

Odoogimaakandaan:

Building  
Understanding,  
Connections, and  
Relationships through  
35 Years of the  
Niagara Escarpment  
Biosphere

Niagara Escarpment  
Biosphere Network



# Niagara Escarpment, an UNESCO Biosphere

- In 1990, 725km of the Niagara Escarpment was designated as a biosphere
- One of four Ontario biospheres, one of nineteen Canadian biospheres
- Recognition through collective advocacy of **communities, partners, and organizations**

# What is a biosphere?

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- Promotes **harmony between humans and nature**
- Integrates **biodiversity, sustainable development, and education**
- A place of learning, balance, and connection for generations

## Biosphere Reserve functions



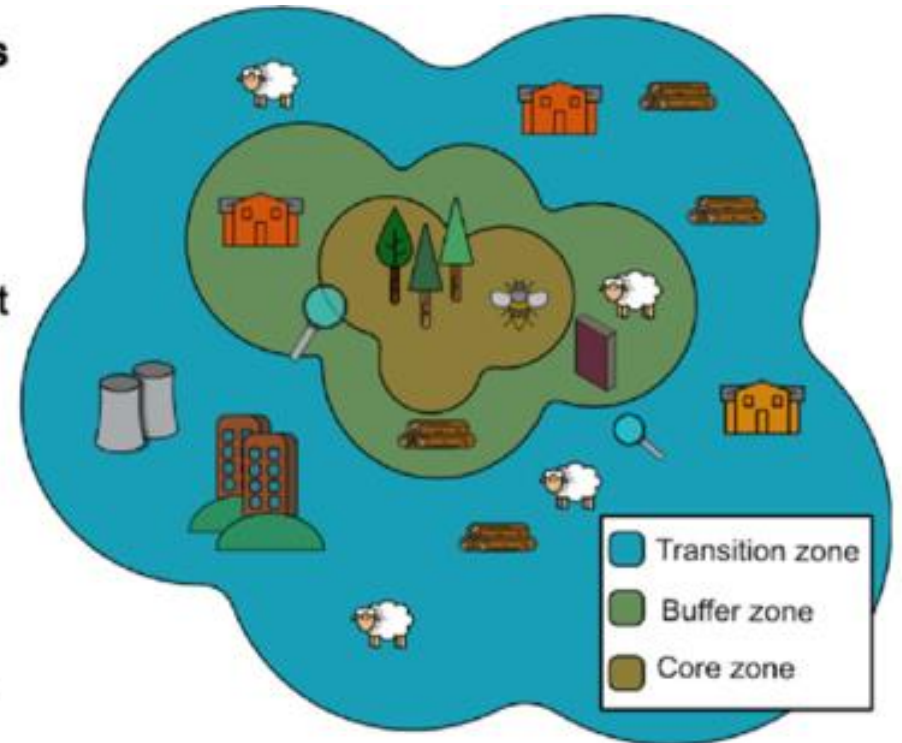
Conservation of biological and cultural diversity



Economic development that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable



Logistic support, underpinning development through research, monitoring, education and training





# Transition to the NEBN

- Established to **restore balance** and strengthen community connections
- **Governed through co-leadership**, Indigenous & non-Indigenous voices
- Guided by **Two-Eyed Seeing** and **ethical space**
- A **living laboratory** for co-governance in action

# Indigenous Worldview and Natural Law Framework

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- Mother Earth does not need managing. She needs remembering.
- Co-governance is not a structure we create; it's a relationship we restore.



# Defining the Indigenous Worldview

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- G'chi-M'nidoo — the Great Mystery
- Four Sacred Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Wind
- Every being has a role; every role carries a duty.
- Governance as a circle of care



# Understanding Natural Law

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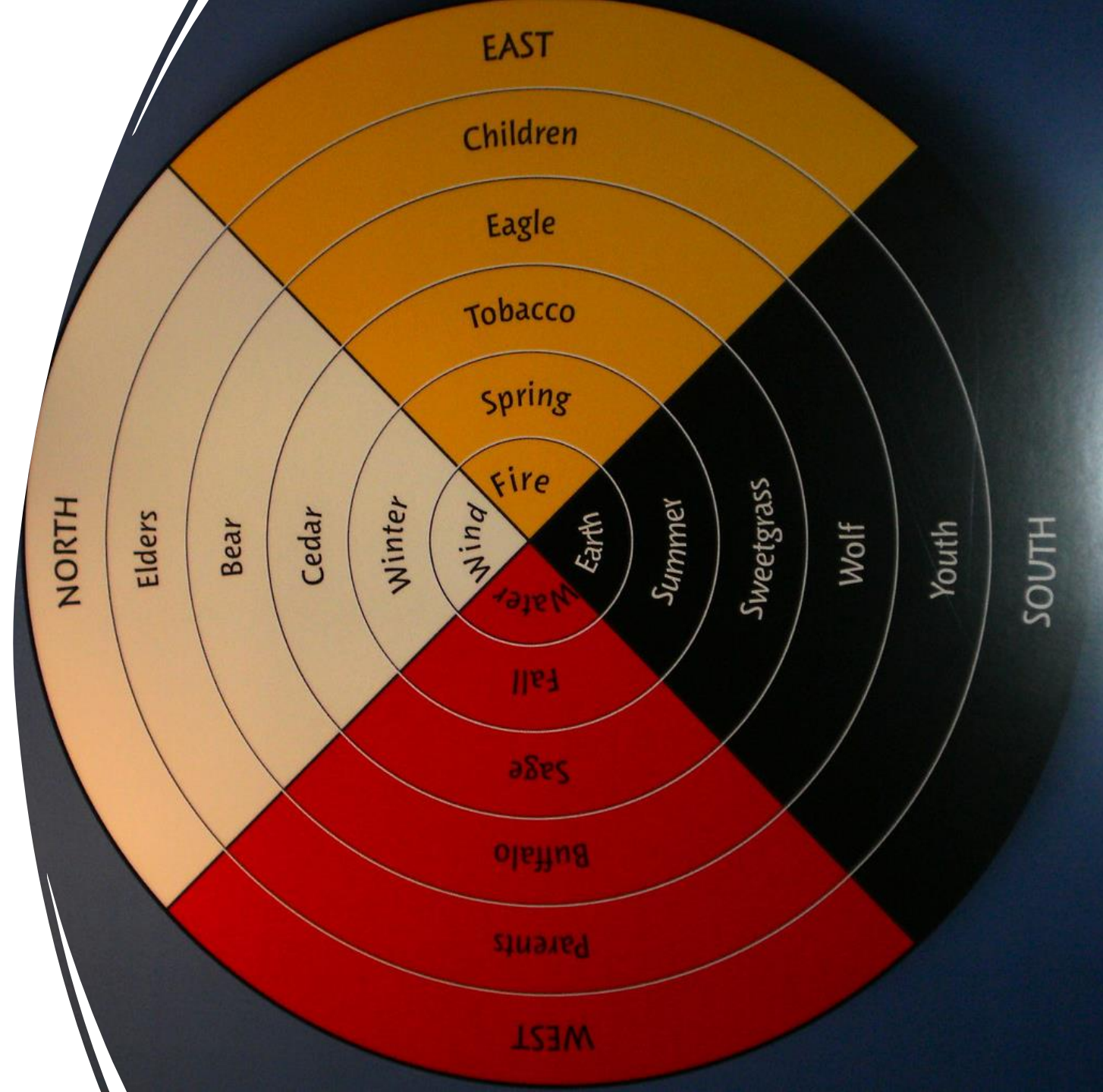
- “Indigenous law is oral — but it is written into Creation.”
- Law of balance, order, and relationship
- Written in the Wolf, Eagle, Bear, Fire, Water, and Wind
- Natural Law = The first law
- “Not to reclaim something lost, but to remember what’s always been written.”



# Principles of Indigenous Governance

- Four Circles of Governance: Medicines & Teachings, Women & Children, Elders, Men
- **Seven Grandparent Teachings:**
  - Wisdom (N'bwaakaawin)
  - Love (Zaagi'idiwin)
  - Respect (M'naadendamowin)
  - Bravery (Aakode'ewin)
  - Honesty (G'wekwakwaadiziwin)
  - Humility (D'baadendiziwin)
  - Truth (Debwewin)

"These are operational laws of leadership and accountability."



# Why Transition to Co-Governance

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- Western frameworks cannot capture sacred relationships
- The biosphere = a living system of shared responsibilities
- Indigenous law brings foundation, not addition
- “Indigenous knowledge isn’t culture added to policy — it’s ethical decision-making.”



# Two-Eyed Seeing and Ethical Space

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- Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing):  
Balance between science and spirit
- Clan system: Natural Law across  
Creation
- Ethical Space = Equality between  
worldviews

“True collaboration isn’t built on  
access — it’s built on accountability.”

**Humans are a part  
of nature, not  
apart from nature.**

**Marc Bekoff**

[veganposters.com](http://veganposters.com)

# Current Reality Check and Myth-Busting

## Myth

- Reclaiming means takeover
- Co-governance means losing control
- Indigenous knowledge is spiritual, not scientific
- Indigenous governance is unstructured
- Inclusion equals co-governance

## Reality

- Reclaiming restores balance
- Shared stewardship, not surrender
- It's empirical and relational
- Deeply structured through clans and ceremony
- Inclusion = consultation; co-governance = shared authority

We don't need  
more managers  
of the Earth...

We need  
caretakers willing  
to be changed by  
her.



# NEB Projects in Action: Activating the Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs) network

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- Builds **partnerships & shared stewardship** across the Escarpment
- Supports and recognizes **existing guardianship practices**
- Partnership with **Ontario Nature** to assess & guide designations
- *Interested? Contact:*  
**[tashagunasinghe@plentycanada.com](mailto:tashagunasinghe@plentycanada.com)**



## NEB Projects in Action: Nature's Contributions to Life

- Partnership with **Brock University & Plenty Canada**
- Developing a **new assessment model** grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing
- Shifting from “nature-as-service” to **reciprocity and respect**
- Grounded in **co-governance, Two-Eyed Seeing & ethical space**

