



PRESS RELEASE

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“There are very few places left on earth where nature and Indigenous Peoples are not under stress. We urgently need solutions that can ensure health and well-being for future generations.” (Danika Billie Littlechild)

Biodiversity decline is a major issue in Canada and globally. Species extinctions, along with problems of land and water quality, are not just environmental issues. These losses are also leading to impacts on human health and well-being, particularly for Indigenous Peoples. As more and more lands, rivers, plants, and animals are lost and degraded, disease risks and food insecurity will become more common. Indigenous cultural practices, languages, and knowledges are threatened; however, they can also guide us towards necessary transformation.

“Conventional policy approaches don’t help us understand and address the linkages between environmental losses and human health problems like zoonotic diseases (e.g., COVID19). We have to get out of our disciplinary and bureaucratic silos and recognize that these ecological losses are interconnected to human health. They also cause economic and social stresses on families and communities.” (Brenda Parlee)

Arramät is a new project funded for 2021-2027 by the New Frontiers Research Fund Transformations Program (NFRF-T) in Canada, that is being launched in response to this global biodiversity and health crisis.

“The *Arramät* Project is about respecting the inherent dignity and interconnectedness of peoples and Mother Earth, life and livelihood, identity and expression, biodiversity and sustainability, and stewardship and well-being. *Arramät* is a word from the Tamasheq language spoken by the Tuareg people of the Sahel and Sahara regions which reflects this holistic worldview.” (Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine)

Over 150 Indigenous organizations, universities, and other partners will work together to highlight the complex problems of biodiversity loss and its implications for health and well-being. The project Team will take a broad approach and be inclusive of many different worldviews and methods for research (i.e., intersectionality, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary). Activities will occur in 70 different kinds of ecosystems that are also spiritually, culturally, and economically important to Indigenous Peoples.

The project is led by Indigenous scholars and activists Danika Billie Littlechild (Carleton University), Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine (former President of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues), and Sherry Pictou (Dalhousie University). John O’Neil (former Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University) and Murray Humphries (Co-Director for the Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition, and Environment at McGill University), are also Co-Principal Investigators of the project. The University of Alberta is the lead institution for the project (led by Brenda Parlee, Nominated Principal Investigator).

“The research builds on the momentum and opportunities created in Treaties, by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)*, the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S)*, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*. We want to harness that momentum in ways that can create fundamental change to the status quo around biodiversity and health.” (Sherry Pictou)

Over half of the \$24 mil research budget will go directly to Indigenous governments and organizations to lead their own work in ways that respect, protect, and elevate the knowledges and Indigenous ways of life. Cultural security and social justice for women and those of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ and ancestral gender diverse communities, will be central to the work of this Team as they address fundamental questions of common concern. How can food security be strengthened for Indigenous Peoples? What are Indigenous-led approaches to conservation that support wild species and agrobiodiversity? What are the best practices for decolonizing education and science? How can we include the voices of Indigenous youth? How can we address the widespread and recurring violence against Mother Earth and Indigenous Peoples? Can we foster healthier relationships to nature? How can we emotionally and spiritually heal from the stresses and losses caused by colonial practices (e.g., residential schools), land and resource development, and climate change?

The diversity of Indigenous Peoples, knowledges, and interdisciplinary Team expertise will be mobilized through the project to produce action at local to global scales of decision-making. Dene, Nisga’a (Canada), and Batwa (Uganda) aim to produce new models of conservation for ‘species at risk’. Other groups such as the peoples of Treaty 8 and Treaty 3 (Canada), Yawanawà (Brazil), and Aymara (Bolivia) will focus on improving land and water security. Alternative economic and livelihood strategies (e.g., Indigenous Guardians) that benefit people and nature will be a focus for Indigenous Peoples in regions such as northern Canada, the Sahara and Sahel regions, and Thailand. The knowledge and customary strategies of Māori (Aotearoa-New Zealand) will contribute to the reconnection communities to their land and seascapes and regeneration of their cultural-ecological systems. The knowledges of Nêhiyawak (Cree), Sámi, and Tribal Peoples of India will be a foundation for action to rewild or restore cultural values and uses of other degraded landscapes. More than 140 projects will be funded on these and other themes over the 6 years.

“It is an honour and a profound responsibility to be part of this Indigenous-led project. It is unique from many other large projects in its embrace of governance models like ethical space, Indigenous research methodologies, and Indigenous Knowledges.” (John O’Neil)

“I am excited to see the work reveal how Indigenous Knowledges and stewardship practices define both the origins and contemporary centres of ecological research, biodiversity science, and conservation biology.” (Murray Humphries)

By 2027, the project will have produced a diversity of holistic and actionable solutions for improved stewardship and care for people and the planet.

“Strategies for biodiversity conservation have not historically been positive for Indigenous Peoples. They have a very small voice, if any, at the tables of decision-making. We don’t just want to be token members of the colonial structures that currently exist, we want to decolonize and Indigenize decisions about nature and health. Everyone needs to be accountable. We will not give up on Mother Earth and the possibility of renewing, strengthening, and elevating the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples, their lands and waters, and all beings who rely upon them.” (Danika Billie Littlechild)

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