance. It means practicing Traditional Knowledge², Sacred and Natural Law, balance, respect, care for one another and the Land, education, cycle breaking, seven generations principles, and taking responsibility to stand with Mother Earth. Ceremony can be many things, but above all, it is a way of life.

We need to Ceremony.

² A note on language: Sometimes people choose to avoid using the term Traditional Knowledge (TK), instead referring to it as Indigenous Knowledge (IK) to show that it is indeed a living, changing Knowledge. At the Ceremony, both terms were used by the Knowledge Keepers. Regardless of terminology, we recognize that First Nations peoples continue to embody their Knowledge in ongoing and ever-changing relationships with Creation - TK/IK is not stuck in time, it is *alive*.

Knowledge Keepers' Mandate

1. Restore First Nations responsibility for the Land through self-determination, jurisdiction and self-governance.
2. Revitalize and exercise language, culture and Ceremony and share our worldview for the benefit of all beings.
3. Revitalize and strengthen Sacred and Natural Law.
4. Validate Traditional/Indigenous Knowledge.
5. Recognize that Climate Change is the inevitable result of the disconnect from the teachings of Natural Law.
6. Promote healing, starting with individuals.
7. Respect women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. What is happening to them is tied to what is happening to the Land.
8. Promote safety, connection and belonging for men so that they can continue to contribute to healthy systems.
9. Make decisions with Seven Generations in mind. Create a paradigm shift that re-establishes ecosystems' inherent value, not their value as resources.
10. Protect the Waters and the salmon.
11. Rebuild relationships with each other and the Land.
12. Prioritize the education of our youth; break intergenerational cycles and remind them of their purpose.
13. Our Nations must stop working in silos.
14. People of all four directions must take ownership and responsibility for their actions and work with First Nations to create a new path forward in relationship with Mother Earth.



Painting by Michelyn Lepage

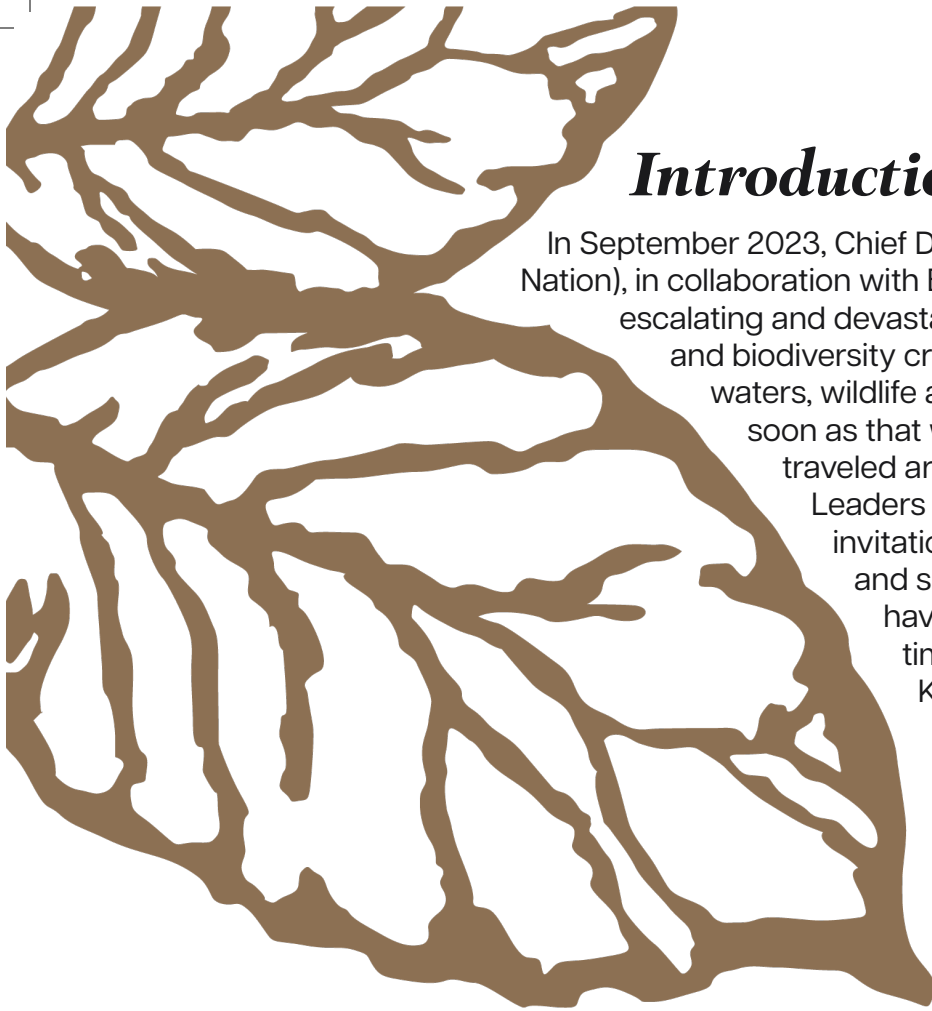
Background

From November 17th to 19th, 2023, Spiritual Knowledge Keepers from what is known as British Columbia came together on Tsleil-Waututh Territory in Ceremony, sharing stories, songs and healing around the current climate crisis, its underlying causes and its profound impacts on the Land and all living beings. These leaders provided insight for First Nations, communities, governments, and society at large to care for the Lands and Waters for future generations. The Gathering hosted observers to listen, heal and be inspired, with motivation and determination, to move forward with the next steps.

Funding was provided by the government of Canada, via the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), with additional support from the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS). Chief Rueben George and his Family generously welcomed and hosted us on their home territory (Tsleil-Waututh). The Gathering is part of work being conducted by the BCAFN to implement the [BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#) and develop a [BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda](#) (BC FNCL Agenda) alongside the Canadian government, which will inform future climate policy and funding reforms for First Nations in BC. Following the Knowledge Keepers Gathering, engagements will be taking place with First Nations in BC to continue to work from the messages shared by the Knowledge Keepers as we strive to understand and implement co-development processes with Canadian governments, and to deepen climate strategies, policy and implementation tools for First Nations communities. This work will include a co-development session to gain input on the concept of co-development with Canadian governments and how it can be done in a good way. It will also see eight regional engagement sessions hosted across BC to define and understand regional climate priorities and implementation strategies. Focus groups, interviews, written responses, and virtual recommendations-review sessions will also be taking place in 2024.

In trust, the Knowledge Keepers initiated this process to guide the work, without knowing what that would look like. This process seeks to acknowledge and uphold the Indigenous Knowledge that is too often left out of planning documents and initiatives. For many years in BC, policy people have worked tirelessly towards self-determination for First Nations peoples, with major wins along the way, including key court cases and the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) into BC and Canadian legislation. However, as the Knowledge Keepers shared, there continues to be a crucial gap in the approach taken by advocacy organizations, leadership, policy people, and communities.

Language, traditions, culture, and Ceremony are the foundation of First Nations identity. They are the sacred and crucial link between the people of these Lands and the Lands themselves. The spiritual element has been missing. Healing is not possible without a true recognition of self. **To heal, one must become themselves.** The Knowledge Keepers have shared that it is time to bring back Ceremony. This is a unique approach, and we hold our hands up to the Knowledge Keepers, the observers, and the BCAFN staff for supporting this work.



Introduction

In September 2023, Chief Darrell Bob, from Xaxli'p First Nation (St'at'imc Nation), in collaboration with BCAFN staff, understood that in light of the escalating and devastating consequences of the dual climate and biodiversity crises, both of which deeply affect our Lands, waters, wildlife and People, it was time for Ceremony. As soon as that was decided, Ceremony began. Chief Darrell traveled around BC to offer tobacco to 23 Spiritual Leaders from different territories – along with an invitation to take their sacred responsibility to attend and share their Knowledge, Knowledge that they have gained over years and decades of sweat, time on the Land, fasting, and Ceremony. The Knowledge Keepers are listed below:

The Ceremony began on Friday evening, with a sweat hosted by the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. The gathering was hosted on Saturday and Sunday, and then ended again in sweat. Sweats are not only a way to cleanse, but also an opportunity to connect with our ancestors and Mother Earth. Many will

enter sweats with a question looking for guidance or support. Often, it requires you to look inward, and open your heart and mind. Sweats are an integral part of the preparation for governance. Governance requires participants to be present in their wholeness, to be grounded in relation to Creation, emotionally regulated, and spiritually aware. We are not just logical beings, we are emotional and spiritual; we are mind, spirit, and soul. When important work is about to take place, many will rely on their ancestors to speak through them. We open and close Ceremony with a sweat to connect ourselves to our ancestors and the spirits who will guide us through what is to come.

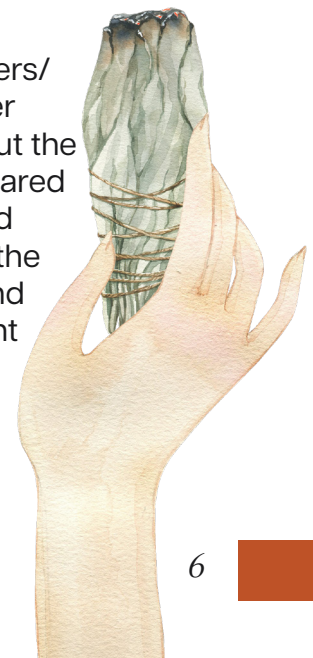


Pictographs, left to right:
Eagle - Sky, Sky People - Fire, Bear - Earth, Salmon - Water

- ◆ Chief Darrell Bob: Xaxli'p First Nation
- ◆ Theresa Bob: Xaxli'p First Nation
- ◆ Former Chief Harvey McLeod: Upper Nicola Band
- ◆ Helen Copeland: St'át'imc
- ◆ Former Kukpi7 Wayne Christian: Splotsin First Nation
- ◆ Marlene Squakin: Syilx Okanagan
- ◆ Former Chief Dave Archie: Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation
- ◆ Former Chief Ryan Day: Bonaparte Indian Band, Secwépemc Nation
- ◆ Elaine Alec: Syilx and Secwépemc Nations
- ◆ Frank Andrew: Xaxli'p First Nation
- ◆ Rod Tomma: Secwépemc Nation
- ◆ Rhona Bowe: Secwépemc Nation
- ◆ Kukpi7 Fred Robbins: Esk'etemc First Nation
- ◆ Shane Pointe: Musqueam Nation
- ◆ Ko'waintco Michel: Nooaitch First Nation
- ◆ Brian Michel: Upper Nicola Band
- ◆ Dr. Robert Joseph: Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk First Nation
- ◆ Rueben George: Tsleil-Waututh Nation
- ◆ Former Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Neskonlith Indian Band
- ◆ Minne Kenoras: Neskonlith Indian Band
- ◆ Chief Arnold Lampreau: Shackan Indian Band
- ◆ Robert Nahanee: Squamish Nation
- ◆ Elliott Tonasket: Syilx Nation

Alongside the 23 Spiritual Knowledge Keepers, 5 drummers, five dancers, and 80+ observers from provincial and federal governments, First Nations, organizations, academics and consulting firms were in attendance to witness the Ceremony and to spend time in spiritual connection, storytelling, silence, prayer, singing, drumming, tears, and hearing teachings and passing on Knowledge from the Ancestors. The observers were invited to build relationships and an understanding of what First Nations governance, laws and knowledge are by experiencing Ceremony first hand. They were tasked with taking the messages and lessons back to their workspaces, families, and lives, and to share the dreams that the Elders, Chiefs and Knowledge-Keepers have for this land, a shared vision for what this country could be: as human beings, we have been given the gift of voice on behalf of those beings who do not have one; it is all of our shared responsibility to carry that forward.

Throughout the event, participants were supported by the young Indigenous helpers/ volunteers from the Together We Can Treatment Centre in Surrey. Stacey Gallagher supported the Knowledge Keepers and observers by providing smudge throughout the Ceremony. The following report is intended to provide an overview of what was shared at the event, but not in the way of typical reports, where information is summarized and “objectively” reported back. Instead, we have sought to capture the words of the Knowledge Keepers as they were shared, in the spirit of storytelling – of Sacred and Natural law. Not everything in this report will make sense to us, and some of it might conflict with our beliefs or understandings of the world. We request that as you read, you read with the patience to withhold judgment and to see each part as an element of something bigger. Reflect on how you feel. Observe. Think about the significance of the word and the significance of the drum.



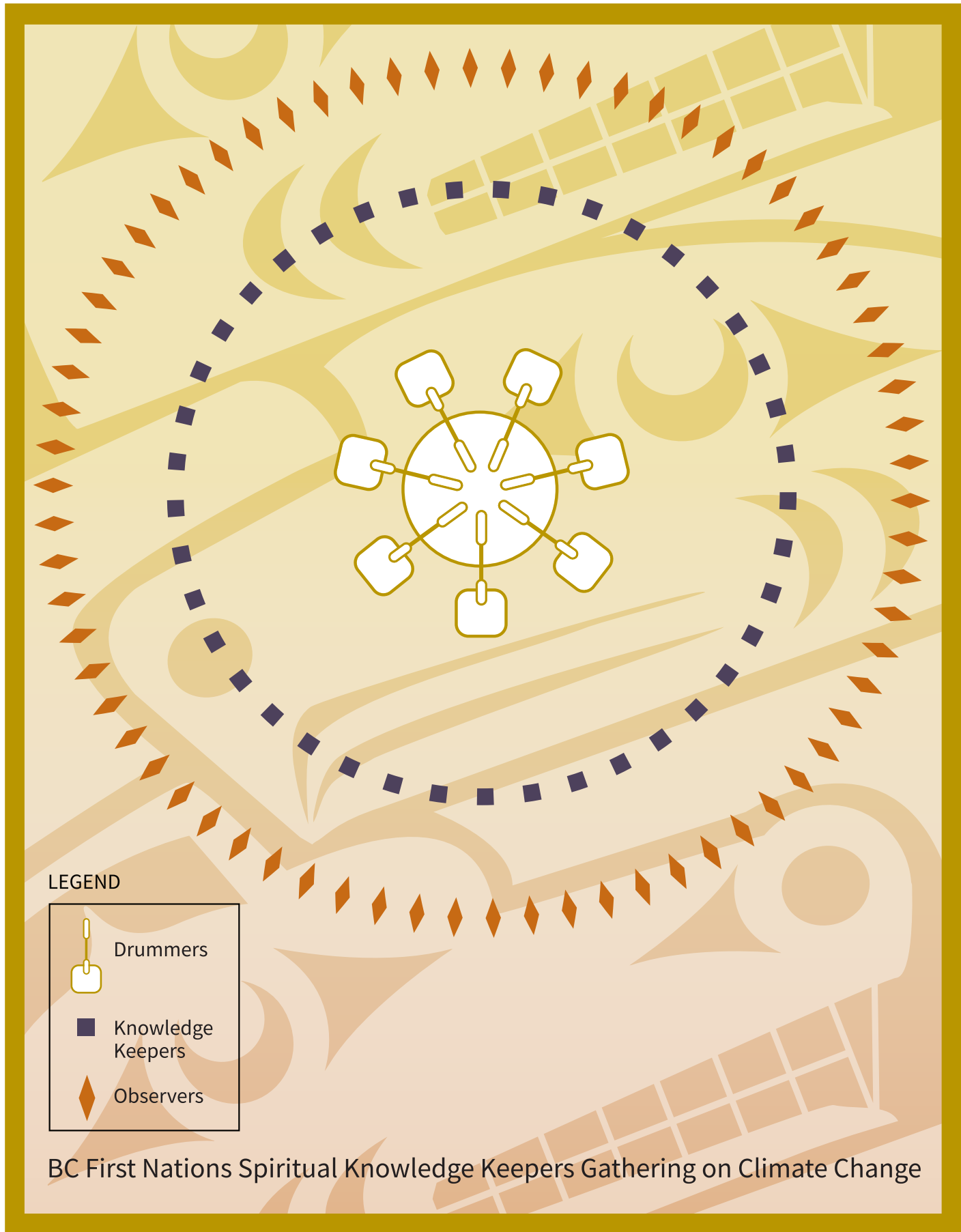


Figure 1: Layout of the Ceremonial Space on Tsleil-Waututh Territory

Ceremony

Host, Sundance Chief Rueben George, Tsleil-Waututh Nation, opened the circle.

Back in the day, everyone had sweats in North America. So many First Nations wanted to do a Ceremony for their environment. This is a Ceremony of earth, wind, water, and fire. When you combine any two elements together with intention, a spirit is born. Your words are medicine and prayer. My grandfather used to say, “Be careful how you say things because your words have a spirit”.

There will be beautiful words that come out today for our environment and our future generations. I see the pipes coming out, and I am so honoured to have all of the Knowledge Keepers in the room today. Your words are medicine. The decisions that we make will benefit everybody. I am so happy to see all of your faces and so many different races. With our journey to creating a better world, we will take anyone who wants to come with us - all paddling in the same canoe.

When you come to Ceremony in our sweat lodge, my mother will call you ta’ah which means “grandmother” in our language. No matter what you look like, she will always welcome you in.

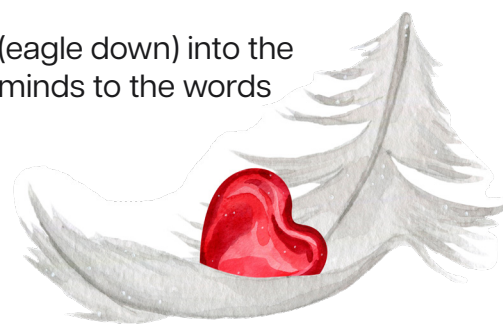
Rueben George’s mother, Ta’ah Amy George, Tsleil-Waututh matriarch, shared an opening prayer, welcoming the Knowledge Keepers and observers. She closed with a song from “A Lament for Confederation,” a speech given by her late father, Chief Dan George.

Ta’ah Amy George’s daughter, Charlene George, Tsleil-Waututh elected council, spoke next.

It’s fitting to have Tsleil-Waututh co-host this event because when you walk out of this building you see so much industry, and we as a small Nation are on the doorstep of industry. There was a dialect of Tsleil-Waututh that died with our old people. The language connects us to the Land. When our Land is sick, the people are sick. The nature song gives respect and love to all that gives us life from the Earth; we take just enough from the Land for what we need. We as Indigenous Peoples know that, and today, we get to educate you all. We’re here to let Ceremony happen.

Shane Point, Musqueam First Nation Elder, honoured the Knowledge Keepers by sharing medicine in the circle.

My Ancestors blessed me to spread *tumulh* (red ochre) and *yuxwule’* (eagle down) into the circle. *Tumulh* is to ground us, and *yuxwule’* is to open our hearts and minds to the words said today, so we can carry them home with us.



Chief Darrell Bob, Xaxli’p First Nation, introduced his grandson, Little Bear, who introduced himself to all of the Knowledge Keepers in the circle

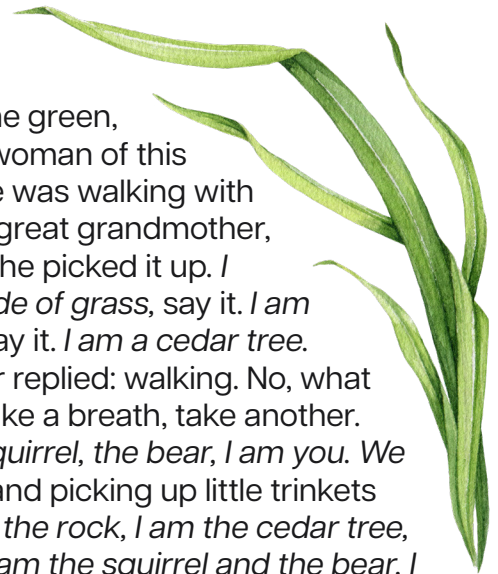
Through the eyes of the Ancestors, we brought these Knowledge Keepers together. There is no agenda in Ceremony; know that you are the agenda. The work is to heal. When you are invited to Ceremony, be ready to pray, heal, and enjoy good company.

Kyle Alec, Syilx Okanagan Nation, and the male youth representative of the BCAFN gave opening remarks on behalf of Regional Chief Terry Teegee.

I was raised in Ceremony, in sweats, and in powwows, and I am so honoured to be standing here today. Living in the Okanagan, I see fires every year, I see communities evacuate and hear about the floods and the winds. The animal people gave up their lives to ensure there is balance in this world, and it is our duty to continue that. I have never seen so many pipes in one room or so many powerful leaders surrounded by government workers. This is the moment we have all been waiting for, and it's about time Ceremony and the work starts to happen in a good way.

Katisha Paul, W̱JOŁŁP and St'át'imc First Nations, and youth representative of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), spoke next and closed with a song.

It is a beautiful day out there. Through the window we can see some green, some sky, some dirt, as we speak today. I come to you today as a woman of this Land. I'll tell a brief story that my grandmother shared with me. She was walking with her great grandmother. Walking side by side, she looked up at her great grandmother, wondering about the world. Her grandma said: pick up that rock. She picked it up. *I am a rock.* See that blade of grass, so beautifully green? *I am a blade of grass,* say it. *I am a blade of grass.* See that cedar tree? *I am a cedar tree,* now you say it. *I am a cedar tree.* Granddaughter asked: what are we doing right now? Grandmother replied: walking. No, what are we really doing? Grandmother said: Stop and think, breathe. Take a breath, take another. Pay attention. *I am that rock, that tree. I am the water, the air, the squirrel, the bear, I am you. We are one with Mother Earth and the Land.* They continued walking, and picking up little trinkets from the Land. *Who are we?* Granddaughter kept on thinking. *I am the rock, I am the cedar tree, I am the water that flows from the mountains down to the ocean, I am the squirrel and the bear, I am you, great grandmother.*



We need to remember this teaching to remember who we are. We as humans should not want to disrespect each other. So why would we want to harm the rock, the cedar tree? We have no right to disrespect, because that is who we are. When we harm the earth, we are harming ourselves. It has to stop. Please. As a younger generation, I am asking: please find your ways, go back to the roots of who we are, and be true to ourselves.



My great grandparents would go for walks, and on one of those walks they found a song. When I hear this song, I am reminded that our Land is our culture. *We didn't just make all of this up* – the feathers, the medicines, the smoke – that's where we learned our songs and found our protocols and our culture and our love.

The Land guides us through life with love. We all start small but we continue to grow. Through this life, we gain momentum and figure out more about who we are meant to be, we learn more and share more. Sometimes in life you have to slow down and let others pick up the speed. You are reminded of how gentle you need to be, because you are the rock, the grass, the eagle in the sky, you **are**.

Katisha shared a song.

As the Knowledge Keepers began to prepare their pipes for Ceremony, Rueben George shared the meaning of Ceremony and its relationship to climate change.

It takes a lifetime to learn a spiritual way of life, and the way I know it is infinite. I'll share a story about Spaniards who were going to come here and fish, and our Ancestors went to the ocean and told the fish to leave, and when the Spaniards came to fish, there was nothing there. Once the Spaniards left, the fish came back. We create a reciprocal relationship with the Land through Ceremony for a reason. What you are going to hear today is our Law. When a child is born, we are meant to raise them with those Laws, but in today's time, people's spirit is missing. You can tell when someone has lost their spirit: their eyes glaze over. People have lost their spirit from residential schools, and we are trying to heal that. We need to spiritually close those wounds. Psychology today is individualized, but we need collective healing so that we find our place in the circle. This Ceremony could go on for months and still not be done, but it's okay because we are starting now.

Chief Darrell Bob reintroduced Little Bear into the circle. He is the little bear cub, and is medicine for the Knowledge Keepers. Chief Bob continued speaking:

We have to adjust and adapt to the environment we have been given. Climate change has been prophesied; it was always going to happen, the two-leggeds just sped it up. It's not a crisis; it's a response from Mother Earth to our actions; we have to adapt to her. Sweats are here to provide healing, but also to prepare us for the changes in the environment that are coming. We have to adjust to the environment that Creator has gifted us, it is now our time to start doing our work. As the red people, our responsibility is to look after Mother Earth.

Wenecwtsin (Wayne Christian), Former Kukpi7 of Splatsin First Nation, shared the seven Laws of Secwépmc people:

1. Health
2. Happiness
3. Seven Generations
4. Generosity
5. Compassion
6. Power
7. Quietness

Through our creation story, there were the 4 Nations: black, yellow, white, and red, and they were sent to different parts of the world. They were given laws, and said that if they strayed from their laws, then the world would go into chaos. They lost their connection to Land. We have no rights, we have responsibilities. Life needs all four elements: earth, air, water and fire. The elements are out of balance – fire is too powerful, and water follows fire. These words come from my Ancestors. Ceremony helps move the obstacles in your way to the side.

Prophecies that have been talked about are here now, we're living them. We have to remember our responsibilities. Listen to Elders and let it flow. Spirits are always walking with us. The time now is a fast-moving river, the words we speak come from mountains and oral history. Do not be afraid of the fast river, look around you to see who is with you, you are at the right place at the right time. Each of you, we've been waiting for you.

When I speak of climate change, I mean the power we have to change things and connect to ourselves. Those of you who fast, meditate, go to the water, that's when the Ancestors come to you. Fire, water, air, and Land are life. Take one away, and we have nothing. We have to bring these things into balance. Our spirits & prayers are powerful. They are the ones that will help us. Be kind to each other. Every moment is a gift, celebrate it. Prayer: there's no right way to do it, it's what comes from the heart.

After the lunch break, Chief Harvey McLeod honoured the Knowledge Keepers and those involved in planning the Gathering.

There was a BCAFN assembly, and at the time I was Chief of Upper Nicola, and I was working with Kukpi7 Darrell Bob who wanted to change some of the language in the resolution. He ultimately said, “I will support your resolution, but first we need to talk about what will happen next.” The discussion was that we have to find a way to collectively come together to do this work; we as leaders, but more importantly, our people back home. At the end of the day, Kukpi7 Darrell said, “Let’s do Ceremony. Once we start doing Ceremony, our people and our government partners will know our worldview, our purpose, and our passion on how we will work together.” Once we decided on the location and the list of speakers, Kukpi7 Darrell picked up his tobacco and travelled BC to invite all of the speakers in-person.

As Chief Harvey went through all of the names of the Knowledge Keepers on their list, the BCAFN gifted each speaker with medicine to honour them. He continued speaking.

I know the worldview of Ministries and departments, I’ve worked in policy and politics, and I’ve seen the silos. Do these people know our worldview? It is time we shared it. Not through negotiating tables or courts, but in Ceremony. We have to start this work in a good way not only for our people but for our partners. How is this going to work? I sit at so many tables, you get tired and burnt out doing this work. We have to get our spiritual Knowledge Keepers to share – we seldom do because it’s so personal, but we have to let the world know who we are. We need to share our worldview. We need to open up so that the BCAFN understands what we do. Through this Ceremony, we can all get a better idea of who we are and how we can help. This is so needed not just for climate change but all the avenues in which we work.

Hereditary Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawaenuk Tribe, spoke next.

This moment has been really moving all day for me. I think I’m getting old. I wanted to say – I felt so good I wanted to cry. I see young people doing Ceremonies – and then I saw this circle. I didn’t want to be anywhere else. That you’re all here says something about you. That you care about the planet and you want to be part of something good. There’s been so much bad going on around the world, wars (Ukraine, Israel), and we have this long standing, growing, evolving issue called climate change that wreaks havoc all over our communities. Climate change is a signal from Mother Earth that we’re in deep trouble, but no one cares to listen. But I’ve been really moved by all of your presence because from this special place and this special Gathering, something can happen. We carry this message forward and we invite everybody into this circle to mitigate the destruction of our time.

“When I first got here, I thought you needed to know something about science to talk about climate change, but you don’t.

There’s room for me, for you, for all of us, for the people that care about Mother Earth, and so I’ve started to have this bold dream, that from this moment we reach out and take responsibility, grow this movement, call everybody who lives here, everybody in our influence to say enough and get involved.”

And I've been thinking all morning, where does it start? It starts right here, right here. With all of you. If you walk out of this room today or tomorrow and you don't make a commitment about doing something about what we're discussing then we're going to be in deep trouble because we won't have any of you as messengers out there recruiting other people, calling other people to do what needs to be done.

You've got to be a part of it. You've got to commit to yourself to say, I'm going to do all that I can, whatever it is. Some of us can do more than others. And we leave this place and we hold on to each other together like we always say in the language of reconciliation. We're one with each other, every colour, every race, we are not only going to be appealing to our own people to get involved... we've got to do something, enough is enough, and so we're going to require skills like relationship building... we forgot to have relationships with each other and the environment. We've got a lot of work and change. I'm so proud of all of you for being here today. When you go home tonight and think about what you've heard and seen, make a commitment, make a plan to do something beyond what we heard today in this beautiful Ceremony. Ceremonies are intended to elicit the deepest response from yourself, from your soul and spirit. It is important in itself, significant, it can't just be politics anymore. We've got to do something, we got to stand up and be counted, be a voice.

I recently had a vision – as I was speaking to some young people. I realized: Our rivers were never meant to be alone. The people that had been there forever needed to be there. The people that were born into those rivers, places, belong to those places through millenia. Everything in my vision told me that the environment—trees, rivers—wanted to renew our relationship so we could be custodians and restore sanctity to this great and wonderful planet of ours. So it is going to be spiritual work as well, not just scientific. Somehow elevating your psyche to the idea that we have responsibility, all of us have the responsibility to be involved.

There are lots of voices of different voices, different interests. We must reach out to those who don't care and are not invited and bring them into our circle. We need to restore sanctity over the Lands all of Turtle Island. The very people who are cruel are the ones we need a relationship with. We have a responsibility for long-term advocacy. I'll say right now that it begins with you.

Dr. David Suzuki was invited into the circle by Rueben George.

We have so much to do, but we've run out of time. Climate change is a symptom of a larger problem. We are facing mass extinction of millions of species, climate change, and poor water quality. As humans evolved, we gained something other species didn't have: big brains, memories – the ability to transmit knowledge to our children. We spread across the planet – we are the original invasive species. If you trace the movement of humans, you can see extinctions spread in a similar pattern. If the civilization couldn't figure out how to live in balance with the natural world's resources, it moved on.

Indigenous Knowledge contains the critical lessons of survival that were born out of the successes and failures of our Ancestors. Reciprocity is the understanding that we live in a web of relationships, and whatever you do will reverberate throughout that web. These relationships have been eternal; our responsibility is as but one thread intertwined with a million others. The conceit of science is: if you look at pieces, you can understand the bigger picture. This is not the case. Air does not belong to anyone. Nature doesn't care about human boundaries. The thickness of a tree ring corresponds to the strength of that year's salmon run. Old growth forests that are rich in nitrogen get it from the salmon. The salmon are feeding the trees. A single, integrated system has been torn apart into departments because we think we can manage it. The forests work together naturally; but the fish are handled by the ministry of fisheries, the trees are handled by the ministry of forests. They will never be managed harmoniously because it's all separated. We've moved out of the web of life, and we now live in a

pyramid with humans at the top and everything else at the bottom. It will never be managed. We're acting as if we're in charge. Our government, too focused on short-term time horizons, cannot think in terms of seven generations.

With science – I think, therefore I am – Knowledge is power – the universe is predictable, like clockwork – humans began to mistake the pieces for the whole. We have placed ourselves intellectually above other beings. We said: we're so smart we can understand; we can make machines, move mountains, live underwater or in space. Our economic system is built on cancer: it thinks it can keep growing. An economy cannot keep growing eternally. Yet, nature is constantly performing services for us, but that is not reflected in our laws. Nature has no value in our economic systems. Instead, our economies are the driving force in its destruction. We have elevated ourselves outside of the pyramid of life. This is our fundamental mistake.

They value the change needed at 70 billion dollars. Politics is incapable of handling this now because politicians are always thinking about the next election and short-term policies that are in their favour. This moment is an opportunity: the government is now looking at First Nations and supporting Indigenous ways of life. Indigenous peoples are the only ones who know how to live sustainably.



“This moment is an opportunity: the government is now looking at First Nations and supporting Indigenous ways of life. Indigenous peoples are the only ones who know how to live sustainably.”

Elder Shane Point, Musqueam First Nation, spoke next.

The scientists say Mother Earth is four billion years old and will die in four billion years. How do they know what happened four billion years ago? I know Mother Earth is old. I can't imagine how many changes she's been through. We've only been here a short time. We don't know what she's gone through. Climate change is hundreds or thousands of years old. My message is that we don't know. In terms of climate change, there's not a lot we can do, we need to change our minds, you need to increase your knowledge. The language carries the messages, our language provides us the connection. We as First Nations people are healing. We are revitalizing our language, culture and Ceremony. We are bringing animals back.

We cannot do much for climate change, but we can change our minds as individuals. When we understand our connection to salmon, we get stronger. How do I preserve that sacred connection? The answer is Ceremony. Ceremony is how we maintain the connection to Mother Earth and all living beings. *Naut'sa mawt*: we are one with the geography and ecosystems we live in. We are connected to everything.

Geography and the ecosystem provide us with language, culture, and Ceremony. We are in the same ecosystem as our Ancestors, but we're behaving like Europeans. We don't need money to make a difference, we need our laws, culture, and celebrations. Our people want to be connected. Language, Ceremony, and culture will provide us with the faith we need to better help Mother Earth. We can't worry about others; nobody cares about us. We need to care about the seven generations – the little bear dancer and our great-grandchildren, especially our great-granddaughters. We treat our earth how we treat our women, and so far we are not doing a good job. We need to share the medicine. We need to teach people that they're part of the ecosystem. Today's medicine has helped heal me. These medicine people give me strength so I can go on. Our Ancestors called on the supernatural beings for the strength to be ourselves. They are part of our ecosystem. We need to Ceremony.

Chief Darrell Bob took a moment to introduce the singers.

Some are Sundance singers, some are Powwow singers. I wanted to take a moment to recognize the importance of the singers' role in Ceremony; the drum is the heartbeat of Ceremony. I also want to remind everyone that the women will speak tomorrow; we decided that there is no better way to close this Gathering than to honour our life givers and remind us where we came from, from Mother Earth. I heard a statement: How we treat Mother Earth is a reflection of how we treat our women, and so far, as men we are not doing a good job. The men need to pick that up because our life givers are waiting for us to bring the balance back.

Frank Andrew, Xaxli'p First Nation, then shared his words.

There was a 120-year-old woman in my community. She was lively and healthy, but she was old. Two weeks before she passed, I was instructed to sit with her and watch her. I watched her breath. As she took her last one, two tears came down her face. I saw another old person pass on, a man. Again, two tears fell down his face when he took his last breath. Today, I now see what they were trying to tell me. How could we have done this to the earth? What went wrong? Our Elders lived by the laws of the Land. Everything they depended on was on the Land.

My brother told me a story, that when he was fasting, a bear told him about the bear Ceremony. He held the Ceremony on the day he was instructed, and 104 grandparents came into the sweat. We cut a four-inch hole in the top of the lodge and covered it with a bear rug. We need to bring the bear back to heal the people. The bear is a healer. The bear has moved onto our reservations, into our cities. So have the deer and the mountain sheep. They're moving in with us because we didn't look after where they live; they're taking over our place now.



All the Atlantic salmon are gone. My brother told me, watch: they're coming for us. When fisheries started years ago they told them to throw out all the salmon from the rivers. The Elders told them not to do that, but they did it anyway. I used to see red coming from the river because of so much salmon, but now I barely see them. All these things have happened in my lifetime.

Everything has gone wrong. We've become disconnected from who we are. tmix^w (the Land) gives us direction; you look at the Land, and you'll know what's coming. New plants in your territory mean a new disease is coming. The Land will tell you where to go to hunt and pick your berries. When we were young, we'd walk outside in the dark, and you could feel the spirits, feel the energy all around you. Now the spirits are missing from our homes.

This is not territorial; it's global. Flooding and fires are everywhere. California had fires one summer and floods the next. When the four elements come together, that's when we know climate change is here. Years ago our people managed fires through controlled burning, but now fires are burning because we're not taking care of the Land; we're not nurturing her how we were taught to. Some people see fire and floods as destruction, but we know them as renewal.

One day I noticed the big dipper was out of place. If you watch the sun come up, change is coming. The earth is off-kilter; it's wobbling. I wasn't the first to discover this, yet it was proven through science years after it was discovered by Indigenous Peoples through their relationship with the Land. These changes are a result of climate change. The time is now to listen to those who have strong relationships with the Land; there is no time to waste. The old people told us not to listen too much to our minds; they're too smart – no emotion. The mind will forget what it's told as soon as it's said. We've been taught to listen to our hearts.

Chief Arnold Lampreau, Shackan Indian Band, went next.

In the fall of 2021, there was an atmospheric river. It forced my community to evacuate because of the flood. Before the flood, we had struggled all summer with fires. Our community has been evacuated several times. Our Elders were treated poorly and not taken care of at the emergency shelters like the white people were.

When everything was flooding, I had to make the decision to evacuate our community. Without Traditional Knowledge I wouldn't have known what to do. I could see that this water was abnormal. We learned to watch the clouds, the moon, the sun, the grass, the plants, and the grasshoppers. It's passed on by stories, gentle stories. All of these things tell you what's going to happen. Traditional knowledge is something that is passed down, not something that you learn in school. It's all the things you learn in your lifetime.

We used to be nomadic, but now we have to ask the government to move. The sound of the drum is Traditional Knowledge; the drum is our shield. When we're fighting for Title and Rights, it's no longer Ceremony; we've resorted to the pen. I've learned to no longer be afraid to speak of where I'm from and who my Ancestors are. We shouldn't be afraid to speak up any longer, especially if we are speaking for those who can't.

The reason our people are dying is the delegated agencies. The same kids you see on the street are the ones coming out of foster care. It's residential schools all over again. How do you stop systemic racism? Not with money, delegation, or programs. It's with love. I had to learn how to love myself again. We forgot how to love each other. That's what this is about today; sharing our stories and Traditional Knowledge.

My dad took me as a young boy into the mountains to check the cattle. He said: wait here while I go. Watch this ant. I watched for over an hour. *What did the ant teach you?* he asked. I don't know. He just kept getting stuck and kept pushing over and over. My father asked me, *did you ever hear the ant say, "I can't?"* As long as we keep fighting for culture, tradition, and language, we'll always have our Land; they can't take that away from us.



After Chief Arnold Lampreau spoke, Judy Wilson, Former Kukpi7 of the Neskonlith Indian Band, took a moment to honour Kukpi7 James Hobart for work he and his community are undertaking in their Territory.

We're talking about our Laws today – and thanks to Katisha for talking about who we are. We are the rocks, the Land, the sun, all of our animals as well. We've been talking about how there's a mass extinction going on. You don't have to look far to see: it's happening in our waters, in our mountains, with our insects.

We wanted to stand up one of our fellow Chiefs, our warrior brother, who's been standing up for the Northern Spotted Owl, and he was feeling alone. He called people to his mountain, and a grandmother saw an owl. The last owl there. He thinks the government might have taken her into captivity to breed her. He doesn't know, because they're not telling him anything.

We wanted to gift him with some owl claws, stone, and crystal. We're fixing up some owl wings before we give them to him as well. This is about our obligation as we come together in this circle. Usually we do things in four – this is the first year we're coming together as Knowledge Keepers for climate change.

But as we know, climate change is everything. And Mother Earth is cleansing herself; all we can do is prepare and help Mother Earth. We can't stop Mother Earth, she's been scorched off six times. All we can do is prepare ourselves now.

I wanted to give that to you Chief Hobart, to you and your family, for the work you've been doing with our Northern Spotted Owl – our relative, our grandmother, Owl.

Former Kukpi7 Wilson invited Kukpi7 Hobart, Spuzzum First Nation, to speak on his work restoring the habitats of the Northern Spotted Owl.

The government thought they could manage the balance in exploitation with how we live our lives. Mistakes have been made. Our fight for the Spotted Owl rests on our fight to protect their habitat. There are First Nations that say they want to log old-growth. They see it as an economic opportunity, but it isn't about the money. The trees mean more. You can't grow back a 500-year-old tree, but you can transition industry. Old-growth forests are not fibre. We need to support Nations so they don't feel the need to get money by succumbing to old-growth extraction. We can't bring our owls back unless we rebuild their habitats.

Ryan Day, Former Kukpi7 of the Bonaparte Indian Band, then spoke.

Every year I practice Ceremony on the Land. I harvest trout, sow roots, observe the Land, and teach youth and Elders. In my Masters of Indigenous Law program, I was given the opportunity to go on a trip to Hawaii to observe and witness the Indigenous people of that Land. There is a small island called Molokini, between Kaho'olawe and Maui islands. Molokini is the umbilical cord between the two islands, Maui being the mother and Kaho'olawe being the baby. The US Navy used Molokini, a sacred Ceremony site, as a munitions test site after World War II. In the 1970s, Hawaiian Islanders would travel to Molokini on surfboards so the army couldn't shoot. Finally, the government abandoned their program. In the 1990s they received funding to start cleaning up the island, clearing off munitions and creating trails and pathways so that elders could go there to do Ceremony. At this point, no greenery and significant soil runoff were making the runoff look like blood in the water. You need a very light rain to restore greenery, giving the Land time to absorb the water. We had the opportunity to attend

a Ceremony on the island. As we were observing, we watched a cloud form over the volcano on Maui and bridge its way to Molokini, bringing light rain. That Ceremony on that devastated Land reignited our relationship with air and water to provide healing to that place. When we do the work and practice, earth, air, water, and fire will meet us halfway. The Land will meet us halfway; nature will lead us to the things we're looking for. Together we can heal.

“When we do the work and practice, earth, air, water, and fire will meet us halfway. The Land will meet us halfway; nature will lead us to the things we're looking for. Together we can heal.”

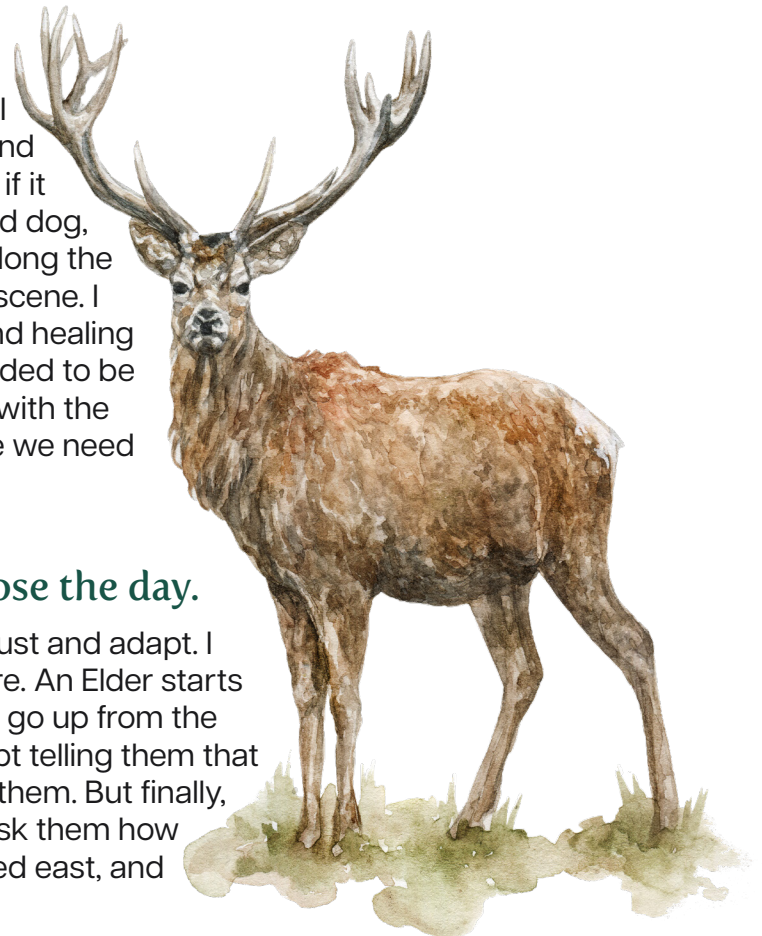
I am of mixed descent, European on my dad's side and Secwépemc from the Bonaparte Indian Band on my mother's side. My intergenerational trauma comes from my white side. When he was younger, my father shot a moose out of season. It was unethical, and he was caught. I shot my first moose in the Wet'suwet'en Yintah. I did it in Ceremony, according to protocols. At university, I learned that to be of service to my people's liberation I had to be on the Land, learning songs, language, and Ceremony. I started hunting regularly, providing meat to Elders. Every year I learn something more; each time I visit, I receive stories from the Elders. Last

year I went to sweat before I went hunting, and I put my intentions out. I stopped at an Elder's place on the way out and gave her berries. I followed all the right protocols. Five minutes after I set up camp, I downed a moose. My father was a hurt man. He made a poor ethical choice in taking that moose. I am interrupting that cycle. Through teaching and experience, we can have an ethical relationship with the Land. As First Nations, we make up three percent of the Canadian population, but we can still be the teachers breaking those cycles.

Finally, another story. Something I wasn't sure I wanted to share. I was hunting deer recently and crested a hill. I looked across the Landscape through my binoculars and saw a deer about a kilometer away. It was too far to tell if it was a doe or a buck. I decided to go after it. With my old dog, we traversed across grassy gullies towards the deer. Along the way, I stumbled on what must have been an old crime scene. I called it in, and I hope to have brought some closure and healing to a family. This deer had led me to something that needed to be found. We must continue building strong relationships with the Land, and then we can trust that it will lead us to where we need to be.

Chief Darrell Bob shared some words to close the day.

People say we are at the eleventh hour. We have to adjust and adapt. I was over at the Turtle Lodge listening to the Elders there. An Elder starts talking about his Igloo facing east. The scientists would go up from the University of Manitoba to do a study, and the Elders kept telling them that Mother Earth was shifting. The scientists would ignore them. But finally, the scientists realized and went back to the Elders to ask them how they knew. It was because the doors to their Igloos faced east, and their east was slowly shifting. These are the indicators.



When the yellow buttercups show up at home, it means the spring salmon are coming. When the grasshoppers start to hop on the grass, it means it's time to go fishing to dry our fish. But now, the buttercups are showing up in February, and the fish aren't there. The grasshoppers are coming later, and the fish aren't there. My wife and I watch the Land. When the Saskatoon berries start to bud off the flower, that is our new indicator to go fishing. We have cherries growing on our Land now, and that's scary, as much as I love cherries. But this is what we have to adjust to.

Chief Darrell Bob had to leave the Ceremony early due to a loss in his community. When you are a Chief, your community comes first. Rueben George took a moment to honour the efforts of Chief Darrell Bob, for his years of advocating for Indigenous Peoples, and for his vision of finally bringing together Knowledge Keepers in Ceremony. The BCAFN blanketed him with a Pendleton Blanket, wrapping him with the love of everyone in that space.

On the second day of Ceremony, Rueben George opened the circle.

It's been humbling to sit in the presence of all this. We're telling the truth of the Land. We can't forget to acknowledge the Ancestors that stand with us. We're clearing the way, breaking the road to this change. Our ways of life have been disrupted. Today we take it back; we take back our responsibilities. There can be abundance. Canoes are designed after the way trout swim through the water.

David Archie, Former Chief of the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation, shared his thoughts.

I grew up catholic in a community and a family filled with abuse. My mother went to residential school. My dad didn't go to residential school. His mom kept him from the Indian agents and the RCMP for two years by running until they gave up chasing them. He was raised with knowledge and culture. Every fall was the hardest, all the kids would leave and he was the only kid around. All those painful energies got to his mom and she left my dad to be adopted. He was abused as a child by his caretaker who was cruel due to their teachings in Residential School, and that cycle continued. Cruelty comes from that broken-down place in people.

There was a moment when my father was punished so severely that he almost left this world. He said "I went to where the Ancestors were. It was so peaceful. You could feel the love all around." He wanted to go, but he was sent back to earth. Growing up, we didn't know what our parents had gone through, but we were taught to blend in. "Don't cry, otherwise the white people will take you. The RCMP will take you" they told us. As I grew older I started to wonder about the seven generations – what did my parents go through and what did that mean for me?

I grew up at parties and was surrounded by abuse. I thought that it was normal, I thought that's what love was. One day I woke up and realized that what we were doing was wrong. I became angry. I didn't want to be Indigenous, I didn't want to be Shushwap, I didn't want to be from Dog Creek, and I didn't want to speak the language. I hated all of it. I felt lost and decided that I wasn't going to live past 25. There were attempts to leave, but I was always sent back. Even after my first son at 21, and 11 months later my second son, I still thought I was leaving. But after losing a couple of friends, and seeing their children left behind, I decided I couldn't leave mine. I had to find another way. I started looking into the traditions we did before going to church, because I wasn't going to go back to the church that hurt my people. I wondered: what can I do to feel better?

I started asking my Elders, what did we do before? I sat with people and listened. In days gone by, Elders would watch the young ones to see their gifts. I had to be sure with these people – can I trust you? At this point, my life opened up to the strength of my Ancestors, our community, and Nations.

“Individuals have a responsibility to heal – to support themselves, to support the young ones to know the strength of why they were born. We must heal to restore the balance between all our relatives and the Land. Healing as we go down the line.”

I learned we are all under the same laws and ways of being. We all want the same things for our children. I learned Ceremony, sweat, and how people connect to Creator. I started to find that healing, I wanted to learn the Secwépemc way. When I need help, I pray to the ones that have passed on. I talk to my Ancestors, my family and my friends in the spirit world. I want to shine the light I've been given.

Our parents would take us as children to see people who were not doing well – they were practicing bad medicine. I asked why are we going to help these people who practice bad medicine? They are still good people, they said. We need to

be respectful and help them. Help put their house in order, and clean up after ourselves, but don't leave anything behind – you don't want to leave your energy here. Our energy is on everything we touch and wear.

What about now? What about today? Do we have the courage to heal? Individuals have a responsibility to heal – to support themselves, to support the young ones to know the strength of why they were born. We must heal to restore the balance between all our relatives and the Land. Healing as we go down the line. What can we do now, in this moment? What can we do today so we don't hand these problems down to our children? Our children aren't going to wait for us to be healthy. We're role models and it's up to us whether we are good ones or bad ones. The young ones are going to do it with or without us. When I don't know how to move forward, I think about what my mom, dad, and my teachers would do. Our only solution is revolution and evolution. I've seen miracles; we are the Knowledge Keepers that we wanted in our lives. Stories pave a road to where we can be well. We have to continue breaking cycles – our women are demanding more of men. Men are demanding more of ourselves. But the cycles are still continuing, we need more from ourselves. It's not a matter of time, it's a matter of heart.

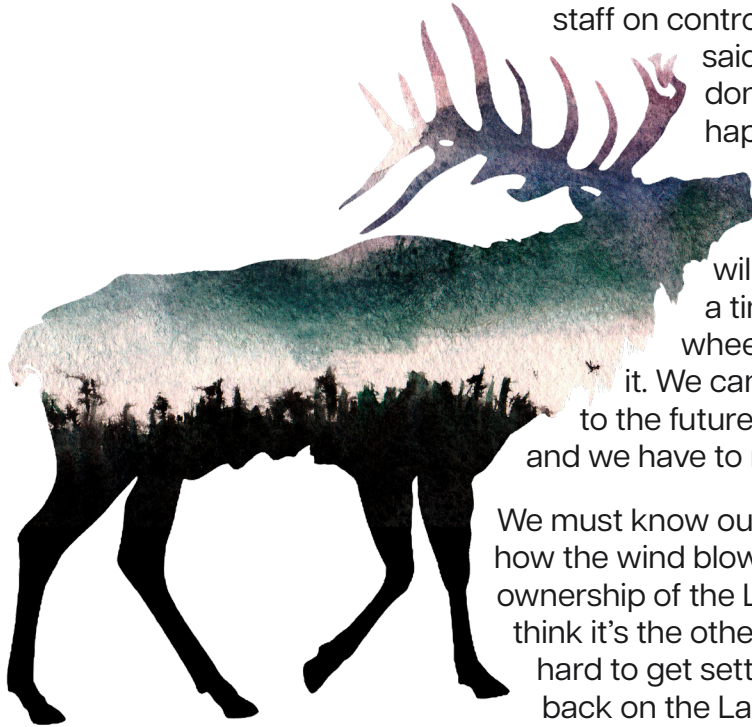
Kukpi7 Fred Robbins, Esk'etemc First Nation, followed.

As leaders, we have to go against the grain. I grew up in an alcoholic community. There was no connection to generations, Land, self, or Tradition. When our community was struggling with alcohol, we had a Chief who came in and banished it, giving everyone vouchers for food instead of money so they couldn't buy alcohol. When drugs came in, we got rid of those too. Before that, when I was young, I started working in town and I would blow my paychecks partying. After the residential school closed in 1981, I went back to my community. I didn't know my own people. I had the residential school chip on my shoulder. I never trusted anyone. One time I spent a few days in the drunk tank at the Williams Lake Stampede. When I got out, I felt and must have smelled something awful. I was getting a ride back out to my community and a car pulled over to pick me up. It was my grandparents. “Have you had enough of this bullshit life?” They asked.

They took me in. They started taking me on the Land. My grandfather said: see all of this Land? I fought overseas to protect this. That moment changed my life. Sunday mornings I began spending time with my family as they spoke the language and practiced Ceremony. I came to life when they were speaking the language. Now I'm so very grateful for my life.

In Esk'etemc now we have a community forest where we're bringing back fire, bringing back elk, where the moose are coming back. Our spiritual and cultural people are helping protect our Territory. We are doing everything in our power to fix our Land and community, but something is missing.

Land. Our population growth is outpacing our space and limiting our opportunities to continue healing ourselves and the Land. We have to stop asking the government. We're training some of their wildfire staff on controlled burns. They're just starting to pay us. They said: that day might not work for us. We said, we don't control the weather, it's happening when it happens.



Our Elders said there will come a time when people are looking for spiritual healing and will not even know it. They said there will come a time when our people are running around with wheelbarrows full of money with nowhere to spend it. We can't do it without our matriarchs. They're the key to the future of our people. They are the future of our people, and we have to respect that.

We must know our Territory. Where the sun goes up and down, how the wind blows in the morning and evening. There is no ownership of the Land, only a sense of belonging. Some people think it's the other way around, that the Land belongs to us, and it's hard to get settlers to understand that. We have to put Traditions back on the Land where they belong.

The connection that I felt spanned generations.

Robert Nahanee, Squamish Nation Elder, continued with some words.

Greed is our biggest sin. Our understanding of who we are has been interrupted. We come from the four directions. When the hungry ones came, we fed them.

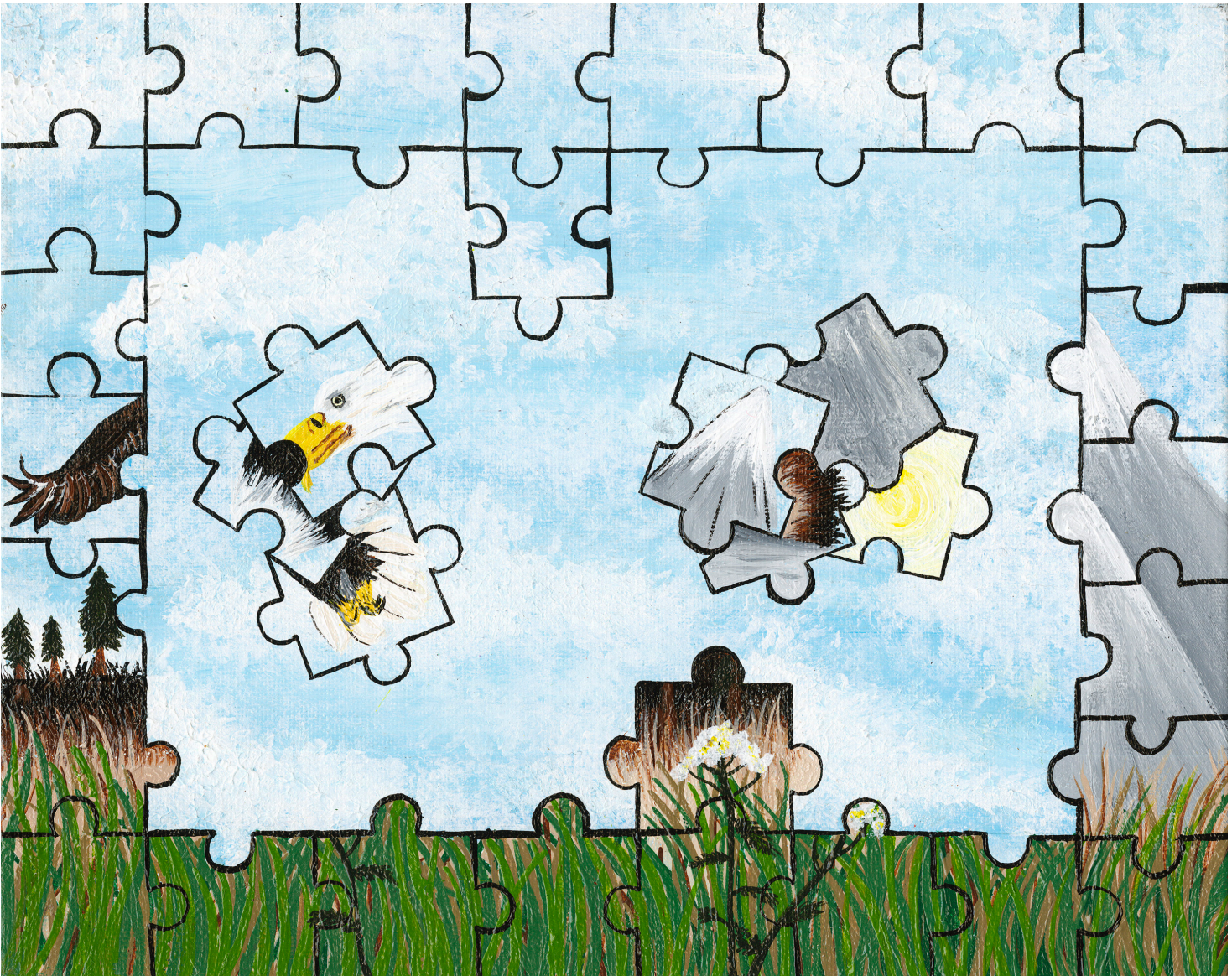
The scientists don't know who we are or how we live. We cleanse ourselves in the water. We go to the mountains to ask our Ancestors to help us. The Great Spirit, the great mystery. Why are we here? The winged ones and the four-leggeds. When we are connected to all things, we have peace.

We have to be humble! We don't own the earth, we take care of it. This doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the people, to Creation. As a leader you no longer belong to yourself; you belong to the people. Be humble, take care of the people. When they ask for help, you go. Today, they teach the opposite.

Who are you? I'm nobody. Just a common man. Nothing special about me. I've been told I'm a holy man, but what is a holy man? It's living the good life, going out on the Land and collecting natural resources.

I was sitting and praying at the headwaters of the harbour. The salmon were popping their heads above the water, and I asked: what are you doing? They came and changed the river, they said.

With our vibrations, the energy of the drum, the people will dance with you. We are part of the water and the mountains. Our old ones know we are made of water. Our Elders told us that if we abuse our



Painting by Michelyn Lepage

medicines, we'll get sick. It disrupts the energy we all have within us. The things we go through, we have to change it with Natural Law. The environment we're living in is being disrupted. Medicine was taken away.

We've been called Natives, savages, First Nations, aboriginals and now Indigenous. What will they call us next? ***We are the people of this Land.*** We've been through pain and suffering. We need to get clarity and focus and become aware of the medicines, the waters, and the mountains. We must go to the spiritual places and cleanse our bodies and minds. We have to go to sacred ground.

Elliot Tonasket, Syilx First Nation, spoke next.

My relatives have really enjoyed what they've seen here – the dancing and laughing and sounds. I'm thankful for the way this Ceremony has taken place. Since the start of this idea, it's been Ceremony. Our great grandchildren will need our help and we'll send the help they need. The connection that our people have is strong, our bloodlines have travelled before. It wasn't that long ago that things started changing. As I stand here as a son, grandson, I am sincere when I say I love my kids, I love my grandkids. I'm fortunate to stand here and say I am a grandfather. I'm thankful for this floor and how it came together. I'm going to do my best to walk into this circle in a good way.

He then began to tell the story of how our world came to be.

A long time ago, a supernatural being – Creator, was always creating things. He had a bundle like the ones laid out before us today, full of medicines. The bundle was laid out on the blanket of time. He tore a strip off the fabric of time. He took feathers from the bundle and started painting a Landscape with all the colours you can imagine. He stroked the feathers and miracles came to be. The miracles bore life. Shaking and moving, beings started emerging. "Here I am", they said. Salmon and crabs in the water. Life was happening, beings were emerging.

Suddenly, the two-leggeds came along with a big brain with thoughts. Somewhere we started to think that the Creator had made such a good picture, maybe we could make it better. We started painting our own strokes, erasing some parts of the picture to replace with our own paint. All of a sudden the painting no longer looked the same, it didn't look like Creator's vision any more.

Humans got tired of looking at the picture so they threw it on the floor and broke it. Our families, relatives under and above ground, in the water, shattered into a million pieces. We set out to build another picture, looking further and further afar, even to this place called Mars.

We need to gather all the people together and talk about what the picture should look like. I've only seen the picture in stories. We have to put the pieces back together. We need to gather those pieces. No matter what they look like, what shape they are. We need to start putting the puzzle back together to see what it looks like. To see what Creator painted for us.

Creator gave us hands and feet and a voice. All the ones with medicine; there are ways we can heal ourselves. Somewhere along the line we all went wrong, all of us in that picture. There's ways we can heal and make right.

How do we put together a jigsaw puzzle? My grandmother liked puzzles – maybe she was learning to fix things. At first, she'd start with the easiest part. In a puzzle that's the four corners. The four directions. Then she'd find the next easiest ones. That's the straight edge pieces. We start to figure out: where do they go? North, east, west, south. Try different places for them. Soon there is a whole framework to work in. Next, find the pieces with face value and start to organize them into groups. This is a tree, this is water, and so on. Until the very last piece, the hardest one. We only know where it goes

“Life doesn't just happen to us, life happens on purpose but we have to know what our purpose is...Humans have forgotten that we depend on each other. If you take away the four corners we are no longer human...Every day we have to save our lives, hold each other up.”

because we've gone through all the work and there's only one more spot for it. When we step back, we can see it clearly. That's what we're up against.

What are our borders? What is our framework? This method works. We're all here. We could be anywhere else. Our relations wanted us to be here. We're trying to gather the pieces and find ways of being for the modern world. Life doesn't just happen to us, life happens on purpose but we have to know what our purpose is. We depend on our relatives for this. Encouragement, support. Humans have forgotten that we depend on each other. If you take away the four corners we are no longer human. We forget that we depend on each other. The things that give us life start there. Every day we have to save our lives, hold each other up.

“Fire, water, earth, air: take away any of those and you lose humans. These ways saved my life; sweat lodge saved my life. Ceremony. Medicine. Food. Every day we have to find something that can save our life. Every day we have to find something that will save us. Tomorrow is not promised. When Creator signed the painting he signed it “welcome to your life”. This puzzle is a bunch of pieces of you and it is your responsibility to put them together. ”



Brian Michel, Upper Nicola Band, then shared.

I was brought into spirituality by the pain in my family. I never heard about my mother's time in Residential School and she died an alcoholic. My daughter struggled with drugs. All my family has their Indian names. I started in the sweat lodge early. I lived by the river by the poplar trees. I'd wake up and hear them popping and crackling in the wind and the cold weather. The songs of extreme cold weather. I never heard the song again. I work on the Land. The cold weather doesn't last long anymore. Those changes are impacting our lives.

One summer, my brother said the sun is burning hotter, it is more intense. The Sun burns us faster now. The ozone is thinner, we have heat domes in the summer. Sickness is related to the weather. Disease leaves gaps in our knowledge. You can feel it today. Water is part of our way of life. Quality water is required for good health. Look at what climate change has done to our forests – they are under stress. Insects go for the weaker trees. The forests are burnt to soil, in the future we'll have more grasslands. We've been in a drought for about 25-30 years. Will it go until the trees are gone? How long will this go on?

The first woman to speak, Elder Minnie Kenoras, Neskonlith Indian Band, stood up, surrounded by her daughters to support her.

This is Mama Bear speaking to you, and around me are my cubs. I'm teaching them the right way. My mother was a bear, and was taken to the Land at 9 years old. She was left there by her people, and lived there for 6 months. All the other animals and birds came, and when it came down to the last one the bear chased the rest away. They took my mother to the water, and showed her where to find the foods. She became that bear; a medicine woman, a knowledge keeper, a midwife. My mom taught me, and took me to sweat lodges, and that is who I am today. I was told by Creator, and by my Ancestors; I have a gift, I can see people who have passed on. My mother also had this gift. My Ancestors send me visions, and they chose me to have these tools, to speak, and to heal. I teach people from all walks of life. You must look for things, if you don't find them, call the Ancestors to help you. Look after your Elders, look after your grandmothers. This is how all people should be treated, don't forget the Elders.

When I had COVID19, I lost my tastebuds. Two years later, I am finally getting my tastebuds back from our traditional medicines. The tools that you have, and that you learn, take it seriously. Mother Earth will grow its garden no matter what. I live in a cabin, that is my den. My daughters want to take care of me in their homes. But I am independent, and I can be independent because I have the tools.

I have a beautiful family and I'm creating a village. It's a beautiful world. We have to work harder. We're all survivors, you're the teachers. Your house is your castle, and you are the teacher within it. When a child needs a home, take them in, nourish them, love them, cherish them. When they leave they might not come back. When a child leaves the house, give them a hug and a kiss. We have to love and cherish our children. My heart goes out to each of you here today. It's a hard job, it hurts. I have spirits all around me, they guide me.

Judy Wilson, Former Kukpi7 of the Neskonlith Indian Band, shared words.

I give thanks to all from this homeland who have made us feel welcome here. We all put our medicines down together today, put our spirits, our ways of knowing, our minds together. This isn't easy work, but this is important work, overdue work. I think we're ready. Many here have been carrying it by themselves.

As women we were talking about this Ceremony, and how the men had a lot to say. Two days is a short time for a Ceremony, especially after so long. As we were listening we realized: the men need this space. The men need to heal. What happened was supposed to happen, they needed that time to share.

My Grandmother raised me, she taught me. These teachings need to be brought back. We need to love ourselves first. We need to get to know ourselves, because when we do, we get to know Mother Earth, the water spirit, and grandfather sky. We get to know every element there is, and we know, because that's who we are. That is why those teachings are sacred. We can't do anything about climate change, because the Knowledge Keepers are saying Mother Earth is cleansing herself because we haven't kept the balance. We're cleansing and purifying ourselves too, and then we will be one. Because then we are leaving any of those differences outside, because they don't matter anymore. The next generations are what matter, and our own healing.

If we change from this work, that's the hope. Change ourselves to change the world. Hope to live, hope for our children to live, for our grandchildren to live. Our ways, our law. Natural law is the most important. We have so much trauma, no doctrine or legislation can overcome that. We need to change the world so that people don't want to leave it.

Women are life-givers. They laid down lives in hopes for all of us. Men are starting to apologize to women. In my lifetime, I've seen 4 men apologize to women. This is important because when they do that we can all come together. We can walk forward together. In abusing women we abuse Mother Earth as well. There is female and male energy in everything. We can find balance and harmony the way that creator intended, imagine the strength we will bring. We're strong together. The women need more time to talk. We need to bring the matriarchs together to talk about this more. Mother Earth's cleansing becomes our cleansing. When Mother Earth frees herself, we'll have to change our lifestyles. Climate change is cleansing and purification. I see the youth standing tall and strong.

Marlene Squakin, Syilx Okanagan Nation, was next to speak.

Natural law moves in a spiral. You see that in nature, in the universe, in weather, in flowers, in the wind. We didn't come from anywhere else, we are of this Land. Our Title and Rights are born and reborn.

There is so much sacred numerology in our ways of being. We all have many mothers: Mother Womb, our mother, two grandmothers, Mother Sweat Lodge, and the baby board. Sacred numerology: we are inside of our mothers for 9 months. Our 4 directions. There are 4 layers on a sweat lodge.

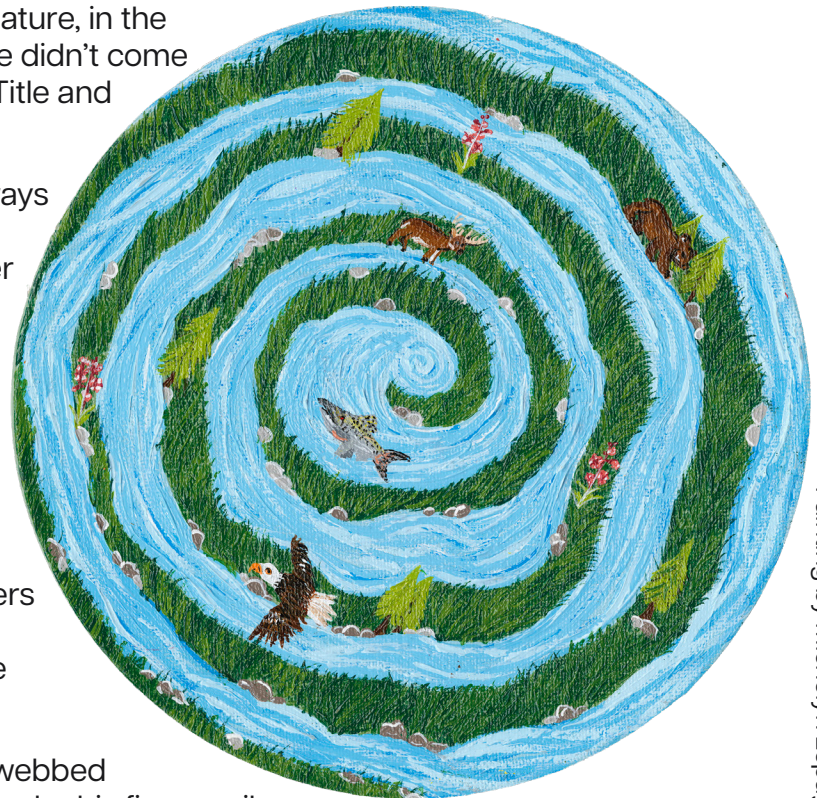
Everything has a spirit. Nothing can live without water. Everything is civilized in nature. The monarch butterfly is in covenant with the water. The nsyilxcən word "to dream". Dreamers of the Land. There are Indigenous peoples all around the world who were given the same instructions, to care for the Land.

Red trees were prophesied. Muskrat with his webbed fingers. Earth created from the grain of sand under his fingernail. Even a tiny grain of sand has a responsibility and a spirit. It cleans our water, purifies it. The rocks are our oldest Ancestors. Instead of a Bible, sometimes we use a rock. We are egalitarian – all equal. We are all born with a gift to make the world a better place. The gift of life was given to women.

The Sweat Lodge is a way of being reborn. All the elements are there. The fire represents life. The first water carriers were women. Babies are encased in water. The hole in the ground where we put the rocks is the belly button, the placenta is the altar. A tobacco line to the altar is the umbilical cord.

In the middle of a turtle's back is 13 moons, around the perimeter there are 28. Creator wears two rainbows. The third shaking is happening now, it was prophesied as well. It's all numerology.

Watch for water, this is our responsibility: the fires, the floods.



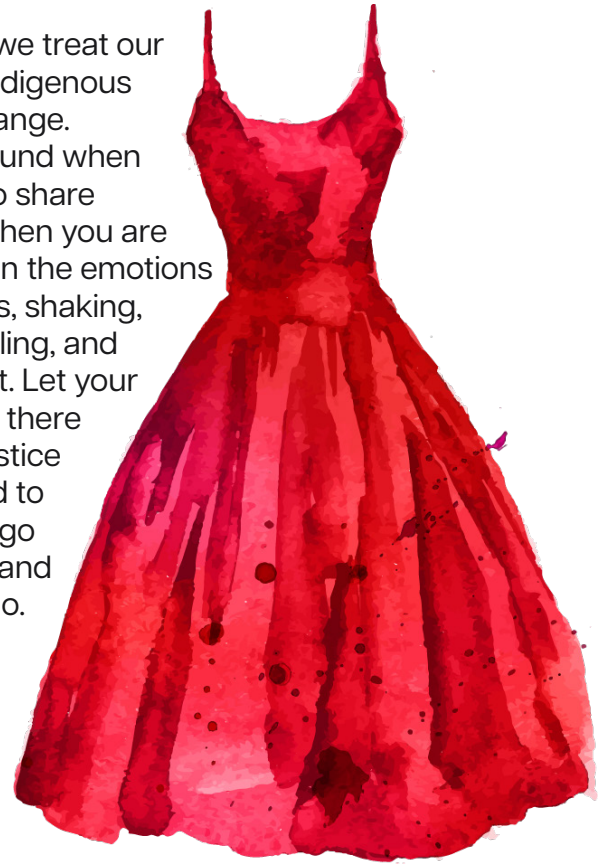
Painting by Michelyn Lepage

Elaine Alec, Syilx Okanagan and Secwépemc Nations, spoke.

When I come into a space I name my Ancestors because when I name my Ancestors I know who I am and it's easy to say what I need to say. Our Elders ask us two questions before making decisions: Who is your name? And What is on your heart?

My Tema would say: you know what many don't. Elected leaders don't know who they belong to, where they come from. Without that they lack courage. We know what to do in our Lands because we know the language. How do I do what I do? Because my Elders told me: we trust. We start the work, we start putting the pieces together. Even though we don't know what the final image will look like or how to get there. We just start. And we trust that we will get where we need to go if we listen well and follow the right path. We need to host governance in Ceremony with protocols, rather than at tables with Roberts' Rules of Order. Sit together and listen with discipline. Ceremony is consensus. The pieces will emerge.

It is often said that the state of our Land is a reflection of how we treat our women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ relatives. Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are tied to climate change. Violence. Yesterday when Ryan shared his story of what he found when he was hunting, I got triggered and I got emotional. I wanted to share about why I cried: Your healing is required to heal the Land. When you are responding emotionally to the contents of the Ceremony, when the emotions are so strong you can't hold them back, when you feel anxious, shaking, like you want to cry or scream – that is an opportunity for healing, and that is the priority. Lean into that, follow that. Connect with that. Let your Ancestors flow through you. Every time we heal, all of that out there heals. I heard a story and got triggered. It would do nobody justice if I held that in. Tears are healing and tears are Ceremony. I had to do it, not just for me. They didn't just belong to me. I had to let go and cry hard until I felt I didn't have to cry anymore. The tears and the healing and vulnerability are necessary in everything we do. This is why we reflect on ourselves, why we cultivate spaces of safety, connection and belonging – because being human, being emotional, having tears, is part of the work. Every time we choose to cry and heal, we are decolonizing. Every time we cry and heal, we are healing the Land. Every time we heal, everything **out there** heals too.



“We need to host governance in Ceremony with protocols, rather than at tables with Roberts' Rules of Order. Sit together and listen with discipline. Ceremony is consensus. The pieces will emerge.”

Recently I worked with government on a Gender Based Violence Action Plan. They asked us: how can Indigenous engagements inform our six pillar action plan? We said: we're going to do this work, but not based on your six pillars. We're going to do what the Elders asked us to do. **The answer is coming of age.** We said: we're going to take this money and talk about coming of age. How does that fit into our action plan, they asked? How does that question fit into self-determination? we responded. We don't know what it will look like. You have to trust us. We have to trust that the people will know.



Ko'waintco Michel, Nooaitch First Nation, shared from her heart.

My name means Tinted Blue Waters, passed from my great grandmother. I carry that name with a responsibility for the water that runs through the veins of Mother Earth. Without water none of us would be here today. I want to talk about the four sacred directions. The east where the sun comes up - that's *emotion*; the Asian people. The South is the *spirituality*, the Indigenous people of the world. The west gate is the black race, the *physical*. The north is the white people, the *mind*. All the people in the four sacred directions are important, all the brothers and sisters; we cannot take care of the earth without one another. When I see all of you with a different race, we need you as much as we need ourselves. Don't feel like you are outside of this responsibility we have for the world.

When I think about the stories that have been shared here; so much sadness and grief here. It all had to do with us being displaced. Put on a reserve, asked to live in the white way. Our world was our backyard; we didn't plant gardens. Residential schools removed our parents and grandparents from their homes and that broke down our family systems. The 60's scoop, where the government took children into childcare. Still today many children are in homes and want to be with their parents. Another family breakdown and displacement. That hurts me. I have nieces and nephews in that situation. One of my nieces was feeling suicidal because she's displaced from her family. So we put a sweat on for her. And that's what we're doing today, we're having Ceremony.

Another displacement now is the fires and floods and Landslides. It's like our house is all shook up and the furniture is all out of order. We need to put things back in order. That means we need to have Ceremony. We need to make sure all along the watersheds, the forest isn't cut down; it keeps shade for the fish to go up and spawn. We need to stop development, the raping of the earth. So much of that is happening, the hurting of the Land.

I do Ceremony, I run sweats, I do stone readings, I teach our ways to people in the school district. I shared with them how to take care of their grief. We share our knowledge; we don't look at it as something that is just for First Nations people. We need to bring these ways back.

Helen Copeland, St'át'imc Nation, was the last woman to speak.

My mother was Doreen Copeland nee Bob. Her parents are Francis and Margaret Bob. My dad is Sam Copeland. He was born and raised on the Land. He never went to school, never knew how to sign his name. He started work at 15 and worked all his life. My dad's dad is Albert Copeland and his dad is Joe Copeland. My mother is a silent speaker of her language; she went to residential school. I was raised being told that I would be tasked with stopping the cycle. I was young when my father died and my mother stayed true and raised me how my grandparents wanted.

I faced some really hard challenges in my life. I have been hurt. In 1983 I made the conscious decision to grow up, to forgive people. I saw councillors, read a lot of books. I hated men. I had no respect for them because they hurt me. I heard someone say that there were some men who stepped forward to apologize to women. A man who had been conducting a Ceremony had caused hurt. His wife, after some coaxing, gave him four lashes. That let me start doing the work. It took a long time but I was able to forgive.

I went back to school. My parents told me that any time you go to school, you have to do something on the Traditional side so you don't lose your way. I graduated six times in my life. I would roll up my sleeves and just do the work. I got a lot of healing from things like AA and church throughout my life, but I would always back out. I realized it was because it wasn't our way.

When I started getting good at forgiving, where it wouldn't take me decades, I started looking at compassion. I believe we are compassionate people because of our worldview. We are a balanced people; all things are connected; we need everything in our lives to live in balance. I wanted to have a symbol to remind myself to become compassionate. To seek it in people. I came up with Jesus Christ on the cross. I wore the crucifix to learn compassion.

In 2016/17, I went to a UBCIC meeting, and I found out there was a position available on our Traditional Stories. I started the next day. I worked with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. We read 60+ Traditional stories and I heard stories from Knowledge Keepers and traditional people all over St'át'imc territory. I was able to do tobacco and food offerings at every community, and to talk to the Ancestors. I've heard people saying our Language is on the Land. I started asking about the Stories.

The Story of How We Got Salmon into St'át'imc Territory: during the era of transformers, there were two brothers, and one was sick. They went down the river to the ocean and found a dam. They broke the dam and let the salmon in. They came home when the little brother was better. When they came back, they brought salmon into all the rivers and creeks. There is a connection with the coastal people. The responsibility that we share, the consideration that we all need to have along that way to work together.

One thing I've learned is that the Transformers – three bears – came from the coast before man came and they made things right for our people. When they got into the interior, Coyote came from the other side and said: no need to come up this way; I've made things right up here. I always remember the stories that tell us who we are, that we all have our own stories that tell us our gifts and how we can contribute.



Harvey McLeod then stepped in.



When I was younger, I spent four days in the mountains. I fasted. I didn't realize these four days would change my life. I met the little people, the ones our people talk about. One came the first night and took away my fear of the dark. I stopped yelling and screaming and just enjoyed the silence and the dark, it was one of the most beautiful nights I've ever had. I saw a mule deer walk in front of me – it didn't even see me. I realized I had become part of the Land. What a beautiful experience. Last year, going up there, I was gifted a pipe to take up there to go and pray. I took it and used it for the four days. We came down and did Ceremony and sweat and shared our experiences with the community. I tried to give the pipe back but he told me to keep it. For the longest time I had built a wall around myself. I had told myself: this is how I'm going to take care of Harvey. Becoming aware of the Land itself changed my life.

Another experience that changed me was when I became a Chief. I wondered: why do my people want me to be a Chief? My wife said it's because you are good at building relationships. I was gifted a staff from our community to acknowledge my leadership. I lean on that staff to remind me of the *good*. In 2014, I was reminded that there were relationships between people. The Fish Lake Accord. We hosted it to remind ourselves that there are protocols amongst ourselves. At that Ceremony, I gifted Kukpi7 Manny Jules and Kukpi7 Shayne Gottfriedsen a horse each to remind myself that we do have a relationship. You're not in this by yourself; you have relationships out there in the work you're doing.

“We have to continue this dialogue without creating more silos. We have to do Ceremony. More Ceremony, less silos. We must each do our own work so that we can work together. I am able to dream again.”

The last few years I've been open in wanting to trust the world again. There's more we can do as people, as individuals to heal Mother Earth. I'm looking around at what's happening out there. There are so many people out there talking about the same things. The lakes are warmer, the water is warmer, the fish have lice. The flies are different, the bees are different, the birds don't go south anymore. Our people are noticing this. Our world is changing and we don't have enough time. I pray every day for the strength to get up and do the work that I have to do. We have to find the way.

We have to continue this dialogue without creating more silos. We have to do Ceremony. More Ceremony, less silos. We must each do our own work so that we can work together. I am able to dream again. I'm sharing that with my wife and my family. I see my grandson playing hockey - he's a goaltender. He lost his first game 13-0. The coach said let me work with that one. He's getting one-on-one coaching and he loves it. It's his second game tonight. He's living his dreams and I am able to follow mine again.



Chief Darrell Bob closed the Ceremony.

Thank you all for being here. Thanks to the BCAFN, Harvey and the staff who made this a reality. This is the first one – we're learning. It's okay, we can grow from here. It's like my grandmother. She couldn't bend over to plant a garden anymore – she said: son, I need help. I got her a long pipe so that she could put one seed down at a time and she used her feet to bury it. Someone seen that, went running down to the band office, told a social worker. They said: we're going to take your children away because you're doing elder abuse. She said: you get out of here! That's where we're disconnected. We have to start taking our ways back again. Our spirituality. What are my thoughts on Truth and Reconciliation? There's no truth and no reconciliation without our spirituality. If you wanna understand it, give our spirituality back. We have to adjust and adapt to the world the Creator gives us. There are too many silos, but only one Mother Earth. The only way we can bring it back is to come together again.

Conclusion

Whether they were born into them or returned later in life, the Knowledge Keepers were raised in their communities and cultures. They participated in sweats, powwows, fasting, and Ceremony to gain access to their spirituality and Knowledge. Over the course of the weekend, they shared a consistent message: We are one with the Land. We are the same as the grasshopper, the squirrel, the bear, the trees, the rocks. Ceremony is the way in which Indigenous peoples create a reciprocal relationship with the Land, and Ceremony must return for people and the Land to be whole again. All the people in the four sacred directions are important. Indigenous or not, all of us have a responsibility for the world. The goal of this Ceremony was to inspire renewed motivation and determination to enable each of us, indigenous and non-indigenous, to take meaningful steps forward on the path of climate action.

The Knowledge Keepers emphasized that Climate change is just a symptom of a larger problem of humans having placed themselves above other beings in a hierarchy of existence. Now it is too late; climate change is happening. Yet it was prophesied; First Nations knew it would come. For all people, not just First Nations, the task now is to adapt our way of life to suit the environment. This means we must humbly accept our role as but one of a thousand threads of being, and to apply Sacred and Natural Law, Stories and observations of the Land. By doing so, we fulfill the role in the environment that the Creator has gifted us. What Stories do we have that can guide us through these times? What do we already know about who we are that can show us the way? What are we seeing on the Land that tells us when to fish, when to harvest berries, how to be amongst one another? We must listen and observe.

On this path toward wholeness, much healing is needed. Both our systems and our peoples are hurting, and of course this is reflected on the Land. Culture and Ceremony, language, Law, and relationship to Land have been taken away. Cycles of abuse have sprung up. People without power feel the need to take power from others, and the cycle continues. Individual healing is the first step. We cannot take care of anyone or anything if we are not well. Ceremony is essential to wellness because it allows us to access the spiritual realm, the interconnectedness of things, the endless other parts of ourselves that we lose when we chunk up the world and put walls around the pieces. **It allows us to be who we are.**

And on this, another key message: Our systems are too siloed – they are unable to see the wholeness of Creation. Humans have mechanized the world: a ministry or department for every resource or subject area; like parts of an engine, categories of thought emphasize things rather than the spaces and relationships in between them. This is not the way the world works. People suffer because of it. In the words of Chief Darrell Bob, “There are too many silos, but only one Mother Earth. The only way we can bring it back is to come together again.” Therefore, we must pay attention to the relationships and connections between things, work to heal our relationships with one-another (as humans) and the Land, and observe how our actions ripple across systems.



Language, culture and Ceremony. Language is the mental framework that bridges the gap between people and the Land. With words that express that a rock can be living, or that the Land is of us, the logic that emerges carries instructions for how to be. Culture is the social framework that reinforces relationality through song, dance, art, Story, Language, Teachings, ways of being, *relationships*. The boundaries between things fade away as we embrace our sacred responsibility to be spiritual, and what emerges is healthy people and healthy systems. In the words of Hereditary Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, “Ceremonies are intended to elicit the deepest response from yourself, from your soul and spirit,” and as such, they are the way to connect with the rest of Creation. In the words of Elder Shane Point, “We need to Ceremony.”

Detailed Knowledge Keepers' Mandate

1. Restore First Nations responsibility for the Land through self-determination, jurisdiction and self-governance.

When we're fighting for Title and Rights, it's no longer Ceremony; we've resorted to the pen. I've learned to no longer be afraid to speak of where I'm from and who my Ancestors are. We shouldn't be afraid to speak up any longer, especially if we are speaking for those who can't...As long as we keep fighting for culture, tradition, and language, we'll always have our Land; they can't take that away from us.

– Chief Arnold Lampreau, Shackan Indian Band

We must know our Territory. Where the sun goes up and down, how the wind blows in the morning and evening. There is no ownership of the Land, only a sense of belonging. Some people think it's the other way around, that the Land belongs to us, and it's hard to get settlers to understand that. We have to put Traditions back on the Land where they belong. – Kukpi7 Fred Robbins, Esk'etemc First Nation

We have to be humble! We don't own the earth, we take care of it. This doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the people, to Creation. As a leader you no longer belong to yourself, you belong to the people. Be humble, take care of the people. When they ask for help, you go. – Robert Nahanee, Squamish Nation

2. Revitalize and exercise language, culture and Ceremony and share our worldview for the benefit of all beings.

The laws we govern by come from the Ceremonies. It's not a system, it's our way of life. We must celebrate that we're still here. Protect the things that are represented in these bundles; water, earth, air, fire. – Sundance Chief Rueben George, Tsleil-Waututh First Nation

Let's do Ceremony. Once we start doing Ceremony, our people and our government partners will know our worldview, our purpose, and our passion on how we will work together.

– Chief Darrell Bob, Xax'lip First Nation

The language carries the messages, our language provides us the connection...How do I preserve that sacred connection? The answer is Ceremony. Ceremony is how we maintain the connection to Mother Earth and all living beings. – Elder Shane Pointe, Musqueam First Nation

How do I do what I do? Because my Elders told me: we trust. We start the work, we start putting the pieces together. Even though we don't know what the final image will look like or how to get there. We *just* start. And we trust that we will get where we need to go if we listen well and follow the right path. We need to host governance in Ceremony with protocols, rather than at tables with Roberts' Rules of Order. Sit together and listen with discipline. Ceremony *is* consensus. The pieces will emerge.

– Elaine Alec, Syilx and Secwépemc Nations

I do Ceremony, I run sweats, I do stone readings, I teach our ways to people in the school district. I shared with them how to take care of their grief. We share our knowledge; we don't look at it as something that is just for First Nations people. We need to bring these ways back.

– Ko'waintco Michel, Nooaitch First Nation

I sit at so many tables, you get tired and burnt out doing this work. We have to get our spiritual Knowledge Keepers to share – we seldom do because it's so personal, but we have to let the world know who we are. We need to share our worldview. We need to open up so that the BCAFN understands what we do. Through this Ceremony, we can all get a better idea of who we are and how we can help. This is so needed not just for climate change but all the avenues in which we work.

– Former Chief Harvey McLeod, Upper Nicola Band

3. Revitalize and strengthen Sacred and Natural Law.

Through our creation story, there were the 4 Nations: black, yellow, white, and red, and they were sent to different parts of the world. They were given laws, and said that if they strayed from their laws then the world would go into chaos. – Wenecwtsin (Wayne Christian), Splatsin First Nation

We have to adjust and adapt to the environment we have been given. Climate change has been prophesied; it was always going to happen, the two-leggeds just sped it up. It's not a crisis; it's a natural process that we have to adapt to. Sweats are here to provide healing, but also to prepare us for the environment that's coming. We have to adjust to the environment that Creator has gifted us, it is now our time to start doing our work. As the red people, our responsibility is to look after Mother Earth.

– Chief Darrell Bob, Xax'lip First Nation

Natural law moves in a spiral. You see that in nature, in the universe, in weather. We didn't come from anywhere else, **we are of this Land**. Our Title and Rights are born and reborn.

– Marlene Squakin, Syilx Okanagan Nation

The prophecies have been coming true. All the trees went red. We have the gift of voice to speak on behalf of those who can't. Flooding and fires have been prophesied. It is our responsibility. Water is our responsibility. And water will become the responsibility of the younger ones.

– Rhona Bowe, Secwépemc Nation

I want to talk about the four sacred directions. The east where the sun comes up - that's *emotion*; the Asian people. The South is the *spirituality*, the Indigenous people of the world. The west gate is the black race, the *physical*. The north is the white people, the *mind*. All the people in the four sacred directions are important, all the brothers and sisters; we cannot take care of the earth without one another. When I see all of you with a different race, we need you as much as we need ourselves. Don't feel like you are outside of this responsibility we have for the world.

– Ko'waintco Michel, Nooaitch First Nation

One thing I've learned is that the Transformers – three bears – came from the coast before man came and they made things right for our people. When they got into the interior, Coyote came from the other side and said: no need to come up this way; I've made things right up here. I always remember the stories that tell us who we are, that we all have our own stories that tell us our gifts and how we can contribute. – Helen Copeland, St'át'imc First Nation

4. Uphold Traditional/ Indigenous Knowledge.

We have to remember our responsibilities. Listen to Elders and let it flow. Spirits are always walking with us. The time now is a fast-moving river, the words we speak come from mountains and oral history. Do not be afraid of the fast river, look around you to see who is with you – you are at the right place at the right time. Each of you, we've been waiting for you.

– Wenecwtsin (Wayne Christian), Splatsin First Nation

I thought you needed to know something about science to talk about climate change, but you don't. There's room for us, the people that care about Mother Earth...It's spiritual, not just scientific.

– Hereditary Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawaenuk Tribe

Indigenous Knowledge contains the critical lessons of survival that were born out of the successes and failures of our Ancestors. Reciprocity is the understanding that we live in a web of relationships, and whatever you do will reverberate throughout that web. These relationships have been eternal; our responsibility is as but one thread intertwined with a million others. – Dr. David Suzuki

Years ago our people managed fires through controlled burning, but now fires are burning because we're not taking care of the Land; we're not nurturing her how we were taught to. Some people see fire and floods as destruction, but we know them as renewal. – Frank Andrew, Xaxli'p First Nation

When the yellow buttercups show up at home, it means the spring salmon are coming. When the grasshoppers start to hop on the grass, it means it's time to go fishing to dry our fish. But now, the buttercups are showing up in February, and the fish aren't there. The grasshoppers are coming later, and the fish aren't there. My wife and I watch the Land. When the Saskatoon berries start to bud off the flower, that is our new indicator to go fishing. We have cherries growing on our Land now, and that's scary, as much as I love cherries. But this is what we have to adjust to.

– Chief Darrel Bob, Xax'lip First Nation

When everything was flooding, I had to make the decision to evacuate our community. Without Traditional Knowledge I wouldn't have known what to do. I could see that this water was abnormal. We learned to watch the clouds, the moon, the sun, the grass, the plants, and the grasshoppers. It's passed on by stories, gentle stories. All of these things tell you what's going to happen. Traditional knowledge is something that is passed down, not something that you learn in school. It's all the things you learn in your lifetime. – Chief Arnold Lampreau, Shackan Indian Band

5. Recognize that Climate Change is the inevitable result of the disconnect from the teachings of Natural Law.

Our understanding of who we are has been interrupted. We come from the four directions. When the hungry ones came, we fed them. The scientists don't know who we are or how we live. We cleanse ourselves in the water. We go to the mountains to ask our Ancestors to help us. The Great Spirit, the great mystery. *Why are we here?* The winged ones and the four-leggeds. When we are connected to all things, we have peace. We have to be humble! We don't own the earth, we take care of it. *This* doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the people, to Creation. As a leader you no longer belong to yourself; you belong to the people. Be humble, take care of the people. When they ask for help, you go. Today, they teach the opposite. – Robert Nahanee, Squamish Nation Elder

An economy cannot keep growing eternally. Nature is constantly performing services for us, but that is not reflected in our laws. Nature has no value in our economic systems. Instead, our economies are the driving force in its destruction. We have elevated ourselves outside of the pyramid of life. This is our fundamental mistake. – Dr. David Suzuki

Our ways, our law. Natural law is the most important. We have so much trauma, no doctrine or legislation can overcome that. We need to change the world so that people don't want to leave it.

– Former Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Neskonlith Indian Band

6. Promote healing, starting with individuals.

You can tell when someone has lost their spirit: their eyes glaze over. People have lost their spirit from residential schools, and we are trying to heal that. We need to spiritually close those wounds. Psychology today is individualized, but we need collective healing so that we find our place in the circle.

– Sundance Chief Rueben George, Tsleil-Waututh First Nation

When you pick up a rock, treat it well, that rock has spirit. Trauma has a spirit, just like love does. Every culture in the world celebrates love and marriage. All of these things feed our souls, whether good or bad. The most important road you ever walk is between your mind, heart and soul...Babies are born with no hate, and that's how we're supposed to raise them. That's how we see their gifts, that's how we heal. We can't work within the ways of the Canadian government. Ceremony is the way of life. Lots of healing needs to be done to open up the eyes of our people. We all have a spirit, we're all born perfect. We're beautiful just the way we are. – Sundance Chief Rueben George, Tsleil-Waututh First Nation

My brother told me a story, that when he was fasting, a bear told him about the bear Ceremony. He held the Ceremony on the day he was instructed, and 104 grandparents came into the sweat. We cut a four-inch hole in the top of the lodge and covered it with a bear rug. We need to bring the bear back to heal the people. The bear is a healer. The bear has moved onto our reservations, into our cities. So have the deer and the mountain sheep. They're moving in with us because we didn't look after where they live; they're taking over our place now. – Frank Andrew, Xax'lip First Nation

Do we have the courage to heal? Individuals have a responsibility to heal – to support themselves to support the young ones to know the strength of why they were born. We must heal to restore the balance between all our relatives and the Land. Healing as we go down the line. What can we do now, in this moment? What can we do today so we don't hand these problems down to our children? Our children aren't going to wait for us to be healthy. We're role models and it's up to us whether we are good ones or bad ones. – David Archie, Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation

They took me in. They started taking me on the Land. My grandfather said: see all of this Land? I fought overseas to protect this. That moment changed my life. Sunday mornings I began spending time with my family as they spoke the language and practiced Ceremony. I came to life when they were speaking the language. Now I'm so very grateful for my life.
– Kukpi7 Fred Robbins, Esk'etemc First Nation

Life doesn't just happen to us, life happens on purpose but we have to know what our purpose is. We depend on our relatives for this. Encouragement, support. Humans have forgotten that we depend on each other. – Elliot Tonasket, Syilx Nation

The tools that you have, and that you learn, take it seriously. Mother Earth will grow its garden no matter what. I live in a cabin, that is my den. My daughters want to take care of me in their homes. But I am independent, and I can be independent because I have the tools.
– Elder Minnie Kenoras, Neskonlith Indian Band

We can't do anything about climate change, because the Knowledge Keepers are saying Mother earth is cleansing herself because we haven't kept the balance. We're cleansing and purifying ourselves too, and then we will be one. – Judy Wilson, Neskonlith Indian Band

When you are responding emotionally to the contents of the Ceremony... that is an opportunity for healing, and that is the priority. Lean into that, follow that. Connect with that. Let your Ancestors flow through you. Every time we heal, all of that *out there* heals... This is why we reflect on ourselves, why we cultivate spaces of safety, connection and belonging – because being human, being emotional, having tears, is part of the work. Every time we choose to cry and heal, we are decolonizing. Every time we cry and heal, we are healing the Land. Every time we heal, everything *out there* heals too.
– Elaine Alec, Syilx and Secwépemc Nations

7. Respect women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. What is happening to them is tied to what is happening to the Land.

We have no rights, we have responsibilities. Life needs all four elements: earth, air, water and fire. The elements are out of balance – fire is too powerful, and water follows fire.

– Wenecwtsin (Wayne Christian), Splantsin First Nation

Our Elders said there will come a time when people are looking for spiritual healing and will not even know it... We can't do it without our matriarchs. They're the key to the future of our people. They are the future of our people, and we have to respect that. – Kukpi7 Fred Robbins, Esk'etemc First Nation

Women are life-givers. They laid down lives in hopes for all of us. Men are starting to apologize to women... This is important because when they do that we can all come together. We can walk forward together. In abusing women we abuse Mother Earth as well. There is female and male energy in everything. We can find balance and harmony the way that creator intended, imagine the strength we will bring... Mother Earth's cleansing becomes our cleansing. – Judy Wilson, Neskonlith Indian Band

Red trees were prophesied. Muskrat with his webbed fingers. Earth created from the grain of sand under his fingernail. Even a tiny grain of sand has a responsibility and a spirit. It cleans our water, purifies it. The rocks are our oldest Ancestors. Instead of a Bible, sometimes we use a rock. We are egalitarian – all equal. We are all born with a gift to make the world a better place. The gift of life was given to women. – Marlene Squakin, Syilx Okanagan Nation

It is often said that the state of our Land is a reflection of how we treat our women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ relatives. Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are tied to climate change. – Elaine Alec, Syilx and Secwépemc Nations

8. Promote safety, connection and belonging for men so that they can continue to contribute to healthy systems.

As women we were talking about this Ceremony, and how the men had a lot to say. Two days is a short time for a Ceremony, especially after so long. As we were listening we realized: the men needed this space. The men need to heal. What happened here was supposed to happen, they needed that time to share. – Judy Wilson, Neskonlith Indian Band

How we treat Mother Earth is a reflection of how we treat our women, and so far, as men we are not doing a good job. The men need to pick that up because our life givers are waiting for us to bring the balance back. Chief Darrel Bob, Xax'lip First Nation

What about now? What about today? Do we have the courage to heal? Individuals have a responsibility to heal – to support themselves to support the young ones to know the strength of why they were born. We must heal to restore the balance between all our relatives and the Land. Healing as we go down the line. What can we do now, in this moment? What can we do today so we don't hand these problems down to our children? Our children aren't going to wait for us to be healthy... Our only solution is revolution and evolution. I've seen miracles; we are the Knowledge Keepers that we wanted in our lives. Stories pave a road to where we can be well. We have to continue breaking cycles – our women are demanding more of men. Men are demanding more of ourselves. But the cycles are still continuing, we need more from ourselves. It's not a matter of time, it's a matter of heart.

– David Archie, Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation

9. Make decisions with the Seven Generations in mind. Create a paradigm shift that re-establishes ecosystems' inherent value, not their value as resources.

We're acting as if we're in charge. Our government, too focused on short-term time horizons, cannot think in terms of seven generations. – Dr. David Suzuki

Naut'sa mawt: we are one with the geography and ecosystems we live in. We are connected to everything. – Elder Shane Point, Musqueam First Nation

There are First Nations that say they want to log old-growth. They see it as an economic opportunity, but it isn't about the money. The trees mean more. You can't grow back a 500-year-old tree, but you can transition industry. Old-growth forests are not fibre. We need to support Nations so they don't feel the need to get money by succumbing to old-growth extraction. We can't bring our owls back unless we rebuild their habitats. – Chief James Hobart, Spuzzum First Nation

Another displacement now is the fires and floods and Landslides. It's like our house is all shook up and the furniture is all out of order. We need to put things back in order. That means we need to have Ceremony. We need to make sure all along the watersheds, the forest isn't cut down; it keeps shade for the fish to go up and spawn. We need to stop development, the raping of the earth. So much of that is happening, the hurting of the Land. – Ko'waintco Michel, Nooaitch First Nation

10. Protect the Waters and the salmon.

Old growth forests that are rich in nitrogen get it from the salmon. The salmon are feeding the trees. A single, integrated system has been torn apart into departments because we think we can manage it. The forests work together naturally; but the fish are handled by the ministry of fisheries, the trees are handled by the ministry of forests. They will never be managed harmoniously because it's all separated. – Dr. David Suzuki

All the Atlantic salmon are gone. My brother told me, watch: they're coming for us. When fisheries started years ago they told them to throw out all the salmon from the rivers. The Elders told them not to do that, but they did it anyway. I used to see red coming from the river because of so much salmon, but now I barely see them. All these things have happened in my lifetime. – Frank Andrew, Xax'lip First Nation

We had the opportunity to attend a Ceremony on the island. As we were observing, we watched a cloud form over the volcano on Maui and bridge its way to Molokini, bringing light rain. That Ceremony on that devastated Land reignited our relationship with air and water to provide healing to that place. When we do the work and practice, earth, air, water, and fire will meet us halfway. The Land will meet us halfway; nature will lead us to the things we're looking for. Together we can heal. – Ryan Day, Bonaparte Indian Band

I was sitting and praying at the headwaters of the harbour. The salmon were popping their heads above the water, and I asked: what are you doing? They came and changed the river, they said. – Robert Nahanee, Squamish Nation

Water is part of our way of life. Quality water is required for good health. Look at what climate change has done to our forests – they are under stress. Insects go for the weaker trees. The forests are burnt to soil, in the future we'll have more grasslands. We've been in a drought for about 25-30 years. Will it go until the trees are gone? How long will this go on? – Brian Michel, Upper Nicola Band

If the Land is the cell, salmon are the mitochondria, they nourish everything. For the salmon to thrive we have to look after the water. We need to watch the Land. – Rhona Bowe, Secwépemc Nation

My name means Tinted Blue Waters, passed from my great grandmother. I carry that name with a responsibility for the water that runs through the veins of Mother Earth. Without water none of us would be here today. – Ko'waintco Michel, Nootka First Nation

The Story of How We Got Salmon into St'át'imc Territory: during the era of transformers, there were two brothers, and one was sick. They went down the river to the ocean and found a dam. They broke the dam and let the salmon in. They came home when the little brother was better. When they came back, they brought salmon into all the rivers and creeks. There is a connection with the coastal people. The responsibility that we share, the consideration that we all need to have along that way to work together. – Helen Copeland, St'át'imc First Nation

Everything in my vision told me that the environment--trees, rivers--wanted a relationship so we could be caretakers. – Hereditary Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawaenuk Tribe

11. Rebuild relationships with each other and the Land.

Relationship building is needed; a lack of relationships with the environment and with each other is what caused climate change...Our rivers were never meant to be alone. The people that had been there forever needed to be there. – Hereditary Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawaenuk Tribe

One day I noticed the big dipper was out of place. If you watch the sun come up, change is coming. The earth is off-kilter; it's wobbling. I wasn't the first to discover this, yet it was proven through science years after it was discovered by Indigenous Peoples through their relationship with the Land. These changes are a result of climate change. The time is now to listen to those who have strong relationships with the Land, there is no time to waste. The old people told us not to listen too much to our minds; they're too smart – no emotion. The mind will forget what it's told as soon as it's said. We've been taught to listen to our hearts. – Frank Andrew, Xax'lip First Nation

I was hunting deer recently and crested a hill. I looked across the Landscape through my binoculars and saw a deer about a kilometer away...I decided to go after it. With my old dog, we traversed across grassy gullies towards the deer. Along the way, I stumbled on what must have been an old crime scene. I called it in, and I hope to have brought some closure and healing to a family. This deer had led me to something that needed to be found. We must continue building strong relationships with the Land, and then we can trust that it will lead us to where we need to be. – Ryan Day, Bonaparte Indian Band

A spider knows how to untie its web after it gets knotted. Together, amongst relations, we know how to repair the Land, to help it. Protect the water, protect the children. When we say every child matters we have to mean it, we have to join together and fight for them because they matter. That's what will stop climate change. – Rhona Bowe, Secwépemc Nation

12. Prioritize the education of our youth; break intergenerational cycles and remind them of their purpose.

The reason our people are dying is the delegated agencies. The same kids you see on the street are the ones coming out of foster care. It's residential schools all over again. How do you stop systemic racism? Not with money, delegation, or programs. It's with love.

– Chief Arnold Lampreau, Shackan Indian Band

When [my father] was younger, [he] shot a moose out of season. It was unethical, and he was caught. I shot my first moose in the Wet'suwet'en Yintah. I did it in Ceremony, according to protocols. At university, I learned that to be of service to my people's liberation I had to be on the Land, learning songs, language, and Ceremony... My father was a hurt man. He made a poor ethical choice in taking that moose. I am interrupting that cycle. Through teaching and experience, we can have an ethical relationship with the Land. As First Nations, we make up three percent of the Canadian population, but we can still be the teachers breaking those cycles. – Ryan Day, Bonaparte Indian Band

We're all survivors, you're the teachers. Your house is your castle, and you are the teacher within it. When a child needs a home, take them in, nourish them, love them, cherish them. When they leave they might not come back. When a child leaves the house, give them a hug and a kiss. We have to love and cherish our children. – Elder Minnie Kenoras, Neskonlith Indian Band

My Grandmother raised me, she taught me. These teachings need to be brought back. We need to love ourselves first. We need to get to know ourselves, because when we do, we get to know Mother Earth, the water spirit, and grandfather sky. We get to know every element there is, and we know, because that's who we are. That is why those teachings are sacred. – Judy Wilson, Neskonlith Indian Band

13. Our Nations must stop working in silos.

I know the worldview of Ministries and departments, I've worked in policy and politics, and I've seen the silos. Do these people know our worldview? It is time we shared it. Not through negotiating tables or courts, but in Ceremony. We have to start this work in a good way not only for our people but for our partners. – Former Chief Harvey McLeod, Upper Nicola Band

We need to come together as one, connect nation-to-nation, dismantle silos. There are too many silos, but only one Mother Earth. – Chief Darrell Bob, Xax'lip First Nation

14. People of all four directions must take ownership and responsibility for their actions and work with First Nations to create a new path forward in relationship with Mother Earth.

With our vibrations, the energy of the drum, the people will dance with you. We are part of the water and the mountains. Our old ones know we are made of water. Our Elders told us that if we abuse our medicines, we'll get sick. It disrupts the energy we all have within us. The things we go through, we have to change it with Natural Law. – Robert Nahanee, Squamish Nation

You've got to be a part of it. You've got to commit to yourself to say, I'm going to do all that I can, whatever it is. Some of us can do more than others. And we leave this place and we hold on to each other together like we always say in the language of reconciliation. We're one with each other, every colour, every race, we are not only going to be appealing to our own people to get involved... we forgot to have relationships with each other and the environment... I'm so proud of all of you for being here today. When you go home tonight and think about what you've heard and seen, make a commitment, make a plan to do something beyond what we heard today in this beautiful Ceremony.

– Hereditary Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawaenuk Tribe

The east where the sun comes up – that's *emotion*; the Asian people. The South is the *spirituality*, the Indigenous people of the world. The west gate is the black race, the *physical*. The north is the white people, the *mind*. All the people in the four sacred directions are important, all the brothers and sisters; we cannot take care of the earth without one another. When I see all of you with a different race, we need you as much as we need ourselves. Don't feel like you are outside of this responsibility we have for the world. – Ko'waintco Michel, Nooaitch First Nation

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Chief Darrell Bob, Chief Rueben George and his family, Tsleil-Waututh Nation, the Government of Canada, the First Nations Health Authority, the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions and to all the people that made this Gathering possible. We hope this is the first Ceremony of many and look forward to continued leadership and direction on our collective climate change work from First Nations Spiritual Knowledge Keepers. This report was written by Naqsmist Storytellers with support from BCAFN staff and oversight from the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda Steering Committee.

NAQSMIST:

Lydia Pengilley, Project Coordinator and Lead, Naqsmist

Jake Rogger, Project Manager and Lead, Naqsmist

Elaine Alec, Founder, Storyteller and Facilitator, Naqsmist

BC FIRST NATIONS CLIMATE LEADERSHIP AGENDA STEERING COMMITTEE:

Janna Wale, Gitanmaax First Nation

Former Chief Harvey McLeod, Upper Nicola Band

Sophie Collins, Esk'etemc

Terry Webber, Nuxalk Nation

Katisha Paul, W̱JOḺEḺP and St'át'imc First Nations, UBCIC Youth Representative

Kyle Alec, Syilx Nation and Secwepemc Nation, BCAFN Youth Representative

BCAFN:

Patricia Rojas, Regional Climate Change Coordinator/Policy Analyst – patricia.rojas@bcfn.ca

Kristi Denby, Climate Change and Environment Policy Analyst – kristi.denby@bcfn.ca

Learn more about the BC First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda here:

<https://www.bcfan.ca/priority-areas/environment/climate-emergency/bc-fncl-agenda>

Please reach out to Patricia or Kristi with questions.



**British Columbia
Assembly of First Nations**



NAQSMIST

Thank you | Lim lemp | Mussi cho | Kukwstsétsemc | Huy ch q'u

