

STANDING OUR GROUND FOR THE LAND

An Indigenous Philanthropy



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Standing Our Ground for the Land: An Indigenous Philanthropy

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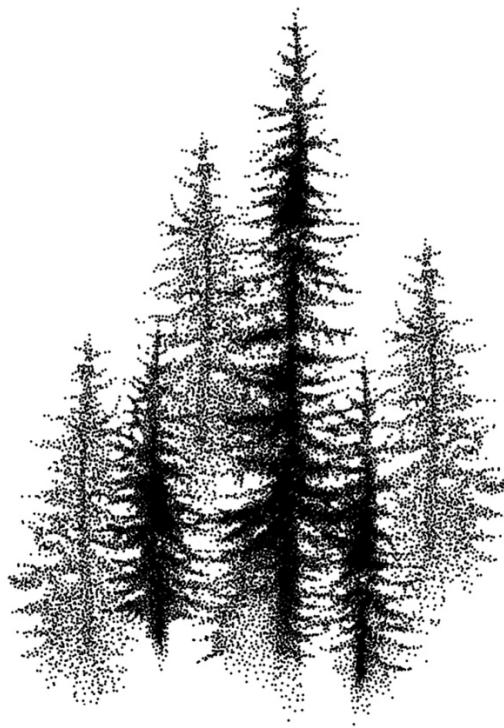
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It seemed so simple in the beginning. Indigenous scholars who work to advance Indigenous Knowledge wanted to find ways to support our graduate students doing the same thing. Some of us have received grants and helped others secure them, but none of us is a philanthropist. We never intended to do the work we've shared in this document. But the remarkable thing about Indigenous Knowledge is that you never know where it's going to lead you when you put your foot on the trail. That's because Knowledge, like the Land, has agency. Western philanthropy doesn't understand this. For that matter, it doesn't understand that Indigenous Knowledge has anything to do with philanthropy.

Your perspective determines the ways you respond to the natural world. This is true for all of us. Philanthropy is a major way that people of Western culture respond to the natural world, so everything from philanthropy's funding agendas to assessable outcomes is determined by Western cultural perspective. Indigenous people have a different perspective of the natural world from yours, so our response is also different from yours. As a result, the environmental projects we carry out do not fit the Western philanthropy agenda. We don't meet your qualifications or fit into your application template prompts. So you generally do not invite the "big" us -- Indigenous peoples -- into funding conversations with you, and you do not fund the work Indigenous peoples do. This is not a hypothetical statement but the actual situation that exists. This paper is an attempt to resolve the impasse by helping you understand an Indigenous perspective well enough to modify your own philanthropic practices and accept our invitation to collaborate. If we both have the courage, we can live into existence precisely the Story you've been waiting for someone to tell you, that we've been waiting for you to hear.

You're going to have to learn what I mean by participating in the process of Indigenous Knowledge, though, not by being told about it. An immersive experience of Indigenous teaching and learning is the only way to do it. Indigenous Knowledge is the source of the wisdom that permits our people to live sustainably as part of the Land. So learning these things will help you understand why Indigenous people do the kinds of environmental projects we do, as well as why and how Western philanthropists must reframe the processes of philanthropy to support work grounded in Indigenous Knowledge.

What this means right now is that I'm going to share a Story with you. And then I'm going to talk about it with you.

A Story of Moose
summer 1999

The moose and I regarded one another in profound silence across a broad meadow edging the dense spruce forest of the Great North Woods. Then he waded from the shallow water ponded in the grass by overnight rain, moved with stately purpose into the dark forest, and vanished. Northern lands were then unfamiliar to me. Here was opportunity to learn from relations I'd never met. I walked across the meadow and knelt to read the conversation between Land and Moose written in his tracks.

As I gently set my own fingers to their point of direct contact, the deep impression moose's weight had created in the wet soil began to fill with seeping water. Standing, I slowly followed the trail he'd written and saw he'd entered the dark forest on the narrow thread of a game trail. When I followed it from the bright meadow into the twilight under the trees, I had to stop to let my eyes adjust. The trail was written much more lightly on the harder ground here, so I walked half-crouched, concentrating.

About thirty yards in, I heard a soft sound and looked up. Moose was standing directly in front of me, six or eight feet away, half again taller than I and with antlers wider than my arm span. He was looking straight at me and had clearly been waiting, watching me work my way along his trail. I slowly straightened but remained otherwise motionless. We were on his ground, not mine. What happened next was his call.

After several long minutes, Moose turned his head purposefully and looked to his right. I turned my own head to see what he was showing me. To my surprise, a two-lane road cut through the forest 60 or 80 yards away. It was flanked on both sides by a broad grassy right-of-way, all of it flooded with bright sunlight. A woman moose stood well out in the grass verge, her back to us. Farther on, beyond her, a cluster of pale tourists in shorts and sunglasses fluttered excitedly, cameras clicking. Farther still, the tourists' cars stood abandoned at wild angles to one another on the roadside.

The people, the woman moose, and the man moose and myself were lined up, so the tourists were looking straight at all three of us. But they saw only the woman moose. They couldn't see the two of us standing in the darkness of the forest behind her because they were blinded by the bright sun and their own sunglasses. The man moose and I exchanged another glance, then looked back at the woman moose and the tourists.

After a few more moments, the man moose called to her with a low sound deep in his throat. The people near the road couldn't hear him, but the woman moose did. She turned away from the people at once, came to the trees, and entered the forest. As distant sounds of disappointment rose from the abandoned crowd, she approached and greeted the man moose without even seeming to notice me, though she was close enough I could have touched her.

Moose gave me a final look then, his dark eyes aglow with intelligence. He turned and walked away on the game trail, moving more deeply into the forest. The woman moose followed him. They vanished in the silent darkness almost at once. I looked back at the road where car doors were slamming and engines were roaring to life again. I felt a little embarrassed to be a human, seeing us from Moose's perspective. But Knowledge often makes us feel a bit ashamed of our previous ignorance. Of course, no one has ever died of feeling embarrassed, whereas people die of ignorance all the time. In fact, that could happen if a person of the dominant culture walked up to a moose after reading this story, not realizing essential parts of it are hidden in places that cannot be seen from their perspective.

The Knowledge this Story conveyed at the time I lived it is conveyed now to anyone who reads it, just as if they had been there themselves. I specifically told the Story in a fairly traditional form that facilitates this process. So if you follow Moose's trail into the forest and stand there with the two of us for a while, you will be able to perceive an essential element of Indigenous reality the people in the sunny highway verge even now do not realize is there, right in front of them. Once you have come to understand important things about story and metaphor by doing this, we'll be able to meet more productively in the interstitial space between our cultures¹ -- at the boundary fires in the places our cultural territories meet,² or on an ephemeral island of sand between the channels of a braided river our cultures are separately traveling.³ The grassy verge close to the edge of the forest where the woman moose met and visited with the tourists who had gotten out of their cars and left the highway was this type of interstitial space. Indigenous people have always met and engaged peacefully with other Indigenous peoples in these edge places between our territories, so we've tried to do the same thing with Western collaborators.

But what Moose taught me that day in the forest is that *visits at boundaries or in interstitial space can only foster real communication among people who already share the same fundamental perspective of reality.* The people of our two

cultures are having so much trouble collaborating because we don't share a fundamental perspective of reality. We are like the tourists and the moose. The woman moose knew exactly who and what was standing in the forest behind her. The tourists didn't have a clue and couldn't even imagine it, though they were actually looking right at it. The tourists had only one perspective, whereas the woman moose had two. Indigenous people have had to learn how Western culture sees the world just to navigate daily life. But people in Western culture don't have much opportunity to learn Indigenous perspective. Most don't even know any other perspective exists. So the first step of our journey into authentic collaboration is for Western philanthropists to acquire some Indigenous Perspective.

Please stop for a moment and reflect on what happened just now, as part of gaining that perspective. I told you a Story about an event I experienced nearly 25 years ago, that helped us understand something very important about collaboration between Western philanthropy and Indigenous people right now. Western literary scholars would say I used the story of Moose, the tourists, and myself as a metaphor to explain a concept I wanted to communicate, because Western culture sees metaphor as created by individually clever human brains. In that worldview, the meaning and significance of the things that happened in the story, and the roles played by moose, the tourists, and myself are things I imagined or projected.

But human brains don't *create* metaphor; they *perceive* it. The biggest obstacle to communication between Indigenous and Western people -- in philanthropy and elsewhere -- is that people of Western culture discount the significance of metaphor and so discount the truest things we tell them when they ask for our help. *Real metaphor, nature's metaphor, is the vocabulary of the universe. Life, whether moose or stars, buffalo or spruce trees, provides the syntax that makes it a language we can understand.* You might want to make a note of this, given where this particular Story goes. Because people who don't understand natural metaphor will never understand sustainability. Metaphor is the language it's written in.

Natural metaphor transmits Indigenous Knowledge, often through Story. The words "knowledge" and "story" are capitalized in that sentence because English is not a language that easily accommodates Indigenous thought. Capitalizing certain English words in specific situations gives us a way to add a bit of extra meaning so they can convey Indigenous ideas. This will make more sense later. For now, what's important is that you understand the way natural metaphor transmits

Knowledge through Stories that are told by the Land. Please let me unpack that statement for you, since this is where our language and communication problem starts.

Many Indigenous people of North America refer to the natural world by using the term *the Land*. This term actually includes everything Western people typically mean when they say "natural world," but "the Land" is conceptually broader and deeper. When we say the Land told a Story, we mean an event took place in which the participants acted as natural metaphors. This doesn't mean the participants were manipulated or robotic, and it also does not mean that we're applying symbolic meaning, ourselves, to participants after the event. What happened long after the Story told itself that July day, that brought it to the pages of this narrative, is that I perceived an important metaphor in it I hadn't consciously noticed then. I'd written it in my personal account of the event, so I knew at the time it was there. But I didn't understand its significance until I realized the same metaphor exists in the Story I'm living out now, as I try to explain an Indigenous perspective of philanthropy to a community that wants to support our peoples' projects but doesn't quite understand them.

For me, that current story is rooted in my own lived experience as a scientist. Our lives are the context for all the Stories with which we engage. My science career was initially boosted by Western science's realization that Indigenous people could feed the discipline's growing hunger for innovative ideas.⁴ But the *culture* of science remained relentlessly Western despite this.⁵ I learned first-hand that research innovative enough to color outside the lines of Western science methodology faces ridicule, hostility, and even active lab and database sabotage.⁶ These are the gentlest words I can find to explain the hard truth of why I left science, founded a nonprofit to advance *Indigenous* Knowledge, and swore I would never again collaborate with people in Western culture. Ironically, it's also exactly how I wound up in the vast landscape where Western philanthropy meets Indigenous people, working with Western culture all over again. It happened because I wanted to help Indigenous graduate students in mainstream universities have a less painful experience engaging with Western research culture than I'd had.

Irony is the place where a path twists and seamlessly circles back on itself, reversing and mirroring what it's just been while somehow still being the same thing. The story of my professional life became ironic at the point when I engaged once again with people of Western culture, but coming into it from a different direction. My movement through these events created a circle: I engaged with and

was hurt by Western culture, disengaged from collaborating with it, saw graduate students hurt the same way, and *re-engaged* with the same culture I had broken relations with earlier. In coming back to the beginning, a surprising twist and reversal formed a circle. This is what I thought about as I tried to understand how to communicate Indigenous perspective. Initially, I thought about it in terms of the difficulty of finding any way to do this, given that I'd failed to do so as a practicing scientist. But I couldn't consign our graduate students to the same dismal fate, so I kept contemplating it. And suddenly I saw that Moose in my mind, the memory of our encounter clear and strong. The moment I did, I saw the metaphor in that Story I hadn't paid close attention to before.

Moose backtracked himself that day in the forest. He had gone into the forest at such a rapid clip on those long legs of his, he should have been a quarter of a mile away by the time I got 30 yards in. I was going along very slowly, recall, studying the ground in dim light. But there he was, standing on the game trail, facing me, waiting. He had to have gone a good distance down the trail, suddenly realized I was coming into the forest behind him, turned around, and come back to find out what was going on. In coming all the way back to a place he had already been, Moose created a circle. A circle, in the functional rather than geometrical sense, doesn't have to be round. What matters is that it comes back to the place it started. When I put it like that, do you see the common metaphor? In coming back to a place of engagement with Western culture, I had backtracked myself the same way Moose did. We had both walked a circle.

When this realization hit me, I had to go outside and sit with my bare feet on the ground for a while to calm down. Because when I first started trying to write this explanation for you, I had been given a small but very clear vision. I had written it right into the first draft of this narrative but felt puzzled about why it was there. Vision usually conveys Knowledge relevant to a specific situation, but that doesn't mean the recipient understands it at once. Now, as I perceived the circle that had brought me to this work at all, and the similar one that Moose had walked in the Story I'd been led to share, I suddenly realized that the vision spoke through a circle metaphor too. In fact, the vision depicted a circle that twisted back on itself to mirror what it had just been, while somehow still remaining the same thing. Here was the same irony of a stalked moose becoming the stalker, and of a human swearing off painful relationship to which they return so someone else won't experience the same pain.

The vision had come at a very early stage in the writing, as I struggled to produce a standard literature review introduction that wouldn't seal me into the

kind of tight Western cultural box that locks out Indigenous Knowledge entirely. I was trying to escape the constraints by describing aspects of collaborative events I'd seen reported in which the powerful presence of Indigenous Knowledge was clearly visible to someone who knew it on sight. Specifically, I was trying to connect those shimmering appearances of "the real thing" to the challenges the people in these collaborative communities had to deal with as the power struggle between different worldviews created the kinds of storms that drop hail and tornadoes at the interface between the winds of winter and spring. Here is what I wrote, so you can see my initial report of the vision in the actual context in which it arose:

This is a story of mud-soaked, mosquito-bitten meetings seasoned with woodsmoke in a dark forest that sprouted fair weather and good relationships like redwood needles after a wildfire.^{7,8} It is also a story of the sweating, exhausted euphoria of dancing ceremony into the night and discovering kinship in the honest conflict and truth-telling that's happened all day.⁹ Painful memories are counted over like beads to protect hearts that have trusted too often. Yet that trust could be the medicine of the world's healing.¹⁰ Elders speak the unspeakable into a silence brittle with guilt.¹¹ Yet guilt that would finally shatter could be swept away. The story everyone saw as simple and linear twists into paradox as the river of buffalo hoofprints in the dark earth of a soft summer night rises at the horizon and arches up, then backwards, to stretch itself across the sky in a mirroring river of stars that is Milky Way. The scent of burning sage threads its way into the darkness of our anger and pain, and anger exhales, trembling. The fearful heart that's been hurt so many times softens and finds it is holding its breath. This is not the journey any of us thought we would take. But it is the journey required of us now.

You can see remnants there of the standard literature review I initially thought I should write, in the footnoted summaries of events published in several different papers. But do you see the circle metaphor that wrote itself into the middle of all that? I sat there penning a paragraph of human angst, and a vision painted a whole different picture -- one that needed no literature review, but that grabbed the rug that early draft of this narrative was standing on, and yanked. Hard. Here is the key passage, in case you missed it: *The story everyone saw as simple and linear twists into paradox as the river of buffalo hoofprints in the dark earth of a soft*

summer night rises at the horizon and arches up, then backwards, to stretch itself across the sky in a mirroring river of stars that is Milky Way.

Do you see the circle? I called it a paradox, but it certainly fits the definition of irony I gave you, for the tracks on the ground rise up into the sky and turn back on themselves, becoming a pattern of stars that mirrors the hoofprints below. The same but not the same. Notice that almost every other statement to that point in the paragraph has a footnoted reference. The vision could have liberated me from the angst I went on to write as I completed the paragraph then, but it didn't for the simple reason that it took me a while to understand what had happened. You know, like it did that day I nearly walked head-first into a moose.

What made me see it was the circle showing up, and in an ironic form at that. Metaphor is the language of the universe. Here it was speaking to me over and over again as I tried to understand how to share an Indigenous perspective with you in a way that could make a real difference to us all. Natural metaphor is the vocabulary of the universe; life provides the syntax that makes it a language we can understand. When I finally understood that I'd been shown the same metaphor in three different contexts, *while* I was struggling to find a way to communicate Indigenous Knowledge to people of Western culture, I understood at last that the circle held the key. If I explained that to you, there might be a way forward. But first I had to solve one last puzzling thing about the way this circle had come in the vision. Remember that this was the only place the circle had appeared *specifically* in relation to this work. The circle in my own life had spun itself out over a period of many decades, and Moose had walked out that particular circle 25 years earlier. But the circle in the vision that came specifically as I struggled to write about the tumultuous collaborative relationships between Western philanthropists and Indigenous people was a pointed response. And it was also troubling. For it was a hauntingly beautiful image, but there was something terribly wrong in it I couldn't put my finger on at first.

In the vision, prairie land lay still and silent in the dark of a moonless night. The starlight was so bright, however, that I could clearly see the ground and even some shadows in the hollows where hooves had sunk deeply into the soil when it was wet. A braided river of grooves ran across the land, each one a trail countless buffalo had created by walking one behind another during migration, the herd moving as a river of separate streams flowing in parallel. At the horizon, the land itself seemed to rise as if to the crest of a low hill, the streams of tracks pocked with individual hoofprints rising on its flanks as it did. But then somehow the tracks seemed to keep going upward even when the land stopped. Rising higher

into the sky, the round hoofprints began to shine and shimmer, and I saw that they were turning into and becoming the stars. I suddenly realized the countless stars in the sky, that had been the countless tracks of the herds of buffalo, were so numerous that they made up the pale river of Milky Way that spread over my head all the way to the far side of the sky.

Looking at the image again, I felt a shiver as I realized what had been so troubling about the vision itself. The night had been too silent. The tracks of the great migrating herds were there, but the buffalo themselves were not.

They were gone.

Seeing the Natural World from Indigenous Perspective

Migrating buffalo and the stars of the Milky Way galaxy were shown to me as parts of a single circle. In a healthy natural world, both buffalo and galaxies move in cyclic ways, going somewhere and then working back around to the place they started and doing it all over again. Before you can understand the Knowledge communicated through this vision, you must begin to see and understand the circle itself. We will begin with the metaphor the vision provided us: migrating buffalo and the spiral galaxy of stars of which we are a part.

In their undisturbed habitat, buffalo trace out an enormous pattern of seasonal migration that once covered about a third of Turtle Island (North America). The Milky Way swings back and forth across our night sky because our perspective of the stars changes due to earth's axial rotation and its path through space. But the stars in a spiral galaxy also rotate around and around the galaxy's center.¹² Galactic rotation is similar to the seasonal migratory motion of buffalo. Both these movements are cyclic and essentially circular. Western culture immediately points out (and may be doing so within you at this moment) that buffalo migration is entirely different from galactic rotation. And that's true.

But differences, however real, do not erase the commonalities that nevertheless exist. Fundamental commonalities in things that are otherwise extremely different manifest real, natural metaphor. And remember: Natural metaphor is the vocabulary of the universe. Life, whether stars or buffalo, provides the syntax that makes it a language we can understand. So it is extremely important to pay attention to -- to not throw away as meaningless -- the very real metaphor of cyclic, circular motion expressed in things as different as galaxies and buffalo herds. Such metaphors communicate essential information about the natural world.

Reflect, for a moment, on the seasonal cycles of grasses, water, and weather upon which the great buffalo herds wheeled around and around the Great Plains of Turtle Island, until their people were decimated and the Great Plains had been cross-fenced by rails, fences, and roads. Can you see it in your mind's eye? Envision the millions upon millions of hooves marking the cycling passage of red calves, shaggy adults, and nodding Elders, all following the seasonal waves of rippling spring grama, wild summer sunflowers, ripening bluestem turning red. And then reflect upon -- really picture what you know (or look it up online if you find you know less than you realized) -- the cycles of Earth spinning on its own axis against an encircling three-dimensional backdrop of stars, of planets tracking around the Sun against the same backdrop but with different effects on our changing line of sight, of Sun and stars circling majestically around the hub of the Milky Way creating yet another set of changing views of the universe in our line of sight from Earth's surface. The Western mind focuses on the *differences* between all these things -- differences of cause and appearance, of location and periodicity, and of material (star, grass, or buffalo) in which the patterns manifest. Western culture throws away as "mere" metaphor the fundamental information about Reality that manifests within, *and therefore communicates through*, the wheeling circle of cyclic motion present in all these things. Galaxies, solar systems, Earth, seasons, and buffalo move in ways that describe one of the most essential and fundamental patterns of life: the Circle that moves in a spinning or cyclic way.

The Circle manifests in an almost endless number of different forms, from solar systems to the human learning processes.¹³ The movement of blood through the body is even called a *circulatory* system in all animals. Despite the diversity of shapes and sizes and even hearts in animals from earthworms to whales, the body's blood goes all the way around to come back to the place it started and then begins the circuit again. *It circles*. The Circle is so powerfully meaningful, in so many ways,¹⁴ that it's one of the main reasons the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada established in the wake of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is usually simply called "The Circle."¹⁵

Western culture's linear cause-and-effect understanding of the universe sees all of these different circles as "merely" metaphor because none of them causally explains any of the others. But all these circles actually have a very deep underlying cause in common. They are recurring expressions or manifestations of a pattern that's so fundamental to life it shows up over and over across an almost infinite range of scales. That pattern is of cyclic movement going all the way

around to come back to the starting point again and again, even if it loops through arteries and veins in your fingers on the way. The Circle is the natural metaphor for this cycling movement. Both the word and the image are used as metonym for the deeper power that creates this movement, the power that is life itself.¹⁶ Whenever we see the circle manifesting in the shape of a bird nest or a bead of dew, remembering that power keeps us in right relationship with everything that exists, with the life of which we're a part.

Because the Circle is a fundamental engine of living systems, to obstruct or stop its motion is lethal. Imagine, for only a moment, what would happen if the Earth stopped rotating on its axis or stopped orbiting the sun. When the cycle of life stops moving within a body's heart and blood vessels, or in an ecosystem's cycle of nutrient flow, the results are just as catastrophic. The Circle was disrupted on the Great Plains when the great wheel of buffalo migration was destroyed. That's the image I saw in the vision -- the empty parallel traces worn into the earth by streams of migrating buffalo that had since vanished. The vast and empty silence of that place really existed for a brief time immediately after all but a handful of the many millions of buffalo that had created those trails were killed. Their empty migration traces would have remained visible until, one by one, they were plowed under, paved over, and built on. During this same time, agriculture and other changes disrupted the cycles of flowering, seeding, and dying through which the Circle manifested in the grasses, flowers, and herbaceous plants of these same prairies.

If, for only a moment, you could be dropped into the world of wide skies and waving grass sea of 300 years ago, and could see the prairies when the Circle still functioned in a healthy way, you would shred your clothing in anguished grief to see for yourself how much has changed since the power and beauty of life's great engine was destroyed there. Because the Western perspective is always focused on "improvements," you've never been able to see the accelerating tide of destruction that's been happening at the same time. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, loss of soil, and drought did not begin in this land 30, 50, or even 100 years ago. Those consequences began the moment the settlers strung wires and rails and roadways from east to west across that circle and cut it in half, damming and damning the flow of the engine that had powered North America's heart for 35 million years. It might not even have been possible to destroy the herds so thoroughly and so quickly if the cycle of the engine that powered both buffalo and prairie hadn't been forcibly severed and then jammed to a halt first.

But you don't have to travel back in time to witness the disruption of major

circular flow in Earth's environmental systems. It's happening right now. The winds that carry seasonal thunderstorms are starting to slow and stall out,¹⁷ as are the larger cyclic global wind currents that carry major storms such as hurricanes.¹⁸ When wind cycles are disrupted this way, storms stay in one place for hours, drop unprecedented amounts of rain in a single area, and produce extremely dangerous floods. More ominously, we are also starting to see disrupted patterns in the cycling flow of the major ocean currents that are some of the most important drivers of climate on the planet.¹⁹ The consequences of disrupting ocean currents such as the Gulf Stream will be catastrophic on global temperature and rainfall patterns.²⁰ I write "will be" rather than "would be" because it's already happening.

I documented each of the statements I just made about faltering wind and ocean currents and their impacts on weather and climate because it's important you realize these are real, recognized problems happening right now. So the difference between Indigenous and Western culture is not whether or not we see important cyclic movements of wind and water being disrupted. The difference between us is in our cultural *perspective* on that disruption -- how we understand its significance and how we therefore respond. The Western perspective of cause-and-effect generally sees the breakdown of seasonal buffalo and grass circulation on the Great Plains as having nothing at all to do with the breakdown we're starting to see in ocean or wind circulation, because it could not have mechanically *caused* it. That's why the circles in these different systems are seen as "merely" metaphorical. You already know that Indigenous people tend to see these circles as very deeply connected. But if you're a person in Western culture you may be hung up right about now on how that's possible. If so, consider an aquifer as an alternative model.²¹

A Common Underlying Source

Wells provide people with water because holes are dug or drilled down into the ground far enough to intersect the water in an aquifer. Springs exist where the ground surface cuts down into an aquifer and the water in it leaks out naturally. If you have a well that accesses the water in an aquifer, you can pump a lot of water out of the aquifer and store it in a cistern, bottle it commercially, or haul it away in trucks for mining use. If you keep doing this, eventually you can take so much water out of the aquifer that its level drops the same way the top surface of your soda drops when you suck enough of its contents up a straw. When the aquifer drops far enough, springs and wells even hundreds of miles away will dry up as

the aquifer surface sinks below their reach. And of course, the more people who tap wells into an aquifer, and the more water they pump out, the faster the aquifer drops. That's precisely what's been happening to subsurface groundwater all over the world.²² The relationship between aquifers and wells is a useful model for understanding the Circle. The disruptions of ocean and wind currents are connected to each other and to the disrupted seasonal cycles of grass and buffalo on the Great Plains because they are all fed by a common underlying process, in the same way that wells and springs all over the northern Great Plains are connected through a common underlying aquifer.

The cyclic flow that is the engine of life is not geographically limited, but an underlying common source that's literally universal. On earth, various expressions of this cyclic flow intermesh with one another. The flow within them moves around and around, back and forth, between humans and rivers, sun and winds, ocean currents and seasons, humans and animals, plants and animals, soils and sky . . . absolutely every part of every Place. It also moves inside everything, within cytoplasm and lymphatic systems, in the tiniest of tide pools and in the Earth's convective mantle. If the cycling, moving Circle is impeded or blocked anywhere, it is impeded everywhere. If the motion is impeded in enough places, the entire engine begins to experience a damping effect that slows it as a whole. At some point, when too many systems stall out or stop moving in a cell, an organism, an ecosystem, or a planet, life begins to falter.

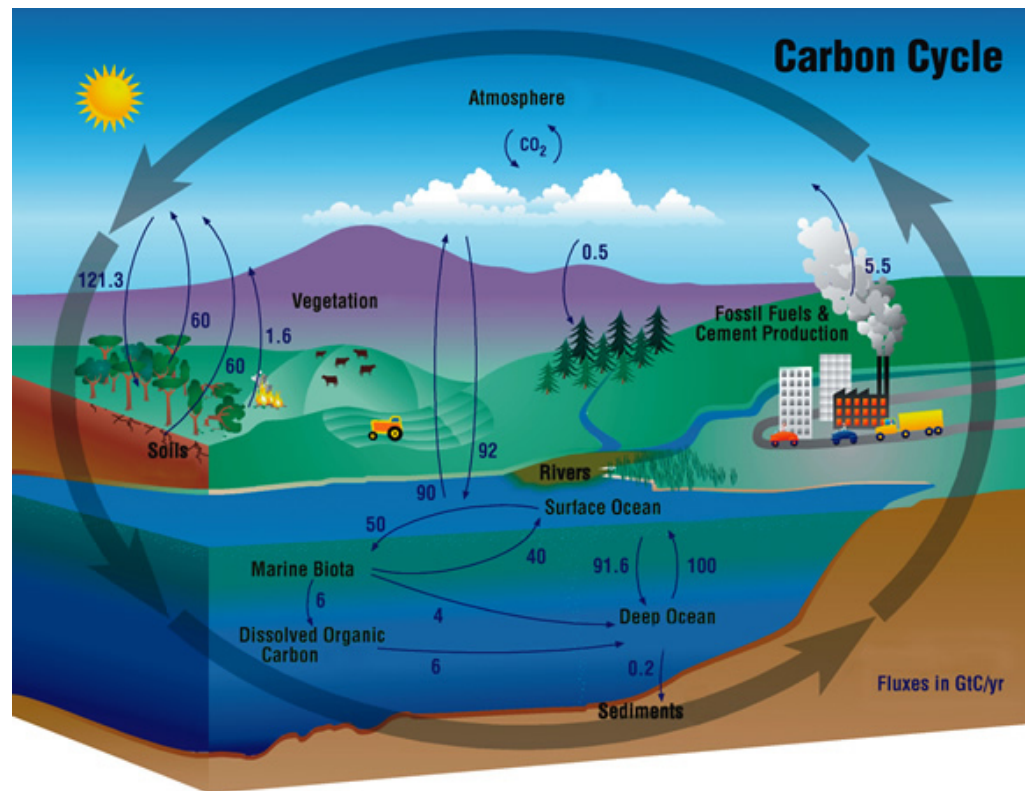
You have come to stand in a place that permits you to see the world, at least a little bit, through an Indigenous perspective. Providing the research citations that document the slowing and disruption of cyclic movements that manifest the Circle allows you to look back at Western culture from that perspective -- to look out from deep beneath the boughs of spruce into the sunny verge bordering the roadway and the people standing there looking at the same things you see. But now you are seeing it all in a new way. Maybe you find your mind shifting perspective back and forth as you see things first one way and then the other -- as manifestations of the Circle and then in the more mechanistic way Western culture sees them. It's a bit like what happens when you look at an optical illusion that can make visual sense as two completely different images. But at least now you see it's possible to interpret what you're looking at in more than one way. You can close one eye and tip your head and see the Circle. That's essential to our ability to communicate with each other.

So let's look farther out from the forest now, all the way back to where the cars are parked on the roadside -- in a grassy place you begin to realize is so

brightly sunny because all the trees were cut down to put the road in and then kept from regrowing to preserve visibility safe enough for high-speed driving. You couldn't have gotten to the forest as easily without it, as you'd have had to walk. But on the other hand, it's completely changed your perspective on, and understanding of, the forest it changed so dramatically just by being there. With that in mind, look all the way back to the ways the dominant culture does, indeed, see the Circle moving through the natural world. You probably remember learning some of them in school. They include the Nitrogen cycle, the trophic cycle that traces food-sourced energy through ecosystems, and the water cycle.

Let's think about the water cycle to see how an Indigenous perspective might influence the way we see problems in the natural world and respond to them. The current mega-drought in the American Southwest that started in 2000 is so far the longest and most severe drought the region has experienced since 800 CE.²³ Nearly 40 million people in seven states depend on water impounded in a system of dammed reservoirs, including Lake Powell and Lake Mead on the Colorado River, that are running dry.²⁴ Now that the reservoirs have shriveled to river configurations that haven't been seen since the dams were constructed,²⁵ the question "Where can we get more water?" is turning attention towards solutions such as constructing desalination plants.²⁶

But that drought is not happening in isolation. A patchwork pattern of extreme heat and drought that trigger massive wildfires and heat deaths is pulsing erratically with, and in astonishingly close proximity to, bouts of extreme flooding caused by unusually torrential rainfall in places all over the world.²⁷ I've provided you few citations for this pattern because all you need to do is pay attention to your news, to the places in Germany, Australia, California, and Canada with massive wildfires burning forests and trapping evacuees on roadways, and the places in Germany, Australia, California, and Canada only a month or two later where helicopters are rescuing people from floodwaters "that rose 26 feet literally overnight" as buildings, bridges, and roads were torn from the ground and swept away. From an Indigenous perspective, a pattern as erratic and as global as the one that's beginning to manifest suggests serious perturbation in the underlying engine driving the whole system.



Here's a final cycle to consider, the carbon cycle that's become the focus of so much Western attention.²⁸ Looking at it, think about the way you usually perceive or think about the presence of excess atmospheric CO_2 . Now close one eye, tilt your head, and look at that very same cycle from the Indigenous perspective you're just starting to experience. Simply shift the issue of excess atmospheric CO_2 into the more wholistic (and also holistic) context of the cyclic engine that drives the entire cosmos we call the Circle. In particular, consider the speeds of the natural processes in the carbon cycle. Think about which of those processes humans have speeded up, and which we've slowed or obstructed. Perhaps you've come far enough you'll be able to feel the subtle but very profound shift in orientation that happens when you do that. If so, it will be easier for you to perceive the significance of the larger pattern of which it is a part: that *many different cyclically flowing bodies of matter and energy are starting to exhibit serious disruption in places all over the world.*

A Fork in the Road

I've learned over the years that this is a point where people of the dominant culture often start to feel serious discomfort. If we were walking into the forest together, they'd stomp angrily back to their cars, slamming doors and muttering imprecations. You might not be doing this, but please let me stop for a moment and address the people who are. Then we'll go on. We've come to an extremely important fork in the road -- for both of us.

If you're someone who's about to stomp off, it may surprise you to learn that I realize no one can "prove" that the disruptions we're seeing in wind flow, ocean currents, and patterns of precipitation express a larger and far more serious damping of the larger Circle that's the driving engine of life on this planet. I'm a scientist, you might remember, and one of my degrees is in ecology. So it's very possible I understand your reason for harrumphing protest even better than you do. Here's the tricky thing you need to know about that particular rebuttal: trying to "prove" the validity of Indigenous perception of these individual cycles, or the Circle they manifest, is not actually meaningful. People in Western culture have a cultural reflex to always seek logical proof that can verify ideas about the natural world as true or false, yes. But that system only works in a cause-and-effect situation where the natural world is literally mechanistic.²⁹ Indigenous understanding of the natural world is not mechanistic or cause-and-effect. So you can't use those methods to evaluate the "trueness" of things like the Circle. The Western gold standard for evaluating truth collapses in the place of Indigenous perspective we're standing in right now. Logical deductive "proof" becomes an irrelevant concept.

But -- and this is very important -- *you can certainly evaluate Indigenous understanding of the natural world as an efficacious system of environmental thought, and you have done so.* You've carried out statistical analyses that show you Indigenous understanding of the natural world has permitted just 5% of the planet's population to preserve 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity.³⁰ That's why you want to support Indigenous-led environmental projects. You are the ones who assessed things that way, ran the figures, and came to the conclusion that we know something important about the natural world that you don't seem to know. So you said you want to learn from us. You said that whatever it is we're doing is so important that you want to provide financial support to help us do more of it.

So, you know, you've got to make up your mind about what it is you really want.

The difference between Indigenous and Western culture isn't whether or not we see important cyclic movements in the natural world. The difference is our cultural *perspective* about the *significance* and *meaning* of the cycles. These determine the ways we respond to the natural world. Philanthropy is a major way that people of Western culture respond to the natural world. So everything from funding agendas to assessable outcomes is determined by Western cultural perspective. Indigenous people have a different perspective of the natural world from yours, so our response is also different from yours. As a result, the environmental projects we carry out do not fit the Western philanthropy agenda. They don't meet your qualifications or fit into your application template prompts. So you will not, and cannot, fund them. This is not a hypothetical statement but the actual situation that exists. This paper is an attempt to resolve the impasse by helping you understand us enough that you can modify your own philanthropic practices.

People in Western culture have never really modified their own practices to work with Indigenous people before. It's always been the other way around. So you are breaking trail, which is why this is so hard. But if you truly want to support the work that has permitted 5% of the world's population to preserve 80% of the world's biodiversity, you need to be the ones who change this time. Because if Indigenous people are the ones who change instead, by learning how to apply for the kinds of grants and relationship-based awards you want to give us (as you so often suggest we must do), the work we are doing -- that you yourself can see is so vitally important -- will not happen anymore. You yourself will have acculturated it out of existence.

Worse, you will have destroyed the beauty of our own Indigenous relationship with the natural world. This is the relationship that permitted a moose to engage with me in a way I am sure you wonder if I've exaggerated.³¹ It is frustrating, infuriating, and painful to constantly resist Western culture's acculturation pressure. But losing our close relationship with the Land would be even more painful. The late Lakota scholar and powerhouse Vine Deloria explained that our experiences with the natural world simply "proved so intense and so encompassing that Indians did not move away from them"³² even when Western culture applied legal pressure, took our children away, and committed acts of outright genocide.

Those excessive tactics aren't happening right now. But as Cree scholar Cash Ahenakew points out, Western colonization of our ways of knowing -- our ways of understanding the reality of the natural world itself, what philosophers call

ontology -- is insidious and dangerous. It happens the moment someone stops an explanation of the Circle to *demand* proof that's based in a view of nature as a linear, mechanistic chain of cause-and-effect, even though the Circle paints a picture of nature as deep relationships of fundamental connection in which a moose and a human are literally relatives. So that demand itself is destructive of not just our people, but of the wisdom you so desperately want to learn and understand. As Ahenakew asks, "... how can we experience this Indigenous ontology of inter-being-relationality, if we have been colonized by the ways of knowing that numb our sense to it?"³³ The answer, as he knows, is that we can't. That apparently simple demand for "proof" isn't simple at all.

What makes this impasse particularly deadly now is that there aren't enough people in the world still doing the environmental work Indigenous people do. If, one by one, we surrender our cultural worldview to you so we can get the money we need to feed our families, and we thereby go numb in the places within us that sense the natural world in a way you do not even know exists, it's game over. For everyone.

Always before, you have demanded we accommodate you, that we do it your way, that we acculturate. We are resolved not to do that this time.

I told you at the outset of our journey that this paper was born because we wanted to establish a system to support Indigenous graduate students using Indigenous methods in their thesis and dissertation work. This project has become the IKhana Fund,³⁴ and an eight-person team met in June of 2022 to begin to hammer out how our small group could support these graduate students without being swept out to sea by the tsunami of colonization pressure that comes with the amount of money we knew we would need to raise. Our team was seven Indigenous people from Aotearoa, Zambia, and Turtle Island, and one non-Indigenous person who's worked closely with and learned from Indigenous people for 25 years.³⁵ One other non-Indigenous person, this one from Western philanthropy and very new to Indigenous worldview, participated to help us better understand how people in that field would see our ideas and the materials we planned to produce, and to begin to learn and understand Indigenous worldview by working with us in a deeply collaborative way.

In our group's June meeting sessions, we discussed many of the things I've touched upon so far in this paper. The more we learned about the many ways Western philanthropy believes Indigenous people fall far short of being reliable and trustworthy stewards of foundation funds, the more we realized how deep the abyss is between what we need and what Western philanthropy is willing to

provide. But the times are ones in which we cannot acculturate. We have to stand our ground now, for the sake of the Land and All Our Relations.

As we talked about what ground it was that we specifically needed to stand on, to not surrender to Western philanthropy just to get funding, we realized people in Western culture don't know what that ground even looks like. We have to explain there are things we won't change even if the funder thinks we should, and we have to explain why so they understand we're protecting the Land rather than being either obstreperous or naive. So we began to draw up a list of First Principles that would protect our ability to remain in the Indigenous space that makes the work we do possible. We decided to write a document that outlines these First Principles clearly for potential donors, hoping clear communication might prevent trouble down the road. And we decided we would go over this document with a potential funder preparing to make an award, explain it as clearly as we could, and then sign it together in mutual agreement so everyone knows from the outset of collaboration: "this is how we are going to do the work you're financially supporting."

When our meeting concluded, though, and I sat down to write up the results of our work, I grew despondent. We had come up with a plan that could truly protect the integrity of Indigenous work funded by Western philanthropy. But I couldn't imagine how we could put it in play. I have been awarded 5 grants from the National Science Foundation, which (at that time at least) operated as one of the most egalitarian granting agencies it's possible to imagine. But when I honestly imagined myself presenting a list of First Principles to an NSF Program Officer just as I'd made it to the point of being in the award pipeline, I felt physically sick with dread. So I couldn't even *imagine* doing such a thing with one of the private foundation officers I've been dealing with more recently. These are people who won't reply to an unsolicited email even after being introduced, and who often treat potential funding recipients with cold contempt if they dare to speak before being spoken to in a meeting. This kind of behavior happens because philanthropy is a one-way street in Western culture. The recipient's role in that system is not to tell the donor, "This is how you must behave in relationship with us." It is to thank the donor, and to do so effusively. If Indigenous people try to change that script, we are given a "take it or leave it" option. And in a system where wealth is in the hands of a few, there are always plenty of people willing to "take it". We are expendable.

But the Land is not. That's what we finally came to stand on, was the ground of the Land itself. The Land is not expendable. We will not sell it out, nor our

relationship with it, for the sake of money that can help us do the things that need to be done at this time. If we have to scrape our pennies together to do the necessary work ourselves, living in our car and eating crackers, that's what we will do. It's what we've been doing all these years anyway. You didn't leave us much to do anything else *with*. So we coined a motto, a watchword that can help us be brave when the time comes to hand a program officer our list of First Principles:

We are standing our ground, for the Land.

This entire paper, so far, has been an attempt to bring you into the forest, to stand you on that sacred ground of the living Land with us long enough that you could start to get a sense of it, so you'd have some idea of why that list of First Principles exists when we hand it to you. Because we know you've been standing out in the sunlight by the road, with dark glasses on to protect your eyes, and that you had no idea we were even back here among these trees. We have to stay here because we can only do what we do if we stand in the place that's Indigenous. You haven't even understood that space existed. So you couldn't possibly understand that you need to change your grant policies and procedures to successfully collaborate with people standing in that space, on that ground. But you do. Because this time, we cannot be the ones who change. If you really want to support Indigenous-led environmental projects, this time the one who changes will have to be you.

The amazing and beautiful thing is that when you do that, you will take steps into kinship with an entire world of life. You will begin to see how very many relatives stand in the forest, that you could not see until now, waiting for you and wanting to welcome you home. We will benefit if you can hear what I'm telling you now, and what we want to tell you as we come together to collaborate. But you will benefit far, far more.

For starters, you'll begin to understand something vitally important you know has been eluding you: sustainability.

Reciprocity, Relationship, and Sustainability

The Circle connects us and so brings us into relationship. Obstructing the primary flow of the Circle that's the engine powering all of life dams up its natural, circular flow and damps the connected current of life force moving through and

powering everything else. Doing such a terrible thing imperils the health and ultimately the life of absolutely everything, from ocean currents to buffalo to the seasonality that permits agriculture. In Indigenous worldview, engaging in practices that obstruct the Circle's primary flow -- its circulation through all the things that exist -- is the greatest moral crime possible. There is a word we commonly use to refer to our responsibility, as parts of this beautiful living system we call the Land, to keep the part of the flow with which we are personally engaged moving -- to make sure we don't obstruct or dam it up under the mistaken and arrogant belief that we can, or even should, somehow keep it for ourselves alone. Fulfilling that responsibility is one of the primary and most sacred ethical values of Indigenous peoples. We call it *reciprocity*.

If you have read the primers and guidebooks about Indigenous ways written for philanthropists, you have surely read a definition of this term that's something along the lines of "Reciprocity is a giving back that is not transactional but an expression of love and gratitude." Indigenous people typically pair reciprocity with relationship. A commonly-cited rubric in philanthropy called "the 4 Rs" combines reciprocity with relationship, responsibility, and respect. It was developed by the mainstream-led nonprofit group International Funders for Indigenous Peoples, in collaboration with a group of Indigenous leaders, as a way to communicate the cornerstone of Indigenous ethics to Western philanthropists.³⁶ If you've read philanthropy publications written by Indigenous authors, you might have seen richer explanations such as this one by Mohawk Roberta Jamieson,³⁷ one of the participants in the Circle philanthropic group of Canada: "Reciprocity is the foundation that underpins all our relationships; it is the lens through which we look at all relationships, both human and non-human. Reciprocity is the essence of how we give and receive. It maintains the cycle of life and the sustainability of our people."

Please stop for a moment and look at Jamieson's definition from the place within Indigenous perspective into which we've been walking together all this way. Do you see now why she says "it is the lens through which we look"? She is talking about *Indigenous perspective*. Do you see the significance now of her phrase "maintains the cycle of life"? *She is telling you about the Circle*. And do you see that she connects this cycle, the Circle, very tightly to sustainability?

Whatever the descriptions or definitions of reciprocity you've encountered, perhaps you can see that no mere "definition" of that term in the English language can possibly convey the magnitude of the real meaning to which the term points, that you may be starting to feel grow within your comprehension. Even saying

that reciprocity is nature's law cannot convey the depth of meaning, the responsibility, or the catastrophic consequences of violation folded into this one simple word. The cyclic, circular movement that powers all the things that exist in the universe wells up within earth-based and cosmic systems from a common source. It is therefore *in* all things, and *connects* all things. So impeding the flow in one place impedes flow in the entire system, thereby impacting everything else. Furthermore, putting toxins into the flow puts toxins into every part of the whole system.³⁸

When Indigenous people say "everything is connected," this is what we mean -- or at least, it is *the significant tip of the iceberg of what we mean*. We are talking about a shared commonality of every single thing on this planet that goes far beyond gene pools and ecosystems. That's why Indigenous people so often pair relationship with reciprocity. *Everything is quite literally connected*. This is why obstructing flow of the Circle for personal gain always backfires. Damming the Circle's flow in any one location impedes flow in the whole system, creating imbalance. If this isn't corrected, the system becomes more and more unstable and will at some point collapse. This is what we're starting to see happen in the water cycle, carbon cycle, major ocean currents, and both global and continental wind currents. To impede the movement of this universal Circle violates the fundamental nature of the living universe. Reciprocity is therefore a law of nature.³⁹

Sustainability, like reciprocity, points to a conceptual reality that's far deeper and richer than a simple definition can encompass. Perhaps the simplest way to describe sustainability is to say that beings who live sustainably understand at a very deep level that if the Circle's flow is impeded, the entire system suffers. So they willingly choose to live within, and adapt themselves to, the available flow of matter and energy in the system. When they accept a gift of matter or energy such as food or water from the system, they return or pass something meaningful and actually useful back into the system so no deficit is created. They understand that maintaining the system's balance is essential to its long-term functionality, which is to say its sustainability. And they also understand that the living system *gives* them the things they need, instead of seeing it as a situation in which they must *take* what they need from it by intellectual or physical force. Instead of asking, "Where can we get more water?" they ask, "How we can align ourselves better with everything that exists, and with all that's moving in the Circle, to preserve and maintain the health of the whole system?"

"Where can we get more water?" seems a pragmatic question to people in the

Colorado River Basin facing the worst drought (so far) in 1400 years and loss of a water supply on which 40 million people depend. They had, and have, what they feel is a realistic need for water that simply must be met. That's why they previously answered the question by stopping the area's primary water cycle dead in its tracks and are now eyeing the waters of the Pacific. Annual rainfall in Las Vegas, Nevada, for instance, whose population growth rate of 22,480% over the last 90 years⁴⁰ is the highest of any of the urban areas served by the reservoir system, is a bit more than 4 inches (10 cm) per year.⁴¹ The area had no river, historically, but it had a dry riverbed with seasonal flooding that produced an ephemeral wetlands for which the city is named: "las vegas" means "the meadows" in Spanish. There are a few aquifers in the Las Vegas area but they're at depth and limited. So the people living in Las Vegas on the locally available water, and the people on similarly arid lands across the desert Southwest, felt it was simply common sense to look for a source of water that would make the land they saw as desolate and barren bloom in vibrant abundance.⁴²

But, before the reservoirs were built, there was rich and abundant Native biodiversity in the deserts of Arizona, Nevada, and California. Urban sprawl has destroyed the original biota in many places, but it can still be seen in protected areas. Death Valley, at the edge of the Mojave Desert in California, has even less annual rainfall than does Las Vegas -- not quite 2.5 inches (6 cm) each year. Yet it is the native home of more than 1000 species of plants, 307 species of birds, 36 of reptiles, 51 Native mammal species, 3 species of amphibians, and 5 species of fish ecologically unique enough to be federally protected. Mammals include bighorn sheep, coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, and mule deer as well as the jackrabbits and rodents you might have expected as the only companions to the resident snakes and lizards everyone thinks are the only inhabitants of deserts.⁴³ Insects and a rich microfauna are also essential parts of the ecosystem, though they don't get much attention in the park's guidebooks. And in the spring, this desert blooms beautifully all by itself.⁴⁴

There were and are Indigenous people living in Death Valley too, though they've never called their home by such a pejorative name. Like Indigenous people on deserts throughout the larger area, they grow native crops adapted to local conditions, harvest wild plants and fruits, and hunt. They are at home in the desert, happy and satisfied. Barbara Durham, the Death Valley Tribal Historic Preservation Officer of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, whose traditional lands include the place now called Death Valley, expresses a view of this land as precious for exactly what it is:⁴⁵

"Our desert lands . . . have significant importance to us, the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, neighboring tribes and the desert communities. Areas such as the Avawatz Mountains, the Panamint Valley, the Coso Range area, Silurian Valley and the Kingston Range all matter to us; their presence is valued for their history, landscape, story telling and connection with our ancestors who lived here and enjoyed them as much as we do today. The plants, animals and people of these areas have survived through countless hostilities and threat of extinction but we always persevered because it is our duty to protect our lands, our homes, our way of life and ties to our aboriginal territories."

Indigenous plants, animals, and people of these deserts live within the amount of water moving through the Circle of that system, sharing it freely across the entire community of plants, animals, and humans, and adapting to normal fluctuating changes in availability. Adaptations include changing the structural and behavioral characteristics of water use (exceptionally deep-reaching roots on plants, for instance, or resting in shade or a burrow during the hottest times of day) and living wisely in regard to population size and spatial distribution. Instead of asking "Where can we get more water?" the Indigenous living things in the desert ecosystem ask, "How do I live in such a way that I have what I need without impeding or obstructing the flow of the Circle flowing through this entire Place?" This proper and healthy relationship between people and the Land is the quintessence of pragmatic realism and the core of sustainability.

Perhaps you can see from this brief description that sustainability is a law of nature, like reciprocity is. It is not a human construct. Animals and plants live sustainably, through structural adaptation and behavioral choices. Sustainability has nothing to do with economic measures or calculations.⁴⁶ It has everything to do with preserving and protecting the cyclic movements of life's engine, its beating heart, that we call the Circle.

When I first began to explain the Circle to you, I did so within the context of natural metaphor. I told you: *Natural metaphor is the vocabulary of the universe. Life, whether stars or buffalo, provides the syntax that makes it a language we can understand.* Then I told you this is so important because people who don't understand natural metaphor will never understand sustainability because metaphor is the language it's written in. Now, at this point in our journey together, metaphor is going to carry you more deeply into an understanding of everything that's been right in front of you all along.

The Language of the Land

It's time to talk a little more about what we mean by the term "the Land." Like reciprocity and sustainability, the simple English word "Land" points to a conceptual reality that's far deeper and richer than a simple definition can encompass. Different Indigenous traditions have different terms for this aspect of reality in their own languages, and the Aboriginal peoples of Australia also use the English word "Country" for it. But all the words Indigenous people use for the Land refer to the enormous woven network of the seen and unseen, of relationships and the physical manifestations of relationships, that is quite literally everything there is. The Land includes soil and rocks, yes, and it also includes waters, air, winds, clouds, sun, moon, stars, planets, galaxies, soil microbes, water microbes, plants, animals, viruses, bacteria, fungi, wildfire, lightning, storms, and human beings. It includes unseen things too, such as Ancestors, Dreams, Visions, language, and songs. The plants and animals are a part of the Land, their own independent nations with their own ways and customs. They are not "lower" than human beings or less wise or capable, but beings with their own agency who can be wise teachers,⁴⁷ powerful healers, and leaders who can turn a tide of events. They, and every other thing that is part of the Land, are our relations.

To approach the larger concept I'm trying to get you to here, consider the Story about Moose I told you at the beginning of our journey together. That Story brought us into the landscape of dark forest and sunny roadside in which our journey has taken place. What I want you to notice is that this means the Story is therefore playing out at three different levels: (1) It told itself as a lived event between myself, two actual moose, and a whole group of tourists, in July of 1999, in a part of the Great North Woods located in northern New Hampshire just a few miles from the Canadian border. (2) It told itself in this narrative as I wrote, guiding the way I've laid out the narrative elements and therefore the way you have read them. (3) It told itself within your own imagination as you read the Story, pictured Moose and the woman moose, me, the trees, the tourists, and the brightly sunny roadway; and then shifted in your imagination (with my encouragement) so that you were the person walking the moose trail and learning to see what's in the darkness under the trees.

That's why I have capitalized the word Story when I've referred to this event and its telling. A person of the dominant culture might think I had "planned" or designed all this, but if I had I'd have used the lower-case s. A Story that has so

much life and agency that it can live and convey Knowledge across multiple platforms is a powerfully different thing from the type of story a human creates by intent. As far as I know, only a Story originally told by (expressed through) the Land has the capability to function so effortlessly across multiple platforms at once. So you'd be able to see it, I actually traced out for you the way I encountered this Story telling itself as I wrote earlier sections of this paper, and I explained how I became consciously aware that this was even happening. I told you about having to go outside and sit quietly with my feet on the Land until I understood what the larger Story was, that the smaller bit of Story about buffalo and the Milky Way that had shown up in my writing was pointing to.

The relationship between Knowledge and the Land, and the agency of both, is a reality of Indigenous experience. Western culture *constructs* knowledge, rather than being *given* Knowledge by the Land. So scientists, farmers, industrialists, politicians, and philanthropists *decide themselves, as human beings*, what environmental projects "need" to be done, how they should be done, and when they should be done. Indigenous people, on the other hand, receive Knowledge about the Land *from* the Land, through a wide variety of means. So Indigenous people do not decide what environmental projects need to be done, and how. The Land decides, and it communicates this need to us through Knowledge. So Indigenous environmental projects are ones the Land actually knows must be done. This is why Indigenous people have been saying people in the dominant culture need to give up their control of environmental projects intended to help ecosystems heal, and let Indigenous people lead instead now that things are getting so critical.

Indigenous Perception and Different Ways of Knowing

People in Western culture find it difficult to understand how Indigenous people could have such a different experience of reality. So let me explain by using something you're familiar with: visual perception. Most vertebrate eyes, human eyes included, respond to energy in a specific part of the electromagnetic spectrum. We call that part of the spectrum "the visible light spectrum" because it's, well, the part of the spectrum that's visible. Other parts of the electromagnetic spectrum include things like radio waves and X-rays.⁴⁸ As you know, it's possible to generate a visual image with X-rays, though, if you use special film that's sensitive to that wavelength. What this shows you is that it's not the type of wave or the amount of energy in the wave that determines whether or not you can see it

as an image. What matters is having the right *receptor*. FM radio waves travel through the air without us being able to hear them or see them, but the receiver in a radio vibrates in response to that frequency and converts it to sound waves our ears can hear. In that case, there are two receivers -- one in the radio and one in our ears.

Bees have visual receptors for Ultraviolet (UV) light, which humans can't normally see. Flowers have pigments that respond to UV light the same way they have pigments that respond to light in the visible spectrum. So flowers have spots or stripes that are yellow, red, and so on . . . and some of them also have markings that are "written" in UV pigments we can't see at all. But bees can. Here's a picture made with UV-sensitive film showing you the difference this makes in what we see and what bees see, when we look at the same flower with different optical receptors.



Flower in visible light (left) and UV light (right).

Imagine what would happen if you saw a bee land in the outer ring of reproductive structures in this flower's center, and you asked it, "Why did you land there in particular?" The bee would say, "Because I can see that these structures are ready to give me nectar in exchange for pollination." You would say, "See it!? I don't see anything. What are you talking about?" Or, if a bee

painted a flower in art class and made a flower look like what it sees, the human art teacher would say, "What is this dark area? That's not there. And why have you painted the outer area pink? Make the petals yellow all over, everywhere. That's what this flower looks like." If the bee insists its picture looks like the flower it sees, the teacher gives a failing grade. Every other teacher and student in the school says the bee sees it "wrong," so how is the bee going to convince them that the flower really looks the way he sees it?

This is our life as Indigenous people in a world that's been acculturated. Acculturation is the process by which Western people "correct" Indigenous perceptions of reality with penalties attached to nonconformance. But Indigenous perceptions of the natural world don't need correcting. We are able to perceive things you can't, because our cultures teach us how as we grow up. It's not a supernatural ability, any more than the bee's UV vision is supernatural. It's simply a natural perception of Knowledge that's really present in the environment.

The multiple ways of knowing⁴⁹ Indigenous people use to receive this range of information are analogous to different types of sensory receptors that can detect different wavelengths such as red light or radio waves or X-rays. Story, a way of knowing that's figured prominently in this paper, is one of the more powerful ways of transmitting Knowledge. Western culture responds to Story too, of course, which is why the entertainment industry is so powerful and financially lucrative. But recognition of, acknowledgement of, and training in appropriate use of Story as a real way of knowing is absent from both Western educational and professional settings. Instead, people in Western culture privilege intellectual ways of knowing over all others -- what Vine Deloria called "this one quarter of human experience" that legitimizes information through cause-and-effect verification.⁵⁰ Many of the more rancorous long-term debates in Western culture are about which ways of knowing should be recognized and accepted, with people in both the arts and religious communities contending against the culture's privileging of intellectual ways of knowing. Ironically, they tend to argue their case with intellectual ways of knowing.⁵¹

Relational Knowing

Indigenous Knowledge has other important attributes besides "ways of knowing." Another attribute of Knowledge is the way it arises at all to begin with, which is *relationally*. When we say Knowledge is relational, we mean it emerges within relationship, as a phenomenon of the processes of relational interaction.⁵² Even if

you're used to the dominant culture's way of thinking about knowledge as the brilliant construct of an individual mind, you've almost certainly experienced its relational quality yourself. For instance, you may have had the experience of talking about something with other people and experiencing a burst of clarity and understanding that "suddenly came" to you. This relational nature of knowledge is actually why so many people had problems when they had to work in isolation during the pandemic. They couldn't talk out problems with co-workers over the water cooler or lunch, so never got the sparks of inspiration those interactions generate.

When you come to know a great deal about, and care very deeply for, a certain type of animal or plant or a particular Place, Knowledge can emerge within that relationship too. Nobel Laureate Barbara McClintock, who is not Indigenous, explained to biographer Evelyn Fox Keller that her work on corn genetics was fueled by the same process Indigenous people call relational knowing. "Over and over again," wrote Keller, "she tells us one must have the time to look, the patience to 'hear what the material has to say to you,' the openness to 'let it come to you.' Above all, one must have 'a feeling for the organism'."⁵³ So relational knowing isn't restricted to Indigenous people, but simply not usually recognized or acknowledged as a process in Western culture.

Relational knowing isn't restricted to humans either, though Western culture's assumption that knowledge is created by human minds can make this a bit harder to grasp at first. But consider that I learned important things through my interaction with Moose that summer day. It's important you remember the intentionality of the process when that happened. Moose, standing there quietly only a few steps away from me, calmly turned his head and *looked at something*, thereby directing my gaze to find out what he wanted to show me. And of course, I remained observant, then reflected very deeply on what had happened and what kind of Knowledge had been conveyed. This is the sort of thing I mean when I say that Indigenous people learn, as we grow up, how to receive and perceive this type of Knowledge. You might think anyone in that circumstance would understand they were being told to look at something so they could learn a thing. But I can tell you from many decades spent with people of the dominant culture that this is not the case. Instead of paying attention to the animal, they think about themselves: "Wow! Look how close I am to a moose! This is amazing!" Or they are so eager to "get it" that they project. They ask frantically, "What does 'moose' symbolize? Does it matter that he's male? I know male animals matter a lot in Celtic mythology. Is he an archetype?" Either way, the Knowledge actually being

transmitted goes entirely unperceived. I've learned from these situations that there's a definite skill set for receiving Knowledge of this type, and that it's unbelievably hard for people of the dominant culture to master it.

The Indigenous Epistemic System

A culture's ways of knowing -- the entire spectrum that includes where knowledge comes from, whether it's relational or individual, linear or emergent, internal or external, all the different or prioritized ways of knowing, and all the processes by which information is processed and evaluated and then added to an individual or community knowledge base -- are called its epistemic system. Its study is called epistemology. Only part of any peoples' epistemic system is visible, even to them. People commonly do things the ways they've learned to do them growing up, taught by parents and grandparents, mentors and teachers, and also simply by living among others. They often wind up not being consciously aware of what they're doing or why. It requires deep self-reflection and a certain amount of collaboration (for the relational knowing it produces) to perceive or see one's own epistemic system. A lot of it remains invisible but powerfully active.

As we've pointed out several times, the most prominent part of the Western epistemic system understands the natural world as operating through linear and mechanistic processes of cause-and-effect. The scientific method is a means of evaluating or assessing knowledge within that system. A hypothesis is a testable premise that a given cause will produce a specific effect. This is the deep epistemic ground upon which Western culture stands, that might have made you feel uncomfortable as you read my words about the Circle's expression in cycles of water, wind, sea, and carbon. If you wanted to see "evidence" at that point of our journey, that's why. You intuitively wanted to use the Western system of evaluation -- testing a hypothesis of cause and effect -- to "prove" whether or not the Circle's role in things was true. It might not have been an issue for you personally of course, but it's such a common response that it's why I stopped then, to state as explicitly as I could, that *we are in an entirely different epistemic system where the Western evaluation method does not always apply, because Indigenous people see the natural world as a living system rather than a mechanistic one of cause-and-effect*. When I said that everything from Western philanthropy's funding agendas to its design of assessable outcomes is determined by Western cultural perspective, it's the Western epistemic system that's the actual point of engagement. This is the place where cultural perspective generates the

research agendas, methods, and evaluation "tests" that most professional people in Western culture -- including philanthropists -- deem acceptable and valid.

Indigenous people use an epistemic system with which Western philanthropists are unfamiliar. So you tell us the things we want to do are wrong, misguided, or naive because that's how they look from the cultural place you stand. When we tell you our projects don't fit your funding application structures, requirements, and requests for information, you set up programs to teach us how to adhere to your standards. You don't understand that the systems of engagement between us, that you've set up and so rigorously maintain, *actively prevent* our collaboration because they exist within the larger Western epistemic system. The practices by which Western philanthropy engages Indigenous people can only endlessly reinforce that system, which is the same one that treats the natural world as a cause-and-effect mechanism -- the paradigm that got us all into this environmental mess to begin with.

We are like the bees in the art classroom. We don't need to be corrected. And we don't need to change. We need to be heard.

The Indigenous Epistemic System in Environmental Practice

Indigenous people sometimes engage in Ceremony as a means of acquiring Knowledge when we need understanding or guidance at a critical time.⁵⁴ An important part of even the simplest of Ceremonies is aligning ourselves better with everything that exists -- that is, with the Circle itself.⁵⁵ Remember that it's a human's responsibility to do everything in their power to keep the Circle moving as it should. If everything could be aligned as it should be, in a healthy way, the world's environments would be healthy.

When we align ourselves with the natural world, we can perceive the Land's communication. It conveys Knowledge to us through natural metaphor, Dream, Vision, or other Indigenous ways of knowing. As I've pointed out, there are many more ways of learning and knowing than people in the dominant culture realize, and usually Knowledge comes to us through several of them at the same time to make communication a little easier to understand.

When part of the natural world is out of balance and suffering in a particular Place, because of the impact of things people have done to it, an Indigenous person may be given Knowledge about it in this way. The person receives Knowledge that it would be good to do a specific thing, to carry out a specific action, because this would help rebalance whatever has been harmed or disrupted.

Many Indigenous people are presently being sent Knowledge in a number of different ways, with signifiers of great urgency, about specific actions that need to be taken to preserve the life and functionality of the ecosystems in particular places. For the most part, this is the type of environmental project Indigenous people carry out, and for which we could use financial support.

Because of the epistemic system Indigenous people are in, if a potential funder asks us, "Why do you want to do this?" the honest reply, and the only one we really have, is "Because I was sent a Dream" or "Because a hawk showed me such-and-such a thing that gave me the Knowledge it must be done." If you ask "How does this help mitigate climate change?" the honest reply is "It helps restore the Circle, which of course will eventually help the climate because it helps everything be in better balance." Do you see the problems here? A foundation representative may think it's charming to hear "The Ancestors told me to do this in a Dream" in conversation, but when the time comes to talk money attitudes often change very dramatically.

But that's not the most important take-home message about the differences between our cultural epistemic systems. The most important consequence of this difference between our epistemic systems, and the reason I brought up a term like "epistemic system" to begin with, is that the natural world itself sets the agenda for Indigenous-led environmental projects because *our epistemic system is Land-based*. As the Native Hawai'ian scholar of epistemology Manulani Meyer says, the land is our "epistemological cornerstone."⁵⁶ Because of the deep connection between Land and Knowledge, which you saw for yourself in the Story about Moose, the land is "' . . . more than a physical place. It is an idea that engages knowledge and contextualizes knowing'."⁵⁷

Indigenous scholar Vanessa Watts, Mohawk and Anishinaabe Bear Clan, Six Nations of the Grand River, puts a slightly different spin on this that can deepen your understanding of the relationships between Land, animals such as Moose, humans, and Knowledge. She writes about a concept she calls Indigenous Place-Thought, describing it as "'the non-distinctive space where place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated. Place-Thought is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking, and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts'. . . [This] necessarily disrupts a concept of knowledge separate from the geosphere and biosphere, and posits instead that land and thought are integral to one another. Biota, geology and thinking are one and the same."⁵⁸

Do you know how to get the water cycle back into balance? Neither do we.

But the Land does. And it's starting to tell us step by step what to do. Such Knowledge doesn't usually clearly connect to a specific outcome though. That is, we may know we need to do a thing, but we don't know exactly why, or what doing it accomplishes. (And we might not understand if we did.) Our epistemic system permits us to receive and then follow the instructions we're given, to do it carefully and responsibly enough to remain on the right path, and to change what we do if altered circumstances require modifications. This is all that's necessary. We don't need to know the "mechanistic cause-and-effect" reasons and outcomes you think are essential to a viable project. Those don't even apply to the reality we're living and doing the work in.

Indigenous people know how to care for ecosystems because we have a Land-based epistemic system. This is why Manulani Meyer, the Native Hawai'iian I quoted earlier, observes: "Indigenous people are all about place. Land/aina, defined as 'that which feeds,' is the everything of our sense of love, joy and nourishment. Land is our mother. *This is not a metaphor.*"⁵⁹ It is, instead, *reality*. It is the pattern the bee can see on the flower, that is actually there. Your inability to see it is irrelevant to the fact that it exists. The blindness of the tourists because they had on dark glasses to protect them from the bright sun of the place without trees they'd created to drive in does not change the fact that Moose and I were, in point of real fact, standing side by side under the trees right in front of them.

Indigenous people have a Land-based epistemic system because we live in a Land-based worldview. Our Stories, laws, and the values we live by all come from the Land. If you look back at the words of the relationship I've woven between us in this paper, you will see the Land shows up over and over again. It is the touchstone to which I return every time I have to tell you why a thing matters, or why we know it's important. Perhaps you can see, then, why it's so destructive to have to pick up everything we're doing and move into an epistemic system and a value system that's based on something else, not the Land, in order to get the resources we need to serve the Land itself. Without realizing it, you ask us to leave the Land behind in order to get the money to help it. We can't do that. *We are a Land-based people. Nothing we do makes any sense or has any impact if it's taken off that ground.*

This was why the group of us working to plan a program of Indigenous Philanthropy that would support people carrying out projects using Indigenous Knowledge to serve the Land established a motto and First Principles that can guide both donors and recipients of funds as they collaborate in programs of

Indigenous Philanthropy. These Principles, listed at the end of this narrative, facilitate reciprocity and relationship within the Land-based epistemic system that guides and supports the work of Indigenous-led environmental projects. It is our hope these Principles will serve as a template Indigenous communities can adapt and use to open a productive dialog of their own with potential funders. We also hope that funding agencies and individuals can use the narrative provided here to explore the importance of each of these Principles, and come to understand and respect them, then respond to them appropriately. In particular, we hope that funding agencies who work through this document and our list of Principles will begin to understand *why* and then *how* they need to restructure their philanthropic practices so they align with and support the Land-based system in which Indigenous-led environmental projects take place.

Circling Back

We have walked several extremely important manifestations of the Circle together on this journey. One very important one remains. It is the circle that began when I shared a paragraph I originally wrote for the introduction I thought this paper would have. This paragraph recorded a rather telegraphic first report of a vision that came to me as I sat writing it, and also the context in which the vision was given. That context is visible in the rest of the paragraph, which is why I included the whole thing when I first told you about the vision. Here it is again, as we circle back.

This is a story of mud-soaked, mosquito-bitten meetings seasoned with woodsmoke in a dark forest that sprouted fair weather and good relationships like redwood needles after a wildfire.^{60,61} It is also a story of the sweating, exhausted euphoria of dancing ceremony into the night and discovering kinship in the honest conflict and truth-telling that's happened all day.⁶² Painful memories are counted over like beads to protect hearts that have trusted too often. Yet that trust could be the medicine of the world's healing.⁶³ Elders speak the unspeakable into a silence brittle with guilt.⁶⁴ Yet guilt that would finally shatter could be swept away. The story everyone saw as simple and linear twists into paradox as the river of buffalo hoofprints in the dark earth of a soft summer night rises at the horizon and arches up, then backwards, to stretch itself across the sky in a mirroring river of stars that is Milky Way. The scent of burning sage

threads its way into the darkness of our anger and pain, and anger exhales, trembling. The fearful heart that's been hurt so many times softens and finds it is holding its breath. This is not the journey any of us thought we would take. But it is the journey required of us now.

The context in which Knowledge emerges contributes to the *meaning* of that Knowledge. We touched lightly on this issue when we explored the relational aspect of Indigenous Knowledge. Context is the set of relationships between the physical and conceptual things in a certain place, at a certain moment in time, that create the interactions from which Knowledge emerges.

The essential importance of context is sometimes hard for people in Western culture to grasp because Western knowledge is intentionally decontextualized. A fundamental premise of the linear, mechanistic view of nature is that if information is true here, it's also true there. If the same cause produces different effects in a rainforest of Borneo and a rainforest of Central America, the information is considered faulty. This is one of those basic tenets of the Western epistemic system that informs Western philanthropic practices in an almost subliminal way. It's why so many foundations ask funding applicants to address the ways their project can be "scaled up" and exported to other places to leverage the donor's impact.

But a great deal of important knowledge is highly contextual. Imagine, for instance, the different meanings in, and the different ways you would respond to, a guest at your dinner party who asks, "What was in this stew?" while smiling and holding up their dish for another helping -- compared to the same thing being asked by a guest who is visibly pale and has a cold sweat breaking out across their face. Knowledge about being a good cook or having left the meat out too long to thaw emerges from contextualized information communicated to us by language of more than one kind. We all process the context in which Knowledge arises to help us understand its meaning.

When I was writing that paragraph at the time the vision brought Knowledge, I had been reading stories about real cross-cultural collaboration between Western funders and Indigenous people. Some of the most productive meetings were highly volatile. The people participating in them freely shared the fact that they'd been stimulated, terrified, energized, and exhausted by the process. But despite the lightning flashes of real power visible in the reports of these meetings, I found only occasional expression of Indigenous perspective in their published materials. I felt like someone in a drought seeing heat lighting all around the horizon but not

getting rain from it. So I wondered what all the anguished power struggle I was seeing in these reports was really accomplishing. And of course I was looking at everything in the context of my own life -- the context of having attempted to bridge a cultural gap in a profession that thought it wanted what Indigenous people have to offer, but turned out to want it only within its own Western framework. As Indigenous scholar Cash Ahenakew, a member of the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation, has observed: ". . . [W]hen Indigenous knowledge is recognized by mainstream knowledge production mechanisms, it tends to be presented through the frames of Western epistemology rather than on its own terms." ⁶⁵

So the vision came to me in the context of anger and despair that had very deep roots. That's why I tried to conclude the paragraph I was writing: *This is not the journey any of us thought we would take*. I was speaking for myself, but I also wondered how any of us could willingly keep shoving ourselves into the brambles of a thicket that was apparently impassable. Then, sighing, I resignedly wrote the inexplicable rebuttal to my own statement: *But it is the journey required of us now*. I felt the Land pushing me to move forward, but I didn't see how that could happen. I was ready to back out, despite feeling the Land moving through our work like the sinuous thread of smoke from burning sage. I knew a lot of other Indigenous people who felt the same way. We are tired of being constantly corrected about the nature of reality, not being allowed to correct statements about our own people, and licking wounds we had been so sure we could avoid this time. This is the context in which that vision came.

Here again, now in that context, is the imagery. The tracks went across the earth, worn in parallel grooves, rose up a low hill, then ascended into the night sky and became stars. The stars passed back over the top of my head as the pale river of the Milky Way Galaxy, and vanished into the dim distance above the far horizon.

The land was still and silent, yes. And the buffalo were indeed gone. But looking at the vision in context, I finally perceived the thing that was far more important: the stars did not come back down to the ground at the far end of the sky. They vanished into the distance, instead. Still in the sky.

The stars did not come back down to the ground. In a vision that showed them to have first been buffalo hoofprints that rose from the ground, they could have and should have. For everything is connected. The stars are not other than buffalo tracks or the buffalo who make them. Night cycles into morning, day into night. Light and shadows slide across the land and ripple in the wind. The Circle moves,

cycling. Buffalo tracks that manifest as stars become buffalo tracks again, and Buffalo are in the tracks and of the tracks, and in the stars and of the stars, and it all goes 'round and 'round, one life flowing through the river of it all.

This is the Knowledge that finally pressed itself into my conscious awareness and demanded that I deal with it. It was the most important information communicated by that little vision, and at first I had been unable to see it -- because it was simply too hard to face the fact that the Circle I saw forming itself in a vision did not come back to its starting point.

The Circle was broken.

You've seen some of the ample evidence from science that, in fact, the Circle is coming apart in a number of places now. You also know that Indigenous people are being given Knowledge about the actions the Land needs us to carry out to help it rebalance itself. We Indigenous people must be strong enough to stand up and explain ourselves to you, and get your material help so we can do what the Land tells us is essential. *Because the Circle has broken.* And Western people must try much harder to really listen to us and ask questions, and let go of the idea that your value as a human being is somehow tied up in knowing all the answers and always being right. *Because the Circle is breaking right now.* Let us find a way to teach you what you need to know so you can work with us the way you should, the way you must if we are to have any chance of restoring that Circle. Let yourselves find a new way of relating to the world that is other than what you know now, but that you will find fits with the remembered comfort of a beloved cloak you once had but lost and have found again. It's going to be hard. The wildfire that burns out the undergrowth choking a forest and restores its health is not an easy experience to live through. Even when we know it needs to happen, our hearts sink when we see the first towering columns of smoke. But the Circle has broken and is breaking right now. Whether Western or Indigenous, we can not afford to let the difficulty of the task before us turn us aside from its doing. The lives and futures of the coming seven generations and all their descendants depend on our courage now.

Lumbee philanthropist Edgar Villanueva thinks we can do this. The closing words of his book *Decolonizing Wealth* tell us that "Reciprocity is based on our fundamental interconnection—there is no Other, no Us versus Them, no Haves versus Have-Nots."⁶⁶ What hit me most, reading those words, was their context. For as he ended his book, Villanueva shared a story I know very well. It's one

about a very early expression of Indigenous Philanthropy, and it emerged among my own people, the Choctaw.

It happened in 1847. Our nation had just finished going through the Removal, a terrible journey from our homeLands in present-day Mississippi and Alabama to land the US government had set aside as the "Indian Nations" that is now Oklahoma. It was called the Removal because it was authorized by legislation called the Indian Removal Act⁶⁷ that permitted the government to dispossess a number of tribes of their lands and move them to the Nations. This would permit American settlers to move into "wild uninhabited land free for the taking" that was, in fact, already occupied. So many Choctaw died of hardship and privation as one group of people after another made the journey to the Nations between 1830 and 1840 that the event came to be known as The Trail of Tears and Death.⁶⁸ As our people arrived, they scrambled to build homes and plant crops to survive, dealing at the same time with the physical and emotional trauma of everything that had been done to them. So when they heard about a terrible potato famine starving people to death in Ireland, they deeply understood the painfulness of that situation. Just seven years into the bleak reality of complete dispossession, therefore, my ancestors responded by taking up a collection from their own meager resources -- an amount equivalent to about \$5,000 today -- and sending it to the people of Ireland to help them. Our peoples have been in relationship ever since.⁶⁹ During the recent pandemic, when the Irish heard about the horrifying impact of Covid on the Diné (Navajo), they took up and sent a collection of their own, tagging it as a continuation of the flow of sharing my ancestors initiated more than 150 years ago.⁷⁰ What had moved my ancestors, of course, was the flow of the Circle, the natural, *Indigenous* philanthropy of the Land itself.

The Circle has been broken. But we have been brought together to help each other create the conditions in which the Circle heals its own self, and us with it. We Indigenous people have the Knowledge. You Western people have the material resources. Let us each bring what we have to the task, and our courage with it.

On a hot August night in 2020, as Coronavirus swept the world and protests flared like a raging fever, a line of thunderstorms swept the ridges of California's Santa Cruz mountains. Lightning ignited the drought-stricken landscape of ancient redwoods and Douglas fir, and within a month the fire had burned more than 86,000 acres, including all of California's Big Basin State Park.^{71,72} After the

fire, the towering redwoods the park had been created to protect were gaunt, charred black, every one of their branches and all their needles burned off. Fire had hollowed some of the trees into brittle shells that crashed to the ground in storms the first winter "after." Other trees smoldered inside the fire perimeter for months, all the way into the following spring.⁷³ Yet bright green sprouts of new growth began to appear directly on the blackened redwood trunks of the completely denuded trees that very same spring. And a year after that, in 2022, park officials were able to reopen parts of Big Basin to the public. But there are new rules and limited access now. This time around, the land's health is being prioritized over the public's desires.

The redwoods are not the only things in the park sprouting new growth. Big Basin park officials and the Sempervirens Fund that's footing most of the bill for the park's revitalization, invited members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band to collaborate in facilitating the forest's healing.⁷⁴ Tribal leader Valentin Lopez explained that this time, any collaborative relationship would have to be grounded in the historical, cultural, and intellectual reality of Indian people. It was time for the dominant culture to acknowledge the truth. The Amah Mutsun could provide the necessary details, and would do so to help prepare new interpretive texts for the park and educational materials for the state. *If the voices of California tribes*

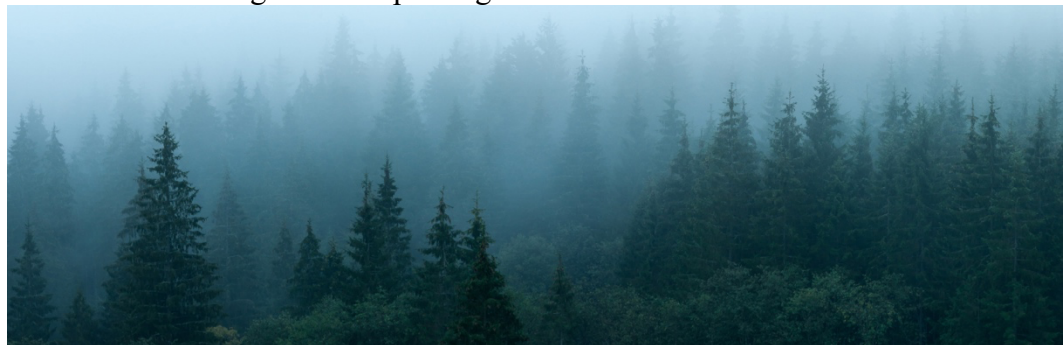


are to be heard meaningfully at the tables where crucial environmental decisions are being made now, Lopez pointed out, *those voices have to speak with fully restored power*.⁷⁵ That power resides in honesty.

The honesty begins with Californians facing the fact that the Amah Mutsun are not the people who lived among those specific redwoods for millennia and knew them best, but their nearest relatives. The people of this particular redwood forest, on the land of what is now a state park, were the Awaswas. They're no longer around because settlers in California's missions, goldfields, and towns killed every last Awaswas person on the face of the earth.

There can be no more for the Awaswas. But the larger Circle turns and there is somehow new life. The redwoods sprout tufts of fat needles. Traditional Ecological Knowledge sprouts changes in priorities and park policy. Ceremony is "restoring the sacredness to the ground" of Big Basin's redwoods, the Amah Mutsun creating a place for ceremony among the tall black trees growing a furry coating of needles that will slowly elongate into new branches. The place of ceremony in the forest the Amah Mutsun are creating, that the park service and the funder are respecting, supporting, and not trying to control, is for people from all tribes, not the Amah Mutsun alone. Here again is natural Indigenous Philanthropy: the reciprocity that honors, restores, and facilitates the Circle. The return of Indigenous people and ways to Big Basin, the return of Ceremony to the forest that has been burned and burned again for hundreds of years, weaves Indigenous Knowledge back into life itself -- into the redwoods, into the mountains, and into all those living there.⁷⁶

The Circle stretches, reaches down to touch its roots, comes home to the place it started from, and starts around the cycle again. The redwoods heal. And so does the Forest. As it does, the stars drift to the forest floor on the wings of lightning bugs, nestle into the ferns and the furry green moss, and touch the leaping heels of a moose with the light of the spinning universe.



INDIGENOUS FIRST PRINCIPLES FOR USE IN IKHANA FUND WORK
suggestions from the first IKhana Fund planning meeting
June 4-15, 2022

IKhana Fund Planning Team:
Dawn Hill Adams, Shawn Wilson, Fiona Cram,
Jessica Venable, Julius Wassenas, Beverly Te Huia,
John Njovu, Jo Belasco, Jessica Sweidan

A General Statement About IKhana Fund in the Context of Collaboration with Western Philanthropy. The IKhana fund brings a (k)new pathway to philanthropic funding into Indigenous communities' traditional ways of supporting the land, to facilitate healing and strengthening environmental resilience in the places of which Indigenous people are the traditional caretakers. The 'k' in (k)new signals that this way of working may be new to funders but is knew or well-known to Indigenous communities.

Following is a list of First Principles for Indigenous Philanthropy that we drew up for consideration and discussion in our first IKhana Fund meeting. This list is not intended to serve as a final document, but as a collection of ideas that can be discussed, thought about, and tested in a process of exploring new possible avenues and means by which Indigenous peoples and communities can collaborate in productive ways with Western philanthropists. We respectfully ask those who use or try to use all or part of this list to give us feedback (dawn@tapestryinstitute.org) on what worked and what didn't, so we can learn from your experience. We will be happy to share from our own experience with you as well. We expect the document will have to be applied in a variety of practical ways, in a range of situations, for it to begin to shape itself into something/s that is/are genuinely useful to the communities it can serve.



Preamble: Stepping into the unknown involves trust and letting go of control. However, doing this is part of reciprocal process. Before we work together or collaborate with a Western ally, we need to concretely outline our First Principles, using this list as a starting point, and identifying and adding any items that may pertain to a specific situation. The funder will eventually learn and gain knowledge from engaging in these actions. Western allies do not need complete

understanding of Indigenous ways to proceed in collaborative relationship with us, and it is impossible for us to provide such understanding. Instead, we invite you to join us on a pathway of hope. We anticipate a resistance to change as part of normal human process, but we ask you to enter into this relationship with us in good faith, and to participate actively with us in making every effort to communicate with one another, asking questions whenever necessary, and gently but firmly holding each other accountable to the larger goal we serve in our work together.

The following First Principles are universal and apply to the ways we collaborate with both Indigenous people and people of Western culture.

Our Core Principles

- We are standing our ground for the Land.
- The Land is at the center of everything.
- The Land is alive and has agency.

Additional Basic Principles:

About the Land

- By "Land" we refer to all that exists, seen and unseen, on earth and across the entire cosmos, including humans and All Our Relations.
- The Land is living and living things can heal.
- If the Land dies then everyone dies.

About Land-Based Environmental Work

- The Land is leading. The Land knows how to heal itself and is telling Indigenous people how to do that. The work we do is not an expression of human ideas.
- We are doing the things we are doing in our environmental work because we can hear the Land. This is not a mystical or religious statement, but one of sensed reality.
- We are working to effect non-human solutions to things, in comparison to the system of Western control that effects human solutions.
- The Land takes priority over human stakeholders, because we Indigenous recipients are Standing Our Ground for the Land.

About Relationship

- Relationality is of essential importance, epistemically and also ethically.
- We issue a call to relationship. We offer our allies an *opportunity* to be in relationship and to learn, not a *demand*.
- We acknowledge that our allies are standing on Indigenous Land and that they themselves have very old and deep Indigenous roots. This will help us establish meaningful relationships of healing.
- Relationships between funders and recipients should be mutual and two-way, reciprocal. Funders must realize they will receive something out of relationship with the people they fund, so they need to participate and engage with us. Being in relationship is not about money, whether donor or recipient.
- We should treat people the same regardless of how much funding they contribute or receive. The relationship formed is more important than money. We should engage in relationship with one another even if no grant money moves. Relationship is not transactional.
- IKhana fund offers different levels of relationship to philanthropists, depending on where they are willing to meet.
- Funders have problems that Indigenous partners can help solve. Support is not a one-way street that follows only the flow of financial resources.
- We realize there are aspects of being in relationship that funders may not be used to. We must learn what these are so we can communicate them.
- We should be a good host when we invite someone into our Place

About the Work We Do

- There must be flexibility of time in the work we do.
- The processes of what we do are more important than outcome.
- We will try to articulate what success looks like, but it may not be possible to satisfy a Western funder's expectations of success metrics.
- Indigenous groups must lead collaborative endeavors, within our Land-based, relational ethical systems.

- Indigenous Process is essential. It is not enough for Indigenous people to simply be involved in a project for it to be truly "Indigenous" in its values, methods, and principles.

The following First Principles are for Indigenous People, and apply to the ways we collaborate with people of Western culture.

- We should talk to you as if you already know the things we are talking about, remembering that we just need to help you reveal Knowledge from within yourselves.
- We Indigenous recipients pledge to tell you what you need to know in order to enter this space with us.
- We Indigenous recipients will ask your motivation for entering this space with us.
- We Indigenous recipients will do our best to keep things simple and straightforward, as much as we can.

The following First Principles are for people of Western culture and apply to the ways they should behave in collaborative relationships with Indigenous people.

- Western collaborators must recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous people/s.
- Funders must relinquish control over our collaborative work together.
- Everyone is welcome on the Land and to Country, but the traditional owners/custodians of Land should be acknowledged.
- Because there must be flexibility of time in the work that is done, the donor cannot set those limits.
- Because the processes of what are done are more important than outcome, the donor cannot set demands for specific expectations of outcome. However, assumptions or hopes about outcome possibilities should be communicated for the purposes of fostering understanding as we learn to work together.

- Because it may be difficult or impossible to articulate what success looks like, the donor may not stipulate expected metrics of success. Again, assumptions or hopes about what success would look like should be communicated for the purposes of fostering understanding as we learn to work together.
- Western collaborators must be transparent about the source of the resources they intend to contribute to the work we do together. Since all things are connected, certain kinds of resources from specific sources may be inimical to the work to which they would be applied. It is essential to make sure that resources do not carry lethal toxins into environments that will be harmed, rather than benefitted, by what these resources bring. We will ask you about the sources of funds you offer us, and you should let us know if you're aware of a potential problem we do not see.

To Think About Going Forward:

How will we repair breeches in our agreement once we formulate it as a working document? It will be impossible to prevent all problems, but we should have processes for restorative justice or some other means of repairing relationships harmed by miscommunication, misunderstanding, or the challenges of cross-cultural collaboration. As we proceed into collaborative relationships that apply these First Principles in a working way, we need to keep detailed records of the process and also of the ways these Principles help the group members better understand situations in which assumptions and methods have come into conflict. It is especially important that we record the means we try to use to resolve problems if the agreement we've drafted seems to have been violated by one or more of the parties involved in the collaborative project. The purpose of such records is solely to assist all the participants, Indigenous and Western, in better understanding how we can make our collaborations more powerful, more effective, and more synergistic.



Acknowledgements

Although I wrote this narrative in a first-person singular voice because of the way Knowledge moved within the writing process, the ideas expressed in this work emerged from many hours of collaboration with an entire team of people who engaged in resource-sharing, discussion, laughter, and the occasional thoughtful disagreement that always led to deeper understanding of what we're trying to do and why.

Three people were particularly strong presences throughout a process that began more than three years ago now. Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) and Fiona Cram (Māori) have been co-leaders of the IKhana Fund team from the start. They have worked hard over email and in the occasional Zoom session to help shape ideas enough that we could even start to pull an IKhana Fund planning team together. They contributed ideas, publications, dreams, experiences, wisdom, and strength to the entire effort. To all this, Shawn added an always ready sense of humor and an almost imperturbable equanimity, both of which kept things from upending themselves when the going simply got hard. For her part, whenever we were struggling to articulate a concept we couldn't find words for, Fiona almost always produced a brilliant professional quality graphic or incisive comment that expressed it perfectly. Jo Belasco, who is Tapestry Institute's co-president with me and has been part of our work for very close to 25 years now, was a mainstay throughout. She was always there to pitch in on everything from locating to formatting references, being our one-person computer tech support department, and figuring out the logistics of meeting as a group spread across 16 time zones. The most important things Jo brought to this work, however, are her constant presence as a sounding board, her willingness to engage in endless discussions about how we might proceed, and the breadth of knowledge of many kinds she brought to this work as an attorney well-read in environmental issues and the ways they are playing out in issues of Indigenous jurisprudence.

The rest of the IKhana Fund planning team brought such a wide range of expertise, knowledge, perspective, and perception to our joint endeavor that it's impossible to imagine having tried to do this work without them. John Njovu, of the Tande-Nsenga ethnic group in Zambia, reminded us, in absolutely essential and always clearly articulated ways, how to hold open space in the materials we are trying to prepare so they can support the experiences of our Indigenous brothers and sisters worldwide, on lands other than those of Turtle Island or Aotearoa. His experiences living in a situation that still deals with the fallout of a

governmental colonial system whose political and economic practices determine much of what happens, were particularly important to the group's ability to at least try to establish a system that could accommodate diversity beyond our own experiences. Jessica Venable, of Pamunkey and Mattaponi descent, constantly worked to help us navigate a different range of diversity that was at least as hard to understand, reminding us of the expectations people in Western philanthropy have when they meet groups such as ours, and helping us imagine ways we and our allies can communicate with these people more effectively to achieve our goals. Māori team member Bev Te Huia contributed the essential role that parents and families play in the work we're trying to do together, and the importance of keeping in mind an entirely different set of limitations that impact so many of our brothers and sisters who are trying to serve the Land's needs while simultaneously caring for multiple generations of family members in situations with challenging transportation and communication conditions. And last, but absolutely not least, team member, Julius Wassenas, who is Opaskwayak Cree, brought the perspective and tech-savviness of the younger generation we must also find a way to connect with, and somehow managed to do this with a level of responsibility, thoughtfulness, and expertise that is decades beyond his actual age. It speaks a great deal of Julius' gifts to tell you that the list of First Principles included here is possible at all because of the meticulous notes of our meeting he took it upon himself to record and enter into a group document we were all able to share and edit. That kind of incentive and creativity is unusual in a seasoned adult with grown children of their own. It's extraordinary in someone who's still in college. We feel blessed to be able to have Julius on our team.

Ceremony is almost unspeakably important to an endeavor of this type. We are deeply indebted to Marcus Briggs-Cloud (Maskoke) for opening our meeting with appropriate Ceremony, and to Pat McCabe (Diné) for helping us understand how we could engage the Lands of our different locations around the world in this work as we met in cyberspace.

Three other people who helped make everything possible include Tapestry Board Member Vicki Solomon, who has been a mainstay of our board and of Tapestry itself for a long time now. Her supporting Zoom chats as things unfolded and I worried about budget shortfalls and all the technical problems that keep having to be ironed out for a project like this kept me calmly certain we'd find solutions. Her financial support provided computer equipment without which we could not have met on Zoom or prepared this document. Jessica Sweidan, the IKhana Fund planning team's first Participant-Donor, also provided financial

support that helped make the meeting possible. She also piloted the first phase of a program that will permit select donors to participate in the work of the IKhana Fund team so they can begin to learn Indigenous worldview in something of an immersive environment. Sometimes it seemed the situations of our meetings sessions must have made Jessica feel more like a crash-test dummy than a test pilot, but she kept her aplomb and even her smile. And finally, I want to express gratitude to my brother, Dixon Hill, for several helpful conversations at various points in this process, and for reading the manuscript of the report we produced and offering very helpful feedback.

Beyond these people, I must extend words of very deep gratitude and appreciation to all those who wrote or contributed to the publications listed in the Bibliography. These are the people who have been forging a path into the landscape that's becoming recognized as something that is, at least potentially, Indigenous Philanthropy. I'm not sure we know exactly what it looks like yet, but these people are the ones who've been hammering the raw form into shape at the forge.

And finally, I wish to thank very humbly, and with the deepest possible feelings of joy, that which inspired the work called IKhana Fund, gave us the guidance through the Dreams and Visions we needed to understand how to respond to it, and provided us with the courage, the fellowship, and the bare minimum resources we had to have to midwife its birth. *Yakoke*, Land, Ancestors, and All Our Relations.

In particular, we thank the land of Pine Ridge, in northwestern Nebraska, which has given us home and partnership, for being the engine that has powered work it would have been impossible to do otherwise. The times are hard, we have done this work right through a pandemic, and we have been unable to meet in person at any time during the process. This Land, the Ancestors here and in the lands of our families, and All Our Relations here and elsewhere have carried us and brought us together every time things could so easily have come apart. This project could not, and would not, exist without their guidance, support, and power. *Yakoke!*

Dawn Hill Adams, September 19, 2022

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