



Algonquin Anishinaabeg Land Acknowledgement

LYNN GEHL, PhD, Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe

Ottawa was built on Algonquin Anishinaabeg traditional territory. The Algonquin Nation was one of the first Indigenous Nations that Champlain recorded as he travelled up the Kichesippi, best translated as the Great River, now called the Ottawa River.

Algonquin territory consists of approximately 48 million acres inclusive of rivers, lakes, boreal forests, rock, trees, four legged, winged, and finned. Through the creation of Upper and Lower Canada, now Ontario and Quebec, and through the French surrender of land that they did not own to the British, the Algonquin Anishinaabeg have been divided along the very river that once united them. Through the overlay of Canada, the nation state, and the imposition of a provincial federal order, the Algonquin are now divided by language, law, and religion. While approximately 39 million acres of traditional territory is in Quebec, 9 million is in Ontario.

Through processes of genocide inherent in colonization, which continues today, the Algonquin have been relegated to small plots of land. There are ten federally recognized First Nation communities made up of mostly registered status members: one in Ontario and nine in Quebec. These communities reside on only small fractions of the larger Algonquin Anishinaabeg traditional territory. Pikwàkanagàn First Nation's land base consists of a mere 1,561 acres; Barriere Lake only 59; while Wolf Lake has been denied a land base altogether. There are also many communities in Ontario, made up of mostly non-status members, that have been more formally organized to accommodate the federal government's need to define Indigenous rights in narrow terms, and they all lack their own collective land base known as reserve lands.

The Kichesippi has been subjected to the logging, hydroelectric, nuclear power, and the fishing and sport hunting industries. These industries have clogged the Great River, flooded important landscapes, and are currently dumping radio-active particles in the river. Moreover, the nuclear power industry is warming up the river through using the water to cool down nuclear reactors.

Although the Algonquin Anishinaabeg were emissaries during the 1764 Treaty at Niagara, and many of the men fought on the side of the British during the 1776 American revolution, and during WW1 and WW2, Algonquin were and are continually denied the jurisdiction of their land and resources.



Anishinaabe knowledge philosophy is a life way that situates humans within a broader context of the natural world versus a religion selectively practiced. Within this philosophy, the Four Sacred Elements – Water, Rock, Wind, and Fire – are valued as more intelligent than other beings. As such, places where they intersect are sacred. This way of knowing and being is best understood as emerging from the naturalistic paradigm versus the humanistic paradigm. Within this philosophy it is valued that women exist closer to Creator because they open the Eastern Doorway during child birth, and in terms of the nurturing and caring work that they do. Whereas men, in the work they do such as taking life and trees for sustenance, exist further away from Creator. In this way, it is said that Algonquin women hold more of Creator’s knowledge.