

# ENVIRONMENT & BIODIVERSITY



Native Women's  
Association of Canada

L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

## NWAC and the Environment

The Native Women's Association of Canada believes that when Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people are impacted by environmental degradation and climate change, they must be centered in conversations and looked to as active and consenting participants in the healing and wellbeing of the land and its inhabitants.

## Consultation and Consent

Governments and businesses taking land and natural resources without the consent of communities is an aspect of colonialism that continues to harm Indigenous women, girls, gender diverse people and their communities. There is a duty to consult Indigenous people when outsider actions could harm the environment. It is important to remember that even though a community was **consulted**, they may not have **consented**.

## Violence Against the Earth is Violence Against our Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People

- In each Indigenous community, women, girls and gender diverse people hold unique relationships with the lands that are Nation/traditional territory specific. Colonialism has tried to destroy this relationship by forcibly displacing Indigenous communities and removing women, girls and gender diverse people from their traditional roles. Violence like this is committed against Indigenous women, girls, gender diverse people and their communities to prevent traditional ways of knowing and being from being passed onto children. The result is communities losing or adapting their cultural teachings. This process of colonization makes it easier for colonizer settlement on traditional lands and extraction of natural resources.
- Indigenous communities experience the most extreme burdens of climate change and their economic, cultural and spiritual practices are threatened because of it. The impacts of climate change, increased natural disasters and the influence of extractive industries make it more challenging and dangerous for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people to carry out their responsibilities to the land.
- Pollution of water and land is changing the way Indigenous people interact with the environment. This carelessness is harming those who live off the land the most because harmful toxins are seeping into food and water sources. This reality has also been linked to a change in the way Indigenous mothers practice healthy living, which contributed to children being removed from their communities and put into residential schools and the current child welfare system.

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**“My hope is that our land is restored so my community can return home.”**

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- Indigenous people's relationship to the land comes from the understanding that our culture and livelihood are dependent on the nurturing of the environment. Indigenous cultures are formed over generations in relation to land and territory.
- In many First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, it is women, girls and gender diverse people who are entrusted with knowledge to care for the environment, families and communities.
- Indigenous understandings of the world are inseparable from land and water, which form the conditions for health and wellbeing.
- When the environment is not protected, it threatens the economic security, food security, health and culture of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.
- Ignoring the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people in environmental stewardship mirrors the destructive actions of industries and governments.
- Pollution, displacement and climate change all have a direct and immediate impact on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

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- Indigenous women endure the burdens of colonization and recognize the injustices that are harming the earth and its people. Indigenous women have taken charge to protect the land, and their relationship with it, which places them at the forefront of environmental activism as they lead environmental movements against harmful actions of governments and businesses. Women need to be centered in conversations about environmental protection, climate change, and land stewardship so that the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous people are advanced over the capital gains of governments and industries.
- To end this violence, all stakeholders must ensure culturally-safe, trauma-informed, and nation-specific responses are meaningfully acted on and prioritized. Governments and resource industries must create space for Indigenous women, value their consent, and recognize that if they fail to do so, they are continuing to carry out colonial violence against Indigenous women and children.

### TO LEARN MORE, PLEASE CONTACT:

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