

MAY 2021



# Indigenous People and Fresh Water Management

## ESTABLISHING A CANADA WATER AGENCY



Artwork provided by Onchaminahos School Saddle Lake

Respect our Water.

# About Keepers of the Water

We are First Nations, Métis, Inuit, environmental groups, concerned citizens, and communities working together for the protection of Water, air, land, and all living things, today and tomorrow, in the Arctic Ocean Drainage Basin.

## Project Background

Keepers of the Water learned that the Government of Canada is starting a Canada Water Agency and we feel it is important to be involved in this process, to have oversight and provide Indigenous input and ensure our voices are included from the beginning. Recognizing there has been decades of work done already, we look at the current state of the Waters and see there is still a lot of work to be done.

KOW was provided funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) for research and moderation of four workshops on freshwater to be held with four Indigenous communities. The information collected from the Freshwater Workshops will inform a report to the Government of Canada and also informed this booklet.

An online survey was also conducted to help us understand Indigenous Peoples' needs and concerns when it comes to Fresh Water, with the intention of helping to create change that will help protect fresh water for now and future generations. The responses will help to inform Keepers of the Waters' consultation with the Government of Canada in the development of a Canada Water Agency.

# NIPIY (cree) TU (dene) AOHKÍÍ (blackfoot)

**Water is a sacred precious gift from Creator.**

**Water is free and should not be sold or used as a commodity.**

**We hold deep respect for every drop of water and thus water should not be wasted nor taken for granted.**

**Water as a living entity has to be kept clean and free of pollution.**

## **Water is Life!**

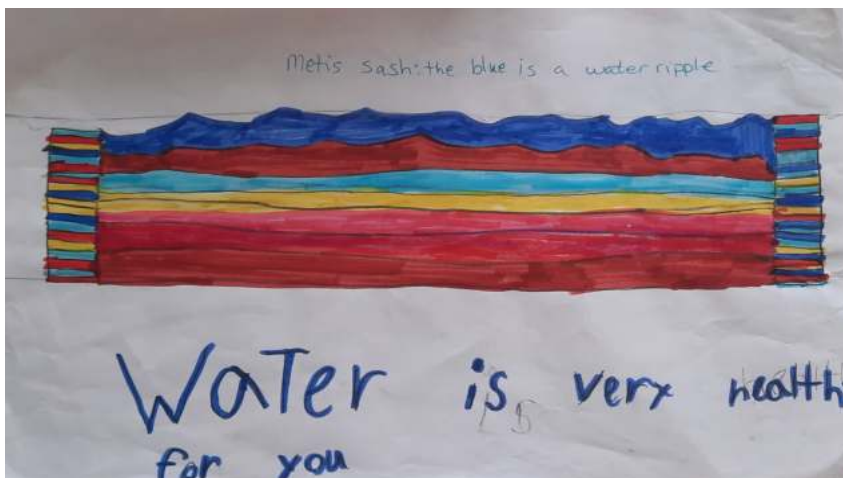
Artwork provided by Kikino Metis Settlement School



***Water is our inherent right since time immemorial and Indigenous Peoples have treaty rights as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the waters flow.***

# Community Voices

Workshops and phone interviews were conducted from March 4th to April 6th, 2021 with members of the Louis Bull Tribe, Piikani of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Woodland Cree First Nation, Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Cold Lake First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation and Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. These communities are located within Treaties 6, 7 and 8, which extends from B.C to Saskatchewan, however, we acknowledge that Indigenous traditional territories extend beyond the constructed colonial borders. Languages spoken with these communities include Cree, Blackfoot, Michif and Dene.



Artwork provided by Kikino Metis Settlement School

"My rights don't have boundaries"

"Water is Boss"

"We are in a water crisis, from Treaty 7 all the way north to Treaty 8, the community people have shared they buy bottled water as they don't trust their water."



Artwork provided by Onchaminahos School Saddle Lake

**The Louis Bull Tribe is signatory to Treaty 6 and is one of the Four Nations of Maskwacis, Alberta. They are located approximately 20 km SW of Wetaskiwin and 25 km NW of Ponoka in Central Alberta.**

**Local Freshwater Sources**

- Battle River
- Pigeon Lake
- Buck Lake
- Twin Lake
- Local aquifer/spring



Photo from Alberta Native News, March 28, 2018. Ribbon-cutting ceremony to support the Louis Bull Tribe's commitment to energy efficiency.

**Community Feedback**

Impacts by adjacent land use (ie. herbicides and pesticides used for agriculture, grazing leases and livestock in small creeks and tributaries) causing contamination of groundwater sources.

Tree removal by landowners for financial purposes. They are destroying habitats that must be considered under the Migratory Birds Convention Act and impacts our ability to exercise our Treaty Rights.

Decline in health of plants gathered in and around local water sources used for food and medicines. Traditional knowledge keepers are starting to use bottled water for ceremonies as local sources are not safe for use.

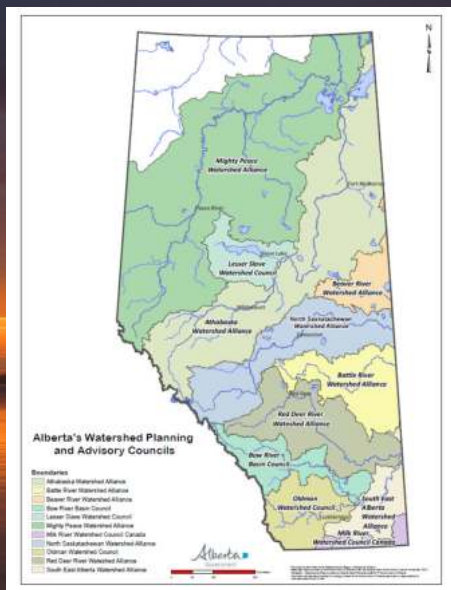
Protect water quality and quantity for their children, their grandchildren, and for the future generations. Safety and abundance for the future is a priority.

Need resources for proper home sewage treatment. They still use shoot-outs on-reserve for home sewage treatment. These are illegal by Health Canada, but is still the practice in First Nation communities. Children are playing outside and coming in direct contact with the effluent.

Need for remediation of abandoned wells and pipelines to prevent further damage from seepage to surface and groundwater.

The Natural Resources Transfer Act needs to be revised. The Province of Alberta does not manage natural resources, including water, in light of Indigenous rights and uses.

Photo from Travel Alberta, Pigeon Lake Provincial Park



Treaty 6

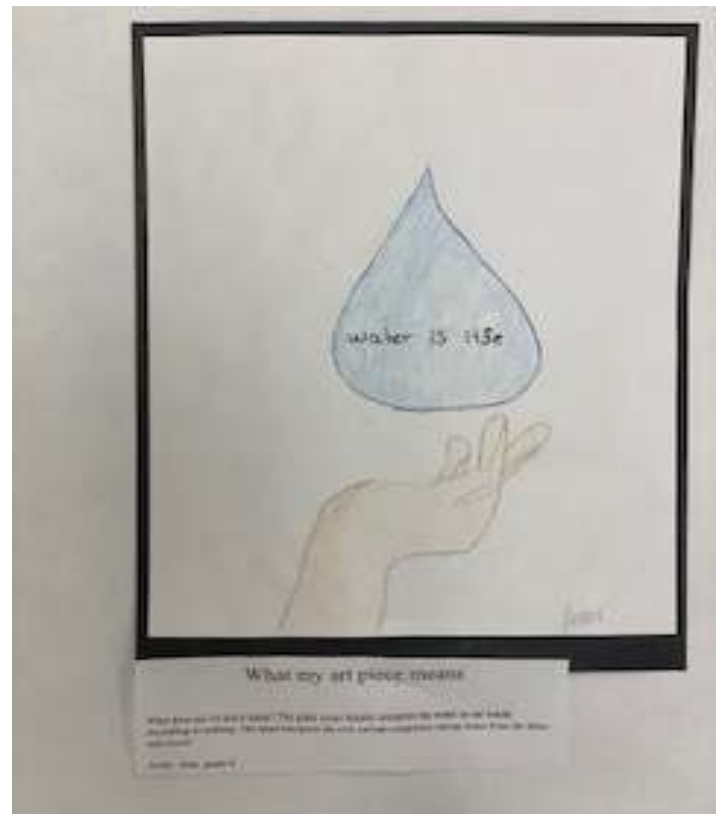
**Louis Bull Tribe**

"You can't replace the mountains, the Creator made them this way for a reason"

**"Water is Medicine"**

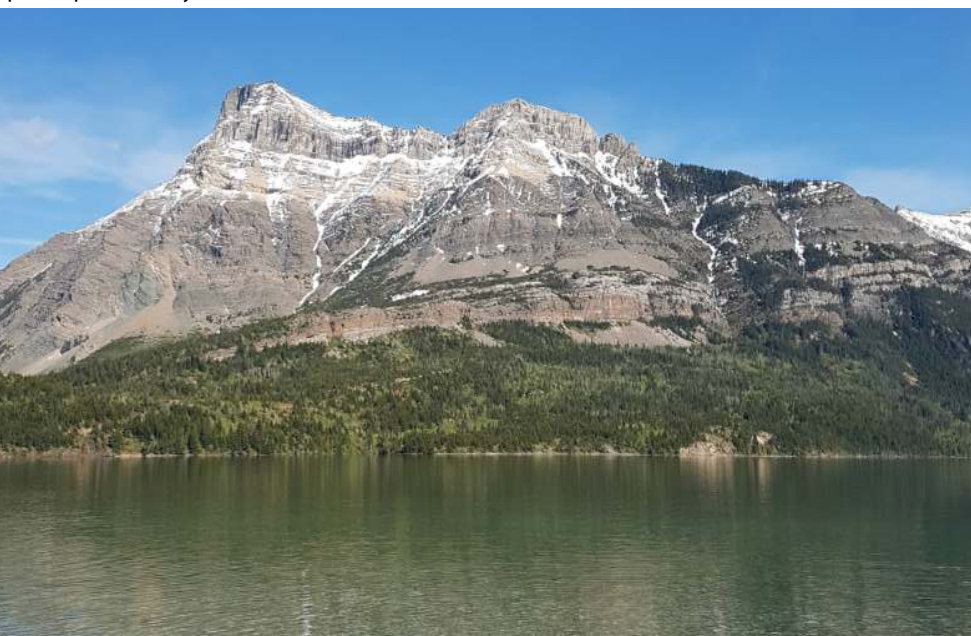


Artwork provided by Onchaminahos School Saddle Lake



Art work provided by Caroline Robin School Saskatoon

photo provided by Vanessa One Owl



"Water is not owned, we have a free right to water, it's our inherent right that has existed since time immemorial, that right was never given up"

# Piikani Nation

## Treaty 7



Blackfoot Confederacy

High Bush in Piikani Nation. Located directly below the townsite of Piikani at the river bottom. In the background you can see the Oldman River with the Rocky Mountains and the Porcupine Hills in the background. Photo provided by Carleigh Grier-Stewart

**The Traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy is roughly the southern half of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the northern portion of Montana. Headwaters flow through their territory from the Eastern Slopes all the way to the Great Lakes. The Blackfoot Confederacy in Southern Alberta are signatories to Treaty 7 which includes the Piikani, Kainai and Siksika Nations.**



### Local Freshwater Sources

- Old Man River and Dam
- Bow River
- Belly River
- Milk River
- Livingstone River
- St. Mary's River and Dam

### Community Feedback

Water is over allocated in southern Alberta not enough water for all the licenses that have been issued by the Provincial government over the last century and province uses discriminatory practice of FITFIR ("first in time, first in right")

Grazing lease holder's livestock and ranching causing impacts to the small creeks and tributaries.

On-going rehabilitation work for species at risk in the Eastern Slopes is currently being done to protect Bull and Westslope Cutthroat trout.

Old Man River and Dam the water is much colder when it flows out from the base of the dam, which impacts native trout species and local vegetation used in ceremonies. Cottonwood Trees for Sundances and willows for Sweatlodges are getting harder to find. The chokecherries near the river has a funny taste and the people don't pick or eat the berries near the river.

Need for headwater and source water protection. Impacts to the environment due to coal development and mining in the Eastern Slopes.

Photo provided by Niitsitapi Water Protectors website



**Nitsitapi Water Protectors are mobilizing grassroots initiatives to stop all proposed open-pit coal development projects.**

Fact: In order to drink pond water you have to boil it

# Water Is Life

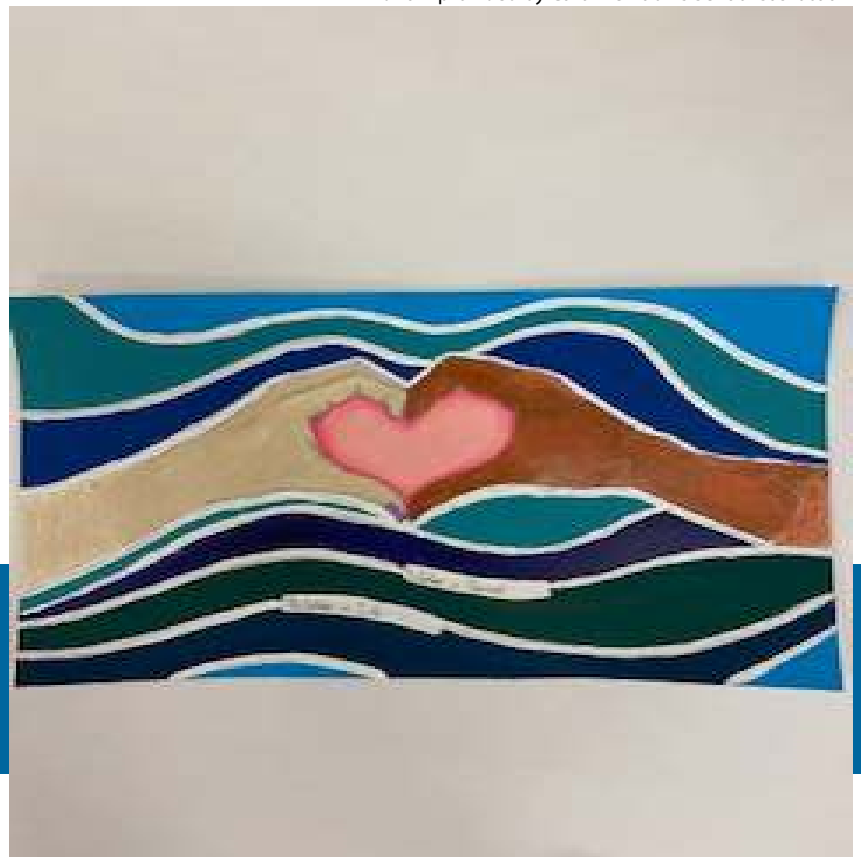
Fact: Some Indigenous People did not have clean drinking water



Artwork provided by Kikino Metis Settlement School

"As a signatory of Treaty 8, I should be able to practice my rights anywhere in Treaty 8."

Artwork provided by Caroline Robins School Saskatoon



**"Need support to break up dams"**



# Woodland Cree First Nation

Treaty 8

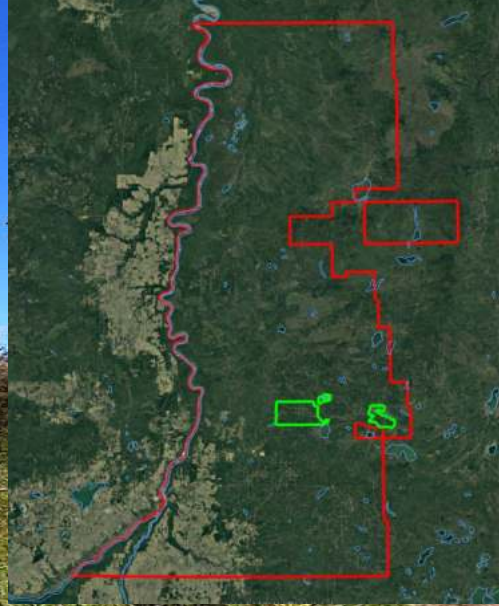


Photo and map from Woodland Cree First Nation website

**The Woodland Cree First Nation is located 85 kilometers northeast of the Town of Peace River and 500km NW of Edmonton, Alberta. The Woodland Cree First Nation is made up of four reserves in northern Alberta (Cadotte Lake, Simon Lake, Golden Lake, and Marten Lake) and are signatory to Treaty Eight (8).**



## Community Feedback

Impacts since the 1970's from an in-situ plant, owned and operated by Shell Canada Ltd. A dam and weir were put on the lake to provide water to the plant. The water from the lake is no longer used by the plant, but it has caused environmental damages over the decades that have now caused long term impacts to the communities.

Nobody uses Cadotte Lake anymore and community members do not consume fish from it, some members have seen sores and mutations on the fish.

Many people have observed a reduction of quantity and quality of game, fish and waterfowl in the area.

Elders shared, they used to hear the waterfowl making sounds around the lake all year round, now we don't hear them on the lake like when we were young.

Within Woodland territory is Muskeg area. The muskeg has also been impacted. In the early 1980's community members collected muskeg water to use. Today, muskeg water is hard to find

One of the youth participant shared that, **"it was only 15 years ago we would swim in Cadotte lake, now no one goes directly in the water"**

## Local Freshwater Sources

Cadotte Lake  
Laboucan Lake  
Simon Lakes  
Marten Lake  
Haig Lake  
Bison Lake  
Otter Lakes  
Joker Lake  
Rat Lake

Peace River  
Cadotte River  
Otter River  
Marten River

Photo provided by Woodland Cree First Nation website



Photo provided by Keepers of the Water



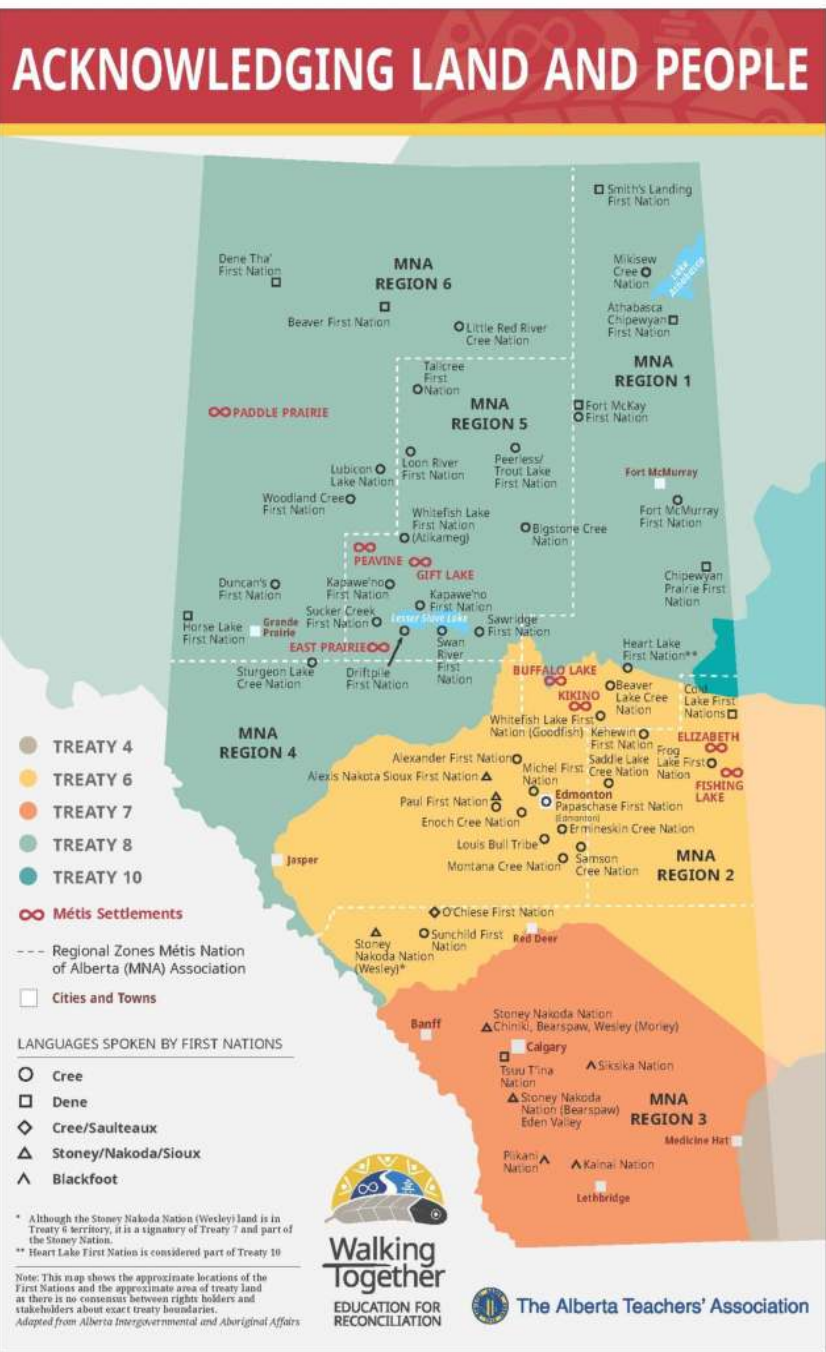


Artwork provided by Caroline Robins School Saskatoon

**"Fishing is part of Indigenous Peoples culture and identity. It sustains us and is a constitutionally protected Treaty right."**



Ice Fishing on Saddle Lake, photos provided by Onchaminahos School



Map provided by Alberta School Council, Alberta Métis Settlements and First Nations

**Indigenous treaties in Canada are agreements made between the Crown and Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit).**

**"It's up to the grassroots people to push our leadership to get a fair chair and input on decisions about our water and natural resources, so we can stand and protect what is left."**

# Denesuline and Cree Voices

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (Treaty 8)

Mikisew Cree First Nation (Treaty 8)

Cold Lake First Nation (Treaty 6)

photo from Cold Lake First Nation website



**Denesuline and Cree voices from members of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN), the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN/Fort Chipewyan) and the Cold Lake First Nation (CLFN).**

**Cold Lake First Nation is made up of five reserves and is located 300 km east of Edmonton and 20 km south of the City of Cold Lake. They are the only Denesuline community who are signatory to Treaty Six (6).**

**The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation is made up of eight reserves and The Mikisew Cree First Nation is made up of nine reserves and they are located 600 km northeast of Edmonton and 230 km north of Fort McMurray. They are both signatories to Treaty Eight (8).**

## Local Freshwater Sources

Cold Lake  
Ethel Lake  
Primrose Lake  
Crane Lake  
Little Bear Lake  
Fork Lake  
Wolf Lake  
Martineau Lake  
Tucker Lake  
Marie Lake  
Little Sardine Lake  
May Lake  
Slave Lake

Dehcho Watershed

Mackenzie River  
Athabasca River  
Firebag River  
Peace River  
Slave River  
Beaver River  
Cold River  
Sand River  
Rita River  
Primrose River  
Local Spring



"Indigenous Peoples have treaty rights to hunt, trap and fish. We are able to harvest and practice our rights anywhere and anytime in our treaty territories"

**"What it comes down to is we are still the owners of this land"**

## Community Feedback (ACFN/MCFN/CLFN)

Impacts from the legacy of the oil and gas industry. Tar sands, in-situ projects and pipelines run all throughout their territories. There is a long history of issues with tailings ponds, depositions, brackish water, groundwater and surface water contamination.

In ACFN and MCFN, the tar sands and in-situ projects require an enormous amount of water to develop, and the amount being withdrawn is not being replaced.

Certain times of year, water is low and has been low since water withdrawals began for industry. In the fall, which coincides with hunting and harvesting time, community members use the waterways for navigation to access traditional hunting grounds, traplines and fishing sites. Some areas are no longer accessible due to the low flows.

CLFN members are concerned about the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range within their traditional territory with impacts to their water and local wildlife from noise and water pollution.

Some of their reserves are adjacent to Provincial Municipalities. You see a drastic difference in the water quality between off and on reserve systems. The municipality is top of the line and the reserve one is of lower quality.

Medicines are harvested along the riparian areas, but it requires traveling long distances to reach traditional land use areas not impacted by resource development and water withdrawals.

"We use water in the Sweat Lodge ceremony, praying with it and for it. We acknowledge water in our ceremonies and it is respected as sacred part of life"

"It is hard to translate this to government, as Indigenous Peoples have a different value system when it comes to freshwater protection. The 'minimum' standard is not enough"



Picture provided by Google Images

"For the Water Agency to be inclusive and respect reconciliation there must be representation by Indigenous people from the start.

**"Indigenous Peoples are the first stewards of land and water and, we must be there contributing towards the creation and implementation of a Canada Water Agency."**

# Conclusion



Photo from the Canadian Energy Centre website

Water is one of the world's most basic needs and has been taken for granted over the past century. It is up to the current and future governments to understand Indigenous People of the lands they have occupied. To begin this relationship on the creation of a water agency to be truly inclusive the Government needs to respect reconciliation and the inherent rights of Indigenous people to adequate and clean water sources. To be able to trust and use the freshwater as was intended in our ceremonies and to harvest for our food and medicines.

Since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have had a respectful, spiritual and protective relationship to the water and aquatic plants and fish species. Representation of Indigenous people from the start and contributing throughout the lifetime of the creation and implementation of a Canada Water Agency is imperative.

The focus of the government needs to shift from development to headwater and source water protection. Support for community-based monitoring and testing of the quality of water and the fish populations needs to occur. A start in this direction would be to provide funding to assist in the monitoring of their local freshwater sources.

## Community Contacts

Lawrence Lamouche  
Woodland Cree First Nation

Melanie Daniels-Anderson  
Louis Bull Tribe

Nancy Scannie  
Cold Lake First Nation

Melody Lepine/Mike Mercredi  
MCFN/ACFN

Adam North Peigan  
Piikani Nation

## Community Schools

Onchaminahos School Saddle  
Lake

Kikino Metis Settlement School

Caroline Robins School  
Saskatoon SK

To the Teachers, Students and  
for their contributions of the  
beautiful artwork and photos of

**"What Water Means to Me"**

**Ayhay/Mussi cho/Thank you to everyone who  
participated in these community workshops.**

# For More Information

**KeepersOfTheWater.ca**

Facebook: @KeepersOfTheWater

Executive Director, Jesse Cardinal, [nipiy3@gmail.com](mailto:nipiy3@gmail.com)

