

kisiskâciwan-sîpî

Heritage River Initiative Study

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Background

The County of Smoky Lake has initiated the process of designating the kisiskâciwan-sîpî, the North Saskatchewan River, as a Heritage River. An important piece of this process is engaging with the Indigenous communities that have both historic and current traditional ties to kisiskâciwan-sîpî. pipikwan pêhtâkwan partnered with O2 Design and visited with communities between November 2022 and March 2023 to hear stories and understand the requests for accountability to Indigenous stakeholders.

The method used was more of a principle than a technique; which is visiting. Indigenous Scholar Cindy Gaudet has proposed *keeoukaywin: The Visiting Way - Fostering an Indigenous Research Methodology*; as a way of conducting research with and for Indigenous communities. Gaudet (2019) shares that “with relationality at its core, *keeoukaywin* re-centres Métis and Cree ways of being, and presents a practical and meaningful methodology that fosters *miyopimatisiwin*, living and being well in relation”. Using visiting as an approach for relationship building, our activities were grounded in co-leading the dialogue and prioritizing community protocol when speaking about the River. While we connected with many nations, we refer to the River by its Cree name, *kisiskâciwan-sîpî* as this was the language of the Elders who opened this project in a good way.

Purpose of the work:

- Hear and gather stories across the designated space of *kisiskâciwan-sîpî*
- Learn how Indigenous communities have connected with the River, past, present, and future
- Learn Indigenous perspectives on governance and what co-governance might look like
- Build relationships with Indigenous stakeholders

What we produced:

- A collection of stories retold from the perspective of the listener
- Descriptions of Indigenous Peoples' connection with the River
- Recommendations on the future of the Heritage River governance



Researcher's Statement

Research is intended to bring change, but we often forget that we ourselves are changed by the research we conduct. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) notes that research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise, but rather an activity that is framed by the social conditions and the researcher's own experience.

As a mi'kmaq woman on one side, and a first-generation Canadian on the other, my own relationship with kisiskâciwan-sîpî has only recently germinated. Being new to these territories, my relations have not been in connection with this river historically. Spiritually, on the other hand, the dialogue about water connects Indigenous peoples back to our mother earth; Someone we all have learned from and are in relationship with to different degrees.

Through my journey learning Indigenous research methodologies, I fall deeper into my lessons from Stephanie Tyler *PhD Candidate, RSW*, Kristina Koop, *MSW, RSW* and Elder Leona Makokis, *PhD*.

From a Western lens, when we read a book or hear a story, there is an expectation that the storyteller is clear and descriptive. The story listener must try to put themselves in the mind of the storyteller to gain insight. Then, when we write about the stories we hear, we try and re-share the stories or critique them. There is a word for this - rhetorical analysis.

Indigenous storytelling is deeper. When Indigenous people tell stories, the responsibility is on the story listener to be introspective and understand the story from their own experiences and perspectives. As oral storytellers, the writing of stories can sometimes cross ethical and culturally appropriate boundaries. So when we have been permitted to share these stories we have a choice: fall into Western methods or lean into our heart. For this reason, all of the stories that have been shared with me throughout this journey, I will re-tell them from my perspective as the story listener. I acknowledge this concept is not new. Jo-Ann Archibald has built a framework for story work that I will explore in this journey. As a beginner to story work, I am excited by the chance to learn this framework through experience.

To all the participants who sat with me and shared story, wela'lin, nata'n teliula'lin.
Thank you, I do well by you.



Scope & Approach

Before I share stories, I think it is important to summarize the scope and approach to this work.

- pipikwan pêhtâkwan started the project with a Circle of Elders in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton, AB), on November 17, 2022. The Elders and community members present started the project out in a good way, and for all the knowledge, teachings and blessings they shared, we thank them.
- As our project kicked off, I reached out to Indigenous communities across Alberta. In many cases, I began visiting, keeoukaywin, for the purpose of sharing myself and getting to know the communities. Afterward, I would visit again and begin the work together.
- In a few cases, communities were happy to visit, and work, during the same period. Most of the time this was done in person, but some did visit virtually.
- For some parts of the project, I got to sit in relationship with Elders, one to one, and hear their personal stories, learn about their relationship to the River, and share food. It was an honour to receive their teachings and guidance from them.
- One challenge with reaching more communities was timing. Community is busy! There is lots of important work happening. To fit in another project may have taken the community away from their collective priorities.
- Additionally, our engagement was focused between December 2022 and February 2023. This timeline wasn't a great fit for some but did open doors to future collaboration.
- Another challenge was navigating the amount of work happening related to kisiskâciwan-sîpî! Some communities passed on visiting because they felt they already had dialogue related to the River. Some did not visit but still passed along notes from other work, which they allowed to be incorporated into this document.
- Overall, there were 15 communities who welcomed us with initial visits and, of those, 10 had participated in further dialogue. In total, 68 community members shared in stories and recommendations for this project.
- I see these 68 participants as co-researchers in this work. Therefore, you own this document too. Like the River, this document is a living, breathing spirit and can grow and change with time.
- My approach is to practice storytelling; the way the information was given to me, in story.



My Personal Story

Connecting Myself to the River.

My story is a personal one, one of my own experience. I share this as a way to situate myself in this research. Indigenous research means we no longer disconnect ourselves from the research we conduct. Quite the opposite, we embrace our identity, and our experience, and speak about it openly. To honour this, I want to share a recent experience.

Last year, I joined my colleagues for a paddle down the River, in an inflatable boat. Our craft was Captain'd by a strong, independent eight-year-old. Yes, you read that correctly. She was only eight years old, but she commanded the ten of us with ease. Unifying the group with her instructions, stroke, stroke, stroke, we travelled down the kisiskâciwan-sîpî with purpose. But, like any other eight-year-old, she quickly grew tired of leading the ship and slyly slipped in a request to go swimming. As I mentioned earlier, I am new to my relationship with the River. I hear stories of pollution and contaminated fishing. I'm a huge fisher woman! Fishing brings me so much peace. Unlike my eight-year-old friend, I could never tire of fishing.

I also have a soft spot for children. I'm not a mother myself, but I have motherly qualities. Weak to the puppy dog eyes of this little one, I whispered to her mom, "I can take her in if you are okay with that". Her mom agreed and the two of us quickly made our way into kisiskâciwan-sîpî. She jumped in first. So quickly I might add, that she forgot to take her gum out of her pocket. I followed her speed and jumped in. The current was quite fast. I guess that is why the Cree say, kisiskâciwan-sîpî; it means swift-flowing river.

We held on to the raft and let kisiskâciwan-sîpî carry us beside our friends. A few times she tried to swim away, but I'm not that soft, I can say no sometimes. Eventually, we started to get closer to the end of our journey and my team hoisted me back up. In reality, it was a two-boat effort but let's not talk about that.

Following our adventure, we planned to gather at a team member's house. The cab came to take us back to our car and it smelled horrible. I could not wait to get into my vehicle. When I did, I realized the smell was still there. It was not the cab, it was me! Bathed in kisiskâciwan-sîpî, water that once could have cleaned me, rotted me instead.



The Cardinal's Hallways

A story re-imagined.

It was a snowy winter day. oskanêw, Cardinal, had just finished an important job and was feeling something new inside. See, he helped some others find a lost friend, but he wasn't exactly sure how he even did it. Cardinal decided he needed to take a journey by himself and reflect. He began flight, gliding up and down, further and further away from his home. Even through the thick snowflakes, Cardinal's deep red feathers were still intense.

Getting very tired and hungry, Cardinal searched for a dense tree to take a break.

With a big tree in his eyesight, he flew right to the closest branch and began taking a nap. As he slept, a strong wind gust swooped in from nowhere, straight across the branch. Cardinal didn't know it at the time, but the branch he stepped on had a broken connection to the tree trunk. It snapped off. Before he even awoke, he had hit another branch and hurt his wing. Cardinal tumbled down the thick trunk and landed on the ground.

Cardinal lay on the ground, tending to his injuries when a young woman walked by. She spotted Cardinal's bright feathers and walked

over. She told Cardinal she has a warm pocket under her coat and offered to put him in. Cardinal wasn't sure what to do, but the woman had an energy that made him trust her, so he agreed. Gently, the woman picked Cardinal up, opened her jacket and placed him in her pocket. The pocket was attached to a sweater she has underneath, and it was nestled right beside her heart. Cardinal felt safe.

The woman carried Cardinal back to her house. On her mantel, she has three different round bowls. Cardinal immediately noticed the bright white bowl. The woman shared that this bowl belonged to her friend. She left it with her for protection while she travelled around. Before Cardinal could examine the other two, his eyes shifted toward the one he knew was for him. He felt strongly the woman was going to offer to make this bowl into a nest for him, and she did exactly that.

Cardinal got comfortable in his bowl and spent his days watching the woman come and go. Sometimes she would disappear for days, but she always returned.



The Cardinal's Hallways cont.

Over time, Cardinal began to feel better. He wanted to try flying, but he was patient. He began by flapping his wings, allowing himself to feel the air underneath them. After a while, he decided it was time to try. Cardinal stood on the edge of the mantle and began flying.

He had never flown inside a house before. From the room he started in, he realized he could go in three directions. Each down a long, narrow hall that took him to a different room. No matter how far down the hall he travelled, Cardinal always knew that following the hall would bring him back to the mantle, and the bowls.

Eventually, the time came for Cardinal to head back to his home. His wing was healing, and he knew that he couldn't stay with the woman forever. He thanked her for her kindness and promised to visit often. Each year, Cardinal made the long journey back to visit his friend. Sometimes it was harder to find than others. The landscape was continually changing and Cardinal lost a lot of the visual markers he used to navigate himself back to the woman's home.

During one visit, she told Cardinal she was afraid she would be forced to move. Cardinal asked the woman why she felt this way. She sighed deeply and explained, these developers had taken away all the resources around her. She couldn't grow fruits or vegetables, she couldn't get wood for her fire, and she couldn't hunt any food.

After listening, Cardinal flew to the mantle, sitting with the bowls again. He then took flight and began flying down each hallway. Cardinal very much wanted the woman to keep her home, but he knew that if the developers kept going, these hallways would never be there for him to fly again.

Thank you for sharing your personal experience with me. I felt the power in your story. I know you thought you didn't leave me with much, but the learning I took from your story grounds me in knowing how important it is to protect these spiritual places. hiy hiy



The Snake's Vibrations

A story re-imagined.

Rattlesnake had just finished finally shedding his skin. Three days before, he had slithered over to the bank of the river and rubbed his head on a large bolder. He knew he needed the rock's help to renew and start regenerating himself again.

As he moved around his prairie landscape, trying to let go of his old skin, he made a few stops to visit friends. His first visit was to Caribou. Rattlesnake and Caribou were sharing stories and laughing. They had a very playful relationship. All of a sudden, Caribou looks down at Rattlesnake and jokes, "Rattlesnake, you are always walking on the ground, I can never see all of you. Do you have tiny legs down there?". Rattlesnake playfully hissed his tongue at Caribou. He then smiles softly and explains, "There are two sides to me. One always touches the land, and one always faces the sky". He then laughs at Caribou and says "Unlike you, your belly floats somewhere in the middle". The two finished their laughs and Rattlesnake continued on his journey.

On his next visit, Rattlesnake decided to visit his friend Eagle. The two had a different relationship than Rattlesnake and Caribou. Eagle was more wise, and Rattlesnake enjoyed talking about deep, meaningful things in his life. Rattlesnake began sharing with Eagle that sometimes he felt alone. He wished that he could shout, like their friend Wolf. Anytime Wolf feels alone, he can howl and his friends come find him. Eagle took Rattlesnake under his wing and told him, "Rattlesnake, you have a tail that makes beautiful music". Rattlesnake sighed. He knew he had a tail, but it always scared others away, it didn't bring them closer. Eagle whispered sweetly, "It doesn't scare me". Rattlesnake smiled and gave his tail a little wiggle. Eagle told him, "If you ever feel alone, you just have to rattle your tail. Remember, I can see a lot from up here, and you are not alone". Rattlesnake was warmed inside. He began making his way, but he knew that he could always hear his friend through his vibrations if he just rattled his tail.

Rattlesnake had time to visit one more friend.



The Snake's Vibrations cont.

He made his way to Muskrat's place. Muskrat was pretty tired, but he welcomed Rattlesnake in. Muskrat explained that he hadn't done much visiting all winter. He told Rattlesnake he was getting excited for the spring! The ice was shifting and melting, the water would start flowing, and that would make it easier for him to find food. Rattlesnake was excited for his friend and asked him what he likes the most about spring.

Muskrat thought for a moment, trying to remember last spring. It felt so far away, but he could imagine it because it was right around the corner. Muskrat said, "I like seeing the land wake up. It's beautiful to take something old and make something new". Rattlesnake, almost finished shedding his skin thought about his experience. He said to Muskrat, "Muskrat, I think I am like the spring. I shed my skin and I start new. My tail comes off and grows bigger".

Muskrat was curious about Rattlesnake. He never hung out with other animals who shed their skin like this. He said, "Rattlesnake, can I ask you a question about your skin?".

Rattlesnake loved questions! It gave him a chance to think about his journey. He nodded at Muskrat and allowed him to ask his question. Muskrat tilted his head and asked, "What happens to your skin when you leave it?". Rattlesnake never thought about that before. Usually, he just slithered away and never really saw it again. Thinking deeply, he answered, "I think when I shed my skin it just stays where I left it. It becomes a part of my history. Sometimes it's not straight, or clean, but it stays there, the trace of my connection between the land and the sky; my lifeline on the path to starting new.". Muskrat nodded to show his understanding. He said to Rattlesnake, "My friend, I think you are just like the spring".

Thank you for sharing these teachings with me. I know I asked a lot of questions, but you walked me through the journey with patience. I am learning a stronger connection between the water and Creator. I will let my vibrations connect me in the way you taught me. hiy hiy



The Badger's Escape

A Story Re-imagined

Badger was having a bad day. He was growing more frustrated over the past few weeks. The nights were cold, but the days were very hot. To top it off, there hadn't been a sprinkle of rain in weeks. Badger had a set of matches that he could use to make a fire. He looked at them every day, but he knew he couldn't use them because, in these conditions, it was not safe. Badger learned from the older Badgers that when it's dry, fires can spread and destroy the land. But Badger was growing impatient.

He waited a day, then another and another. He was cold every night and had a difficult time sleeping. Eventually, Badger went to his family and asked what he should do. Each visit, someone different told him the same thing, "Badger, you cannot start the fire. You will hurt all the other animals". Badger knew this was true, and so he put his matches away.

Even though he decided to listen, it did not stop Badger from being angry. Every night he would be mad, and every day he would be tired. No one would give Badger advice on what he could do to stay warm, they just

yelled at him not to start the fire!

After another few weeks of cold nights, hot days, and no rain, Badger decided his only option was to start the fire, but he was going to be *very* careful. Badger gathered everything he needed. He gathered many rocks and piled them up, layer by layer, on the side. He made it taller than himself so it would protect the land. Inside, he built the fire. Badger climbed up his wall and looked down the hole. He contemplated if he should light the fire or not. He thought about the risk. He also thought about all the work he did to build a safe fire.

Badger climbed down. When his feet were planted on the ground, he lit the match and tossed it in. The fire started and it began warming him up! He walked around the walls of the fire to make sure everything looked good. He saw no problems and gave himself a pat on the back for a job well done. Badger sat by the fire, finally warming up. What Badger forgot was how great it feels to be warm!

As the flames continued to burn, they warmed his face. After weeks of not getting a good



The Badger's Escape

sleep, Badger's eyes began to get sleepy. The warmth of the fire had relaxed his entire body so much he uncontrollably fell asleep.

The fire continued to burn through the night, but as it did, the rocks continued to grow hotter. Eventually, they got so hot that the grass beside them caught fire. Badger was so tired he didn't wake up until it was too late to stop it. Fire had begun to burn all across the field. It burned all the grass, and it was moving into the forest. Trees caught on fire. It didn't matter what animals were around, they were all in trouble.

Badger had run in the other direction and narrowly escaped the fire. Many other animals were not so lucky. The fire had burned their homes and taken many of their lives. Badger had no choice. He could not go back to his home. There was no shelter or food left. He and some other Badgers who survived had travelled down the River, away from the ash-covered land.

Years went by, and Badger grew into his new home and built a family. People shared the story of the great fire. Eventually Badger

passed away. Generations of his family continued to grow but they did not share his story. They did not want to remember the loss that Badger caused. Years continued without the Badgers talking about the fire. Eventually, they forgot.

Years and years later, a Badger family member was celebrating with the Beaver family. Beaver invited Badger to his lodge, fed him, and shared his knowledge. Badger was trying to be friendly, but Beaver looked over and told him, "Your people are bad". Badger had no idea what he was talking about. Beaver shared the story about the great fire and all the death that was caused. Badger did not believe him at first, but he went to speak to an Old one and asked, "kaaahsinnoon, did our ancestors have a great fire that killed many other animals"? His Grandfather looked at him, "Yes. We did that".

Thank you for sharing this deep history with me. I learned the importance of truth, even if it hurts. It connects us to the River, and the true reasons people found themselves in relation with Omakaty, the North Saskatchewan River. All my relations.



The Jackfish's Catch

A Story Re-imagined

Jackfish was hanging out in the cold, rocky water, thinking about what she could get up to today. She was surrounded by other Jack and never really spent a day alone. She dreamed of what it might look like to be alone for a while. Not competing for food. Not defending herself against other Jack who tries to take her napping space. Most importantly, not worrying about her eggs.

Jackfish was getting hungry though and decided that it might be time to get a snack. She heard rumblings about a great spot that was filled with smaller fish that day. She headed over and scoped out a good place to wait. She was very fast, but she knew that in order to get the burst of energy needed to catch the fish, she would have to be patient. There were other Jackfish everywhere! She saw others get fish after fish, but there were too many of them, and not enough to eat.

She groaned to herself again and thought how great it would be to be alone. All of a sudden a fish landed quite close to her! Jackfish locked her focus, and without thinking twice she launched herself at her lunch. She took a hard

bite and felt a little pinch. Ouch!

All of a sudden Jackfish was being dragged by her mouth to the surface of the water. She pulled and pulled, trying to get away. Her heart was racing and her mouth was being torn. She knew that she had no chance, but her mind started thinking about her children. She thought about all her friends and family. She wasn't going to give up that fast! Jackfish broke the surface but she kept fighting. She zoomed left, she zagged right! She pulled herself downward, even though it was hurting her mouth.

No matter how hard she worked, Jackfish kept getting dragged up to the surface. Eventually, she looked around. There was a young man, he wasn't quite a child, but he wasn't an adult either. She didn't know much about humans, but she heard that sometimes they pull you out of the River. Sometimes you come back, sometimes you don't. The young man was double her size but she decided to keep fighting. As soon as she got close to him, she tried again. Zoom left, zag right. she told herself.



The Jackfish's Catch

She caught him off guard and pulled so hard he almost fell in. He brought her up to him and she froze. He hooked his hand in her mouth and pulled out the pinching object. The pain was still there, but she felt relieved. He put his fingers under her gills and held her on his side. She was at eye level with his chest. She wondered if she would be one of the Jackfish to go back home or not. And if not, where was she going?

At this point, she was struggling to breathe. The young boy had her out of the water for a while and she was starting to think it was the end. He laid her on the ground, and she wondered if she could jump all the way back into the River. Before she could act, everything went black.

Jackfish gave her life to feed the young man. In the beginning, she struggled with the idea, but after a while, she softened. She knew Creator asked her to help the humans by giving her body for food. She was happy to live her responsibility and her spirit stayed watching over her home, the River.

It was about 30 years later, and Jackfish visited the River. She looked around, but she did not see any other Jackfish. The water was lower, and there wasn't much room left. Either way, 'Where did all the fish go?', she thought.

Jackfish thought back to her wish. She wished to be alone, she wished for the water to be quiet. She felt guilty. What if this was her fault? What if her wish made all the fish disappear and the water shrink?

Jackfish asked the water, "Water, what can I do to heal you? You need the fish back. The young boy and his family will be hungry". Water said to her, "Pray for me. Things are not okay. But they can be, as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and I flow".

Thank you for sharing your humour and stories with us. I acknowledge your strong voice on Indigenous rights and am grateful for your guidance on what the future can look like. I learned the undeniable impact an unhealthy River has on community. hiy hiy



Indigenous Peoples Connection kisiskâciwan-sîpî

There are many ways Indigenous people connect to water. The connections I discuss below are connections specifically made with kisiskâciwan-sîpî. Respecting oral history, some details are reserved for those who were present during the visits. Sacred teachings may be mentioned, but the details remain with those knowledge holders, to be shared with those who build the relationship and request that knowledge in an ethical way.

Creation

Water is sacred. Water has spirit. Water is life, and water has a very profound place in the nehiyawak (Cree) Creation story. During the Circle of Elders opening dialogue, many shared about how Cree people are connected to all water through the creation of mother earth. The creation story is shared by those who carry that traditional knowledge. There are shorter and longer versions of this story, but each shares an important lesson, water was here first and is the source of life for humans. The Elders in this Circle shared about their spiritual connections to kisiskâciwan-sîpî and their interactions with the River, in and around, amiskwacîwâskahikan. What I learned from my colleagues who attended this opening was how much hope Indigenous people, and specifically our Elders, have for repairing the health of the River in the way Creator intended it. By understanding our original teachings, like the creation story, we can no longer play ignorant of our kinship responsibilities to kisiskâciwan-sîpî.

Trade

In the thick of colonization, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) explored the River in desire of trading with nehiyawak. Fort Edmonton was one of the largest and most prominent posts for trade. Settlers depended on Indigenous Peoples for these trades yet Indigenous Peoples continued to be unrecognized for their role in economics. The River, a gathering place for many reasons, was also used for trade between Indigenous nations long before European settlers entered the picture. If we speak about kisiskâciwan-sîpî and trade, we cannot remove Indigenous history before HBC. What I learned from the dialogue on trade is that many nations have an economic relationship with the River, for example, the Iron Confederacy. The difference from Settlers is that Indigenous People honour the water as a connector for economics, not as a resource for economic gain.



Ceremony

It didn't matter if I was visiting with Gift Lake Métis Settlement in Treaty 8, the Blackfoot Confederacy in Treaty 7, or anyone along my path in between, Indigenous communities share many stories of ceremonies held near the River. It was told to me that some sacred ceremonial sites, such as those for Sun Dance, have had to be moved because of the harm to the River. Water is *needed* for many ceremonies. It can symbolize purity and life. Without access to clean, healthy water, some ceremonies are at risk of being lost. Indigenous people now have to pray for *kisiskâciwan-sîpî*, instead of through and alongside them. I learned that not all people know the protocols of the water because the spirit of the water is hurt. Water is sick, and this is the time to bring healing to the River. In return, the River will help bring healing to the rest of the world.

Women's Role

Grandmother Moon controls the tides in both women and the waters. With such a powerful connection, women are given the responsibility to be protectors of the water. This means we are protectors for *kisiskâciwan-sîpî*, and in return, *kisiskâciwan-sîpî* supports the swimmers, the crawlers, the legged ones, the winged ones, and the plants. I learned that it is more than a spiritual relationship between women and the River, this is an all-encompassing relationship; it is an ethical one, an ontological one, a kinship one, a reciprocal one, and a holistic one. It goes beyond the defined parameters of the English language. Specifically, when learning about women's role in being water protectors, I learned that there are many words to describe the water on the River. For example, in Cree, there are even words to describe the water *around* a Beaver dam. Indigenous women need to be involved in the dialogue about *kisiskâciwan-sîpî* as a Heritage River, because Western worldview, language, and connection is too limited.

Medicines

There are many traditional medicines found along the banks and land of *kisiskâciwan-sîpî*. In some cases, these medicines are needed for sacred bundles, such as the Beaver Bundle of the Blackfoot People. Indigenous people across Alberta shared stories about medicines that were found near the River before, but now extractive developments have destroyed the land and many of these medicines are lost. Rat root, a healing medicine, was once easily found near parts of *kisiskâciwan-sîpî* closest to O'Chiese First Nation. Today, this community has to travel a long distance to find this medicine.



Medicines cont.

The story of lost medicine was not uncommon. Many communities have lost proximity and access to traditional medicines. I learned that developers have a legal duty of *consulting* with Indigenous communities about the land and medicines, but often, they proceed without a land restoration plan. At least, without one that was agreed upon by Elders and community. kisiskâciwan-sîpî has given life to many medicines and has moved them further away to protect them. However, in doing so, Indigenous communities are being re-harmed by colonization because it is the harmful development the River is responding to.

Hunting & Fishing

Just as the medicines have left, so have the animals. Lands that were once plenty with moose, elk, and deer are now sparse. The animal world speaks to other societies in a language humans don't understand. Animals learn from kisiskâciwan-sîpî and have retreated to water further away. The impact has been harmful to Indigenous communities who depend on hunting to sustain life. Parts of the moose are sacred and needed for specific ceremonies. Without the ability to hunt, Indigenous people will go more than hungry, their spirits will starve. I learned how important animals are for navigating the land. If you see a sick deer, you can follow him and watch the plants he eats to heal himself. These are the plants you can also eat if you are sick. The River brings the animal world close to the human world. Without a healthy river, we also lose this healthy kinship.

Fishing has also been impacted by the River. Dams are being built and have lowered the water level. Less fish can survive. Parts of kisiskâciwan-sîpî were once a major source of food for communities. Now, communities shared, they wouldn't even think of eating the fish in these waters. I learned about the polarizing difference seen in fishing between today, and less than 30 years ago. If kisiskâciwan-sîpî doesn't start with Heritage Designation, I worry about what the next 30 years might look like.

Recreation

I smile thinking about the stories I heard of fun and laughter on the River. Friends sharing experiences, playing and learning together. I think about my own experience. What would recreation look like if kisiskâciwan-sîpî was healthy? I learned that the way people interact with the River today is not how we interacted with the River in the past.



Governance & the Future

Indigenous governance is much like Indigenous research, collaborative and collective. Governance around the water should be treated with special care due to the unique and deep relationship between these two kin. I want to start by acknowledging the voices of many communities I visited with - this is only the very beginning. The work done and reflected in this report is barely a starting point. Community *wants* to be involved, and they want the conversation to continue. The reflections in this section are summarized and come with some recommendations. As mentioned at the beginning of this document, this document is living and breathing. It can, and should, change with more community input.

Designation Without Protection Lacks Depth

Heritage River Designation is not important to Indigenous People. That is, unless this work is a stepping stone for legal protections for the River. Designation without protection lacks depth. Indigenous people work to heal the water, not put a label on it. We must consider what protection looks like and how that can be done under Heritage River Designation. Time used to designate the River could be used to follow the flow of the Magpie River and give kisiskâciwan-sîpî legal personhood.

Recommendation(s)

- Use this knowledge, and team, to inform advocacy for legal protection and personhood.
- The designation should walk hand-in-hand with protection, like two canoes travelling together down the River, this journey should be taken side by side.

Governance Begins Together, In Ceremony

Many nations feel these visits are only the start. Governance should not be designed until everyone comes together, in the same space, and co-develops the model. Indigenous people should be equal, or more, in number on governance teams because of their vast connections to the River. Governance that is drafted from recommendations only, and not through traditional, collective methods would not lend itself to a meaningful outcome. The important way to start



co-governance is through Ceremony at kisiskâciwan-sîpî, in amiskwacîwâskahikan. Meaningful work means that communities are invited with significant planning and that the traditional ecological knowledge needed is honoured.

Recommendation(s)

- Bring community together and co-design a governance model that is informed by all perspectives.
- Ensure the voices around governance are weighed in the favour of Indigenous voices.
- Start with a ceremony in amiskwacîwâskahikan. Ask community members what ceremony would be most appropriate.
- Plan for, and provide funding for travel costs, protocol, and honourarium.

Language Matters

There are many names for the North Saskatchewan River. kisiskâciwan-sîpî for the Cree, omaka-ty for the Blackfoot. Returning to original place names is a critical part of decolonizing. Understand how the integration of the language breathes a spirit into the work that cannot be done in English alone.

Recommendation(s)

- Use the language of the people you are speaking with, when talking about the River.
- Learn and use original place names throughout documents and project deliverables.

Dear kisiskâciwan-sîpî,

Thank you for guiding me on this journey. Thank you for the energy you give me as a woman. I honour this as I walked into community and ask to speak about you. Thank you for the knowledge you give our people to keep us connected to the spirit world. Thank you for the abundance you provide. I will pray for you. I will protect you. The work has just begun. hiy hiy



Appendix C-1 - Co-Researchers

The below list are participants in the research.

Communities & Agency

- Samson Cree Nation
- O'Chiese First Nation
- Kainai First Nation
- Siksika First Nation
- Piikani First Nation
- Whitefish (Atikameg) First Nation
- East Prairie Métis Settlement
- Gift Lake Métis Settlement
- Papachase First Nation #136
- Michel First Nation
- Keepers of the Water

Elders, Knowledge Keepers & Community

- Elder Delores Cardinal
- Elder Clifford Cardinal
- Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback
- Elder Jerry Saddleback
- Elder Carola Cunningham
- Elder Daphne Alexis
- Elder Arnold Alexis
- Elder Tony Arcand
- Fernie Marty
- Jessica Dion

Contributions for Knowledge of Indigenous Storytelling

- Stephanie Tyler, *PhD Candidate*
- Kristina Koop, *MSW, RSW*
- Elder Leona Makokis, *PhD*



Appendix C-2: Record of Engagement

The following table represents key dates for engagement and partners involved.

Date of Engagement	Stakeholders	Type of Engagement
December 1, 2022	Samson Cree Nation	Virtual engagement session
January 25, 2023	O'Chiese First Nation	In person engagement session
January 26, 2023 & February 28, 2023	Kainai First Nation	Visit about project; In person engagement session
January 26, 2023 & February 28, 2023	Siksika First Nation	Visit about project; In person engagement session
January 26, 2023	Piikani First Nation	Dialogue about project
January 31, 2023	Whitefish (Atikameg) First Nation	Visit about project
January 16, 2023	East Prairie Métis Settlement	Visit about project
January 31, 2023	Gift Lake Métis Settlement	Visit about project
November 27, 2022	Papachase First Nation #136	Written contribution to project
November 27, 2022	Michel First Nation	Written contribution to project
December 8, 2022 & February 1, 2023	Keepers of the Water	Legal summit conference; Dialogue about project
March 1, 2023	Elder Delores Cardinal	In person visit about project
March 1, 2023	Elder Clifford Cardinal	In person visit about project
November 17, 2022	Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Elder Jerry Saddleback	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Elder Carola Cunningham	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Elder Daphne Alexis	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Elder Arnold Alexis	In person circle about project
February 17, 2023	Elder Tony Arcand	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Fernie Marty	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Jessica Dion	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Kevin Cardinal	In person circle about project
November 17, 2022	Elder Arnold Alexis	In person circle about project
March 24, 2023	Stephanie Tyler, <i>PhD Candidate</i>	Virtual visit about project
March 24, 2023	Kristina Koop, <i>MSW, RSW</i>	Virtual visit about project
March 25, 2023	Elder Leona Makokis, <i>PhD</i>	Virtual visit about project
February 9, 2023 & February 15, 2023	Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement	Dialogue about project
January 26, 2023	Saddle Lake First Nation	Dialogue about project
January 16, 2023	Peavine Métis Settlement	Dialogue about project
January 23, 2023	Alexis First Nation	Dialogue about project
January 27, 2023	Alexander First Nation	Dialogue about project