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# Collaborative Conservation and Contexts of Resistance: New (and Enduring) Strategies for Survival

*Anna J. Willow*

Proponents of schemes to incorporate indigenous individuals and ideas into mainstream natural resource management point out that participation allows Native voices to be heard, giving previously excluded citizens seats at environmental decision-making tables while simultaneously supporting effective programming and indigenous rights.<sup>1</sup> These claims have validity. While initiatives have varied in both their durability and their ability to respectfully integrate diverse perspectives, Native North Americans have found ways to productively present their communities' critical concerns in new and important arenas and, through their recent collaborative undertakings, have become accepted as valid environmental actors—an achievement environmental justice scholar Laura Pulido refers to as “ecological legitimacy.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, critics argue, partaking in mainstream processes leads to empowerment not on autonomous indigenous terms, but only within an asymmetrical (post)colonial system.† Even as indigenous contributions are encouraged, usually sincerely, the politically dominant settler society continues to set operating discourses, patterns of information transmission, and rules for producing relevant knowledge.

As anthropologist Paul Nadasdy suggests in his critique of land claims and co-management in northern Canada, “to be ‘empowered,’ local people must first agree to the rules of the game, rules that they had no role in creating and that constrain what

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it is possible to do and think.”<sup>3</sup> Global observers of indigenous inclusion in resource conservation projects have noted similar disparities. Based on their study of joint forest management in India, for example, Nicholas Hildyard and his colleagues argue that so long as access to tangible and intangible resources remains uneven, merely sitting around the same table is insufficient. In order to empower formerly marginalized groups, they propose that “participation requires wider processes of social transformation and structural change to the system of social relations through which inequalities are reproduced.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Richard Howitt and Sandra Suchet-Pearson draw on evidence from wildlife management in Australia to declare that employing “naïve or simplistic accommodations of diversity in ways that deny the embeddedness of power and privilege in social, economic and environmental relations at all scales will reproduce the problems in new forms rather than open up new possibilities.”<sup>5</sup>

Complex historical and political realities underlie interactions between indigenous peoples and surrounding settler societies. These ensure that attempts to determine whether or not participating in collaborative conservation effectively enhances indigenous sociopolitical prospects yield equally complex and inevitably paradoxical results. Throughout this article, I use the phrase *land-based self-determination* to describe an indigenous community’s ability to make decisions regarding its customary land base and thus define the trajectory of its citizens’ land-based livelihoods, cultural beliefs and practices, and future opportunities.<sup>6</sup> I argue that collaborative conservation can be constructively approached as a productive and pragmatic strategy for taking incremental steps toward land-based self-determination and thereby promoting long-term physical, cultural, and political survival.

Researchers seeking to understand the politics of environmental protection have found value in contemplating collaboration as a potential vehicle for indigenous empowerment.<sup>7</sup> But such inquiries bring to light only a partial picture. Andrea Smith urges us to differentiate between *centering* and *including*; the approach she advocates “differs from a politics of inclusion that seeks to include a marginalized voice within a pre-established politics or discourse” and instead demands a comprehensive re-centering of perspective.<sup>8</sup> Shifting, as I do here, from an analysis centered on the power structures that contour and sometimes complicate intentionally diverse initiatives—within which indigenous contributors typically comprise one small component—to a perspective that positions indigenous individuals and organizations at the center of their own worlds encourages a different set of questions. How, I ask, have First Nations communities worked to promote the land-based self-determination upon which their identities as culturally distinct and politically autonomous peoples depend? How have their strategies for protecting the material foundations of cultural and political life shifted over time in response to changing opportunities and circumstances?

Living with legacies of unjust land and resource policy, coping with by-products of industrial production systems that threaten the continuance of land-based subsistence and culture, and weighing options that are largely limited by external political, economic, and legal frameworks, Native North American leaders have become adept at following multiple paths toward the same ultimate goal—the survival of their people. In this context, the political paradox posed by indigenous involvement in collaborative

conservation is, like previous engagements with outsiders that simultaneously empower and disempower indigenous participants, both acknowledged and expected. In order to illuminate some of the pathways along which Native peoples have traveled in pursuit of empowerment and autonomy, I define and describe collaborative conservation (a new context of resistance) and strategic accommodation (an enduring one). I then present the cases of three Canadian First Nations organizations involved in the Boreal Leadership Council (BLC)—a twenty-one-member coalition committed to working collectively toward “solutions-based dialogue on issues affecting the boreal region of Canada”—to suggest that participation in collaborative conservation both extends and transforms patterns of resistance established through the actions, decisions, and desires of previous generations.<sup>9</sup> It is, we will see, a contemporary enactment of resistance through strategic accommodation.

### COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION (NEW CONTEXTS OF RESISTANCE)

Historians of the North American environmental movement differentiate between *conservation* (which, following the approach of early United States forester Gifford Pinchot, argues for responsible stewardship and prudent use) and *preservation* (which, in accordance with the views of naturalist, writer, and Sierra Club founder John Muir, seeks to maintain natural areas in an untouched and untrammled state).<sup>10</sup> In fact, indigenous peoples’ customary environmental relationships are neither conservationist nor preservationist; while “conservation” comes closer to describing how members of small-scale societies utilize lands and resources, terms like *coexistence* and *sustainable use* have been proposed as more accurate alternatives.<sup>11</sup> Although they operate outside of environmentalism’s terminological divisions and debates, Native North Americans’ historical relationship with settlers’ environmental protection efforts is far from harmonious. Clashes accompanied the establishment of many prominent protected places, with indigenous inhabitants expelled—sometimes forcibly—from the areas that became Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks by the late 1800s.<sup>12</sup> Referred to by critics as *fortress conservation* (despite its more precisely preservationist philosophy), this enduring exclusionary model was founded upon the Cartesian presumption that humans do not belong in pristine “nature,” as well as the racist colonial conviction that distant experts know better than local residents how best to care for the land.<sup>13</sup>

Change began in the 1980s, when major environmental groups abandoned fortress models in favor of a new emphasis on the sustainable use of protected areas and the inclusion of local people. This move had multiple motives. Top-down environmental protection programs run by states and international agencies were not producing positive results, leading observers to interpret the rise of participatory paradigms as a response to the failures of fortress conservation.<sup>14</sup> Experts now contended that local involvement, knowledge, and commitment were necessary components of successful initiatives, that giving locals a stake in natural resource management would encourage support and compliance, and that programs developed at local levels would be comparatively cost-effective.<sup>15</sup> Wider shifts in global politics and discourse were equally influential. With newly accessible informational and educational networks,

local residents were becoming increasingly critical of outside interference. Concurrent changes in ecological thinking were also transforming conservation conduct; as Fikret Berkes notes, collaborative models emerged just as scientific and applied ecology were undergoing “a shift from reductionism to a systems view of the world [and] a shift to include humans in the ecosystem.”<sup>16</sup>

The outcome of this transition has been known by several names, including “community-based conservation,” “community-based natural resource management,” and “community natural resource management,” and has taken forms ranging from joint forestry and wildlife management to integrated conservation/economic development ventures. Still, a set of foundational principles distinguishes the approach: a commitment to involving communities, a desire to link socioeconomic and environmental goals, an ambition to empower local people and their knowledge, and a belief that the global economy guides patterns of resource use and conservation opportunities.<sup>17</sup> With this history in mind—and following individuals working on the ground who use the term self-referentially—I define *collaborative conservation* broadly to mean any organized attempt to unite diverse individuals and interests for the common purpose of environmental protection.

Adjusting these basic principles to North America’s distinctive historical and political situation has resulted in two (occasionally overlapping) kinds of collaborative conservation. First, formal co-management boards and committees involving indigenous residents, state-scientific resource managers, environmental groups, and private-sector stakeholders have arisen at the intersection of ongoing land claims negotiations and the new emphasis on local participation. Observing that co-management is now a preferred approach to wildlife management in northern Canada and Alaska, Nadasdy suggests that its rise in North America can be considered a regional manifestation of the global community-based and participatory development/conservation phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Although novel co-management models capable of recognizing First Nations cultural values and priorities are now being realized in some parts of the Canadian north, North American co-management is thus vulnerable (as implied in the introduction) to the same critiques as collaborative conservation in other parts of the world.<sup>19</sup>

Second, and at the same time, informal alliances between indigenous residents and concerned non-Natives have developed in response to struggles over the future of threatened areas and ecosystems. In the 1990s, for example, high-profile conflicts surrounding British Columbia’s Clayoquot Sound and Great Bear Rainforest brought representatives from multiple sectors together to resolve heated debates.<sup>20</sup> In numerous less-publicized instances as well, alliances between citizens of American Indian and European descent have been inspired by the mutually perceived necessity of protecting a shared landscape from an outsider enemy that poses an immediate and urgent threat.<sup>21</sup> Such alliances have not always proceeded smoothly and decision-making power has not always been shared equally, but many environmentalists have come to appreciate the political and legal potency of First Nations’ land and resource rights, and consequently acknowledge working with and respecting indigenous cultures as essential to the future of conservation.<sup>22</sup> It is within this context of collaboration that the Boreal Leadership Council (BLC) began.

## *The Boreal Leadership Council*

The BLC grew out of conversations in the early 2000s between leaders of the Pew Charitable Trusts' Boreal Conservation Campaign and Ducks Unlimited Canada about how to make boreal forest conservation a reality in Canada. An Ottawa-based group called the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI) was created to serve as the BLC's secretariat and convener. Founding BLC members met in 2003 to draft the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework (BFCF), an eight-page document summarizing council members' shared vision "to sustain the ecological and cultural integrity of the Canadian Boreal Forest in perpetuity."<sup>23</sup> The BFCF articulates a clear overarching goal of protecting at least half of Canada's boreal forest "in a network of large interconnected protected areas" and encouraging sustainable use throughout the remaining portion.<sup>24</sup> Although the group's paramount purpose is safeguarding Canada's boreal ecosystems, respect for aboriginal lands, rights, and cultures figures prominently among the BFCF's guiding commitments.<sup>25</sup> BLC members come together twice each year to discuss the group's progress, goals, and directions and commit to ongoing participation—largely facilitated by emails and conference calls—in at least one of the BLC's working groups.<sup>26</sup>

The majority of the BLC's twenty-one members have been involved since the council's creation. The BLC includes six environmental groups (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Ducks Unlimited Canada, ForestEthics, The Nature Conservancy, The Pembina Institute, and World Wildlife Fund Canada), six investment institutions (Bâtirente, Calvert, Desjardins Funds, Domini Social Investments, NEI Investments, and TD Bank), three timber companies (Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries, Domtar, and Tembec), one energy company (Suncor), and five First Nations entities (Innu Nation, Poplar River First Nation, Treaty 8 First Nations, Kaksa Nation, and Dehcho First Nations).<sup>27</sup> Although participating First Nations organizations include subarctic Algonquian and Athabaskan groups with a wide range of contemporary concerns, all share cultural roots in a land-based subsistence hunting way of life and historical roots in the Canadian (post)colonial experience.

The BLC's inclusion of environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), investment institutions, resource extractive industries, and First Nations organizations reflects its status as an intentionally diverse, multi-sector group as well as its conviction that multiple ways of understanding, valuing, and using the forest are essential to building a sustainable boreal future. North American approaches to collaborative conservation—formal co-management arrangements and informal alliances alike—are influential precedents for the BLC's balanced philosophy. Yet unlike co-management (which focuses on a specific resource or area) and informal alliances (which focus on a specific dispute), the BLC's operational philosophy entails working proactively and pragmatically to address high-level national concerns and cross-cutting themes that interest members with very different perspectives.<sup>28</sup> The BLC also differs from co-management arrangements in that it does not possess management authority over any resource or parcel of land. Furthermore, while the BLC aims to influence corporate entities and provincial and national governments, it explicitly does not include government representation at any level other than that of participating First Nations.

Rather than attempting to create or enforce rules, then, the BLC's role is primarily advisory. Nevertheless, the BLC shares several characteristics of groups proven to care successfully for broadly distributed natural resources, including the capacity to deal constructively with difference and the ability to generate and circulate information (on ecological conditions as well as social and political trends) to aid informed decision-making.<sup>29</sup> Studies of efficacy in complex resource management contexts additionally suggest that trust building and leadership (in the form of project initiation and conflict mediation) are among the factors that enhance socioecological resilience in the face of rapidly changing circumstances.<sup>30</sup> Facilitating information transmission, bringing dissimilar perspectives and ways of knowing into dialogue, offering guidance for addressing uncertainty, and inspiring external implementation of sustainable management planning and practice (and in some instances offering funding to make it possible) are among the BLC's main goals. The BLC thus plays a valuable collaborative conservation role even in the absence of a managerial mandate.

### STRATEGIC ACCOMMODATION (ENDURING CONTEXTS OF RESISTANCE)

Understanding the forms resistance takes demands close attention to the contexts within which it unfolds. Although collaborative conservation is a recent development, American Indians have crafted strategic alliances with non-Native outsiders and used introduced items, ideas, and organizational forms to meet their own needs for more than five hundred years. In the boreal forest and far beyond, indigenous campaigns of resistance have been tailored to fit unique historical and cultural backgrounds, as well as specific cultural, economic, and political situations. Rather than imagining colonial domination and indigenous resistance as monolithic facts, I therefore take resistance to include a diverse array of responses to complex and constantly changing sociopolitical settings. Participation in collaborative conservation—and in the BLC as one outgrowth of it—thus joins a long line of responses to an equally long line of threats to land, life, and self-determination.

As indicated above, critics point out that participation in mainstream processes presents a paradox by inviting indigenous people to become contributing members of dominant systems but failing to resolve underlying inequities or address valid desires for difference. To be sure, most Native people (including those involved in the BLC) are well aware of the contradictions that complicate their decisions to embrace or refuse such participation. In his study of Lumbee Indian ethnohistory, Gerald Sider uses the phrase *politics of accommodation* to describe how adopting the undertakings and aspirations of the surrounding society can serve as a path toward indigenous empowerment, dignity, and pride but simultaneously reinforce indigenous groups' perceived dependence and position of relative inferiority.<sup>31</sup> Because utilizing settler societal institutions in ways intended to augment indigenous empowerment and autonomy demands the insightful ability to make proactive choices, I use the derivative term *strategic accommodation* to highlight the individual agency and astuteness of Native North American leaders.

The historical record reveals that indigenous Americans have long made conscious decisions about when, where, and how to accommodate outsiders. Lumbee education



scholar Bryan Brayboy reminds us that “many strategies of resistance through accommodation are, in fact, centuries old.”<sup>32</sup> And, as anthropologist Larry Nesper learned while conducting research among Anishinaabe people in northern Wisconsin, adaptability is a central component of American Indian identity, with the ability to continuously improvise new collective relationships with larger forces and move between multiple modes of articulation and interaction with outsiders described by Anishinaabeg as “one of the qualities they identify as most Indian about themselves.”<sup>33</sup> Historical and contemporary economic relationships, linguistic choices, and educational decisions—along with recent engagement in collaborative conservation efforts—are among the ways that Native people have drawn selectively from the dominant society’s array of political, social, and technological options in order to advance their own causes.<sup>34</sup>

Ronald Niezen’s story of the James Bay Cree struggle to defend a forest-based way of life from the challenges of extensive hydroelectric development offers an instructive and proximate example of indigenous people’s ability to modify patterns of resistance to match changing circumstances.<sup>35</sup> In the 1970s, the Québec government announced plans for a multibillion-dollar hydroelectric project that would flood vast portions of the Cree homeland. The Cree were never consulted. Upon hearing of the impending construction, Cree leaders mobilized quickly and, in 1975, agreed to the provisions of a modern treaty known as the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA). While the JBNQA delivered some monetary compensation and is sometimes lauded for its inclusion of an income security program that provides guaranteed payments to families who spend a significant amount of time in the bush, it also transformed the cultural and political landscape of Cree life by instituting a formal centralized administration.

Citing ethnohistorical evidence from the fur trade era and from more recent times, Niezen argues that Cree people have for generations selectively employed technological and organizational tools invented outside of Cree society. As he notes, “the forest way of life has a long history of accommodation and innovation resulting from outside influence” that ranges from airplanes and snowmobiles to rifles, outboard motors, and radios.<sup>36</sup> Contrary to outsiders’ expectations, externally manufactured implements have diminished neither Cree peoples’ forest-based spirituality nor their social relationships with the animals they hunt. Similarly, regarding the emergence of Cree bureaucracy demanded by the JBNQA process, Niezen shows that the existence of an administration based on Euro-Canadian models does not imply that Cree values, goals, and strategies conform to those of non-Native organizations. Far from signifying Cree capitulation to dominant interests, Niezen believes—and, based on my experiences elsewhere in Canada, I agree—that Cree leaders’ agreement to the less-than-ideal terms of the JBNQA was motivated by their deep desire to sustain their land-based way of life. While some outsiders view the existence of a centralized Cree administration as an affront to cultural authenticity, Niezen concludes by stating that “the Cree have developed a form of administrative culture in which relatively efficient bureaucracies can be used to *define and defend an aboriginal way of life* situated in the practice of forest-based subsistence.”<sup>37</sup>



In the context of resource extraction that has characterized the Canadian north since the 1970s, the development of political bodies and NGOs capable of facilitating opposition, demanding consultation, and/or tapping into mainstream legal structures has given First Nations communities hope that future generations will retain opportunities to learn and live on the land. The BLC represents one such organization—an option for First Nations leaders seeking to further their peoples’ land-based self-determination not by distancing themselves from settler societal institutions, but by strategically accommodating them.

## COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION CASE STUDIES

In 2012 and 2013, I conducted multi-sited ethnographic research with the goal of understanding cultural and political dimensions of First Nations participation in the Boreal Leadership Council.<sup>38</sup> Taking the 2.2 million square miles of Canada’s boreal forest as my field site, the BLC initially served as a unifying spatial and conceptual center. I learned early on that First Nations BLC participants gain valuable networking opportunities and access to direct funding for their land-use planning programs. Over time, however, I found that there was much to be gained by repositioning First Nations participants as centers in their own right. This repositioning revealed that they come to the table not because they think their perspective will predominate, but because they envision the BLC as a strategic platform for efforts to regain and/or retain land-based self-determination through practical engagement with the surrounding settler society’s environmental decision-making processes. For them, collaborative conservation contains the promising possibility of influencing the future of Canadian conservation in ways that ensure their own needs and goals are met.<sup>39</sup> As we will see in the case studies that comprise the remainder of this article, First Nations’ participation in collaborative conservation continues an enduring pattern of strategic accommodation.

First Nations BLC participants travel from their own communities to sit among others who represent very different interests and possess very different perspectives. They bring unique experiences of environmental transformation, distinctive histories of cultural continuity and change, and singular patterns of sociopolitical relationships, all of which influence how they approach their involvement in the BLC and the contributions and choices they make. Looking from three very different First Nations communities situated in the eastern, central, and western portions of Canada’s boreal forest (fig. 1) toward the BLC, I show how indigenous participation in collaborative conservation augments long-term struggles for land-based self-determination.

### *Innu Nation: Fighting for Nitassinan*

The Labrador-Quebec Peninsula, a vast land of coniferous forest and tundra, has been home to Innu people since time immemorial. They call this place Nitassinan—our land. Only sixty years ago, Innu were mobile hunters, traveling throughout Nitassinan according to seasonal patterns and the movement of caribou herds. Pressuring Innu families to abandon their traditional lifestyle, the government began requiring children



**FIGURE 1:** Landscape photographs of West Moberly First Nations; Poplar River First Nation; Innu Nation. Photos by author. Map of Aboriginal Peoples of North America's Boreal Region with case study locations denoted. Map adapted from Boreal Songbird Initiative, <http://www.borealbirds.org/ethnobotany.shtml>.

to attend schools and hunters to adhere to provincial game laws in the 1960s, effectively criminalizing nomadic land-based subsistence.<sup>40</sup> Today, Labrador Innu reside primarily in the communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish and are collectively represented by the Innu Nation.<sup>41</sup> Until very recently, the Innu of Labrador were party to neither a historic treaty nor a contemporary land-claims agreement; a land-claims and self-government agreement-in-principle was signed in 2011 and final agreement negotiations are in progress.<sup>42</sup>

The rapid transition to sedentary life had tragic consequences.<sup>43</sup> Despite dramatic changes, many Innu people continue to spend time in “the country”—the English term Labradorians use to refer to what most Canadians call “the bush” and most environmentalists call “wilderness”—where the way of life experienced by previous generations still organizes social and spiritual relationships among humans and between humans and animals.<sup>44</sup> In the 1940s, ethnographer Julius Lips wrote that Innu people “have always been, and always want to remain, hunters.”<sup>45</sup> This remains the case today: caribou and other wild game are valued above purchased foods and the perceived contrast between the advantages of country life and the challenges of life in the settled communities is a topic of frequent discussion among Innu citizens.<sup>46</sup>

Active Innu involvement in the protection of Nitassinan predates the appearance of the BLC by nearly twenty years, indicating that the BLC is one of many strategies used to advance Innu land-based self-determination. Since the 1980s, Innu citizens have earned a reputation for making their voices heard regarding activities in their territory—and for protesting vehemently when they are ignored. As an Innu Nation employee told me when I visited Labrador in June 2012, Innu “have demonstrated time and time again that they’ll just mess things right up if you don’t deal with them. They’ll get involved.”<sup>47</sup> This pattern of intensive involvement—using direct action and political engagement to address land and resource conflicts—began in the late 1980s and laid the foundation for today’s well-informed and highly politicized Innu citizenry.

In 1986, several nations began using Labrador’s Goose Bay Air Force Base to conduct frequent and far-ranging low-level military flight-training exercises. As described by Marie Wadden and as documented in the film *Hunters and Bombers*, sudden fly-overs caused severe disruption of hunting activities and country camp life and had detrimental effects on human and animal health.<sup>48</sup> Many Innu considered “the flights to be the most serious encroachment ever to take place on their land.”<sup>49</sup> In 1988, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was considering Goose Bay for a multimillion-dollar training center. Because it would have radically increased the number of military exercises conducted over Nitassinan, Innu activists adamantly opposed the NATO plan. When their request for a meeting with NATO officials was denied in September 1988, protesters from Sheshatshiu occupied the base’s runway, led by women and including numerous children. After seven trips to the runway, dozens of arrests, and international media attention, Innu observers noted that it was only when they took dramatic and direct action that the government finally acknowledged their existence.<sup>50</sup> The warming of the Cold War in the years that followed prevented the NATO training center’s construction.

Innu citizens again turned to direct action in the 1990s, when development of a major nickel mine at Voisey’s Bay was initiated without consulting Innu people or identifying indigenous interests in an important area. Together with Inuit neighbors, Innu protestors occupied the proposed mine site in February 1995. As noted by Robert Gibson in his analysis of the dispute,

It is impossible to know just how much attention would have been paid to the local communities’ concerns had they not used site occupations, media events and court actions, as well as participation in the formal assessment process and in negotiations with the mining company. However, past experience of both [Labrador indigenous] groups, especially the Innu efforts to stop low-level military flight training over their lands, has taught them not to expect automatic recognition of their rights and interests through formal processes.<sup>51</sup>

In this case, direct action brought about an unprecedented environmental assessment that considered indigenous social issues, land claims and rights, and long-term sustainability. The parties ultimately formulated a new technique for tackling questions regarding Nitassinan and its resources, an agreement that permitted the mine

to proceed under guidance from a specific impact benefit agreement (IBA) and a co-management board composed of representatives from indigenous communities, the provincial government, and the mining company.<sup>52</sup>

In both of these well-documented instances, Innu protestors took direct action because it offered a way—perhaps the only way—to oblige outsiders' recognition of Innu voices, views, and rights and increase Innu people's ability to control what takes place in their territory. Innu activists of the 1980s and 1990s were inspired by a deep desire to ensure that future generations have opportunities to experience an Innu way of life and to ensure that when development does take place, it proceeds according to Innu terms and benefits Innu people. With public sentiment in Canada encouraging a wider recognition of aboriginal rights and a pioneering agreement in place directing the Voisey's Bay mine's operations, Innu people no longer have to block runways or occupy mine sites to secure a place at the negotiating table. While Innu leaders' determination to safeguard the resources that make a land-based lifestyle possible remains as strong as ever, more recently they have advanced land-based self-determination not primarily through direct action and protest, but through official channels of consultation and negotiation.

In the late 1990s, Innu Nation entered the arena of forest-management planning, with its environment office playing a lead role in the creation of a comprehensive forest ecosystem strategy plan for Labrador/Nitassinan Forest Management District 19.<sup>53</sup> This work had much in common with the work later supported by the BLC and was undertaken for the same reason as later BLC participation. By the time the BLC came into being in 2003, Innu Nation was nationally recognized for its innovative forestry program. Invited to participate in the BLC's inaugural meeting, Innu Nation became one of the group's founding members. The following year, the Canadian Boreal Initiative contacted Innu Nation with an open offer of assistance, which was followed by funding to support enhanced mapping and data-collection capabilities and expand the Innu Environmental Guardians program.<sup>54</sup>

BLC involvement was thus incorporated into a multifaceted and dynamic strategy for protecting the Innu homeland. The networking and financing opportunities associated with a decade of BLC participation have enabled Innu Nation to combine traditional ecological and Western scientific knowledge in formats deemed credible by non-Native decision-makers, thereby allowing some measure of control over whether, when, and where Nitassinan military and industrial development would take place. Over the course of twenty-five years, the pathways available for promoting Innu objectives—and therefore the specific strategies selected by Innu leaders—have changed considerably. The ultimate goal underlying Innu action has not. As Innu Nation forester Guy Playfair made clear, although the types of activities it undertakes vary widely, “the central pillar of the Innu Nation is ensuring the survival of the Innu people.”<sup>55</sup> Involvement in collaborative conservation follows direct action and occupations, co-management arrangements, and impact benefit agreements as an emerging strategy for securing the continued access to Nitassinan and its resources that is so essential if the Innu are to survive as a cohesive cultural group.

## *Poplar River First Nation: Protecting Asatiwisipi Aki*

Poplar River First Nation elder Abel Bruce wanted me to understand his purpose for protecting his homeland and encouraging younger members of his community to carry on this critical task. “You have to respect everything,” he explained. “We’re given this land to respect the land. That’s how it is now. Everything that we see, the creator has given us to take care of this land.”<sup>56</sup> The Anishinaabe people of Poplar River have hunted, fished, trapped, and gathered east of Lake Winnipeg for countless generations. Out on the land, ethnohistorian Laura Peers observes, the Anishinaabe “seasonal round was not simply a movement of humans over a natural landscape . . . they moved within a world that was at once spiritual and physical.”<sup>57</sup> Success in subsistence—and in life—depended upon reciprocal relationships with more powerful “other-than-human persons” who share humans’ social and moral world.<sup>58</sup> This worldview continues to infuse daily life and influence decisions for traditional Anishinaabeg today.

By the eighteenth century, Anishinaabe people were enthusiastic participants in the fur trade, which enabled them to expand north and west to occupy both sides of Lake Winnipeg long before Europeans arrived there.<sup>59</sup> They remained seasonally mobile and relatively autonomous for many years. After the fifth of Canada’s Numbered Treaties was negotiated in 1875, the introduction of officially designated chiefs and bands altered sociopolitical structures and the creation of delineated reserves constrained geographical movements, but Anishinaabe signatories were promised that they and their descendants would “have right to pursue their avocations of hunting and fishing throughout the tract surrendered . . . subject to such regulations as may from time to time be made by Her Government of Her Dominion of Canada, and saving and excepting such tracts as may from time to time be required or taken up for settlement, mining, lumbering or other purposes.”<sup>60</sup> Although the community’s children were forced to attend residential schools—leading to losses of language, cultural identity, and pride from which survivors are still struggling to recover—Poplar River’s relative inaccessibility prevented its land from being “taken up” by Euro-Canadians. And while dozens of Anishinaabe communities in the United States and Canada have already experienced logging, mining, hydroelectric power generation, and/or other environmentally damaging developments, Poplar River’s water runs pure and the region’s intact boreal forest teems with wildlife.<sup>61</sup>

By the 1980s, Poplar River residents saw neighboring First Nations facing industrial impacts firsthand and grew increasingly worried about the future of their own homeland. In a documentary produced by the First Nation, community activist Sophia Rabliauskas describes the realization that inspired decades of work: “We used to take it for granted that the land would always be here, but when we learned of the threats, we had to protect the land. We made a commitment to protect the land for future generations.”<sup>62</sup> Recognizing the health of Asatiwisipi Aki—Poplar River land—as rooted in elders’ and ancestors’ active caretaking rather than a fortuitous accident, residents initiated land use and occupancy studies, memory mapping, and archaeological investigations.<sup>63</sup> These efforts culminated in the Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan (AALMP), an eighty-six-page document that offers a comprehensive vision of

land protection and combines Anishinaabe ecological knowledge with Western science to “sustain the culture and very life of the community.”<sup>64</sup>

Armed with meticulously collected data, compellingly summarized in rich text and in dozens of maps and photos, the people of Poplar River set out to convince outsiders that they should be the ones to make important decisions about Asatiwisipi Aki’s future. This legislative land protection strategy paid off: in 1999, new Manitoba provincial regulations permitted Poplar River to nominate 3,328 square miles as a protected provincial park reserve, with interim protection from logging, mining, and hydroelectric development. In 2008, after years of discussions with Poplar River and other area First Nations, the Manitoba Legislature passed Bill 6, known as the East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Lands Act, enabling “First Nations and aboriginal communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg to engage in land use and resource management planning for designated areas of Crown land that they have traditionally used.”<sup>65</sup> This landmark bill created a mechanism through which the AALMP was able to obtain legal standing. Today, Poplar River’s landbase is legally recognized by Manitoba and its management plan is being implemented by the community.<sup>66</sup>

Like Innu Nation, by the time the BLC formed in 2003 Poplar River was widely recognized for its innovative work in land-use planning and was invited to serve as one of the group’s founding members. Complementing earlier planning and legislative undertakings, their participation in the BLC has given Poplar River direct access to essential financial support for land-management activities, without which provincial recognition of the AALMP may not have been possible.<sup>67</sup> BLC participants from Poplar River have been especially encouraged by Euro-Canadian members’ willingness to acknowledge that First Nations must play a lead role in determining if, how, and when conservation and/or development take place within their territories.<sup>68</sup> Crucially, collaborative conservation has also helped Poplar River residents generate broad public awareness of their continuing campaign to protect their homeland from destructive development, thus enhancing the legal protection of the AALMP with the intangible, but still imperative, layers of protection offered by citizen interest.

With this goal—increasing national and international visibility so that any attempt to initiate development that undermines the health of Asatiwisipi Aki meets costly public disapproval—in mind, Poplar River First Nation entered the global forum of United Nations’ world heritage protection. Together with three adjacent Anishinaabe communities (Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids, and Pikangikum) in 2002 Poplar River agreed to a protected areas accord designed to promote a shared vision of land protection and mutual support. Out of this accord grew the Pimachiowin Aki proposed World Heritage Site (Pimachiowin Aki means “the land that gives life”). People from Poplar River have played a lead role in documenting the cultural and natural significance of the 20,753-square-mile area and, together with other First Nations representatives and officials from Manitoba and Ontario, submitted a bid for addition to UNESCO’s World Heritage list in January 2012.<sup>69</sup>

Poplar River disapproves of extractive industrial development and opposes commercial use of its lands, waters, and forests.<sup>70</sup> The First Nation’s measured approach has entailed compiling robust data, presenting it in terms comprehensible



to key decision-makers, and working through formal legal channels to persuade outside officials that Anishinaabe people are competent land managers. The community's leaders have made concurrent use of the same basic strategy at multiple scales to augment their prospects for land-based self-determination; Poplar River citizens view land-management planning, legal recognition at the provincial level, and the ongoing campaign for international recognition as tools for ensuring the survival of their language, culture, and land-based way of life. Participation in the BLC is, in turn, a tool for supporting, funding, and educating others regarding their outlook and the value of their work. Their strategy has proven successful; with legal recognition of the AALMP and potential global recognition of the Pimachiowin Aki region, Poplar River residents can now be certain that opportunities to and live and learn on the land will be available for future generations.

### *West Moberly First Nations: Confronting Cumulative Effects on Dane-zaa nané?*

Dane-zaa nané?, the Dane-zaa homeland, stretches across much of northeastern British Columbia and northwestern Alberta.<sup>71</sup> Dane-zaa people "believe they have always been on the land of their ancestors, put there at the beginning of the world by 'Heaven Sitter,' the creator" and the long duration of human inhabitation of the region is substantiated by archaeological evidence.<sup>72</sup> Over the course of at least 10,500 years, indigenous groups developed a richly emplaced cultural life as hunters of the area's abundant wildlife. Dane-zaa people participate in enduring social interactions with others who share their world; as Robin and Jillian Ridington state, "to be Dane-zaa is to be surrounded by relatives . . . Even animals are relations who have the ability to give life and bestow power."<sup>73</sup> Today, between 2,500 and 3,000 indigenous people live in northeastern British Columbia, including nearly 250 residents of West Moberly First Nations (WMFN), a predominantly Dane-zaa community with a significant Cree minority.<sup>74</sup> Partaking in twenty-first-century technological, informational, and economic exchanges has done little to diminish the importance of traditional subsistence and has, if anything, reinforced its centrality to cultural identity.

Here, colonization is a story of ongoing land-use conflict prompted by outsiders' attempts to control the rich resources of Dane-zaa nané?. Following the explorations of Alexander Mackenzie in 1789 to 1793 and the subsequent arrival of Hudson's Bay Company fur traders, Dane-zaa people were incorporated into an expanding global economy, but remained committed to their mobile hunting lifestyle.<sup>75</sup> With the introduction of firearms and the demands of the fur trade, animal populations declined rapidly, causing periods of extreme hardship and famine throughout the 1800s.<sup>76</sup> An 1891 report indicating that immense quantities of petroleum might exist in the district and then, more urgently, the 1896 Klondike gold rush and the northward flow of prospectors, interested Canada in securing the eighth of its numbered treaties with the original inhabitants of the 324,900-square-mile area that was eventually delineated as Treaty 8 Territory.<sup>77</sup> When Dane-zaa leaders agreed to the treaty in 1900, their strategic objective "was to secure their traditional hunting, fishing, and trapping rights."<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, they refused to sign until commissioners promised they would



be “as free to hunt and fish after the treaty as they would be if they never entered into it.”<sup>79</sup> Contemporary descendants argue that declining wildlife populations and degraded lands and waterways prevent them from fully exercising their subsistence rights, thereby violating the treaty agreement.<sup>80</sup>

The fertile valleys of the Peace River country began attracting agricultural settlement in the early-twentieth century. Rather than recognizing the extensive seasonal pattern of First Nations’ land use, newcomers saw unoccupied land as theirs to claim and “improve.”<sup>81</sup> In the 1920s, the imposition of a registered trapline system permitted settlers to register areas formerly utilized by Native hunters, who were then cited for trespassing in places their families had hunted for generations.<sup>82</sup> They responded by registering their own traplines, choosing to “fight the Whites on their own terms.”<sup>83</sup> Still, northeastern British Columbia’s indigenous inhabitants lived relatively unrestricted until the mid-twentieth century, when World War II motivated the construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942. Additional agriculture and logging followed, fragmenting wildlife habitat and progressively undermining First Nations citizens’ subsistence opportunities.

Conventional oil and gas production also began in this era. As ethnographer Hugh Brody concluded more than three decades ago, “the future of the region is now inseparable from the world’s demand for energy, and all the attendant apprehensions and crisis. External domination of the region’s economy began with the fur trade; it culminated in an oil and gas frontier.”<sup>84</sup> Today, the use of horizontal hydrofracturing technology to extract fossil fuels from deep shale layer, or fracking, has exponentially increased this type of industrial activity, turning pristine boreal forests into industrial zones that cannot be restored. Concurrently with its participation in collaborative conservation, and for the same ultimate reason, recently WMFN has taken a stand, releasing a joint position paper identifying the shale gas industry’s intensive use of water, flawed consultation framework, and lack of attention to cumulative impacts as key First Nations concerns.<sup>85</sup>

Southern energy demands are also supplied by the Peace River’s massive hydroelectric dams. Constructed between 1962 and 1967 with no First Nations’ consultation, the W. A. C. Bennett Dam flooded hunting and trapping land, severely disrupted the migration of caribou and other species, and carried methyl mercury contamination to downstream waters.<sup>86</sup> A second large dam, the Peace Canyon Dam, was completed in 1980. Hearings concerning the possible construction of a third major dam, referred to as Site C, are now underway. WMFN has actively opposed this third dam’s construction and has collaborated with environmental groups, most notably including the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative, the David Suzuki Foundation, and the more local Peace Valley Environmental Association, to document and publicize probable detrimental effects.<sup>87</sup>

Compounding the dams’ devastating effects on caribou populations, the area surrounding WMFN has seen the construction of massive metallurgical coal mines since the 1980s. While WMFN does not oppose all mining, First Nation members became extremely concerned when the province approved an application to conduct bulk sample exploration in an area that provided critical winter habitat for the endangered Burnt

Pine caribou herd.<sup>88</sup> In 2010, WMFN initiated a legal challenge in hopes of resolving this situation. Their strategic use of litigation to advance land-based self-determination was successful; the First Nation won the case, with the British Columbia Supreme Court declaring that WMFN citizens have the right to “exercise meaningfully traditional hunting practices,” including harvesting specific species in specific places traditionally included in their seasonal round.<sup>89</sup> Even more recently, WMFN has collaborated with biologists and the provincial ministry of environment to develop an action plan for the Moberly caribou herd that complies with Canada’s Species at Risk Act.<sup>90</sup>

With a population that continues to spend time on the land and its proactive positions on shale gas development, the proposed Site C dam, and coal mining, WMFN is widely regarded as a regional conservation leader.<sup>91</sup> Aided by personal networks and word-of-mouth, WMFN became involved with the BLC in 2010. In May 2012, the BLC held its semiannual meeting in Fort St. John, British Columbia, which allowed coalition members to tour a heavily industrialized shale gas extraction site and witness firsthand the transformations taking place. While not an official BLC member, WMFN has attended meetings as an observer and participated actively in working groups focusing on caribou conservation, FPIC (free, prior, and informed consent), and shale gas, through which the First Nation has gained a vehicle for taking high-profile, national action on issues of urgent local concern.<sup>92</sup> WMFN now confronts the direct impacts of two large hydroelectric dams (and an additional proposed one), eleven mines, 8,000 oil and gas well sites, 10,000 pipelines, eight wind farms, and an untold number of powerlines and support facilities in addition to ongoing forestry, agriculture, and tourist outfitting.<sup>93</sup> Still, provincial and industrial administrators refuse to address the effects of these developments in any cumulative fashion.<sup>94</sup> Appreciating the capacity of a broad, multi-sector group to influence public sentiment and policy in Canada and beyond, it is WMFN’s hope that the BLC will encourage a broader awareness of the cumulative effects associated with decades of industrial activity on Dane-zaa nané?.

Acknowledging the need for regional economic development and the fact that some First Nations families benefit from energy industry jobs, WMFN has consistently argued that development should not be halted altogether, but should avoid sensitive areas and proceed only with First Nations approval. Talking between meetings in his busy office, Chief Roland Willson outlined his community’s overarching goal: “We’re trying to preserve our culture,” he told me, “We’re trying to preserve who we are as a people.”<sup>95</sup> When Dune-zaa leaders accepted Treaty 8 in 1900 but insisted their subsistence rights be retained, a pattern of strategically adopting and adapting external institutions to accomplish the ultimate goal of survival through land-based self-determination was discernible. This pattern was also apparent in the 1920s when Natives registered traplines to preserve their access to customary hunting areas. And it is visible today in WMFN’s ongoing organized opposition to current shale gas and hydroelectric development trajectories and in the community’s recent use of the Canadian court system and Species at Risk Act to protect endangered caribou. Participation in the BLC—with its transmission of information, its facilitation of open discussion, and its capacity to influence diverse decision-makers—continues this pattern of strategic action, offering new means for achieving an enduring end.

## CONCLUSION: STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

At one of the BLC's semiannual meetings, held this time in Thunder Bay, Ontario, an Anishinaabe band councilor from Poplar River First Nation introduced himself and the work he'd been doing for more than twenty years by explaining where he came from. The boreal forest "is where I live," he declared; "that is my home."<sup>96</sup> Although their worlds are separated by thousands of miles, shaped by ecological and cultural diversity, and contoured by different historical experiences, this sense of emplacement unites First Nations BLC participants. When indigenous perspectives are placed at the center of analysis, the boreal forest cannot be mistaken for an uninhabited wilderness or a remote resource frontier. It is a homeland worth fighting for. Non-Native collaborative conservation participants must be willing to accept this reality. Other lessons, too, can be learned from careful attention to First Nations perspectives—the value of defining key concepts in ways that challenge Western/ethnocentric assumptions, the necessity of recognizing culture and politics as inseparable from environmental issues, and the importance of expecting and accepting divergent perspectives and operating openly and transparently to bring them into dialogue.

As the case studies presented here demonstrate, First Nations BLC participants are also united by a common underlying goal: survival as culturally distinct and politically autonomous peoples. Whether through direct action protest, impact benefit agreements, land claims negotiations, provincial land use planning legislation, global world heritage programs, public position papers, or litigation—all strategies used by the First Nations organizations described here—First Nations citizens have pursued numerous paths on their multigenerational quests to promote land-based self-determination. Seen through this lens, collaborative conservation emerges as one of many strategies employed to accomplish this ultimate goal, and participation in the BLC appears to be a small part of a much larger plan. Collaborative conservation differs from earlier instances of strategic accommodation in its explicit emphasis on the land and its protection, its incorporation of numerous geographically distant parties, and its attention to how global economic markets drive local resource extraction, but it offers new options for accomplishing an identical ambition. Looking to the land as a core of cultural identity as well as a source of physical sustenance and, at the same time, sharing a modern reality structured by unequal interactions and continuing land use conflicts, preserving the possibility of a land-based way of life is an undertaking that is as political as it is necessary.

Although generations of Native North American leaders have selectively accommodated, adopted, and adapted introduced institutions in hopes of advancing their peoples' prospects, multiple possibilities for enacting resistance coexist and compete for primacy within contemporary indigenous communities.<sup>97</sup> Some indigenous leaders argue adamantly against engaging with implicitly unjust colonizing institutions and processes, while others see value in working practically and incrementally within the existing system. Among scholarly observers as well, the concept of collaboration generates both condemnation and inspiration. Some critics have gone so far as to suggest that participatory and collaborative approaches constitute a form of "tyranny,"

while others highlight collaboration's intrinsic benefits, noting that it enables diverse groups to integrate information beyond the capacity of any individual or organization to comprehend independently and serves to "stabiliz[e] expectations and facilitat[e] the cooperation of a large number of disparate groups."<sup>98</sup> It is certainly possible that in some cases and some places such frameworks may inadvertently delay substantive progress toward social and environmental justice. But it is also possible for collaborative conservation to function as a catalyst for positive change and self-empowerment. In this complex and contradictory context, partnering with environmentally concerned Euro-Canadians is a strategic choice to work pragmatically within an admittedly imperfect societal framework. Contexts of resistance—and therefore, the particular strategies most likely to succeed in any given moment—change constantly. But the goal of promoting the land-based self-determination so fundamental to First Nations' long-term survival remains, as enduring as the people themselves.

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### *List of Abbreviations*

BLC	Boreal Leadership Council
CBI	Canadian Boreal Initiative
BFCF	Boreal Forest Conservation Framework
NGO	non-governmental organization
JBNQA	James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
IBA	impact benefit agreement
AALMP	Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan
WMFN	West Moberly First Nations
FPIC	free, prior, and informed consent

### NOTES

† My use of the term (*post*)colonial is intended to indicate that indigenous peoples in Canada and elsewhere experience legacies of colonialism in tangible ways that can by no means be relegated to the historic past.

1. Alan Thein Durning, *Guardians of the Land: Indigenous Peoples and the Health of the Earth* (Worldwatch Paper 112, 1992); Stan Stevens, "Lessons and Directions," in *Conservation through Cultural Survival: Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas*, ed. Stan Stevens (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), 265–98; Michael Wells and Katrina Brandon, *People and Parks: Linking Protected Area Management with Local Communities* (Washington, DC: World Bank/World Wildlife Fund/US Agency for International Development, 1992).

2. Penobscot anthropologist Darren Ranco applies the notion of *ecological legitimacy* to issues of American Indian land rights; he argues “for the Penobscot Indian Nation, as for many other Indian nations, ecological legitimacy and recognition are matters of life and death;” Darren Ranco, “The Ecological Indian and the Politics of Representation,” in *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian*, ed. Michael E. Harkin and David Rich Lewis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 32–51, 43. On ecological legitimacy more generally, see Laura Pulido, “Ecological Legitimacy and Cultural Essentialism: Hispano Grazing in the Southwest,” in *The Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Environmental Justice Movements in the United States*, ed. Daniel Richard Faber (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 293–311.

3. Paul Nadasdy, “The Anti-Politics of TEK: The Institutionalization of Co-Management Discourse and Practice,” *Anthropologica* 47, no. 2 (2005): 215–32, 220, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25606237>.

4. Nicholas Hildyard, Pandurang Hegde, Paul Wolvekamp, and Somasekhare Reddy, “Pluralism, Participation and Power: Joint Forest Management in India,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, ed. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 56–71, 69.

5. Richard Howitt and Sandra Suchet-Pearson, “Rethinking the Building Blocks: Ontological Pluralism and the Idea of ‘Management,’” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 88, no. 3 (2006): 323–35, 331, doi 10.1111/j.1468-0459.2006.00225.x.

6. See also Anna J. Willow, “Doing Sovereignty in Native North America: Anishinaabe Counter-Mapping and the Struggle for Land-Based Self-Determination,” *Human Ecology: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 41, no. 6 (2013): 871–84, doi 10.1007/s10745-013-9593-9.

7. See Tobias Haller, Marc Galvin, Patrick Meroka, Jamil Alca, and Alex Alvarez, “Who Gains From Community Conservation? Intended and Unintended Costs and Benefits of Participative Approaches in Peru and Tanzania,” *The Journal of Environment and Development* 17, no. 2 (2008): 118–44, doi 10.1177/1070496508316853. I have also addressed this topic in my own research and writing.

8. Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

9. Boreal Leadership Council, “Free, Prior and Informed Consent in Canada” (2012), <http://www.borealcanada.ca/documents/FPICReport-English-web.pdf>, 2.

10. Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York: Longman, 2000); R. W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

11. Eric Alden Smith and Mark Wishnie, “Conservation and Subsistence in Small-Scale Societies,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29 (2000): 493–524, doi 10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.493. Smith and Wishnie warn against conflating conservation and sustainability, proposing that in order to qualify as conservation, a practice must not only function to prevent and/or mitigate environmental degradation but must also be designed to do so. They argue that while sustainable land use practices are widespread in small-scale societies, conservation by design is a rarity.

12. Mark Dowie, *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009); Robert H. Keller and Michael Francis Turek, *American Indians and National Parks* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).

13. Dan Brockington, *Fortress Conservation: The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserves, Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

14. Fikret Berkes, “Community-Based Conservation in a Globalized World,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104, no. 39 (2007): 15188–93, doi 10.1073/pnas.0702098104; Stephen R. Kellert, Jai N. Nehta, Syma A. Ebbin, and Laly L. Lichtenfeld, “Community Natural Resource Management: Promise, Rhetoric, and Reality,” *Society and Natural Resources* 13, no. 8 (2000): 705–15, doi 10.1080/089419200750035575.

15. Peter R. Wilshusen, Steven R. Brechin, Crystal L. Fortwangler, and Patrick C. West, "Contested Nature: Conservation and Development at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century," in *Contested Nature: Promoting International Biodiversity with Social Justice in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Brechin, Wilshusen, Fortwangler, and West (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1–22.
16. Fikret Berkes, "Rethinking Community-Based Conservation," *Conservation Biology* 18, no. 3 (2004): 621–30, 622, doi 10.1111/j.1523-1739.2004.00077.x.
17. David Hulme and Marshall Murphree, "Communities, Wildlife and the "New Conservation" in Africa," *Journal of International Development* 11 (1999): 277–85, doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1099-1328(199903/04)11:2<277::AID-JID582>3.0.CO;2-T.
18. Nadasdy, "The Anti-Politics of TEK," 216; see also David C. Natcher, Susan Davis, and Clifford G. Hickey, "Co-Management: Managing Relationships, Not Resources," *Human Organization* 64, no. 3 (2005): 240–50.
19. One of the most innovative arrangements exists in the Northwest Territories, where a unique Protected Areas Strategy is uniting stakeholders to participate in protected area identification and implementation driven by local First Nations communities and organizations. See Angela Stadel, Raymond Taniton, and Heidi Hader, "Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy: How Community Values are Shaping the Protection of Wild Spaces and Heritage Places," in *Wilderness in the Circumpolar North: Searching for Compatibility in Ecological, Traditional, and Ecotourism Values*, Proceedings May 15-16, 2001, Anchorage, RMRS-P-26, ed. Alan E. Watson, Lilian Alessa, and Janet Sproull, US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station (Ogden, UT: 2002): 20–26, <http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/39113>; The Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy Advisory Committee, *Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy: A Balanced Approach to Establishing Protected Areas in the Northwest Territories* (1999), <http://www.nwtpas.ca/documents/document-1999-PASmanualcomplete.pdf>.
20. On Clayoquot Sound, see Tara C. Goetze, "Empowered Co-Management: Towards Power-Sharing and Indigenous Rights in Clayoquot Sound, BC," *Anthropologica* 47, no. 2 (2005): 247–65, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25606239>; *A Political Space: Reading the Global through Clayoquot Sound*, ed. Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). On the Great Bear Rainforest, see R. Alex Clapp, "Wilderness Ethics and Political Ecology: Remapping the Great Bear Rainforest," *Political Geography* 23, no. 7 (2004): 839–62, doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2004.05.012; Karena Shaw, "The Global/Local Politics of the Great Bear Rainforest," *Environmental Politics* 13, no. 2 (2004): 373–92, 10.1080/0964401042000209621; Merran Smith and Art Sterritt, "Towards a Shared Vision: Lesson Learned from Collaboration between First Nations and Environmental Organizations to Protect the Great Bear Rainforest and Coastal First Nations," in *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships*, ed. Lynne Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 131–48.
21. Zoltán Grossman, "Unlikely Alliances: Treaty Conflicts and Environmental Cooperation between Native American and Rural White Communities," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 29, no. 4 (2005): 21–43; Soren Larsen, "Promoting Aboriginal Territoriality Through Interethnic Alliances: The Case of the Cheslatta T'en in Northern British Columbia," *Human Organization* 62, no. 1 (2003): 74–84.
22. Smith and Sterritt, "Towards a Shared Vision." This is especially true in light of Supreme Court decisions ranging in time from *Calder v. British Columbia* (1973), which acknowledged Aboriginal land rights for the first time, to *R. v. Sparrow* (1990), which explicitly recognized Aboriginal resource rights), to the very recent *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia* (2014), which recognized Tsilhqot'in title to customary lands.
23. Canadian Boreal Initiative, "Boreal Forest Conservation Framework" (2003), <http://www.borealcanada.ca/framework-e.php>, 2.



24. Ibid., 3.
25. Ibid. Also see Canadian Boreal Initiative, "Working with Aboriginal Communities" (2008), [http://www.borealcanada.ca/documents/Working\\_with\\_Aboriginal\\_Communities-e.pdf](http://www.borealcanada.ca/documents/Working_with_Aboriginal_Communities-e.pdf).
26. BLC meetings are held semiannually in locations that alternate between east and west, urban and (relatively) rural.
27. With the exception of Poplar River First Nation, participating First Nations groups are organizations that represent multiple communities within a designated political, cultural, and/or geographical boundary.
28. Fieldnotes, November 8, 2012.
29. Thomas Dietz, Elinor Ostrom, and Paul C. Stern, "The Struggle to Govern the Commons," *Science* 302, no. 5652: 1907–12, doi: 10.1126/science.1091015.
30. Per Olsson, Carl Folke, and Fikret Berkes, "Adaptive Comanagement for Building Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems," *Environmental Management* 34, no. 1: 75–90, doi: 10.1007/s00267-003-0101-7.
31. Gerald Sider, *Lumbee Indian Histories: Race, Ethnicity, and Indian Identity in the Southern United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29.
32. Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, "Transformational Resistance and Social Justice: American Indians in Ivy League Institutions," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2005): 193–211, 198, doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3651390>.
33. Larry Nesper, *The Walleye War: The Struggle for Ojibwe Spearfishing and Treaty Rights* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 205.
34. On historical economic relationships, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On contemporary economic relationships, see Jessica R. Cattelino, "Casino Roots: The Cultural Production of Twentieth-Century Seminole Economic Development," in *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian Hosmer and Colleen O'Neill (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 66–90. On linguistic choices, see Barbara Meek, *We Are Our Language: An Ethnography of Language Revitalization in a Northern Athabaskan Community* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010). On educational decisions, see Brayboy, "Transformational Resistance and Social Justice."
35. Ronald Niezen, *Defending the Land: Sovereignty and Forest Life in James Bay Cree Society* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998).
36. Ibid., 7.
37. Ibid., 139, emphasis added.
38. I visited affiliates of Innu Nation in June 2012, Poplar River First Nation in August 2012, Treaty 8 and Dehcho First Nations in June 2013, and Kaska Nation in August 2013. In November 2012, I attended a BLC meeting as an invited observer. Along the way, I conducted telephone interviews with CBI employees and non-Native BLC members and content analyses of documents produced by the BLC, CBI, and First Nations organizations.
39. Valérie Courtois, Canadian Boreal Initiative Senior Aboriginal Relations Advisor, fieldnotes, June 21, 2012.
40. Marie Wadden, *Nitassinan: The Innu Struggle to Reclaim Their Homeland* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 1991).
41. Recent census figures indicate 1,314 residents of Sheshatshiu and 931 residents of Natuashish, with populations rising rapidly in both communities (2011 data from Statistics Canada, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>). In addition, around 16,000 Innu citizens reside in the province of Québec.



42. The agreement-in-principle is available at [http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ccl\\_farim\\_nl\\_labinnu\\_caip\\_1331749872252\\_eng.pdf](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/ccl_farim_nl_labinnu_caip_1331749872252_eng.pdf).
43. Colin Samson, *A Way of Life that Does Not Exist: Canada and the Extinguishment of the Innu* (London: Verso, 2003). Also see Myriam Denov and Kathryn Campbell, "Casualties of Aboriginal Displacement in Canada: Children at Risk among the Innu of Labrador," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 20, no. 2 (2002): 21–33.
44. On traditional Innu subsistence and spirituality, see Georg Henriksen, *Hunters in the Barrens: The Naskapi on the Edge of the White Man's World* (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1973); Julius E. Lips, "Notes on Montagnais-Naskapi Economy: Lake St. John and Lake Mistassini Bands," *Ethnos* 12, nos. 1–2 (1947): 1–78, doi: 10.1080/00141844.1947.9980659; Frank G. Speck, *Naskapi: The Savage Hunters of the Labrador Peninsula* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935).
45. Lips, "Notes on Montagnais-Naskapi Economy," 1.
46. Fieldnotes, June 23, 2012; see also Wadden, *Nitassinan*.
47. Interview, June 22, 2012.
48. Wadden, *Nitassinan; Hunters and Bombers*, directed by Hugh Brody and Nigel Markham (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1991) [documentary film].
49. Wadden, *Nitassinan*, 35.
50. Brody and Markham, *Hunters and Bombers*.
51. Robert B. Gibson, "Sustainability Assessment and Conflict Resolution: Reaching Agreement to Proceed with the Voisey's Bay Nickel Mine," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 14, nos. 3–4 (2006): 334–48, 344, doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2004.07.007.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Innu Nation and Newfoundland and Labrador (Provincial Department of Forest Resources and Agrifoods), *Forest Ecosystem Strategy Plan for Forest Management District 19 Labrador/Nitassinan* (Sheshatshiu and Northwest River, NL, 2003).
54. For more on this program, see <http://www.smu.ca/administration/gorsebrook/innu.html>.
55. Fieldnotes, June 25, 2012.
56. Interview, August 5, 2012.
57. Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada: 1780–1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 25.
58. A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Teachings from the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy*, ed. Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock (New York: Liveright, 1975), 141–78; A. Irving Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History*, ed. Jennifer Brown (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1992).
59. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*; Harold Hickerson, *The Chippewa and their Neighbors: A Study in Ethnohistory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1970).
60. Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of Berens River*; Government of Canada, *Treaty 5 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Saulteaux and Swampy Cree Tribes of Indians at Berens's River and Norway House with Adhesions* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969 [original treaty 1875]).
61. Poplar River is home to more than 1,200 Anishinaabe people (data from [http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/FNP/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND\\_NUMBER=277&lang=eng](http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/FNP/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=277&lang=eng)).
62. *We Are the Land*, documentary film directed by Daniel Clark (Poplar River First Nation, Manitoba, Canada, 2008). DVD.
63. Fieldnotes, August 3, 2012.
64. Poplar River First Nation, *Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan* (Poplar River, Manitoba, Canada, 2011), [http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/lands\\_branch/pdf/pfrn\\_management\\_plan\\_18may2011.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/lands_branch/pdf/pfrn_management_plan_18may2011.pdf).

65. Province of Manitoba, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, 39<sup>th</sup> Legislature, *Bill 6, The East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Areas Act* (Winnipeg: The Queens Printer for the Province of Manitoba, 2008), 2.
66. Ray Rabliauskas, personal communication, September 25, 2012.
67. In addition to Poplar River's ten-year relationship with CBI and the BLC, partnerships with other environmental non-governmental organizations (notably including Natural Resources Defense Council and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society) have offered complementary funding, technical and legal advice, and moral support.
68. Fieldnotes, August 6, 2012 and November 8, 2012.
69. The provinces of Manitoba and Ontario as well as all four Protected Area Accord signatories are parties to the nomination process. For more information on the Pimachiowin Aki project, see <http://www.pimachiowinaki.org/>. In June, 2013, UNESCO deferred its decision on the nomination, seeking more information about what makes *Pimachiowin Aki* unique. See Steve Lambert, "Second UNESCO Heritage Bid in the Works for Pimachiowin Aki Boreal Forest," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto, ON, January 14, 2014), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/second-unesco-heritage-bid-in-the-works-for-pimachiowin-aki-boreal-forest/article16333759/>. A decision is expected in 2015 or 2016.
70. Poplar River First Nation, *Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan*, 33.
71. *Dane-zaa* means "real people." In the anthropological and historical literature the *Dane-zaa* are referred to as "Beaver Indians."
72. David V. Burley, J. Scott Hamilton, and Knut R. Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794–1823* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), 13.
73. Robin Ridington and Jillian Ridington, *Where Happiness Dwells: A History of the Dane-zaa First Nations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 218.
74. Population data from <http://treaty8.bc.ca/communities/>. Cree people arrived in the region in the late 1700s and have since been incorporated into *Dane-zaa* families and communities.
75. Burley, Hamilton, and Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan*.
76. David Leonard, *Delayed Frontier: The Peace River Country to 1909* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995).
77. Ridington and Ridington, *Where Happiness Dwells*; Rene Fumoleau, *As Long As This Land Shall Stand: A History of Treaty 8 and Treaty 11, 1870–1939* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004 [1975]). Treaty 8 was originally signed near Lesser Slave Lake, Alberta on June 21, 1899. An adhesion was signed at Fort St. John, British Columbia on May 13, 1900.
78. Ridington and Ridington, *Where Happiness Dwells*, 223.
79. Fumoleau, *As Long As This Land Shall Stand*, 87–88; see also Leonard, *Delayed Frontier*; West Moberly First Nations Land Use Department, *I Want to Eat Caribou Before I Die* (Initial Submissions for the Proposed Mining Activity at First Coal Corporation's Goodrich Property, 2009).
80. Fieldnotes June 17, 2013.
81. Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1983). On this topic more generally, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).
82. Treaty 8 Tribal Association, *The Two Mountains That Sit Together: An Ethno-historical Overview* (Fort St. John, BC: Treaty 8 Tribal Association, 1992).
83. Brody, *Maps and Dreams*, 95.
84. *Ibid.*, 126.
85. BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council, Treaty 8 Tribal Association, and West Moberly First Nations, *Shale Gas, Cumulative Impacts and Reforming the Current Consultation Process* (Position Paper, 2012).
86. West Moberly First Nations, *Traditional Land Use-Occupancy Study*.

87. Since 2006, WMFN and Peace Valley Environmental Association have voiced opposition by organizing an annual event called Paddle for the Peace. For information on this annual event, see <http://paddleforthepeace.ca/>.

88. West Moberly First Nations Land Use Department, *I Want to Eat Caribou*.

89. Quoted in Bruce R. Muir and Annie L. Booth, "An Environmental Justice Analysis of Caribou Recovery Planning, Protection of an Indigenous Culture, and Coal Mining Development of Northeast British Columbia, Canada," *Environment, Development, and Sustainability* 14, no. 4 (2012): 455–76, 465. The entity originally granted the approval was subsequently sold to another company not currently interested in proceeding with exploration in this region.

90. R. Scott McNay, Debbie Cichowski, and Bruce Muir, *Action Plan for the Moberly Herd of Woodland Caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Canada* [draft] (West Moberly First Nation, BC: Species at Risk Act Action Plan Series, 2012). Canada's federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) was passed in 2002 and is designed to protect endangered species and their habitats.

91. John Lewis, Economic Development Director at West Moberly First Nation, interview, June 18, 2013.

92. Given the long history of expropriation of indigenous lands for resource development and the more recent trajectory of Canadian court decisions that require governments to consult with Aboriginal peoples before development occurs, Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) has become a topic of widespread conversation among indigenous communities, environmentalist groups, and resource-extractive companies in the boreal forest region. In addition, the rights of indigenous peoples to participate in decisions impacting their populations, livelihoods, and customary lands have been recognized by the United Nations.

93. Annie L. Booth and Norm W. Skelton, "'You Spoil Everything!' Indigenous Peoples and the Consequences of Industrial Development in British Columbia," *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 13, no. 4 (2011): 685–702, doi 10.1007/s10668-011-9284-x.

94. Annie L. Booth and Norm W. Skelton, "We are Fighting for Ourselves"—First Nations' Evaluation of British Columbia and Canadian Environmental Assessment Processes," *Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management* 13, no. 3 (2011): 367–404, doi 10.1142/S1464333211003936.

95. Interview, June 17, 2013.

96. Fieldnotes, November 8, 2012.

97. See Nesper, *The Walleye Wars*; Niezen, *Defending the Land*; Sider, *Lumbee Indian Histories*.

98. In the introduction to their edited volume, Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari define tyranny as an "illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power;" Cooke and Kothari, "The Case for Participation as Tyranny," in *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (London, Zed Books, 2001), 1–15, 4. Several contributors to this volume suggest that participation is rarely as empowering or liberating as its proponents believe. On the other hand, see Olsson, Folke, and Berkes, "Adaptive Comanagement." The final quotation comes from Sara Singleton, *Constructing Cooperation: The Evolution of Institutions of Comanagement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 142.