



Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

Engaging Indigenous Peoples in Climate Change Policy

Virtual Roundtable Discussion

January 15th, 2025



CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
OBJECTIVE.....	2
METHODOLOGY	2
Theme A: Exploring the relationships between Indigenous WG2SGD+ peoples and the land.	3
Theme B: Impacts of IPCAs on Climate Change, Adaptation, and Resilience	4
Theme C: IPCAs as Gender Equitable Initiatives	5
Theme D: Strengthening Partnerships for Indigenous-Led Conservation	6
CONCLUSION	7
ANNEX.....	9

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the virtual roundtable held on January 15, 2025, for the Engaging Indigenous Peoples in Climate Change Policy (EIPCCP) project, which focused on Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and the leadership of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse (W2STGD+) individuals in climate change mitigation. Twenty-seven self-identified Indigenous W2STGD+ participants shared insights into the intersection of conservation, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and gender equity. The discussion examined the challenges and opportunities for empowering these communities in environmental stewardship, underscoring the importance of reclaiming land rights and sovereignty. Key themes included the relationship between Indigenous W2STGD+ peoples and the land, the local impact of IPCAs, and the need for inclusive, equitable leadership.

This report synthesizes the findings from the roundtable, highlighting the essential role of Indigenous W2STGD+ leadership in addressing climate change and sharing cultural knowledge. It also calls for increased support from governments and external organizations to ensure that Indigenous-led conservation efforts are effective, inclusive, and sustainable. The shared perspectives, stories, and experiences provided a powerful narrative of resilience, interconnectedness, and a profound commitment to preserving the land and waters for future generations.

OBJECTIVE

This virtual roundtable aimed to connect Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse peoples to discuss climate change, the significance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) transfer, and Indigenous-led conservation. Specifically, NWAC sought to understand how these groups can receive better support as participants and leaders in climate change mitigation, encouraging and inspiring meaningful engagement in conservation on local, provincial, and national levels.

METHODOLOGY

On January 15th, 2025, twenty-seven (27) self-identified Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse individuals attended a two-hour virtual roundtable discussion on Zoom. Promotional posters were shared on NWAC's social media to encourage eligible participants to register. Only those who met the necessary criteria could attend the discussion, ensuring that the platform was dedicated to Indigenous W2STGD+ peoples in Canada.

The roundtable discussion was divided into two sections. The first section provided a briefing on the EIPCCP project, outlining its scope, context, objectives, and deliverables. The second section facilitated a discussion guided by specific questions. These questions were categorized into four themes, each pertaining to conservation, climate change, ecological knowledge, and advocacy. Each section was allotted 20 minutes. Responses were gathered through a recorded transcript, the Zoom chat feature, and a Google form shared with participants for 24 hours following the scheduled discussion.

Questions were presented on PowerPoint during the Zoom call for all participants to reference. Some questions did not elicit an immediate response, so follow-up questions were displayed on the screen to encourage engagement.

THEME A: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS WG2SGD+ PEOPLES AND THE LAND.

Q.1: How do cultural and historical connections to the land shape the roles of Indigenous W2STGD+ peoples as ecological protectors today?

Follow-up: How has the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the land evolved over time? What factors have driven these changes?

For many, traditional ecological knowledge is passed down through generations, reinforcing the importance of Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals as environmental protectors.

“I was taught how to forage honourably in order to ensure there would continue to be more to forage in future years.” – Shantell Powell, Author

This perspective highlights the responsibility to protect biodiversity through sustainable practices. However, colonial policies, like residential schools, disrupted intergenerational learning, making it challenging for some to retain and transmit this knowledge. Participants also stressed that the health of the land directly affects the well-being of Indigenous women and children. These insights underscore the *urgency* of prioritizing these voices in conservation efforts.

“...WG2SGDLGBTQ+ experience extractive violence at a higher demographic than others. Indigenous women are tied to the Land, their health and wellness. Therefore, the wellness of the Land is vital.” – Jolene Thrasher, Indigenous Governance Student

Follow-up: How do these land-based relationships manifest in your own community/territory or region?

Traditional practices, such as controlled burns, were once vital for preserving healthy ecosystems; however, many of these methods have been abandoned due to urbanization and legal obstacles.

“When I was little, my father taught me how to do controlled burns of fields, but I’ve forgotten most of that knowledge now that I live in a big city.” - Shantell Powell, Author

Policies that undermine Indigenous land stewardship have resulted in habitat degradation and a loss of biodiversity. Several participants discussed the adverse effects of unsustainable industrial agriculture and over-extraction. Stories were shared about shorelines eroding and homes falling into the ocean on the Tuk (Tuktoyatuk) Peninsula. Despite these challenges, Indigenous-led movements are reclaiming stewardship roles, reinforcing traditional knowledge, and promoting environmental resilience.

“Inuvialuit were among the first to sign a Final Agreement (modern-day treaty) in 1984. It drastically changed the way Inuvialuit were being excluded from decision-making on their own Lands.” – Jolene Thrasher. Indigenous Governance Student

“Land back movements, treaty rights, and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty have been pivotal in reclaiming these roles.” – Angela Reece, Environmental Consultant

THEME B: IMPACTS OF IPCAS ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ADAPTATION, AND RESILIENCE

This theme aimed to explore the effects and impacts of Indigenous-led conservation, both in theory and in practice, from the perspectives of Indigenous W2STGD+ peoples with a range of experience in the environmental field.

Q.1: Regarding the environment, culture, economy, social well-being, and spirituality, what are the possible benefits of Indigenous-led conservation and protection?

Participants had several positive opinions about Indigenous-led conservation. Notably, IPCAs play a crucial role in addressing climate change by preserving biodiversity, protecting sacred sites, and ensuring the balance of ecosystems. Simultaneously, these initiatives strengthen sovereignty and facilitate the transfer of traditional knowledge across generations.

“Protecting sacred sites and traditional lands ensures the survival of cultural identity.” - Wittig Manuel, Environmental Director

“Direct involvement in conservation fosters self-determination and strengthens local governance.” - Angela Reece

However, many Indigenous conservation efforts struggle to gain recognition in mainstream conservation dialogues. Two participants expressed frustration with the dominance of Western academia in conservation:

“I feel like many conservation initiatives are led by academia, and unfortunately, unless you are in that sphere of people, your life experiences don’t count.” - Sarah Janson, Environmental Technician

“Academia and Western research has really dominated over indigenous research methodology in a big way for hundreds of years... Western research methodology really sort of clouds, Indigenous research methodologies.” - Jolene Thrasher, Indigenous Governance Student

“...I would love to include collaborative efforts. [This] Could bridge gaps between Indigenous and non-indigenous groups, fostering collaboration and mutual understanding.” – Participant

Follow-up: What are some challenges Indigenous Peoples face in mobilizing conservation efforts?

A key barrier to Indigenous-led conservation, as highlighted by participants, is the ongoing lack of land rights, along with financial constraints that limit support for conservation projects compared to commercial ventures. Despite these challenges, participants noted that Indigenous

communities continue to adapt. For example, one participant shared that Inuvialuit leaders have worked with governments to implement measures that stabilize shorelines affected by climate change. This has had a significant impact on infrastructure, hunting grounds, and animal migration pathways.

“Many Indigenous groups do not have formal ownership of their ancestral lands, limiting their authority to manage them.” - Rhian Sugden, Environmental Officer

“Wahnapitae First Nation recently received funding for an IPCA. One of the challenges we are currently facing is that a large portion of the area we are trying to protect [is] held under mining claims. Therefore, the mining companies still have the right to go forward with any exploration projects they want on these lands we are trying to protect” - Sarah Janson, Environmental Technician

THEME C: IPCAS AS GENDER EQUITABLE INITIATIVES

This theme explored how Indigenous-led conservation can serve as a platform for promoting gender equity. The questions guided participants to consider the importance of uplifting Indigenous W2STGD+ voices, potential challenges, and the actions that can be taken.

Q.1: Why is it important to include Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse peoples in conservation important? How could your participation impact conservation on a national scale?

It was shared that including Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals in conservation leadership leads to more innovative and culturally appropriate solutions. Another participant shared their experience at the Wet’suwet’en protest, noting that the groups were primarily comprised of women and Two-Spirit individuals with children. This signifies the familiar ancestral role of these groups as nurturers, healers, and often the primary caretakers of the next generation.

“Diversity in leadership and decision-making leads to more innovative and effective solutions, especially in complex fields like conservation.” – Participant

“In 2019-2020, when I was marching in solidarity with Wet’suwet’en, the groups were primarily made up of women and Two-Spirit folks with their children. I think that’s because a lot of the men were at day jobs at that time.” - Shantell Powell, Author

Follow-up: What challenges could you, as an Indigenous woman, 2-Spirit, or gender-diverse person, face in supporting conservation initiatives?

“...WG2SGDLGBTQ+ experience extractive violence at a higher demographic than others...” - Jolene Thrasher, Indigenous Governance Student

Follow-up: What actions can be taken to address these challenges?

Women and gender-diverse individuals have been environmental stewards since time immemorial. Their active participation and leadership in land-defending movements highlight the strength and leadership of gender-diverse communities in environmental activities. Including their perspectives in national conservation and climate change dialogue allows for diversity in decision-making.

One participant noted that individuals who identify as LGBTQ2+ possess immense knowledge from various perspectives, likening them to *living libraries*. Their active participation in land defence movements highlights the strength and leadership of gender-diverse communities in environmental activism. Including these perspectives ensures that conservation efforts are effective and equitable for Indigenous W2STGD+ Peoples.

THEME D: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

This theme emphasized the importance of shifting away from colonial frameworks and ensuring that partnerships are built on genuine respect for Indigenous governance systems. It explored how meaningful collaboration must prioritize Indigenous decision-making, remarkably amplifying the leadership of women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse peoples in conservation efforts.

Q.1: How can external organizations, like nonprofits, governments and academic institutions, better support the success of indigenous-led conservation? How can these partnerships be structured to prioritize and amplify leadership roles of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse peoples?

Participants emphasized that external organizations must recognize and respect longstanding Indigenous governance systems and directly support initiatives that advocate for Indigenous land rights, such as Land Back, rather than imposing Western institutional structures. Participants also emphasized the need for meaningful representation rather than tokenism. This approach upholds Indigenous rights and fosters conservation strategies rooted in traditional laws and practices.

“Land Back movements are so pivotal. They do not appeal to nor recognize federal and colonial institutional systems. Indigenous folks have had systems of governance, laws, and justice, since time immemorial. Land Back undermines the imperial crown and settler state.” – Jolene Thrasher, Indigenous Governance Student

“Through meaningful representation rather than lip service. I was once on a committee, and it became rapidly apparent I was only there to tick off a diversity checkbox.” - Shantell Powell, Author

Follow-up: What challenges may arise within these partnerships, and what steps can be taken to ensure Indigenous W2STGD+ peoples' leadership and knowledge are respected throughout the process?

Indigenous voices must hold real decision-making power, not just be included for optics. Expanding digital access can also help amplify Indigenous leadership and support advocacy efforts.

"I think high-speed internet has been instrumental in providing Indigenous people with the ability to elevate themselves. Idle No More was the beginning of this, I think." - Shantell Powell, Author

"I think they really need to remember the INDIGENOUS LED portion. We were working with Ontario Parks briefly and they had a lot of ideas on how we could run the IPCA, but were really just [explaining] how Ontario Parks would run things if it was them" – Sarah Janson, Environmental Technician

"Sharing experiences and knowledge at a national level can educate broader audiences about the importance of integrating indigenous and gender-diverse perspectives in conservation efforts" - Wittig Manuel, Environmental Director

Follow-up: How can we encourage our youth to be involved in conservation initiatives to ensure the continuation of knowledge and protection of land?

Engaging youth in conservation efforts is essential to ensure the continuation of traditional knowledge. Participants suggested various approaches, including community gardens, forest schools, and mentorship programs. By investing in youth education and leadership, Indigenous communities can ensure the sustainability of conservation efforts.

"I think groups like this can help make a good platform for WG2SGD+ people. It helps people connect with other people with similar mindsets." - Sarah Janson, Environmental Technician


"Creating a form of inclusion programs to give them a sense of belonging that they are not alone." – Participant

"When we give opportunities to our youth through conservation, traditional teaching, food sovereignty. We ensure that the environment and wildlife have a future too." - Participant

CONCLUSION

This roundtable served as a powerful reminder of the profound and ongoing relationship between Indigenous peoples and the land, as well as the vital role that Indigenous women, Two-Spirit individuals, transgender folks, and gender-diverse peoples play in conservation. Participants shared their experiences and challenges, demonstrating how they are already leading the effort to protect their territories, cultures, and ways of life.

One thing is clear: Indigenous-led conservation is not just important—it's essential. From passing down traditional ecological knowledge to advocating for Indigenous land rights initiatives, such as the Land Back movement, these leaders demonstrate how environmental protection and cultural survival are inextricably linked. However, they cannot do it alone. Lasting change requires governments, organizations, and allies to



step up by listening and taking meaningful action. This means providing authentic support, respecting Indigenous governance, and ensuring that conservation efforts are led by those who understand these lands best.

As this dialogue continues, governments, organizations, and allies must amplify the voices of Indigenous W2STGD+ peoples, respect Indigenous-led conservation, and collaborate to find lasting, sustainable solutions. By fostering meaningful partnerships and ensuring that conservation efforts are equitable and inclusive, we can strive towards a future that honours the land and the diverse communities that protect it.



ANNEX

Project: Engaging Indigenous Peoples in Climate Change Policy (EIPCCP)

Department: Environment

Date: January 15th, 2025, 1 to 3 p.m.

Location: Zoom

Facilitation: Aiyana Louis – Project Lead

Elder: Candice Anderson

Supporting Staff: Kenzie Tyler, Senior Policy Advisor

Number of Participants: 27

At the time of this roundtable, the terminology used to describe our constituents was “Indigenous women, girls, 2-spirit, transgender, and gender diverse peoples”. The Native Women’s Association of Canada now instead uses the term “Indigenous women in all their diversity”. To remain transparent and consistent with reporting, the original terminology was used in this report.