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Interconnectedness With Trees: Culturally Significant Values

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What began as a personal inventory of items made from the land to show the value of trees, shrubs, and plants to Indigenous communities has opened a narrative about the restoration of Indigenous culture, bringing awareness towards reconciliation and cultural revitalization. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission must be committed to truly have a meaningful respectful relationship with Indigenous Peoples in Canada that promotes healing and wellness. Understanding the culturally significant values is just one step towards the reconciliation process.

In July of 2023, I was invited by the Canadian Forest Service to present to the 2 Billion Trees (2BT) program about what my connection is to the trees and the land. Referring back to the list I generated, I began to add these items into a PowerPoint presentation, and it grew further into a report called "Interconnectedness With Trees: Culturally Significant Values." As the list grew, there came a realization that there are many things made from several different trees; not all listed in the report. For example, the birch tree is just one of the trees in the list that had several items made from it.

I started keeping track of all the uses of not just the wood but parts of the trees—such as leaves, needles, fungus, gum, sap, bark, branches, buds, and roots—used every day in Indigenous culture. Ultimately, I was thankful for this understanding and in the end, I was proud to share my knowledge and connection to the land and trees. Sharing this Traditional Knowledge comes from living on the land. This knowledge not only comes from me, but it also comes from the land and the Creator. As an Indigenous person, I have always been taught to be thankful for what Mother Earth provides. The land becomes the teacher once you live on it a certain way, with no amenities. You begin to appreciate what it gives to keep you safe and warm, providing sustenance, healing, and wellness.

Types of housing structures, such as bush shelters, and ceremonial structures are all made from trees. These shelters are used while hunting and fishing for food, for gathering medicines while staying on the land, to carry out land-based activities, to survive, and to perform ceremonies. Gardens, structured with wood, provide sustenance and knowledge. The trees even tell us when to fish for





certain types of fish as well. These items, structures, and medicines are considered culturally significant values within the Indigenous communities. This ancestral knowledge has been interrupted due to residential schools in which survivors were stopped from sharing any knowledge that would help us live on the land.

Sharing this paper could bring the cultural awareness that is needed to ensure meaningful dialogue amongst First Nations, industry, and government.

A healing lodge and Sweat Lodge are not just structures; they are sacred structures used for ceremonies. They show the value and importance of the trees to our Indigenous Nation. The wood is from hand-selected tree species that are meaningful to Indigenous Culture. All the structures and items used provide healing and wellness and the pride of making something from the land, which is important to our people. Without the trees, our existence would be deeply affected even in the modern world.





Editorial note

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