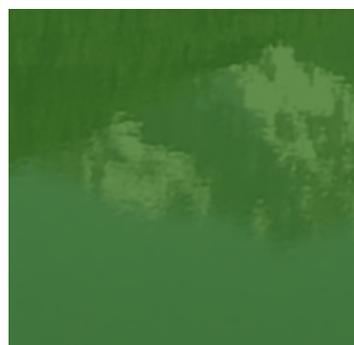


Indigenous- Municipal Land Case Studies

Ian Attridge



Acknowledgements

At the Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts (ACLT), we express our gratitude for the lands, sky, and waters stretching across Canada, and the animals and plants that call it home. We are grateful for their beauty and bounty, and we thank Indigenous peoples who were and are the traditional guardians of this land. We are grateful for the land, sharing of knowledge, medicine, and much more.

Canada has been home since time immemorial to the ancestors of the First Nations, Métis people, and Inuit. As a national organization, ACLT operates in various parts of Canada, and we acknowledge that many of ACLT's employees and volunteers are settlers working and living on traditional territories of the First Peoples of this land.

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We are pleased to work with our coalition partners in the Municipal Protected Areas Program, Indigenous communities, municipalities, environmental organizations, and land trusts.



Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts/ Alliance canadienne des organismes de conservation
201-569 Johnson St. Victoria BC V8W 1M2
info@acoc.ca
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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.



Collaboration in Action

All of the land in what is known as Canada is Indigenous territory. In recent years as Indigenous rights, Truth and Reconciliation, the Duty to Consult, and right relations are more fully recognized, there have been numerous examples of small and large municipalities, Indigenous communities, and related organizations and citizens reaching out and finding common ground and opportunities for collaboration. Here, we describe several of these as brief case studies, with emphasis on projects where Indigenous access, holding and use of lands has been central.

This document has been prepared by the Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts (ACLT), the mission of which is to support and empower land trusts across Canada to be vibrant, unified, and effective in advancing land conservation. The report has been developed under the joint Municipal Protected Areas Project (MPAP) that is delivered by a Coalition led by Nature Canada and includes the Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts (and their regional alliance partners — Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia (LTABC), the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA), and Quebec's Réseau de milieux naturels protégés (RMN)), BC Nature, Ontario Nature, and Wildlands League.

The Coalition's focus is to:

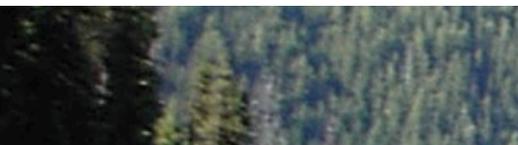
1. Work with pilot municipalities across Canada that have demonstrated a readiness to create or increase their protected areas;
2. Help expand or establish new protected areas under municipal jurisdiction;
3. Raise general awareness to contribute towards international and federal targets of conserving 30% of terrestrial lands and inland waters by the year 2030 within municipal master plans;
4. Help municipalities to add their protected areas and Other effective area based conservation measures (OECMs) to the national database in order to contribute to Canada's 25x25 and 30x30 conservation goals;
5. Promote the importance of urban and peri-urban protected areas for human health and biodiversity;
6. Promote Indigenous conservation efforts in conjunction with municipal actors; and
7. Develop civic pride for conservation contributions of communities to the national effort.

Author

The author, Ian Attridge, is a settler of Celtic heritage living and working in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough, Ontario) in the territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. As an ecologist and lawyer, he has founded, operated, and advised many land trusts and assisted their land projects. He has written extensively and helped develop the legal and incentive framework for land securement/holding in Ontario and beyond. He supports Indigenous land trusts through ACLT and otherwise, and is a past chair of the Board of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance.

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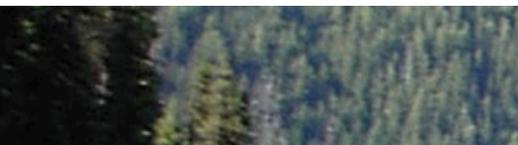
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I. Lessons Learned

The case studies include such arrangements as: forming joint corporations, land transfers, leases, access rights, cultural and ceremonial activities, naming, land use planning, park and forest management, and community research. With a diversity of examples here and elsewhere, there are several key lessons that emerge:

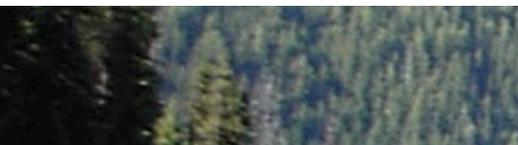
- **Build relationships, both institutional and personal.** These relationships have overcome missteps, enabled new possibilities, sustained projects over many years, and brought more resources and an Indigenous perspective to the table.
- **Develop structures and processes for ongoing collaboration.** This collaboration might be through periodic joint council meetings, shared corporations or management boards, consultation processes, and enabling organizations to bring their expertise and capacities to a project.
- **Be bold and creative in structures and tenures.** In several of these case studies, non-conventional structures, restructuring, risk taking, and a diversity of land tenures (e.g. leases, covenants, mortgages) and timelines have enabled innovative arrangements to emerge.
- **Look for opportunities.** Sometimes opportunities knock on the door, initially seeming too big or complex to address alone. That might be a run-down industrial site or building, a misstep, the need to bring in wider expertise. Such opportunities can bring people together in new ways and ultimately make the effort, time and expense worthwhile.
- **Seek partnership funding.** Several examples here began or were leveraged through government or commercial funding at critical stages. Funding can bring people to the table, support shared efforts, and enable research, among others.
- **Bring in both complementary and unexpected partners.** Both familiar and unusual partners can add trust and creativity to solve a situation.
- **Take and build from small steps.** Often small steps – a statement, request, meeting – can lead to a conversation and next steps, building scope and capacity over time.



I. Lessons Learned

- **Create policy pathways for future support.** Some of the examples here emerged from a simple declaration of respect, willingness to dialogue or pursue mutual objectives. Through mutual learning and exploration over time, these then were elaborated and refined into policy and budget directions that then enabled more impactful initiatives and successful arrangements.
- **Give the initiative sufficient time.** Many of these case studies took a decade or more to be realized, from initial idea to resourcing and implementation. This relies on building trust, continuity in relationships, and sustained shared interests.

We hope that these initiatives illustrate and inspire a diversity of creative approaches along this emerging pathway. In doing so, these case studies may contribute to land return, Indigenous cultural resurgence, growing reconciliation, and ways of addressing the crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.



II. Case Studies Overview

Table I. Summary table of the Indigenous-Municipal case studies

#	Case study	Province	Indigenous partners	Initiative type
1	Kjipuktuk/Halifax	NS	Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre	Urban land transfer & cultural infrastructure
2	MRC des Sources	QC	W8benaki Nation	Park co-management & Indigenous tourism
3	Toronto/ Tk'oronto	ON	Michi Saagig Nishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, others	Urban Indigenous placekeeping & parks
4	Northumberland County	ON	Alderville First Nation	Forest management collaboration
5	Kenora	ON	Grand Council Treaty #3, Obashkaandagaang First Nation, Ochiichagwe'babigo'ining Ojibwe Nation, and Wauzhushk Onigum Nation	Shared governance & conservation trust
6	National Urban Parks (Saskatoon, Windsor and others)	SK, ON	Saskatoon Tribal Council; Métis Nation-SK; Walpole Island First Nation; Caldwell First Nation; Chippewas of the Thames First Nation	Urban protected areas & reconciliation
7	Edmonton	AB	Edmonton Indigenous Cultural Resource Counsel, Local First Nations	Cultural land allocation & Indigenous housing

II. Case Studies Overview

Table I. Summary table of the Indigenous-Municipal case studies

#	Case study	Province	Indigenous partners	Initiative type
8	Calgary	AB	Blackfeet Confederacy First Nations and Métis, HomeSpace Society, and Calgary Indigenous Community Land Trust	Indigenous housing & community land trust
9	Mission	BC	Leq'ámél, Máthxwi, and Semá:th First Nations, LMS Society	Land transfer & joint governance
10	Powell River	BC	Tla'amin Nation	Land return & reconciliation
11	Squamish and Pemberton	BC	Squamish Nation Lil'Wat Nation	Community forest co-management, Community forest & regional collaboration

III. Case Studies (1-3)

1- Kijipuktuk/Halifax, NS – Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Society/Centre

The Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre was looking for a larger, central site for its programs and events. The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) was approached with a feasibility plan and in 2023 approved the \$1 sale of a half hectare site, valued at \$11.7 million, along with assuming demolition and other costs. Federal, provincial, and philanthropic funding, along with detailed budgeting and design as an iconic “Gateway” building and public space, assisted the project, to be completed in 2026.

Resources: [Resources: https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/230124rc1516.pdf](https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/230124rc1516.pdf)

2- MRC des Sources, QC – W8benaki Tribal Council

In Quebec's Eastern Townships, W8benaki territory (Ndakina) overlaps considerably with the geography of the Municipalité régionale comté (RMC, or Regional County Municipality) des Sources. The MRC's 2021 Sustainable Development and Planning Plan identifies the importance of valuing W8benaki relationships and culture. The MRC and W8benaki worked together to pool resources with federal economic diversification funds to foster sustainable development and Indigenous-featured tourism at the Mont-Ham Regional Park. Their partnership established: a W8benaki-focused interpretive space/centre, Indigenous-inspired lodging facilities, a discovery trail with interpretive panels (and warrior statue), W8benaki-themed designs for infrastructure improvements, and promotional activities and educational tools for visitors to the Park. The MRC announced its intention to create the Park in 2007, with the municipality of Ham-Sud acquiring lands at the base of the mountain in 1983 and the MRC providing a 50-year lease. The non-profit Développement du Mont-Ham Inc. operates the park and has a Board representing local municipalities and users that includes a W8benaki member.

Resources: <https://montham.ca/>

3- Toronto/ Tk'oronto, ON – Michi Saagiig Nishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, others

With the development of the City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan (2022) and its Indigenous Affairs Office, the City has developed policies and a Placekeeping program for engaging urban Indigenous peoples in parks. This includes: priority securement, knowledge sharing, naming, co-planning and -stewardship, and Indigenous-oriented facilities and uses (e.g. art, sacred fires). One specific example is the City working over two years with Indigenous communities to incorporate principles and protocols into the Toronto Islands Park Master Plan, as well as building relationships through the Toronto Island/MCFN Friendship Group.

III. Case Studies (3-5)

Another is at the large High Park, where the City's Parks, Forestry and Recreation division has worked with the Indigenous Land Stewardship Circle on a prescribed and traditional burn with ceremony to restore the rare Black Oak Savannah.

Resources: <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/trees/forest-management/urban-forest-management/prescribed-burn/>
<https://indigenoulandstewardshipto.wordpress.com/>

4- Northumberland County, ON - Alderville First Nation

Northumberland County holds extensive forest lands, particularly on the significant and reforested Oak Ridges Moraine. The County has consulted and worked with Alderville First Nation (the lead here for Williams Treaty First Nations) on the Forest's planning and management and resulting Forest Management Plan 2021-2041. Alderville is identifying the Forest's Indigenous history, cultural values and potential for partnerships, which later can lead to knowledge sharing, designations, additional protections, and Plan revisions. The County and First Nation also work with land trusts, watershed-based Conservation Authorities, institutions, and others on strategic and collaborative land conservation through the Rice Lake Plains Partnership.

Resources: <https://www.northumberland.ca/en/living-here/resources/Documents/FMP-Final.pdf>
<https://www.ricelakeplains.com/>

5- Kenora, ON – Grand Council Treaty #3, Obashkaandagaang First Nation, Ochiichagwe'babigo'ining Ojibwe Nation, and Wauzhushk Onigum Nation

In 2001, the Chief of the Grand Council of Treaty #3 and the Mayor of the City of Kenora recognized the importance of people living in the same area maintaining ways to live and work in harmony. They formed the Common Land, Common Ground initiative to share areas of mutual concern, including literally "common ground" through recognition of the historic Indigenous and fur trade Rat Portage. Periodic city and Anishinaabe ceremonies and feasts were shared. When Abitibi closed its paper mill, the company took interest and agreed to transfer 182 ha of its lands on the historically, culturally and ecologically significant islands to the City in trust until a formal organization could be formed. In 2007-08, the lands were formally transferred to the Rat Portage Common Ground Conservation Organization (RPCGCO). This is an equal partnership among the City of Kenora, the Grand Council and local Treaty #3 First Nations. The Common Ground Research Forum also ran for several years and obtained a federal research grant to support cross-cultural understanding and applied research to support the emerging community partnership.

Resources: <https://www.cgrf.ca/index.php/background-governance/wassay-gaa-bo-the-common-ground/>

III. Case Studies (6-8)

6- Saskatoon and others, SK – Saskatoon Tribal Council, Métis Nation-SK, agencies Windsor and others, ON – Walpole Island First Nation, Caldwell First Nation, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, agencies

Parks Canada is working with several municipalities and Indigenous communities across what is now known as Canada to develop National Urban Parks (NUP). NUPs reflect a vision of conserving nature, connecting people with nature, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. These principles are elaborated in the 2024 Interim National Urban Parks Policy. Such a protected area may involve various governance and operational models and municipal land transfers, explored through a series of process steps. In Windsor, Indigenous and agency partners are moving into the planning stage after discussions, studies, and public consultations. Saskatoon has a steering committee and has conducted wide community engagement. Other cities considering the NUP approach include Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Edmonton.

Resources: <https://parks.canada.ca/pun-nup>
https://letstalk.citywindsor.ca/national-urban-park-windsor?tool=news_feed&gl=1*6b53hx* gcl au*MzM5NzI4NTQwLjE3NDk4NDg5NzU.#tool_tab
<https://urbanparksask.ca/>

7- Edmonton – Edmonton Indigenous Cultural Resource Counsel, Local First Nations

The Edmonton Indigenous Cultural Resource Counsel requested cultural and ceremonial space in 2006. Through consultations and studies, the City of Edmonton then allocated funds and a portion of Whitemud Park for this purpose. Completed in 2023, kihcihkaw askî (“The place here is Sacred”) is now a natural open setting where Indigenous peoples, organizations and communities can participate in ceremony, culture camps, learning opportunities, and grow and harvest plants. The City maintains the servicing and leases the area to the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre to manage Indigenous-focused programming, with ongoing guidance from an Elders Counsel.

Resources: https://www.edmonton.ca/projects_plans/parks_recreation/kihcihkaw-aski-development

8- Calgary, AB – Blackfoot Confederacy First Nations and Métis, HomeSpace Society, and Calgary Indigenous Community Land Trust

The City of Calgary has progressively developed strategies and projects to advance a reconciliation pathway and to also address the lack of housing for vulnerable people. Supported by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, the HomeSpace Society emerged as a community land trust that builds, maintains, and manages affordable housing. The City has provided several housing project sites, awarding construction to HomeSpace on at least two sites. On other HomeSpace sites, Indigenous youth are supported through harm reduction and reconnection with culture through a partnership with the Indigenous-staffed Trellis Home Fire program.

III. Case Studies (8-10)

HomeSpace has also been providing technical support to the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness on the establishment of the Calgary Urban Indigenous Community Land Trust. The City has been engaged, with a \$6 million Indigenous Affordable Housing Fund Program. The City approved its 2023 Affordable Housing for Indigenous Calgarians plan that engages Elders, identifies below-market sales and tax incentives, prioritizes Indigenous organizations and an Indigenous CLT, and supports ceremonial and cultural practices on associated lands.

Resources:

<https://www.calgary.ca/social-services/funding/indigenous-affordable-housing.html>

<https://www.calgary.ca/communities/housing-in-calgary/housing-for-families-in-need.html>

9- Mission, BC – Leq’ámél, Máthxwi, and Semá:th First Nations, LMS Society

In 2011, the British Columbia government planned to transfer unceded “Crown” lands adjacent to a park and former residential school lands to the City of Mission, in the central Fraser River valley. In consultations with Stó:lō communities, the Máthxwi First Nation suggested it be transferred to local First Nations. After over a decade of discussions, BC and the City agreed to the lands being transferred to a new joint non-profit LMS (Leq’ámél Máthxwi Semá:th) Society. The resulting arrangements are: a 99- year nominal lease to the City for a recreational park with Indigenous cultural uses (48 ha), LMS Society-led residential and commercial development (12 ha), and covenants held by the BC government. Lands were transferred in 2025. The City and LMS Society staff a joint park management committee and together identify culturally and ecologically significant areas for conservation.

Resources: https://www.realizingundrip.ca/success-stories/xel_sqeqtogether_we_paddle

10- Powell River, BC – Tla’amin Nation

The City’s pulp and paper mill was built on a key Tla’amin village site. During seawall waterfront development, the City did not engage the Tla’amin Nation and damaged some cultural sites. Confronted and recognizing its mistake, the City contracted the Tla’amin to manage the project and together they developed one of B.C.’s first (2003) municipal-First Nation Community Accords. When surplus mill lands were later sold, the company, City, and Tla’amin bought the parcels through a limited partnership with a mortgage and favourable interest. The Limited Partnership was later restructured, then dissolved, and the lands separately transferred to the City (140 ha) and First Nation (99 ha) or otherwise sold. Together, the City and Tla’amin renamed and continue to explore the rehabilitation of the tisk^wat village site, protection of its environmental and archaeological values, and economic development. In 2025, additional lands were returned by Domtar.

III. Case Studies (10-11)

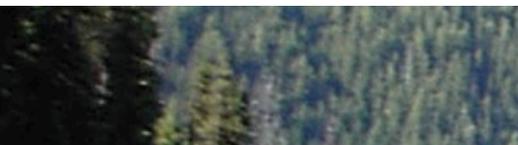
This two-decade collaboration led to the first time (2018) a BC municipality approved parcels within its boundaries to be returned to a First Nation as Treaty Settlement Lands, here as part of realizing the Tla'amin Nation's 2016 modern treaty.

Resources: <https://www.realizingundrip.ca/success-stories/working-together-since-2003>
<https://bcruralcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Tla%E2%80%99amin-Nation-Powell-River.pdf>

11- District of Squamish, BC – Squamish Nation Village of Pemberton, BC – Lil'Wat Nation

These pairs of communities have developed relationships and collaborations through periodic meetings, cooperation agreements, and protocols. These were intended to recognize government-to-government relations and foster information sharing, communications, understanding, and mutual interests. Both of these partnerships have then led to establishing and managing community forests. The Squamish Community Forest Corporation's Board has equal membership from both communities and is a first for co-managing local lands between them. The Corporation consolidates governance for both forestry and community values, such as trails and cultural sites, and shares a portion of revenues on about 10,000 hectares of forest. Earlier shared fire and water servicing arrangements between the Lil'Wat Nation and Pemberton led to establishing a similar Community Forest Corporation and provincial forest agreement in 2018, and later a regional economic development collaborative and strategy.

Resources: <https://evergreen.ca/resource-hub/resources/civic-indigenous-placekeeping-and-partnership-building-toolkit/>



IV. References, Other Resources, and Additional Case Studies

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