

OVERVIEW: OUR APPROACH TO WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Nature United is a learning organization with an underlying commitment to being a respectful partner to Indigenous peoples. Based on Nature United's work over the last decade partnering with Indigenous peoples to support their rightful place in stewarding their territories, we have learned much and also made mistakes along the way. Our practice as a conservation organization has evolved in response to what we have learned.

The reflections captured in this summary on Nature United's approach to supporting Indigenous-led conservation, as well as the full report, are offered with humility—Nature United's approach will continue to evolve and change as we listen to and learn from Indigenous partners, friends and colleagues.

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

Nature United is a Canadian conservation organization that creates solutions for people and nature by building diverse partnerships to protect lands and waters and ensure nature is the foundation of healthy communities, economies and future opportunities. We are the Canadian affiliate of the world's largest conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy (nature.org).

Nature United believes the increased authority of Indigenous peoples to steward their lands and waters results in durable and lasting solutions for people and nature over time. As such, Nature United works in partnership to support Indigenous-led conservation, which is defined and implemented by Indigenous communities, grounded in Indigenous values and perspectives, and often focuses on the interconnected issues of supporting vibrant communities, strong cultures, viable economies, and healthy ecosystems.

Nature United's commitment to working in partnership with Indigenous peoples is informed by a number of interrelated factors:

- Indigenous peoples are the **original inhabitants and stewards** of what we now call Canada, and as such have generations of knowledge and experience managing their territories.
- Issues related to lands and waters are inextricably linked to the inherent **rights and responsibilities** of Indigenous peoples.
- The involvement of Indigenous peoples in the management of lands and waters is recognized and explicitly mandated in both international and **Canadian laws and commitments**. This is in addition to Indigenous laws that describe the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous Nations to care for their territories.
- As a conservation organization, Nature United has an important role to play in the **reconciliation** of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada by seeking to understand past wrongs and co-create new pathways moving forward related to issues of conservation and social justice.
- **Scientific evidence** supports that place-based people can and do manage resources more sustainability than other actors, particularly if they have the ability to make, monitor and enforce their own rules.
- Our **direct experience** working in partnership with Indigenous peoples over the last decade demonstrates that important outcomes for ecosystems and communities are achieved because of the involvement and leadership of Indigenous peoples.

As a Canadian conservation organization, Nature United believes:

1. Place-based Indigenous communities with strong connections to their territories are best positioned to make decisions that will ensure the protection, sustainable management and stewardship of lands and waters that will be durable over time.
2. We have a responsibility and opportunity to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples and to support Indigenous-led conservation.

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

At Nature United, our work is informed by the Indigenous partners we work with, as well as experts and practitioners around the world who advocate for a “rights-based approach” to conservation. In this approach, conservation practice seeks to respect Indigenous rights in all cases and support their further realization where possible. A rights-based approach has emerged in response to historical and current critiques of conservation organizations that have not considered the social impacts of conservation strategies, and more specifically, their impact on Indigenous peoples. A rights-based approach to conservation includes models such as co-management, Indigenous-protected areas, Indigenous territorial governance, and leveraging conservation financing to directly support Indigenous peoples to strengthen their involvement and management in conservation and stewardship that directly influences both ecological and human wellbeing.

HOW WE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

At Nature United, the following principles guide how we work in partnership with Indigenous peoples:

- **Respectful Relationships:** We build lasting partnerships based on trust.
- **Community-Driven:** We follow the lead of our partners, identifying shared interests and providing support as needed.
- **Collaboration and Sharing:** We believe in reciprocity; we work together to share expertise, learn from one another and find solutions.

Developing successful partnerships is essential to how Nature United works with Indigenous peoples. Here are six characteristics that guide our relationship-building:

1. **Partner Centered:** Our work is based on building authentic relationships, establishing trust and developing partnerships focused on shared interests.
2. **Project Co-creation:** We seek to understand what a community needs or wants Nature United’s role to be in each situation. We co-create a plan that aligns with community priorities and our organization’s expertise and mission.
3. **Community Diversity & Engagement:** We recognize and respect the diversity of Indigenous communities, as well as the diversity that exists within Indigenous communities.
4. **Reciprocity & Mutual Learning:** Our partnerships with Indigenous communities are opportunities for mutual learning, sharing and receiving.
5. **Clear Communication & Accountability:** We set clear lines of communication and commit to fulfilling agreed-to roles and responsibilities.

6. **Flexibility & Adaptability:** We strive to be flexible to the needs and constraints of communities, including being aware of competing priorities. We do not rush projects to fit within arbitrary deadlines.

WHAT WE OFFER AS A PARTNER

Nature United plays various roles in partnerships with Indigenous communities. Most often, activities and projects are determined and led by Indigenous communities; Nature United staff provide support on an as-requested basis. Based on the priorities and direction articulated by partners, some of the roles that Nature United plays when working in partnership with Indigenous communities include:

- Developing practical **tools/resources**
- Sharing **models/approaches** across geographies
- Supporting and building **local capacity**
- Facilitating **dialogue** and connections
- Building and supporting **networks**
- **Convening partners** (gatherings, knowledge exchanges, etc.)
- Contributing **funding** (grant agreements, etc.)
- Supporting the development of **sustainable funding/financing** models
- Providing **facilitation** and **planning** support
- Providing **scientific** and **technical support**
- Conducting **research/analysis**
- Conducting **evaluation** and sharing learnings
- Providing **communications capacity and materials**
- Facilitating **strategic engagement** and partnerships
- Providing crown **government relations** support
- Facilitating regional, national and **international connections** regarding Indigenous-led conservation

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Nature United's work in partnership with Indigenous communities is an underpinning of our organization. Whether we are working with specific Indigenous communities or creating tools and opportunities for Indigenous peoples across Canada to network and connect, working in partnership with Indigenous peoples is at the heart of our conservation mission and work. We have made an organizational commitment to "Be a Respectful Partner," and as such are committed to taking responsibility at an individual, team and organizational levels to build our knowledge and capacity. We do this in three primary ways:

1. **Team Learning & Development:** Strengthen the knowledge and practice within Nature United as it relates to Indigenous issues so we can build a culturally competent team and organization (e.g. mandatory cultural safety training, facilitated debriefs and on-the-ground learning for staff and our Board of Directors, cultural competency framework, etc.)

2. **Organizational Policy & Practice:** Develop and implement relevant policies and practices to guide the work that Nature United and our global affiliate does in partnership with Indigenous peoples (e.g. on-the-ground conservation staff who work directly with Indigenous communities, the creation of partnership agreements, communication guidelines, etc.)
3. **Outreach & Education:** Engage with other non-Indigenous partners, allies and funders to build cultural competency and create alignment with our policies and practices related to Indigenous peoples (e.g. orientation sessions for media and contractors, developing Indigenous Learning Curriculum to support funder trips and outreach, etc.)

WHAT WE WORK ON IN PARTNERSHIP

Based on Nature United's experience working in partnership with Indigenous communities, we believe there are four interconnected elements that greatly impact the likelihood of Indigenous communities of successfully asserting their authority to steward and manage their lands and waters. Our projects and activities focus on these four elements:

1. **Strengthen governance:** For Indigenous communities to successfully manage lands and waters, they must play an active decision-making role on matters pertaining to their territories. Ideally, Indigenous governments make and implement relevant stewardship-related laws, regulations, policies and plans based on their community values and Indigenous legal frameworks. Specific projects and activities include:
 - Establishment of Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area, Northwest Territories
 - Marine Plan Partnership, British Columbia
 - Creation of Clayoquot Land Use Visions, British Columbia
 - Indigenous Stewardship Laws Workshop, British Columbia
2. **Enhance stewardship capacity:** In order to realize the vision and direction of Indigenous communities, there must be Indigenous peoples with the skills and resources to implement stewardship policies and plans. Indigenous communities require on-the-ground stewardship managers, planners, specialists, technicians, guardians and more to lead conservation activities and manage lands and waters effectively.
 - First Nations Forestry workshop, Manitoba
 - Moose monitoring and management workshop, Manitoba
 - Indigenous Guardians Toolkit, across Canada
 - Indigenous Guardian Gatherings and grants for Indigenous Guardian Community visits, across Canada
 - Conservation financing pilots, Manitoba, Northwest Territories and British Columbia
3. **Build and sustain leadership:** Effective governance and successful stewardship activities/programs need strong Indigenous leaders. This means leaders who are connected to their culture and territories, feel empowered and supported, are effective and impactful, and are respected by communities and others.
 - Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards (SEAS) program, British Columbia
 - On-the-land youth program support, Northwest Territories
 - Resilient Indigenous Leaders Network, British Columbia

4. **Support local, sustainable economies:** Access to sustainable economic development opportunities that enhance social, cultural, and ecological values and expand opportunities for work and wealth creation is critical to the success of Indigenous-led conservation.
- Technical support to advance economic development planning and negotiations with crown governments and the private sector, British Columbia
 - Access to markets for Indigenous-led production of carbon credits, British Columbia
 - Analysis and funding to support increased access to fisheries assets for Indigenous and local communities, British Columbia

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a more in-depth look at Nature United's approach to working in partnership with Indigenous peoples to support Indigenous-led conservation, please view the full report.

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