

All our Relations

**First Nations perspectives on the intimate connections
between humans, species, and the environment**



**Summary Report of the 2023 First Nations
Dialogues on Culturally Significant Species**





The difficulties we are facing today come from government policies. All of these policies have a negative effect – not only on our lives but on our relatives, all our relations, not just our human relations.

- Elder Ed Perley, Atlantic Dialogue

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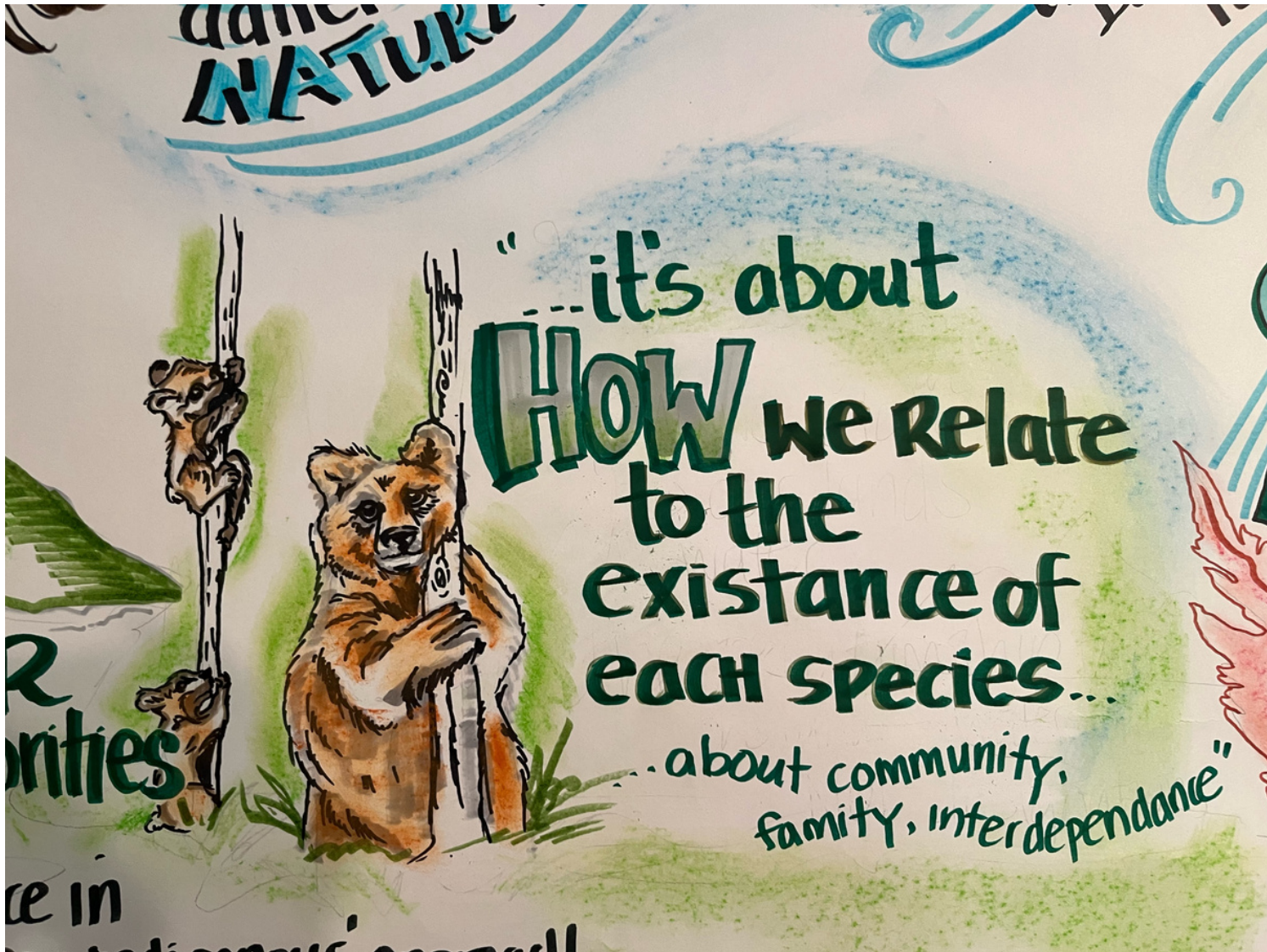
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Report designed and produced by the
IISAAK OLAM Foundation
Art by Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier



Sketch by graphic recorder Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier (White Raven Consulting) of a of a female grizzly bear and her cubs, next to a comment shared by a participant about the importance of how First Nations relate to species. From the 2023 Pacific Dialogue on Culturally Significant Species, co-hosted by AFN and IOF.

OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 DIALOGUES

PARTICIPANTS



74 First Nations technicians, knowledge keepers, Elders, harvesters, stewards, and youth involved in different ways in caring for the lands and waters within their territories attended the 2023 Dialogues.

34

Pacific Dialogue - February 13

20

Central Dialogue - February 27

20

Atlantic Dialogue - March 6

OBJECTIVES

- 1 Foster a space for First Nations to build relationships and share knowledge and experiences about culturally significant species.
- 2 Learn about First Nations' values, principles, approaches, and priorities for species and biodiversity conservation.
- 3 Explore the connections between culture, species, and places, including preferred terminology and how knowledge is shared.

SOLUTIONS-FOCUSED

How might First Nations' knowledge and approaches to species stewardship help Canada develop better conservation strategies, frameworks, policies, and legislation?



Eagle by Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier,
Pacific Dialogue

TERMS PREFERRED BY FIRST NATIONS TO DESCRIBE IMPORTANT SPECIES

Participants of the 2022 First Nations Regional Dialogues revealed that the term '**Species at Risk**' (SAR) does **not resonate** as it fails to express a worldview of connectedness among species and places. The term also excludes the cultural and spiritual values associated with species.

At the 2023 Dialogues, we wanted to know what terms *do* resonate. Below is what we heard.



A multiple choice poll revealed the following preferences:

- **Culturally Significant Species and Places** (CSSP) was the preferred choice of Pacific and Central dialogue participants, with Atlantic Dialogue participants favouring **Culturally Significant Species** (CSS).
- For Central Dialogue participants, CSSP and **Cultural Keystone Species and Places** tied as second choice.
- For Pacific Dialogue participants, CKSP and **Cultural Keystone Species** (CKS) tied as second choice.
- For Atlantic Dialogue participants, no one selected CKS or CKSP as a preferred term.

More interesting, however, are the terms shared by participants to describe species of importance in their own words. These are depicted in the word cloud.



EXAMPLES OF CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT SPECIES AND PLACES

Participants from the dialogues shared the following examples:



LIFE IN THE SKIES & WATERS

- Pacific Salmon
- Atlantic Salmon
- Sturgeon
- Trout
- Turtles
- Freshwater eel
- Eagles
- Insects



PLACES & PLANTS

- Grasslands
- Wetlands
- Fish lake river
- Marshland
- Medicinal plants
- Black ash
- Sweetgrass
- Shell middens
- Cedar
- Huckleberries
- Saskatoon berries
- Hazelnuts

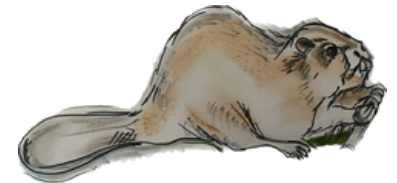
LIFE ON THE LAND

- Bison
- Deer
- Elk
- Moose
- Caribou
- Grizzly bear
- Brown bear
- Mountain goat
- Mountain beaver
- Wolves
- Bobolink
- Lynx



Species mentioned in our creation stories

Biodiversity: Everything is important!



GRAPHIC RECORDING OF EACH DIALOGUE

Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier of White Raven Consulting, a graphic recorder from Tseshaht First Nation, visually reflected what participants shared during each dialogue. **Click on any of these images** to meet Kelly and to watch her describe what she's heard and how's she's reflected it visually at each dialogue.



Hi, I'm Kelly!

Pacific Dialogue

February 13 2023



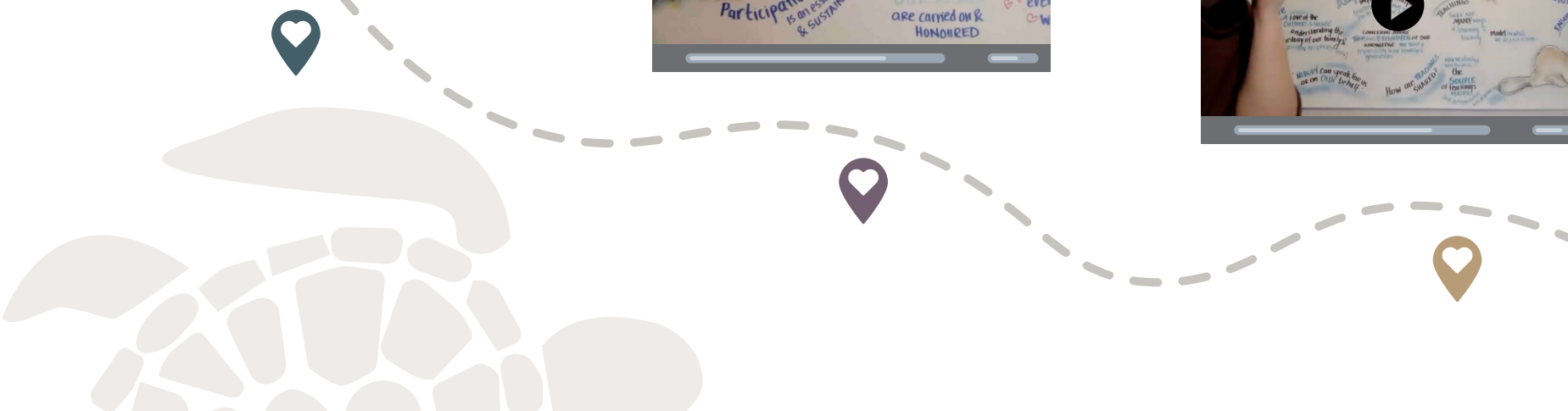
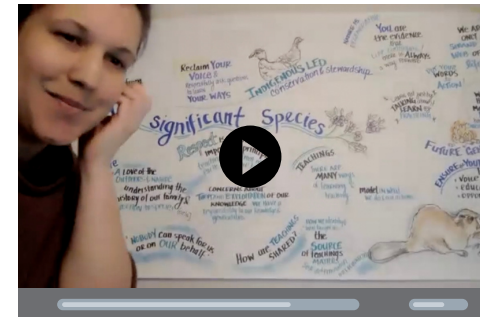
Central Dialogue

February 27 2023



Atlantic Dialogue

March 6 2023



ATLANTIC DIALOGUE

March 6, 2023



Graphic recording by Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier, White Raven Consulting

Themes

Participants of the 2023 Dialogues brought up the following themes and spoke about the importance of these ideas as principles that are central to First Nations approaches and perspectives on the conservation of species, places, and cultures:



RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS



RESPONSIBILITY, RESPECT, AND RECIPROCITY



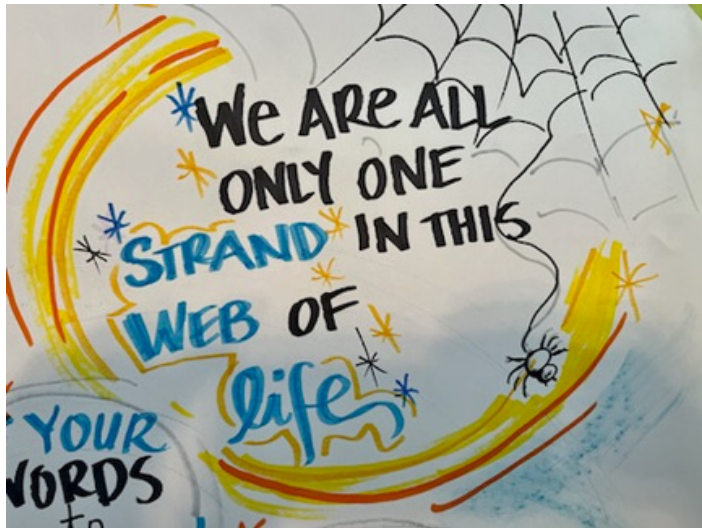
RECONNECTING TO LAND AS CULTURAL RECLAMATION, LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION, AND HEALING



INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Participants from all three dialogues shared stories and values of relationship and interconnectedness, speaking of species as kin and relatives. There were additional reflections on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the relationship with traditional foods, on the value of revisiting the Peace and Friendship Treaties, and about how Crown management of lands and waters has siloed and separated First Nations (and everyone else) from a healthy connection to land.



“Family includes human and non-human relatives.” (Atlantic dialogue)

“The species have shaped us.” (Pacific dialogue)

“Everything is interconnected. If one dies, the other does too.” (Central)

“We are so connected to species that any impact on them will impact us.” (Atlantic dialogue)

“We are only one strand in this web of life.” (Atlantic)

“The pandemic was an opportunity to think seriously about food sovereignty and security and our relationship with food.” (paraphrased from Atlantic dialogue)

“Peace and Friendship treaties offer a non-colonial lens through which to learn about species and environment in a new way – a different way of understanding our relationships.” (Atlantic dialogue)

“Crown management of lands broke those relationships, and the holistic way of viewing things was lost.” (Atlantic dialogue)

“The government is not encouraging our traditional ways of seeing things.” (Central dialogue)

“Spirituality has impacted my relationship to the species in a positive way.” (Pacific dialogue)

“The natural laws of the land are understanding, respect and kinship,” (Central dialogue)

RESPONSIBILITY, RESPECT, AND RECIPROCITY

Rights-based language based on Western worldviews is paralleled by Indigenous perspectives which instead frame the human relationship to land and nonhuman life as a set of responsibilities rooted in respect and reciprocity. We can credit the genius of our non-human neighbours by listening to them and taking their guidance. Approaching land stewardship from a place of respect, duty, and mutuality is the pathway for healing the land from the impacts of industrial activity and climate change.

“Take care of the land because it takes care of us and it has been since the beginning.” (Pacific)

“We need to focus on responsibility as well as rights.” (Atlantic)

“Never take more than you need.” (Atlantic)

“It is our responsibility to take care of our land.” (Pacific)

“The effects of climate chaos and industry are very evident.” (Central)

“It's our duty to be stewards of the land, and the removal of the duty to manage has definitely impacted this.” (Pacific)

“Respect is our first law.” (Pacific)

“The greatest architect in the world is the beaver.”

- Elder Ed Perley, Atlantic

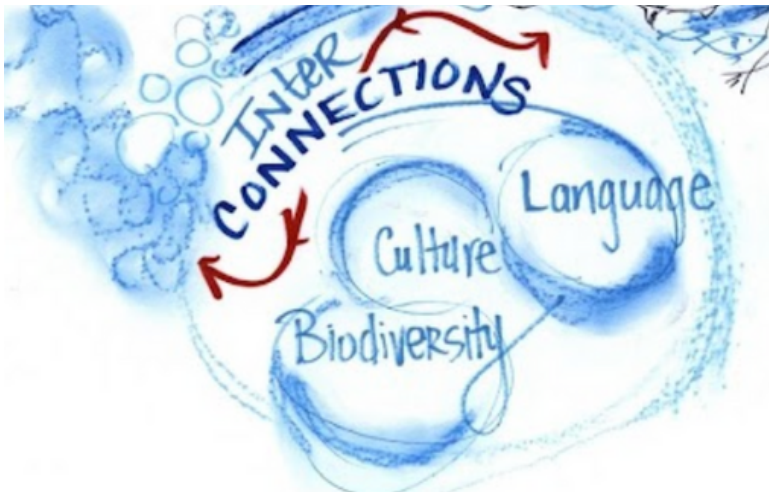


RECONNECTING TO LAND AS PART OF CULTURAL RECLAMATION, LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION, AND HEALING

First Nations have to reclaim their cultures, languages, and approaches to conservation and stewardship because so much has been lost through residential schools and other government policies. Some participants spoke of being born into colonization and getting to know/reconnect with their cultures later in life. Connecting with the land and one's language is a big part of that reclamation, and part of healing.

"REVITALIZING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES SUPPORTS
RENEWED RELATIONSHIPS TO SPECIES."

2022 DIALOGUES REPORT



"PCAs are providing a way for reconnection, knowledge transfer, and language revitalization." (Atlantic)

"Every Indigenous descendent alive today is a survivor from an incredibly resilient culture." (Pacific)

"Reading the Mi'kmaq dictionary is like reading a science book; it is legislation and it describes pre-colonial thinking." (Atlantic)

"Biodiversity is key to cultural existence." (Pacific)

"Words have spirit and potency; they describe relationships." (Atlantic)

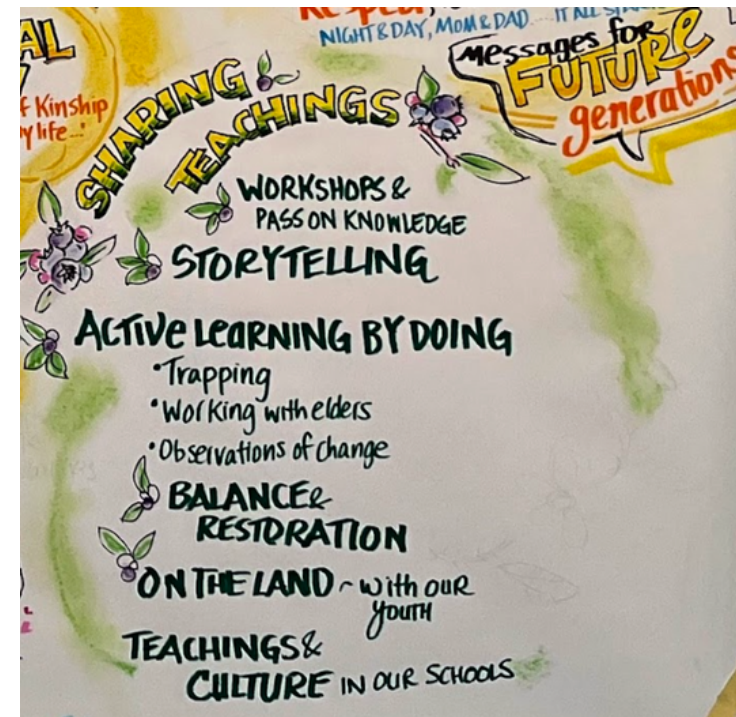
"Once you understand our language you have to live it." (Pacific)

"The land needs healing, and so do the people. This can be accomplished together. The earth is always regenerating and there's always an opportunity for healing." (Atlantic)

INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Fishing, culture camps, Elders sharing stories, families learning together, being on the land, participating in ceremonies, through language learning, walking on the land (many teachings in the language), intergenerational knowledge transfer (from Elders to youth, from youth to parents, etc.--all directions). Different stories are shared at different times of the year (seasonal learning), tribal journeys; language is passed on through the sharing of meal involving CSS, through dances, and through Guardians programs.

Programs that invest in youth are the way forward. Indigenous youth are gaining pride in who they are and passing on critical knowledge to their parents and families. They are beacons of hope.



Youth outreach is a main focus to drive engagement in supporting species.”
(Central dialogue)

“Hold up traditional powers like the matriarchs.” (Pacific dialogue)

Advice for future generations:

- Get out on your land and become familiar
- Learn the language of your land and where you come from

“THESE DIALOGUES ARE AN SPACE FOR SHARING, LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER, AND CONNECTING FROM THE HEART.”

“CEREMONIES ARE VITAL FOR REINFORCING LINKS BETWEEN SPECIES, LANDS AND WATERS, LANGUAGES AND CULTURES.”

2022 DIALOGUES REPORT



Pathways to Reconciliation

Many participants of the 2023 Culturally Significant Species Dialogues for First Nations shared views and wisdom on how Crown governments and various other sectors can be better allies when it comes to supporting First Nations-led conservation. This topic can be considered a cross-cutting theme of the three years of dialogues to date. These ideas also contain foundational principles for the calls to action for Crown governments and other sectors who may be considering how to decolonize their programs and services.

“Connecting and exchanging with people is enriching yourself with different perspectives. Exploratory conversations about conservation happen when openness is prioritized” (Central dialogue).

Funding is needed for communities to reclaim and reintroduce their "way of learning and sharing" (Atlantic dialogue).

“*Managing* species is a eurocentric view of conservation” (Central dialogue). Two-Eyed Seeing is being taught at university and can help centre First Nations voices and approaches.

Federal funding programs like the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk are limiting; they prevent First Nations from taking a holistic approach to species conservation.

“[We] need to include traditional laws as a federal or provincial mandate for Guardians programs”

"Indigenous knowledge systems are standalone systems and must not be forced into Western or colonial scientific frameworks" (2022 dialogues).

Calls to Action

Building on the findings from the 2021, 2022, and 2023 dialogues, we present a number of calls to action for ECCC and Crown Governments to facilitate meaningful collaboration with First Nations. These calls to action will strengthen the Pan-Canadian Approach and future SAR policies and legislation.

AFN-ES RECOMMENDS THAT ECCC...

- 1 ... revise the Pan-Canadian Approach in collaboration with First Nations to reflect First Nations priorities, approaches, and recommendations relevant to SAR, CKSP, and Culturally Significant Species and Places (CSSP);
- 2 ... move beyond a consultative framework and move toward co-governance frameworks with First Nations to advance the protection and stewardship of SAR, CKSP, and CSSP;
- 3 ... engage with, and support capacity within, First Nations leadership in the recovery and care for SAR, CKSP, and CSSP;
- 4 ... redesign programs like the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk (AFSAR) to include species other than those listed in the Species at Risk Act (SARA), including culturally significant species, and;
- 5 ... work with provincial and territorial governments to ensure that these changes are reflected regionally.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AFN	Assembly of First Nations
CKS	Cultural Keystone Species
CKSP	Cultural Keystone Species and Places
CSS	Culturally Significant Species
CSSP	Culturally Significant Species and Places
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
IOF	IISAAK OLAM Foundation
IPCA	Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area
Pan-Canadian Approach	Pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation in Canada
SAR	Species at risk
SARA	Species at Risk Act



CREATING A SPACE THAT DOESN'T EXIST: A NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS NETWORK FOR SPECIES AT RISK

*"The species that are at risk have always cared for humans. It is time to uphold responsibilities to these nonhuman relations."
- A lesson from a respected Elder*



AND

IISAAK



OLAM

HOSTED

TWO NATIONAL DIALOGUES

MARCH 23, 2021
MARCH 25, 2021

128

PARTICIPANTS FROM ACROSS CANADA

THREE THEMES DISCUSSED

1. Species-related issues that matter most
2. Current SAR activities of First Nations participants
3. Aspirations for future SAR work

NEXT STEPS

1. Build awareness
2. Understand and uphold Natural Law
3. Continue dialogue
4. Keep culture in mind
5. Integrate SAR work with work on Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs)

1. SPECIES-RELATED ISSUES THAT MATTER MOST



Cultural keystone species (CKS)



Climate change



Impacts of pollution



Jurisdictional conflicts



Holistic approaches



Partnerships and relationships



Community engagement



Informed consent

2. CURRENT SAR ACTIVITIES OF FIRST NATIONS PARTICIPANTS



Land based practices



Habitat studies



Holistic approaches



Creative funding



Raising awareness



Working with government



Guardian programs



Establishing IPCAs



Building knowledge networks



Fund raising

3. ASPIRATIONS FOR FUTURE SAR WORK



Biocultural revitalization



Holistic approaches



Respect for Indigenous knowledge



Guardian programs



Increased communication



Education and outreach



Resources and capacity

SPECIES, PLACES, AND CULTURE: "SEEING THE CONNECTIONS"
FIRST NATIONS APPROACHES TO TRANSFORMING SPECIES AT RISK CONSERVATION ACROSS CANADA

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS AND
 IISAAK OLAM FOUNDATION HOSTED

3 REGIONAL DIALOGUES

MARCH 2, 2022: PACIFIC
 MARCH 8, 2022: CENTRAL
 MARCH 9, 2022: ATLANTIC

55
 PARTICIPANTS
 FROM ACROSS
CANADA

THREE THEMES DISCUSSED



1. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SPECIES, PLACES, AND CULTURE



Terminology



Culturally significant species



Worldview & values



SAR processes inadequate



Invasive species



Holistic approaches

2. PLANNING FOR ABUNDANCE



Thriving not surviving



Traditional teachings



Stewardship mindset



First Nations' governance



Restoration



Moratoria

3. WORKING BETTER TOGETHER



Relationships



Two Eyed Seeing



Ceremonies



IPCAs and Guardians



Elders & knowledge keepers



Agreements



Community engagement



Sufficient time

SAR = Species at risk

IPCA= Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area

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