

Sustainability Newsletter

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY LAUNCHES ITS FIRST SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

By: **Ledah McKellar**

Lakehead University publicly released its first Sustainability Plan at an event on Wednesday, October 2, 2019. Nearly fifty people attended.

The 2019-2024 Sustainability Plan demonstrates Lakehead's commitment to sustainability at both Lakehead Thunder Bay and Lakehead Orillia, and in the wider community.

At Lakehead University, sustainability is considered in an inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice and equity, Indigenous rights, secure livelihoods, workplace well-being, and leadership for vibrant and resilient communities.

"Sustainability is about protecting and maintaining the health of the Earth, and all living beings that the Earth supports. It is an urgent matter," says Dr. David Barnett, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic).

"There are numerous sustainability challenges, including climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, to name a few. Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can also be viewed as important in the context of sustainability," Dr. Barnett adds.

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coordinator.sustainability@lakeheadu.ca



Sustainability Plan



President and Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Moira McPherson presents at launch of Sustainability Plan. | Photo Credit: Brandon Walker

The plan was developed by the Office of Sustainability in collaboration with numerous faculty, staff, students, and community members who sit on the University's Sustainability Stewardship Council and its Working Groups. The framework for the plan was adapted from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's (AASHE's) Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS).

Lakehead's Sustainability Plan is comprehensive, covering the sustainability of the institution's curriculum, research, grounds, energy, dining services, waste, water, transportation, campus engagement, public engagement, and planning and administration.

While implementation of the plan will be a collective effort across the University, the Office of Sustainability will provide overall coordination.

The plan will benefit students, staff, faculty, and community members through the various commitments it makes, from increased sustainability programming to enhanced stormwater management of its grounds.

Building a culture of sustainability is a challenging but necessary transition. The power to create a more sustainable Lakehead University lies in collective action. The University invites the community to become involved in the implementation of the Sustainability Plan.



Provost and Vice-President (Academic) presents at launch of Sustainability Plan. Photo Credit: Brandon Walker

Ontario Master Naturalist Program

BECOME A MASTER NATURALIST THIS SUMMER: THE ONTARIO MASTER NATURALIST CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

By: Samantha Dewaele

The Ontario Master Naturalist Program (OMNP) is a community-based education program that provides participants with experience in the field of environmental stewardship, knowledge of the natural world, and a Master Naturalist Certificate.

As the first of its kind, the Certificate Program was created through a partnership between Lakehead University and Ontario Nature in the spring of 2015. The OMNP has offered spring, summer, fall, and winter Certificate Program sessions, with room for up to 30 participants in each. The program is composed of approximately 40 hours of instruction, both in the classroom and in the field, and participants are provided with a course package comprised of course notes and study sheets. Participants are also required to complete 30 volunteer hours with an environmental organization.

Over 180 participants have been awarded the Master Naturalist Certificate since the inception of the program. Thanks to its popularity at the Orillia Lakehead campus, the program has now been expanded to include the Thunder Bay campus when programming is available.

The Summer Certificate program ran last July in Red Bay, on the Bruce Peninsula. Module topics included: Flora; Mammals; Amphibians and Reptiles; Birds; and Insects and Other Invertebrates, alongside many others. As the Ontario Nature website notes, participants attained a strong base knowledge as well as met an avid community of naturalists during this program.



Katherine Crandall poses by a cluster of Northern Tooth Fungus during an Ontario Master Naturalist class. | Photo credit: Shania Van Dusen.

The Spring Certificate program is upcoming. Participants will learn about many different elements of the natural world. Topics range from a broad overview of geology and anthropology in the first module, to a specific focus on insects and other invertebrates in the final module. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, this year the program may be run virtually.

Keep an eye out for the expanding Fall and Winter Certificate programs, which focus on an array of subjects, including mushroom foraging, tracking, and winter dendrology.

Find more information about the program on the Lakehead University website.

Sustainability and COVID-19

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

By: Ledah McKellar

Not long after COVID-19 became a global pandemic, connections were made to principles of sustainability. Some of the connections seem obvious. For example, with a large portion of the world's population working from home, we have witnessed a dramatic global reduction in international travel. Consequently, demand for and use of oil dropped, which resulted in diminished greenhouse gas emissions and oil prices below zero dollars for the first time in history. Despite decades of appeals by climate activists, a global reduction in carbon emissions on this level has never been achieved.

As Lakehead University's Sustainability Coordinator, I believe it's important to explore the connections between the novel coronavirus, the work of the Office of Sustainability, and the broader sustainability field. The arrival of COVID-19 came with a sudden shock to our nation, indeed to the global community. Understandably, for many of us, our health and that of our loved ones has been foremost on our minds.

Sustainability offices at universities around the world are questioning how we can keep our communities actively engaged in the sustainability conversation while also being sensitive to the difficult and immediate realities we are facing. Some people worry that by making connections between the pandemic and sustainability, we risk being inconsiderate given the difficult and even traumatic experiences COVID-19 has brought; or that our hoped-for audience is too preoccupied; or that perhaps it is too soon for conversations about COVID-19 and sustainability.

But others suggest we cannot afford not to engage in this discussion if we want to avoid worse scenarios than what we face now. Guardian freelance writer, Peter C. Baker, claims that, "Although COVID-19 is likely the biggest global crisis since the second world war, it is still dwarfed in the long term by climate change".

There are many similarities between the COVID-19 crisis

and the climate crisis. Already there are lessons to be learned from the impacts of COVID-19 and how the world is responding. With a rapidly narrowing window to curb the worst effects of climate change, we do not have a lot of time to spare. Will we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis in a way that merely resumes the status quo, or will we use it as a catalyst to move beyond business as usual toward a more sustainable future?

These are early days. Using a baseball analogy, infectious disease expert Dr. Michael Osterholm claims we are in the second-inning of a nine-inning game. Undoubtedly, the lessons we learn will evolve and deepen over the coming months. But there are some early learnings to note.

The global pandemic is related to our collective health and well-being, the security of our livelihoods, whether our leaders promote equity among all peoples, and how we support one another in a time of uncertainty. It also brings into question the stability of our food systems, equitable access to housing, and expectations of how and where employees work. These are all issues related to climate change.

Both COVID-19 and climate change are systemic in that they affect all aspects of society and multiply risk by setting off chain reactions in a highly globalized world. Indeed, COVID-19 has revealed both the fragility of our economy and how the most vulnerable and marginalized among us are unequally affected in times of crisis. In Canada specifically, COVID-19 highlights ongoing disparities in a country shaped by a colonial past. Lack of access to clean water and medical resources, and crowded housing, for example, make many Indigenous communities vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19.

COVID-19 and the climate crises both also call us to examine our relationship with the natural world. Around the world, humans are manipulating the environment in ways that have had and are having a massively detrimental impact. Human activity is releasing

unprecedented levels of carbon into our atmosphere. One impact of this is the loss of habitat and biodiversity. Other impacts may unleash pandemics in the future. For example, some studies suggest that the thawing of the Arctic tundra may release ancient diseases. Closer to home, increasing temperatures are expanding the geographical reach of Lyme disease.

And while both the novel coronavirus and the climate crisis directly relate to our relationship with the natural world, it is our societal values as a species that have driven the impacts. Values that have so often put profit before people. A key question this current crisis presents us with, then, is how do we value human and ecological health? And how do we want to value them in the future?

In the last couple of months, we have seen governments respond to the global pandemic by taking actions previously thought impossible. For example, the Canadian government has made decisions influenced by science and that are in the interest of human health and wellbeing, despite sometimes detrimental impacts to the economy. Working from home, reduced global emissions, debt forgiveness, and wage subsidies cannot be seen as temporary because that have potential to mitigate the impacts of climate change. It should not take a global disaster to push governments to act in the interests of their people, he says. Can the current global crisis provide enough of a shock that it will reset our societal values?

In this current global climate, I think of climate activists, like Greta Thunberg, who to some seem strident and unrealistic. But if this global pandemic has taught us anything, it's that transformative change of the kind Thunberg talks about is possible. What needs to change in the long-term to ensure a better future for all, is our collective values. Too often we limit what's possible fearing repercussions to the economy. "It takes time", we say. But so much is possible if we can work together to envision a better world--the response to the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated what we can do when we act in unison.

There are multiple ways to emerge from this global health crisis. Like Naomi Klein has said, the crisis could

provide an opportunity for those with wealth and power to further push their own narrow agendas. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency is temporarily suspending penalties for pollution violations. In this crisis there will be, and already have been, terrible tragedy and loss. But the crisis also offers an opportunity to reimagine our future.

The challenge with the climate crisis is that it presents a much slower onset than the global pandemic. While the global pandemic reminds us of our mortality every day, the climate crisis is an emergency unfolding over decades, making it difficult to sustain a level of urgency on a daily basis. The irony, of course, is that the climate crisis has the very real potential to cause future pandemics.

The COVID-19 crisis is challenging me not to limit the possible. Pre- or post-COVID-19, the sustainability field calls for a new paradigm, an economy built on sustainability where all people's health is placed first, where social justice and equity is paramount, and where the ecological health of our planet is nurtured. A world where no one is left behind – human or other living beings.

The pandemic and the climate crisis were both predicted by scientists. As such, both the global pandemic and the climate crisis require national and global cooperation, a worldwide change in behaviour.

Ultimately, our challenge is to take individual and collective action to ensure the world we re-enter, post COVID-19, is a sustainable one. As Naomi Klein said, "The biggest risk for all of us is going to be frittering away this time sitting at home on our social media feeds, living the extremely limited forms of politics that get enabled there."

Instead, let's have the courage to imagine the world we want to live in and make it happen.

Lakehead Leader Award

LAKEHEAD LEADER AWARD: SUSTAINABILITY CATEGORY

This year, a record number of students were awarded the Lakehead Leader Award in the sustainability category, a program run by the Student Success Centre.

Congratulations to all of you!

Sustainability is collective work, and students have historically been on the frontlines of sustainable change. Thank you for your dedication. We are humbled by your leadership.

You can read their full profiles on the Student Success Centre website: lakeheadu.ca/leader



Jacob Kearey-Moreland, Master of Education, Orillia

(photo unavailable)

Jacob's work and support with the Farm Club and its activities at the Orillia campus express his drive to lead the development of innovative solutions that tackle complex problems.

In his dedication to food security, Jacob recently wrote a piece for the Argus about a collective food commons, which sparked initiative toward creative and collective solutions in his readers. Furthermore, he has produced local, organic Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) food boxes for a number of years and provides his community with an abundance of fresh food weekly.

Shadiya Aidid, Master of Health Sciences, Thunder Bay

Shadiya is currently researching how to make the environmental justice movement and climate change activism more accessible to marginalized communities who are disproportionately affected by climate change. Shadiya was recently the LUSU Sustainability Initiative Coordinator. She is also a member of Fossil Free Lakehead, and has been a member of the Lakehead University Sustainability Stewardship Council and Sustainability Executive Advisory Committee for the past two years.

When asked why she is passionate about sustainability, she said: "As an inhabitant of this planet, I believe that it is my responsibility to do my part in seeking climate justice by community organizing, and educating others through my research and my art. It's essential that we frame climate change, not as a problem of the future, but one that is having an immediate and disproportionate impact on our most marginalized communities. We must encourage sustainability in our homes and on the streets, empowering one another to critically analyze what we are complacent in, and where we can put our energy in making our future sustainable and equitable for all."



Shayla Auld, Natural Resource Management, Thunder Bay

Shayla is in the final year of her undergraduate degree in Natural Resource Management. She devoted her honours thesis to analyzing the awareness and behaviour of Lakehead University students regarding plastic usage. This information will be useful to the Office of Sustainability's waste-related planning. She has also constructed a business plan to implement an affordably priced Green Store Co-op on campus.

Shayla works part-time at the not-for-profit organization, Youth Fusion, to help reduce the school dropout rates of at-risk youth.

When asked why she is passionate about sustainability, she said:

"As the only extant human species on Planet Earth, I believe that it is our utmost responsibility to prioritize sustainability, while encouraging others to follow suit. For this reason, among others, it is my passion to educate the public about the consequences of the climate and plastic crises and what we can accomplish by taking action right here at Lakehead University."



Rachel Portinga, PhD in Health Sciences, Thunder Bay

Rachel taught Environmental Science for the last five years in her previous workplace and acted as Faculty Advisor to the student-run Sustainability Club. She has volunteered for Lakehead's Office of Sustainability, and is a member of Fossil Free Lakehead. She is also the Network Coordinator for the Lake Superior Living Labs Network. In that role she helps connect diverse people working on socially-just sustainability projects across the Lake Superior watershed.

When asked why she is passionate about sustainability, she said:

"I have a personal goal to positively influence the affairs of the world—and ecological and social sustainability is how I work towards that goal. Ecological and social sustainability provide a framework that can guide our decisions towards a healthier world, but it will not matter if enough people haven't heard of sustainability or don't understand it. So my passion comes from a deep place of educating others about sustainability concepts, why it is necessary, and how to tangibly work towards sustainability goals. I try to help others visualize a sustainable future and take steps to make it a reality."



Sanjana Sharma, Computer Science, Thunder Bay

Sanjana is pursuing her undergraduate degree in Computer Science. She has played a primary role in establishing the Lakehead University Meal Exchange Chapter, which promotes food produced on local farms, and advocates for equitable and sustainable communities through student-run initiatives. In this work, Sanjana aims to ensure access to ‘good food for all’ at Lakehead. She also sits on the current Board of Directors for LUSU.

When asked why she is passionate about sustainability, she said:

“I have found myself focusing more on reducing my carbon footprint lately because I believe that the planet that has given us life deserves better than the degradation it has had to endure for all these years. It is everyone’s responsibility to not hurt the environment for personal gain or sheer lack of awareness, and one of the best ways to do so is through sustainability—consume less, (re)use more!

This personal endeavor of mine is turning into a professional project as I continue to align my values with those of Meal Exchange’s, and I can’t wait to explore more ways to bring sustainable, equitable, and accessible food to our campus!”



Courtney Strutt, Master of Education, Thunder Bay

Courtney’s thesis is focused on how community activists can address the crisis of values behind climate change-related solidarity work between Indigenous People and settlers. She has also supported curriculum development for the Climate Change Pedagogy course and is a member of the student group Fossil Free Lakehead. Courtney is a member of EarthCare’s Climate Adaptation Working Group and played a key role in prompting the Thunder Bay City Council to declare a climate emergency.

When asked why she is passionate about sustainability, she said:

“As living beings, we are undeniably interconnected with the world around us. While in many ways modern capitalist culture has tried to convince us otherwise, I am committed to learning more about the beauty and complexity of the places that hold me. I am passionate about sustainability work and activism because to me, engaging in sustainable actions reflects this curiosity, as well as the care and responsibility I must assume as a human being on this earth.”

THE Impact Rankings

LAKEHEAD PLACES 98TH IN THE IMPACT RANKINGS

The Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings are the only global performance tables that assess universities against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Comparisons are made across three broad areas: research, outreach, and stewardship. This year, 766 universities from 85 countries participated. Of those, Lakehead ranked 98th.

In 2015, the SDGs were unanimously adopted by world leaders at the UN as part of the 2030 Agenda. The agenda includes 17 SDGs with 169 targets. According to the UN "The SDGs are a set of priorities and aspirations to guide all countries in tackling the world's most

pressing challenges, including ending poverty and hunger; protecting the planet from degradation and addressing climate change; ensuring that all people can enjoy prosperous, healthy and fulfilling lives; and fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies free from fear and violence. "

Lakehead University recently became a member of Sustainable Solutions Development Network Canada (SDSN), which is the Canadian branch of a global network supporting the SDGs at universities. Many of the SDGs align with the University's Sustainability Plan, and the Office of Sustainability looks forward to continuing to find innovative ways to advance sustainability.



Depaving Campus

FROM CONCRETE TO CLASSROOM: RESTORING THE NATURAL WATER CYCLE

By: Ledah McKellar

Lakehead University, in partnership with EcoSuperior Environmental Programs, conducted a Depave Paradise project on the Thunder Bay campus in the summer and fall of 2019.

Depave Paradise is a program of Green Communities Canada where volunteers and neighbourhoods remove unwanted pavement in underutilized spaces and naturalize them with native plants, shrubs, and trees. This project leveraged funding granted to EcoSuperior from Green Communities Canada's Depave Paradise program, as well as additional funding from Lakehead University and the TD Friends of the Environment Fund.

The project removed 100 m² of deteriorating grey infrastructure on campus land and replaced it with native plant gardens and an outdoor classroom. When left unmanaged, urban stormwater (rain or snow) can carry heavy metals, excess nutrients, bacteria, and other pollutants directly into rivers, while also causing damage to habitat, infrastructure, and property. Most storm sewers in the region flow directly into local streams.

By replacing hard surfaces with green spaces, the Depave project restores the natural hydrological cycle by absorbing rainfall and mitigating flooding, filtering pollutants, increasing campus stormwater management and the use of native plant species, and beautifying the area. It also created an outdoor learning space where students and the community can gather and learn about green infrastructure and other topics.



Volunteers help plant the demonstration gardens. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar



Volunteers help remove the concrete. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar



Volunteers during planting day. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar

This project builds on other initiatives at Lakehead University. For example, in 2018 the University installed its first rain garden in response to the University's 2019-2024 Sustainability Plan. This Plan commits to increasing the use of green infrastructure on campus, including treating water as a resource rather than a waste product. This project will be a further step toward realizing this commitment. The project also complements stormwater initiatives led by both EcoSuperior and the City of Thunder Bay.

The space was named M'wade Gaazhi Namaadibinaanowin Outdoor Classroom (Anishinaabemowin for "A Place Where People Sit Down"). The classroom is nestled within the University's arboretum. To continue the theme of ecological learning, it was designed as a space where students and community members can gather outdoors for classes and learn about native plants. Interpretive signage will highlight some of the plants and their traditional uses by Indigenous Peoples.

The four demonstration gardens represent the boreal forest ecosystem, the tallgrass prairie ecosystem, ethnobotanical uses of plants, and pollinator-friendly plants. Many of these plants are locally and culturally significant and are used widely by Indigenous Peoples for edible, medicinal, and ceremonial purposes.

The classroom and gardens are important as they are a symbol of reclamation and resurgence of Indigenous traditional knowledge and they create a space to celebrate the importance of our relationship with the Earth.

Special thanks to the students, faculty, staff, and community members who helped design and install this classroom.

For more information, please email
<coordinator.sustainability@lakeheadu.ca>.



M'wade Gaazhi Namaadibinaanowin Outdoor Classroom. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar

Lake Superior Living Laboratories Network

CONNECTING RESEARCHERS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS ACROSS THE LAKE SUPERIOR WATERSHED



Food Justice Summit.

LSSLN members and other Minnesota Food Justice Summit participants tour the rooftop gardens at the American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) and learn about their programming, services, and mission. Nov 2019.

Photo credit: Rachel Portinga

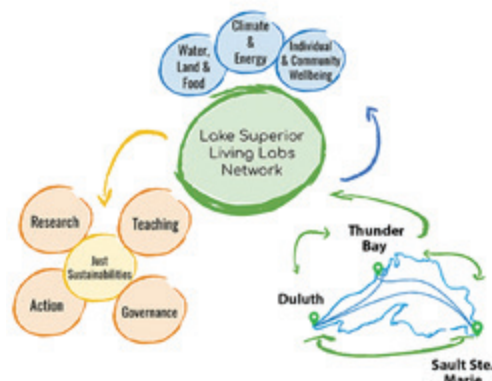
By: Rachel Portinga

Ecological impacts of humans on the earth are among the most pressing concerns of our generation. Across the Lake Superior watershed, the implications of rapid and widespread ecosystem changes include species extinction, loss of biodiversity, declining human health and well-being, and increasing inequality. While there have been many efforts to address these challenges, existing solutions tend to work in isolation limiting opportunities for large-scale change.

To address these challenges, the Lake Superior Living Labs Network (LSSLN) was established in Spring 2019 as a platform to connect researchers and community groups across the Lake Superior watershed. Partners in the three hub cities - Thunder Bay, Duluth, and Sault Ste. Marie - have connected through the network as a way to foster relationships with each other and our

watershed while developing collaborative initiatives at the intersection of water, food, land, climate, energy, and individual and community well-being. In Thunder Bay these groups include Roots to Harvest, the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy, EcoSuperior, Earth Care (City of Thunder Bay), and the Sustainable Food Systems Lab at Lakehead University. Since September 2019, LSSLN members have been connecting through Hub meetings, workshops, and attending conferences together.

To date, participants have completed the first annual survey and the information collected will help us identify common goals, policy interests, and challenges. In the coming months, we will begin a series of interviews with LSSLN members and create case studies of each organization and research project. The interviews will also explore challenges of learning and working together across the Lake Superior watershed. The research findings will be shared back with the LSSLN to provide opportunities for their consultation and feedback. A big thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting this project. Find out more about the LSSLN at www.livinglabsnetwork.org



“Braiding Sweetgrass”

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR

By: Ledah McKellar

When a coworker recommended the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), little did I know it would change my life.

I have been working as Lakehead University’s Sustainability Coordinator for four-and-a-half years, and in that time, I have come across many different interpretations of the concept of “sustainability”. Anyone seeking to define “sustainability” knows it is a term that differs from person to person and place to place. Since assuming the role of Sustainability Coordinator, I have sought to practice sustainability from a holistic and place-based manner--challenging as that can be.

I enrolled in African Studies for my undergraduate work at McGill University. African Studies is, perhaps surprisingly, connected to sustainability. The program taught me about systemic colonial violence, how colonialism contributed to the industrial revolution (such as through the trans-Atlantic slave trade), white privilege, decolonization, and the importance of dismantling socially, economically, and environmentally unjust and inequitable systems. All are concepts integral to sustainability.

For many years, sustainability was a term narrowly associated with environmentalism, and as a consequence concepts of social justice and equity have often been sidelined (although this is changing). And while there is no society or economy without the environment, they are all deeply interconnected.

Take the well-known case of Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (also known as Grassy Narrows First Nation) for example. In the 1960s and 1970s, former owners of a mill upstream of the community dumped industrial effluent containing mercury into the English-Wabigoon river system. The water became so contaminated that a thriving commercial fishery had to be closed and



Like a spider's web, we are all connected. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar

the community’s economy was devastated. Some residents have continued to eat fish from nearby rivers and waterways, and Japanese researchers have found that more than 90 percent of the population shows signs of mercury poisoning. This sobering example of environmental pollution illustrates how the three main pillars of sustainability--environment, society, and economy--are intricately connected and vulnerable to one another.

When the surrounding environment became contaminated by economic industry, the people of Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation’s health and livelihoods were affected. Canada’s economy has historically relied heavily on natural resource extraction, such as the lumber industry in this example, but the negative impacts of these industries are often felt by those least responsible. The Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation case exemplifies environmental racism, a major sustainability challenge, and why social justice and equity, and Indigenous rights are fundamental aspects of sustainability.



Lichen is a symbiotic relationship between fungus and algae. Reciprocity in action. | Photo credit: Ledah McKellar

This is all to say that in my time as a sustainability professional, I have come to witness the importance of understanding and practicing sustainability comprehensively and from a diversity of worldviews. Too often, the term sustainability within and outside of universities in Canada has been shaped by white settlers, and therefore is subject to the blinders worn by those with privilege in class, sex, gender, ethnicity, ability, and so on. What would a sustainability that was shaped by multiple worldviews look like?

Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* begins to answer this question. Her book blends Indigenous science and worldviews with Western science, motivated by a love of storytelling and plants. As a scientist, award-winning professor, member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, and lover of plants, Kimmerer is well positioned to do so.

Principles akin to sustainability were practiced in many Indigenous communities thousands of years before the term sustainability entered popular discourse, and Indigenous communities have been leaders on the frontlines of protecting ecological and human health. As such, Indigenous worldviews and ways of being

can have profound influences on how sustainability is understood and practiced.

Kimmerer's book rarely uses the word sustainability, and I suspect this is intentional. But I would argue that the major themes she discusses – reciprocity, gratitude, and interconnection – are all vital aspects of a deeper sustainability that we need to embrace.

For example:

On Interconnection:

A fundamental concept of sustainability is the understanding that all living beings are interconnected parts of ecosystems, and we depend on our relationships with one another to survive. As Kimmerer notes, "our very existence relies on the gifts of beings who can in fact photosynthesize" (*"Returning the Gift"*, 2013). As humans, Kimmerer calls on us to see ourselves as "only one member of the great democracy of species and understand that we, like every other successful organism, must play by the rules that govern ecosystem function. The laws of thermodynamics have not been suspended on our behalf" (2013). Understanding our interconnectedness is humbling because it challenges us to see the voices of other living beings as equal to our own.

One way we can do this, she says, is through the "grammar of animacy" (*"Braiding Sweetgrass"*, 2013).



Predator and prey: a steelhead spawns next to minnows. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar

Kimmerer notes that in English grammar a being is either a person or a thing. The majority of words in the English language are nouns, conveying a world that is largely perceived as inanimate. For example, in English we refer to a wolf as “it”. In one word, the English language can strip the agency of a living being.



Labrador tea in the boreal forest--a medicinal gift from the Earth. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar

Language is pivotal in shaping our view of the world. Kimmerer asks us, is it possible that the English language allows us to exploit the Earth without moral consequence? Consider the Potawatomi language (a dialect of Anishinaabemowin), Kimmerer says, where living beings are considered as family, and therefore referred to with agency. The word for a stream, for example, is “to be a stream.” It is a verb, conveying a living being that is alive and dynamic. Conversely to English, the majority of words in Potawatomi are verbs, conveying a world that is largely perceived as animate. Kimmerer invites us to refer to other living beings as family, as beings with personhood. In doing so we acknowledge their voice as equal to ours and enter a relationship that holds accountability. We engage in reciprocity.

On Reciprocity:

With relationship comes responsibility, and with that responsibility comes reciprocity. As Kimmerer says, “though the Earth provides us with all that we need, we have created a consumption-driven economy that asks, “What more can we take from the Earth?” and almost never “What does the Earth ask of us in return?”” (“Returning the Gift”, 2013). Reciprocity asks us, as humans, to consider the Earth and all its living and non-living beings in our actions. How do our actions affect feedback loops? How might we operate differently, in a way that honours our relationship with others? How might we give back? In the words of Kimmerer, “our



Nature's beauty. | Photo credit: Ledah McKellar

role as human people is not just to take from the Earth, and the role of the Earth is not just to provide for our single species.... Not only does the Earth sustain us, but that we have the capacity and the responsibility to sustain Her in return” (2013). While humans cannot photosynthesize, gratitude, Kimmerer claims, is one of the powerful ways humans can give back to the Earth.

On Gratitude:

Kimmerer names the practice of gratitude as a radical act, a notion I now see as indispensable to sustainability. “Gratitude propels the recognition of the personhood of all beings and challenges the fallacy of



A trumpeter swan takes flight. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar

human exceptionalism—the idea that we are somehow better, more deserving of the wealth and services of the Earth than other species.... The practice of gratitude can, in a very real way, lead to the practice of self-restraint, of taking only what we need” (“Returning the Gift”, 2013). Some of the most global definitions of sustainability have centered around the idea of continuous consumption. Though these definitions emphasize the importance of responsible consumption, they are still attached to a mindset that sees the world’s resources as ours for the taking. Gratitude, on the other hand, challenges us to feel content, share, consume less, and to develop a deep sense of care for the land.

Perhaps the most significant takeaway from Kimmerer’s book is her call for a collective reverence for the land. Kimmerer writes with a deep and impassioned love for the Earth that is infectious. It is this reverence that has been disrupted by increased industrialization, colonialism, individualism, and globalization. Kimmerer calls this disconnect species loneliness, “a deep, unnamed sadness stemming from estrangement from the rest of Creation, from the loss of relationship” (“Braiding Sweetgrass”, p. 208). But the instinct to care for the land exists within each of us, longing to be

nurtured. Nurturing a loving relationship with the land can profoundly change the way we act by humbling our place within ecosystems and instilling a duty to care. Embracing the concepts of interconnectedness, reciprocity, and gratitude may be a critical step to reawakening that reverence. Perhaps the first step in this process is to develop a sense of place.

As the University Sustainability Coordinator, I facilitate a sustainability tour for the University community, which takes participants through the nature trails on our Thunder Bay campus. More frequently than not, many of the people don’t know these nature trails exist.

Several years ago, I was enrolled in a Placed-based Education class taught by Dr. David Greenwood, Canada Research Chair in Environmental Education. Our first activity was to fill out a 20-question bioregional quiz. The quiz asked questions like, “Name five edible plants in your region and their seasonal availability”, “Where does your garbage go”, and “What is the land use history where you live”? I failed the test. I had never realized how little I knew about the place I live.

Sustainability is very connected to our sense of place. How can we understand our impact on other living beings if we do not know how our garbage is processed,



Water lily. | Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar



A campfire against the backdrop of a recent boreal burn. The cycle continues.
Photo Credit: Ledah McKellar

or where our food comes from? How can we understand other living beings' impact on us if we do not know their behaviour, habitat, and gifts? If we want to live sustainably, knowing the place we are in does matter. Getting to know our place allows us to strengthen relationships with other living and non-living beings. Developing a sense of place cultivates accountability, so that as African Studies taught me, we may then aim to dismantle unjust and inequitable social, economic and environmental systems and in turn make decisions that allow places to thrive. Ultimately, a sense of place will also reconnect us to Mother Earth and, hopefully, reawaken within us a reverence for the land. In a time where we are witnessing major sustainability crises, this could not be more critical.

This may be more of a challenge to settlers, who are relatively new to this place, Turtle Island (also known as North America). Kimmerer argues that "Immigrants cannot by definition be indigenous. Indigenous is a birthright word. No amount of time or caring changes history or substitutes for soul-deep fusion with the land.... But if people do not feel "indigenous," can they nevertheless enter into the deep reciprocity that renews the world?" (p. 213).

While this journey will be different for each person, whether you are a settler, Indigenous to this place, or a refugee, like Kimmerer I choose to believe it can be done, and it must be done. Embracing sustainability with the benefit of multiple worldviews, including Indigenous worldviews, can deepen how we understand it. Practicing sustainability is not easy. But it starts, perhaps, by going outside and getting to know your place. And maybe, by reading *Braiding Sweetgrass*.



The Sustainability Coordinator behind a sheet of Lake Superior ice. | Photo Credit: Lee Amelia

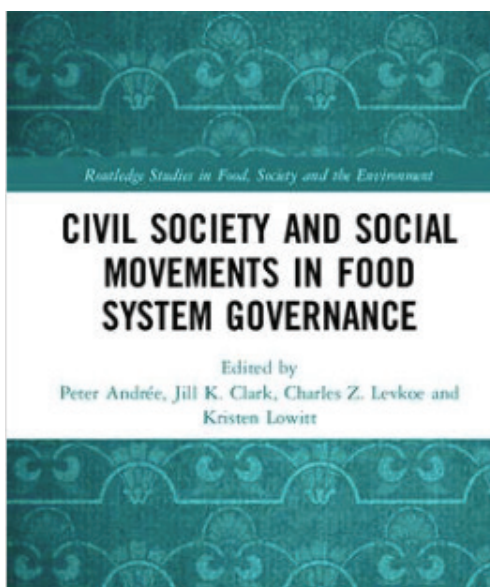
Citations:

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013, October 1). Returning the Gift. Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.humansandnature.org/earth-ethic-robin-kimmerer>
BioRegional Quiz found in *Coevolution Quarterly* 32

Recent Publication

TRAVERSING THEORY & PRACTICE AND THE GOVERNANCE ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM



By Charles Z. Levkoe, Peter André, Jill Clark & Kristen Lowitt

Food systems are in crisis. For social movements and organizations working at the front lines to build more sustainable and just food systems, this crisis also represents an opportunity. *Civil Society & Social Movements in Food System Governance* provides an array of examples from the Global North of how members of food movements are attempting to make change by getting involved in food system decision-making, or 'governance', both inside and outside governments. Local government engagement is exemplified in the case of Correns, France, where organic food advocates have harnessed municipal government to further sustainable community development in their rural community. Formal

government engagement at the national level is examined in a case study of participation in the national food policy consultation process in Canada. While another chapter highlights the case of social movement engagement in the World Committee on Food Security.

Food governance is about more than simply working with governments. Governance refers to all of the relationships, processes, rules, practices, and structures through which power and control are exercised and decisions are made, whether by companies, organizations, governments, Indigenous authorities or international institutions. The case of the YYC Growers and Distributors, a new food producer's cooperative in Alberta, exemplifies the creation of collaborative food system governance mechanisms outside of government, though the chapter on YYC also shows how local and provincial governments had to be engaged to ensure success.

These are examples from just four of the ten chapters covered in this new book, which can be thought of as a primer for food system activists working to strengthen alliances and governance around their own innovations. Published in February 2019, *Civil Society & Social Movements in Food System Governance* includes chapters featuring case studies from Canada, the US, Europe and New Zealand. Most chapters are grounded in research supported through the FLEdGE project, and were discussed at a project workshop in September 2017.

To set the scene for the on-the-ground case examples that follow, the book begins by introducing the concept of neoliberalism, or the predominance of the private sector and markets as prime concerns, as a defining feature of contemporary food systems. We also review the range of ways that social movements characterize the food system and seek to make change – from food security, to right to food, to food sovereignty.

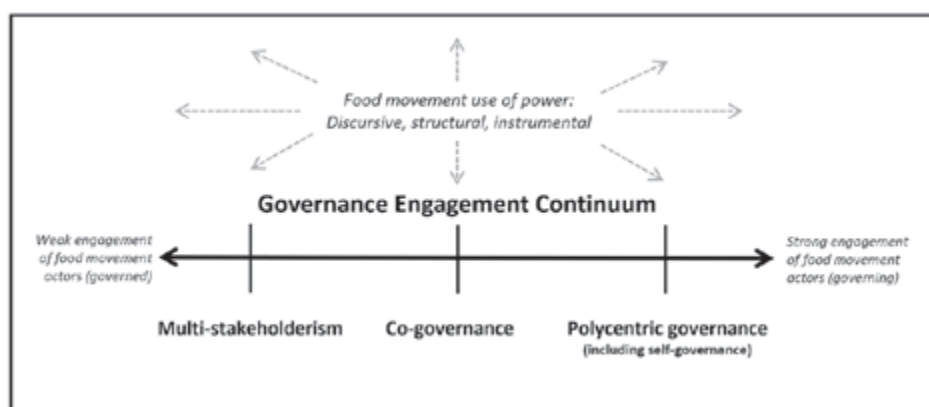


Photo Credit: Charles Z. Levkoe, Peter Andr  e, Jill Clark & Kristen Lowitt

In addition, we present an original framework for thinking about the variety of forms that social movements engage in food system governance. We suggest these forms may be situated along a continuum, emphasizing how social movements experience and work with power.

Governance Engagement Continuum: The role of food movements

This collection illustrates four main ideas:

1. Food movements are increasingly engaging in governance to have a wider, systemic, impact.
2. Food movements engage in governance at a variety of scales, though there is an emphasis on the local scale.
3. The variety of forms that governance engagement takes can be placed along a continuum when considering the power that social movement actors wield.
4. Building relationships with other actors based on

mutual trust and commitment is central to achieving change. This volume highlights how many of the relationships built through local food initiatives may become the foundation for broader collaborations.

By examining and comparing a variety of ways social movements engage in decision-making, at a range of scales, the book offers insights for those considering contemporary food systems and their ongoing transformation by social movements. Alongside the cases featured in this book, we hope that the framework presented in Chapter 1 will be helpful for other communities and researchers to examine what is happening with food in their own backyards.

Civil Society and Social Movements in Food System Governance is an open-access book.

You can read it online or download for free here:
routledge.com/Civil-Society-and-Social-Movements-in-Food-System-Governance-1st-Edition/Andree-Clark-Levkoe-Lowitt/p/book/9781138588073



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