

Clear Waters_{at} Muddy Pond

A Successful Case of Land Back in Kingston





Land Acknowledgement

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University are both located on the traditional and ancestral land of the Massachusett, the original inhabitants of what is now known as Boston and Cambridge. We pay respect to the people of the Massachusett Tribe, past and present, and honor the land itself which remains sacred to the Massachusett People.

Kingston is located on the traditional and ancestral land of the Wampanoag Nation. The Muddy Pond site that this report covers has now been returned to the Wampanoag Common Lands.



Positionality Statement

We are students from Harvard and MIT taking course 11.171 Indigenous Environmental Planning in DUSP at MIT in Cambridge, MA. Under the guidance of Janelle Knox-Hayes, Gabriella Carolini, and Jacqueline Paul, this brief was completed in partnership between the course and Native Land Conservancy.

The need for this brief arose after recognizing the depth of knowledge in indigenous communities, while acknowledging that they should not bear the burden of teaching and sharing their practices with non-indigenous peoples. Thus, after working alongside NLC for the Spring 2023 semester, this brief aims to provide an overview on the successful repatriation of traditional indigenous homelands into native stewardship, bearing an example of how change can be made. Our intended audience comprise of non-indigenous peoples who are interested in working with their local knowledge keepers but uncertain how to best navigate that process.





Seedpods cling to last season's milkweed stems at Muddy Pond as students from the MIT Indigenous Environmental Planning course socialize and build new connections. Most people know that milkweed is the sole host plant for monarch butterflies, but fewer know that milkweed is also an important source of fiber and medicine for Indigenous peoples.

Definitions

To begin, there are several terms that are used throughout this brief that you may be unfamiliar with. It is important to understand these terms thoroughly to understand our brief. Below are our suggested definitions.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) refers to the growing body of knowledge, practices, and beliefs held by Indigenous and local communities about the environment and natural resources that have been acquired through generations of living in close connection with the land, drawing upon cultural memories and sensitivity to change. It includes a deep understanding of the interrelationships between living and non-living things, the ecological processes

that govern them, and the methods for utilizing and managing natural resources sustainably. TEK is often rooted in oral tradition and encompasses a holistic approach to the environment, recognizing that all aspects of the natural world are interconnected and interdependent. It encompasses the world view of indigenous peoples, including ecology, spirituality, human and animal relationships, and more. It is an important source of information and guidance for sustainable resource management and has become increasingly recognized as a valuable complement to scientific knowledge in conservation efforts.

Land Back

"Land back" is a term used by Indigenous peoples and their allies to demand the return of land to

Indigenous communities that was taken from them through colonization, conquest, and forced removals. It is rooted in the belief that Indigenous peoples have a deep spiritual and cultural connection to their traditional territories, and that their land was unjustly taken from them. The “land back” movement seeks to restore this connection by returning control over the land, language, ceremony, food, education, housing, healthcare, governance, medicines, and kinship, and recognizing their sovereignty to ensure Indigenous self-determination. It is seen as a necessary step towards reconciliation and healing from the intergenerational trauma inflicted by colonialism. The movement is gaining momentum in various forms, including through legal actions, protests, and the establishment of Indigenous-led conservation initiatives.

Land Conservancy

A land conservancy is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to preserving and protecting natural areas and working landscapes for their ecological, scenic, and cultural purposes. A land conservancy works in partnership with landowners, communities, and other stakeholders to protect land through a variety of means, including acquiring land or conservation easements, providing technical assistance to landowners, and advocating for policies that support conservation. The goal of a land conservancy is to permanently conserve land for the benefit of current and future generations, while also ensuring that the land remains available for sustainable uses such as agriculture, forestry, and recreation. Land conservancies are an important tool for preserving biodiversity, mitigating the impacts of climate

change, and promoting community resilience.

For the scope of this brief, we will be focusing on the work of NLC, otherwise known as the Native Land Conservancy.



Downy Blue Violets





Cherry blossoms at Muddy Pond

Overview & History

The Native Land Conservancy

The Native Land Conservancy (NLC) was founded in 2012 in Mashpee, Massachusetts, and is the first Native-run land conservation group east of the Mississippi. NLC is a land trust run by indigenous peoples with the goals of preserving healthy landscapes for all living beings, returning land back to its original state whenever possible, and providing access for Indigenous people to exercise traditional lifeways in safe and protected spaces.

Leslie, one of the NLC co-founders, explained the decision to found a land conservancy as a way to re-empower indigenous people to provide a safe space for their tribes. The indigenous people of the

area have seen the beautiful cape, their homelands, disappear before their eyes; the hope was that an organization like the NLC could be used as a vessel to hold land, enabling its leadership to be a part of the movement to conserve native lands and protect their people.

Cultural Respect Easements

An easement is a legal document that provides a group with the right to cross or otherwise use someone else's land for a specified purpose. In this context, a cultural respect easement provides safe passage to indigenous constituents for traditional ceremonies and practices. As said by NLC founder and president Ramona Peters, it is "the closest

expression of land repatriation to indigenous people achieved without an actual transfer of deed. It offers assurance for us to safely access areas of our ancestral homelands to exercise spiritual and cultural practices. Respect for our culture includes respect for our relationship with the earth, especially in areas where our ancestors prayed, danced, toiled,

"clearing farm".

Catholic Girls Summer Camp

The 32.4 acre land track was formerly a Catholic summer camp, founded in 1947 by the Sisters of Divine Providence. Multiple buildings were constructed and operated on the site for the past 70+ years, impacting native species, the land, and the pond. Upon closure of the camp, the land was transferred to the donor family.

Geoengineering

15 buildings, athletic courts, and paved roads linking the buildings existed on the site, primarily stemming from its use as a summer camp. The pond banks have eroded due to overuse. It is important to note that the surrounding area of Kingston, MA has experienced rapid population growth, especially over the last decade which has further impacts on the land and adjacent waterways.

Invasives

Over time, invasive species were introduced to the land including autumn olive, black locust, gray willow, japanese barberry, japanese knotweed, multiflora rose, norway spruce, oriental bittersweet, and yellow iris. These species have a noticeable impact on the overall ecosystem and often crowd out native species like the white cedar, white oak, and northern red-bellied cooter.

Desire to Transfer

The donor family was intent on finding landing stewards who would appreciate the land, prioritize land health, protect the native flora and fauna, especially those that are endangered, and protect



Ichneumon wasp at Muddy Pond. These wasps are parasitoids, and help keep native insect populations in balance.

lived and were buried."

Land Owning Family History

There is evidence that in the 18th century, the muddy pond site was used as a sheep pasture and past groups have found some vestiges of dairy farming as well. There is also documentation showing that the Sisters of Divine Providence purchased around 600 acres, including the muddy pond site, from the Gurnett family. The land was referenced as the



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the land from being further exploited. The hope was that the new land stewards would be able to “turn back the clock” and rebuild the habitat for the native plants and animals, removing invasive species and obtrusive man-made structures marring the land. They began exploring options for potential stewards and came to realize that the ideal candidates were native people.

Initially, the donor family was under the impression that native people did not have the capacity to preserve and protect the environment in the way that the donors wanted. However, upon further research and meeting representatives from the Native Land Conservancy, the donors realized they were wrong. Peter Crawley, a representative of the donor family, saw Leslie Jonas present on climate change from the indigenous perspective at an annual meeting for area non-profits and connected both Leslie and Ramona Peters with the donor family. A partnership was formed as a result. The donors felt the NLC was the best path forward because it allowed the donors to partner with indigenous communities while minimizing the politics involved. Over the long process of creating the partnership between the donors and the Native Land Conservancy, much trust was built and both parties benefited. The donors wanted strong land stewards which they received through a reputable non-profit with governmental recognition and a history of doing good for the natural environment and the Native Land Conservancy got a parcel of their homeland back, which had dual benefits of increasing land access for the Wampanoag and providing a mechanism for the NLC to further their

conservation work.

The Muddy Pond Trust was created as a more palatable vehicle for “land back” from the viewpoint



Black zale moth at Muddy Pond. This species feeds on honey locust, a tree that was brought here from the Appalachian region. The presence of native control mechanisms, like moths, is what keeps native plant species in balance. Invasive plants, set free in our spaces with the absence of their ecological control mechanisms, invade our spaces and destroy our ecosystems.



A cone forming on a young pitch pine no more than three feet tall. These fire-adapted trees begin producing seeds early in their lives and are well-adapted to the sandy and rocky soils of the cape's ancient pine barrens.

Rematriation

Initial Challenges

In order to successfully receive this land back, members of the NLC had to engage with and work with the donor family and the Muddy Pond Trust, requiring the building up of a relationship, trust, and understanding on both sides.

Pete Westover, a conservation professional and ecology professor at Hampshire College, is working to create a book of case studies of successful land back experiences, and noted that many land back engagements, in which land is being given to indigenous people by non-indigenous owners, can be characterized by decades and even centuries of bias against indigenous people and their ability to

“do right” by the land they are now receiving. This can be driven by a suspicion of the other and a lack of understanding that traditional ecological knowledge is a valid and storied way of understanding and stewarding the land. This is often coupled with a fear that in ceding the land, something will be “done” to it that the previous landowners do not approve of or does not align with their goals for the land. This may be particularly true if that goal is the westernized concept of conservation and land preservation, rather than actively stewarding and utilizing it. For example, while for some organizations conservation means a landscape untouched by humans, NLC’s hope is for the Wampanoag commonlands to be a site of sustainable active use, aiming to recover



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plant populations to high enough levels to allow for sustainable harvest and gathering for cultural and medicinal purposes.

This perspective of whether the land-ceders should “let” indigenous recipients take certain actions or not on the ceded land is a systemic, hierarchical view of one party (and their perspective) being higher and more powerful than the other, and is in contradiction with the concept of land back as a step in native self-determination.

The process of returning this particular land back to the NLC was a similarly challenging one; though the donor family approached the conversation with openness and a willingness to learn, the process still required the breaking down of assumptions of those unfamiliar with indigenous people and their traditions. For example, the reason that NLC was selected as the recipient rather than a tribe was because the donor family was worried that a tribe might build a casino on their lands, as allowed by tribal laws. At times, conversations would stall, as these differing perspectives would come into conflict with one another, but ultimately understanding and an agreement was reached.

Obstacles and Complications

At first, the plan was to create a cultural acceptance center on the site where tribal members and other members of the greater community could come with their children year-round to learn about Wampanoag culture. The donors wanted the building to be LEED certified and an exemplar of green building standards. After a year of designing the building with

architects and discussing the details, the donors decided that they no longer wanted a building on the property. They wanted more minimal impact and because they had yet to transfer the land, they had the final say.

What Comes Next

Once the land was transferred, the NLC held a celebration and began planning for the future of the site. They collaborated (and continue to collaborate) with Wampanoag elders, both those on the board of NLC and others who are not directly related to the project, to learn more about what the community wants and needs from the site, including cultural buildings, ecologically and culturally significant plants, and other resources. They decided to remove the legacy buildings and athletic courts from when the site was a summer camp, which was an ambitious undertaking. Nonnative trees, like norwegian spruces, were removed and in their place native species significant to Wampanoag culture were planted.

Since the deed was transferred in 2022, many



Small milkweed bug (Lygaeus kalmii) at Muddy Pond. This is a native insect species that helps keep milkweed populations in balance.

groups have been out to Muddy Pond to help the land heal. Now a wetu and medicine harbor are being built and there is a desire to one day be able to use the surrounding water to paddle and enable further culture sharing with subsequent generations. In particular, because the Wampanoag commonlands are held by the NLC on behalf of the entire Wampanoag Nation, bands of the tribe that do not hold independent landbases now have access to land for cultural practice and preservation.

“We’re not looking at it as just this closed system that humans sometimes visit,” she said. “We’re looking at it as a space where the Wampanoag community can reconnect with their ancestral homeland in an active and deep way.”

Legal Process of Rematriation

The following will outline the different legal processes of rematriation as well as note the process relevant to the Muddy Pond. The ultimate goal in the legal process of rematriation is transference of a deed signaling private property ownership transference. A deed “is a legal document that grants ownership to a piece of real estate or other property asset.” (Cornell) Deeds create boundaries and allow one or more individuals to have authority over a piece of real estate, such as deciding what activities can take place on the land and what parties are authorized to utilize the land, with legal protection. A deed includes: owners, description of property, and an affidavit. To be considered legal, a deed must be

written. For Muddy Pond, the deed was transferred from the donors to the NLC giving the NLC full ownership of the land.

For other cases, co-ownership is another solution where multiple parties are listed on the deed. One or more individuals are authorized to be listed on a deed as co-owners. Co-ownership allows all parties to hold the same amount of ownership and authority over the land. Therefore, if the deed were to be passed, all co-owners must agree to the deeding.

Rematriation can come in both temporary and permanent forms. Forms of temporary rematriation include: licenses, easements, and leases. A real estate license agreement is a form of temporary rematriation. A license is an agreement between two parties: a licensor and licensee. This agreement allows the licensor to grant the licensee authorization to land use, activities that are authorized to be conducted on land, services the licensor will provide the licensee, and the period of time the agreement is valid for. Since a license is a legal agreement, there is legal protection for both parties if either party were to violate the agreement. Ultimately, the licensor has full ownership of the property and the property interest is not transferred. (“Form of Real”) (“When to use”) An easement agreement is another form of temporary rematriation. An easement is “a right to use someone else’s property in the ways described in the easement.” (“Easements & Rights,” 2016) Since the easement would be attached to a land property, the easement is called an appurtenant easement. Unlike a license, easements transfer interest of the property from the easement holder from the land



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owner and are presumed to be permanent. ("When to use") A lease is another form of temporary rematriation and similar to an easement in that the tenant is granted the right to occupy the amount of land for a specified period of time. Additionally, the landlord has full ownership of the property and the property interest is not transferred. Leases provide protection to both parties and are irrevocable and transferable. ("When to use") No forms of temporary rematriation were used in the transference of the Muddy Pond; however, the forms could be used in other cases as solutions.

Forms of permanent rematriation include: rights of first refusal, a life estate, purchase options, and irrevocable trust. The right of first refusal "is a clause in a contract that gives a prioritized, interested party the right to make the first offer on a property before the owner can negotiate with other prospective buyers." (J.P. Morgan Chase) The right of first refusal is an agreement between the owner and prioritized buyer where if the owner receives another offer can ask the prioritized buyer to match or renegotiate. The prioritized buyer then has the right to first refusal on negating the sale or matching/renegotiating with the owner. This agreement is used for the sale and purchase of a property and therefore would not be used if the ownership of the property is being transferred without compensation. Since the Muddy Pond was not bought by the NLC, the right of first refusal was not used in the transfer of ownership. A life estate is another form of permanent rematriation. A life estate "is created by a deed that gives the land to the person "for life" and identifies what should happen to it after the person dies." (Cornell) This

means that the transfer of land ownership would occur after the owner had passed onto the inheritor. While the owner is alive, they have the legal authority over the property but must ensure that the property is able to be fully used by the inheritor. Therefore, even if the owner sells the land while they are alive, once they pass the land automatically surrendered to the person stated in the life estate. An example of this occurred with Jeff Schwartz who is donating his home to the NLC after his passing. Purchase options agreement is another form of permanent rematriation. A purchase option agreement "is a legal document that gives an investor or tenant the exclusive right to decide whether or not to purchase a property during a set period of time." (Contracts Counsel) The purchase option includes a description of the purchase and sale of transferred warrants and shares as well as the warranties and representations of the purchaser and seller. An irrevocable trust is another form of permanent rematriation. Since the Muddy Pond was not bought by the NLC, the purchase option was not used in the transfer of ownership. An irrevocable trust "refers to any trust where the grantor cannot change or end the trust after its creation." (Cornell) Irrevocable trust provides legal protection for the grantor and beneficiary from potential estate taxes and creditors. Unlike wills, irrevocable trusts allow trustees to distribute and manage assets in accordance with the grantor's guidelines over a greater time period. This is the route taken by the donors where the Muddy Pond ownership was transferred to the NLC.

Land Rehabilitation

The rehabilitation of land of Muddy Pond will be carried out through the: demolition of structures, management of invasives, and cultural reconnection. The demolition of structures is one step to land rehabilitation. The intent to demolish a structure can be separated into two categories: intent formed at time of purchase and intent formed after purchase. Evidence of intent timing must be provided in either case. If the intent to demolish a structure is formed at time of purchase, "no deduction shall be allowed under section 165(a) on account of the demolition of the old buildings even though any demolition originally planned is subsequently deferred or abandoned." (Cornell) Therefore, the sale and purchase of the property is defined by only the land and any structures not intended to be demolished at time of purchase. If the intent to demolish a structure is formed after the purchase, "a deduction under section 165(a) is allowed...[for] the loss incurred in a trade or business or in a transaction entered into for profit arising from a demolition of old buildings." (Cornell) At the time of discussing transference of the Muddy Pond, the NLC and donors agreed upon the demolition of all existing structures.

Management of invasive species in order to reinvigorate native species is another step to land rehabilitation. Methods of management include biological, chemical, cultural, mechanical, and physical. Physical management of invasive species includes the physical removal of the species from the land. Mechanical management utilizes machines or tools to till, girdle, chop, or mow. Cultural management aims at changing human behavior to prevent the spread and success rate of

invasive species. Chemical management utilizes chemicals to reduce the spread and success rate of invasive species. Biological management is the potential introduction of natural predation for the decrease in specific invasive species. While all methods of management may be useful in reducing the amount of invasive species, some methods may cause greater harm to the overall wellbeing of the environment compared to others. (U.S. Department of Agriculture) Therefore, the NLC is focused on using both cultural management and mechanical management. The NLC intends to utilize education as cultural management and environmentally-safe practices such as tarps of invasive species to smother without introducing chemicals.

Cultural reconnection is the last step in land rehabilitation. Connected to cultural management, cultural reconnection can come in many forms such as conducting cultural educational activities for both the public and Indigenous peoples and cultural practices of land maintenance. Conducting educational activities for both the public and Indigenous peoples allows others to learn about protecting and preserving both the culture and land. Additionally, Traditional Ecological Knowledge informs cultural practices of land maintenance that contribute to the ecological health of the land and the well being of Native peoples.





Lessons Learned

Differences Between TEK and Western Conservation Practices

Traditional ecological knowledge is often portrayed as separate from science and academia, but many facets of traditional ecological knowledge are the result of thousands of years of careful experimentation by Native peoples. Traditional ecological knowledge has been created by peoples that have had thousands of years to learn how to sustainably manage the landscapes they inhabit, but Western science, which so often dominates conversations around land conservation and management, has had only a few hundred years, at most, to attempt to do what Native people have done and have known how to do for millennia. Often

papers or headlines are published announcing that science has finally “confirmed” something that Indigenous peoples have always known, but that Western society has cast aside as myth or folklore. This trend of only placing value in the literature of Western science ignores the rich ancient wisdom of the Native communities that inhabit our land. Certain Western scientific practices are indispensable parts of conservation and land stewardship in the modern era, but Western science must come to understand that traditional ecological knowledge, including that of cultural or spiritual significance, is the result of intentional and meticulous study of the world around us, and is based in Native science, which although different from modern Western science, must still be

held in high regard.

Often, Western conservation focuses on conserving a wild landscape with the intentional absence of humans as a piece of the landscape puzzle. The idea that natural balance and healthy landscapes require

Opposite Page: The winter rosette of Plymouth gentian awaits spring on the shores of muddy pond. This species is globally rare, occurs at only a few sites, and is a species of special concern in the state of Massachusetts. It is listed as near threatened by the IUCN. Despite its rarity and peril, it is abundant at Muddy Pond, and in July and August its pink blossoms will adorn the shores for weeks.

the absence of humans, however, isn't true—Native peoples lived sustainably on the land for hundreds of generations and the landscapes we inhabit today remained healthy, vibrant, and abundant under their stewardship until the arrival of European colonizers. The “virgin” forests that held immense quantities of carbon and biodiversity also held substantial human populations—they were not virgin to human presence, they were virgin to the presence of humans who did not understand or respect them. These systems have the potential to return to the abundance they once held, and they can do so with the presence of humans, especially when we acknowledge and learn from the vast traditional ecological knowledge of Native peoples.

Importance of Trust and Reciprocity

Indigenous peoples have innumerable reasons to be wary of outsiders who claim to want to build relationships with or offer help to their communities. As non-Native people and organizations strive to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, they must take the time to honor and

understand the historical and present structures that have together created this reality for Native communities. This understanding is one step in approaching relationships with Native people from a place of gratitude and humility, and can lead to richer partnerships that emphasize reciprocity rather than extraction. Native people not only hold answers to questions about land care and stewardship, but they are also the rightful owners and caretakers of our land; building these relationships is not just a chance to heal the land, it is a chance to begin to heal some of the scars of our nation's violent history. These relationships, like all meaningful relationships, take time, commitment, and patience. Through the process of our work, we have observed firsthand some of the relationships that have thrived, and some that have fizzled, with the Native Land Conservancy. Multiple community members have shared with us some of the ways they feel are best to begin pursuing these relationships, and they all boil down to demonstrating to Native people that you respect their valuable time. Preferred first meetings included compensated interviews, a shared meal, or simply meeting to walk the land together in order to know one another as people. These early stages must focus on establishing a foundation of trust, kinship, and reciprocity, rather than on harvesting the fruits from a relationship that has not yet had time to mature.

From the beginning of relationships, the importance of access to land for tribal people can not be understated. Our tribal partners have emphasized that Indigenous people *are* the land, and that the bond with the land of their ancestors is critical to the



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physical, mental, and spiritual health of their people. Gathering together on the land is a significant way to create and maintain relationships, especially as we honor Native people who have taken the time to forge trust and respect with outside partners.

Another critical aspect of building relationships with Indigenous people is autonomy. Tribal members have shared with us time and time again that one of the biggest challenges they face is that organizations often want to work with Native people, but rarely want to do so as equals. These organizations may have more land, money, or political influence than do Native groups, and they can and have used these power imbalances to exert control over those groups, taking the form of talking down to tribal members, resorting to legal action, and attempting to curtail the autonomy of Native peoples. Instead, non-Native groups that acknowledge these power imbalances must see them as opportunities to elevate Native voices, following their lead in conservation as well as in self-determination.

Despite their challenges, collaborations are extremely valuable, and growth through these relationships is always possible through perseverance and repeated commitment to doing better. Relationship-building and the opportunities for learning that it provides are simultaneously the most difficult and most critical parts of successfully returning land to Indigenous peoples. The future of Land Back is diverse in form and execution. The Native Land Conservancy understands this, and works to facilitate the diversity of repatriation through receiving deeded land, holding conservation restrictions, and creating,

pursuing, and holding cultural respect agreements. These three forms of land return to Indigenous supervision and stewardship constitute a broad range of management needs, but also allow for a broad range of donors to do what they can to facilitate the Indigenous land movement while accomplishing their own, meaningful goals. Where these goals overlap, in wanting the best for the land, in wanting it to have a bright and abundant future, are where meaningful and reciprocal relationships can begin to be fruitfully cultivated.



Haircap mosses growing in the rocky soils on the edge of muddy pond.

Future of Partnership

Since acquiring the deed to Muddy Pond, the NLC has been able to move forward in its goal of rebalancing the native ecosystem, beginning with the removal of 15 buildings leftover from its time as a camp. While the removal of these structures disturbed the habitats that had built up around them, it was necessary for the recovery of the land. Today, plants and animals are beginning to return to those spaces once occupied by the buildings, bringing with them hope for the future health of the ecosystem. Invasives management is another ongoing project on the site. With plants like Japanese knotweed, multiflora rose, and bittersweet choking out native plants and curtailing the habitats of native animals, the NLC is in the process of removing them to make

way for native species that carry cultural significance for the Wampanoag, including endangered ones.

The mission of the NLC at Muddy Pond, also known as the Wampanoag Common Lands, is to restore Wampanoag people's access to their ancestral land. The 32 acres held by the NLC is a place for Native people to be able to have access to fresh water, harvest sustainably for medicinal and cultural purposes, and gather in community. In service of this goal, the NLC has plans to build a wetu, a traditional Wampanoag shelter, in order to give respite from any inclement weather to those on the land. In addition, the NLC hopes to build a mishoon to paddle out onto the pond, and provide a space



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for craft making. As the NLC continues to steward Muddy Pond into the future, it will become a place for Native people to practice and protect Indigenous lifeways.

Part of the NLC's stewardship of Muddy Pond involves maintaining a relationship with the Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT), which holds the abutting 322 acres of the Muddy Pond Wilderness Preserve. Because the two organizations hold land so near to each other, the conservation decisions made by one affect the other, and vice versa. Currently, the NLC and NEWT are working towards a cultural respect agreement. Muddy Pond is currently the largest site managed by the NLC, but a cultural respect agreement with NEWT would open up even greater acreage to Indigenous people and practices.



*The fluffy caterpillar of the Isabella tiger moth (*Pyrrharctia isabella*) at Muddy Pond, in its characteristic ball defense position. These caterpillars can eat a huge variety of plants, and help to maintain balance in native plant communities.*



Wild violet

How to Get Involved

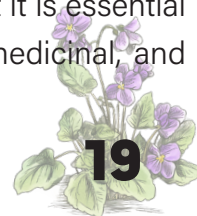
Land Back, rematriation, and reconciliation are collectively the work of healing several hundred years of painful colonization and dispossession. Accordingly, these processes can be long and challenging: they require both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parties to reach across cultural barriers, historic and personal traumas, and inevitable tensions. Despite the difficulties, they can also be one of the most profound and rewarding experiences for all involved. Different actors can get involved in different ways, but one thing holds true regardless of background: a commitment to relationship, respect, reciprocity and trust building are essential.

In addition to aligning one's heart and mind to those

critical ethics, a good starting point is to learn more about what traditional lands you live and work on. Becoming familiar with the tribal groups, customs, existing governance structures, policies, and treaties that exist will help you learn more about how to navigate towards a successful partnership. A good map of traditional lands can be found here <https://native-land.ca>

Land Owners

As discussed throughout this report, Cultural Respect Easements are some of the easiest ways to work towards rematriation. These can be structured in ways that work for both parties, but it is essential that access is allowed for spiritual, medicinal, and



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communal use. Relationships are critical in this regard: to ensure the safety and comfort of all involved, labor is necessary to establish friendships between owners and users. It is important to note that Indigenously stewarded lands benefit from better overall health, increased biodiversity, and more carbon sequestration. Partnering with Indigenous groups in this way can lead to a benefit to all involved: tribal groups gain access to their traditional lands, the land owner watches their land become healthier and more beautiful, and carbon is taken out of the atmosphere for the benefit of the earth and all its inhabitants.

Of course, giving land back wholly to Indigenous peoples is even better. While it can be a complex process, institutions like the Native Land Conservancy have the legal and financial infrastructure to provide appropriate and effective avenues for such donations. These are often meaningful and life-changing processes, met with ceremonious celebrations and maintained through lifelong relationships. It is important to note that land need not be given entirely— whatever can be contributed to the unfolding process of healing is significant.

Local Governments

Local governments have incredible power and opportunity to both create environments conducive to Land Back and participate in Land Back themselves. Cities across North America have identified public parcels to give back to the stewardship of local tribal groups, often to a Indigenous-led trusts like the NLC.

In 2020, the City of Vancouver in British Columbia passed a motion to create a “City Lands Policy Framework” that would prioritize the return of unused or underutilized city-owned lands to Indigenous communities. The framework also includes provisions for Indigenous-led land stewardship and the recognition of Indigenous cultural heritage. In 2019, the City of Oakland gave back a parcel of land to the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, an organization structurally and culturally similar to the NLC.

Though there are numerous additional examples of cities supporting Land Back in various ways, they ultimately fall within one of three categories: symbolic, incentivizing, and direct. Symbolic support looks like cities passing bills that express support for repatriation, land acknowledgements, and tribal autonomy. Such bills are helpful, but not nearly enough on their own. Instead, incentivizing bills follow up words with action. With a range of public policy tools, they encourage public and private actors to directly engage with Land Back. Tax abatements, economic zones, planning and zoning, and other strategies have been used successfully. Finally, direct action sees public governments giving land back to tribal groups, as was seen in Oakland and elsewhere.

Philanthropists

Often, tribal groups and trusts will buy land outright when Cultural Respect Easements or processes of return aren’t possible. These cases will often be urgent either for religious, conservation, or socioecological reasons. Philanthropists can be

catalytic in these situations. Existing partnerships that are maintained even in times where cash flow isn't immediately necessary make identifying these opportunities more efficient and effective. Depending on the receiving organization, gifts come with a range of benefits for the benefactor.

Individuals & Community Groups

The Land Back movement is happening in every region across the world and especially across North America. Find out how to be in solidarity by identifying the Native groups in your area and building relationships based on mutual aid. In this situation, personal education is paramount.



Common milkweed, a plant widely known for hosting the caterpillars of Monarch butterflies, also has several cultural uses for the Wampanoag. Here, the plant emerges from dormancy to greet a warm spring day.



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