

Community Sharing Circle Briefing Note Bloodvein First Nation, Manitoba

Briefing Note of IISD's Natural and Social Capital Program and the IISD Foresight Group

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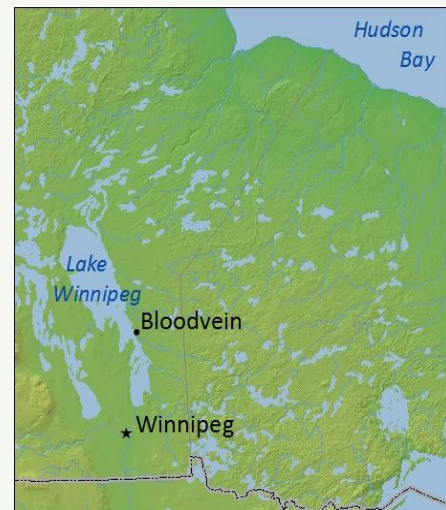
Purpose and Context of the Sharing Circle

An interactive sharing circle-style workshop was held in Bloodvein on February 17, 2011 to explore a series of questions to better understand how the local environment helps maintain and improve the well-being of First Nations peoples living in remote communities. The sharing circle also discussed observed changes in the local environment and how the community might possibly cope with and adapt to future environmental changes related to climate variability and change.

The sharing circle was facilitated by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). The insights compiled serve several purposes, including informing local planning efforts and the Pimachawin Aki's proposal for World Heritage Site status. IISD will also harness the insights to help advance practical terminology and framework for communicating to policy-makers the important linkages between human well-being and the variety of products, services and benefits provided by the boreal environment.

About Bloodvein First Nation

Located on the east side of Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of the Bloodvein River, approximately 193 km north of Winnipeg, Bloodvein First Nation is a signatory to Treaty 5 with an outstanding treaty land entitlement on their land. The reserve has an area of 16.25 km² and a total population of 1,620 (as of August 2011), of which 1,013 live on the reserve.¹ Of the total population, 350 persons declare as being employed, the majority working in the services sector (health care, social services, educational services, government services, sales) and the rest in the trades and the primary and processing industries (transport, manufacturing, utilities, equipment operators and related occupations). Fishing and trapping also support livelihoods within the community. There is semi-permanent road access that ends approximately 10 km from the reserve; during the winter it can be reached by a winter road that crosses Lake Winnipeg.



¹ First Nation Profiles: http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNMain.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=267&lang=eng

What Was Shared by Participants

The members of Bloodvein First Nation have always had strong ties to their environment, but with social and environmental change, the strength of that connection has weakened. The community has begun to realize those impacts, especially related to the availability of clean water and access to traditional foods. The workshop served to highlight the important contributions that the natural environment provides to the community and explored the changes that it has undergone and will likely undergo in the future. With future scenarios in mind, the sharing circle wrapped up with the community identifying a few actions that could be considered to address perceived future risks.

The following is a summary of the sharing circle discussion.

Contribution of the Environment to the Well-Being of the Community

Bloodvein First Nations participants shared many ways in which the local environment contributes to their well-being.

SERVICE PROVIDED BY THE ENVIRONMENT	CONTRIBUTION TO WELL-BEING
* Clean air, water and land are very important	* Water for drinking, habitat for fish and other animals and plants * Increasing waste in the community that pollutes land and water and there is also pollution from industrial activities (sawmills) * Muskeg (peatlands) help to naturally filter water
* The natural environment provides good food, including berries, fish, moose, geese and ducks.	* Wild meat for consumption (moose, ducks) * Presently we eat lot of costly and unhealthy (canned and refrigerated) food * Mushrooms to pick for consumption * Fish, but fish catches are small and the fish seems sick * We used to trap (but presently is too expensive to fly to the trapping sites or it would take a week of canoeing—it is more like camping than part of the lifestyle)
* Trees	* Wood for heating * Increasing erosion around the roads, rivers with disappearing trees in these areas * Wood and mosses used to make tikonogans (cradle board) * Forest helps provide clean air
* Medicinal plants	* Medicinal plants provided for the community * We are losing connections with traditions; we are not using the plants that we used to

The sharing circle participants emphasized that muskeg (peatlands) plays an important role in maintaining key services such as water, air and land. Muskeg provides air to breath, clean water and fish, and the land provides food and medicinal plants.

They were also concerned that the youth is less involved in traditional activities and they know less about traditional ways of managing water, air and land that could help in improving the quality of these ecosystems services: *“We are losing connections with traditions; there is less communication and sharing of knowledge and experience between elders and youth.”*

Observed Changes in the Environment

“The scale of changes in the availability of water, food and animals seems to be bigger in recent decades.”

Participants in the sharing circle described a range of specific changes in the natural environment that have occurred in recent years.

TYPE OF CHANGE	OBSERVATIONS
* Access to traditional foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Access to traditional food: meat (moose, ducks, caribou, fish, rabbits) and berries, mushrooms, and economic opportunity (martens) * Moose is less available (seem to be moving somewhere else, maybe because of wolves) * Caribou has disappeared * Less fish is available, because of illness and new, different species * Trapping martens - disappeared * We used to trap (but presently is too expensive to fly to the trapping sites or it would take a week of canoeing—it is more like camping then part of the lifestyle) * Berries are less available (also due to over-picking and careless picking that destroy the plant) * Presently eat lots of costly unhealthy (canned and refrigerated) food
* Changes in animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fewer migratory birds * Fish catches are small and the fish seems sick * Wild animals are coming more often onto the reserves (perhaps because of lack of food for them)
* Decline in air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Air is polluted from industrial activities (sawmills) * Air pollution is increasing in the community
* Decline in water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Clean water (for drinking, food for fish) used to available, but it is not anymore * Water is currently polluted (dirty, brown, full of algae) * Water level changes cause changes in wild rice occurrence (less availability these days) * Currently, clean water is available in the rapids only (not in the lake anymore)
* Vegetation changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Changes in muskeg (peatlands) are very important as they could influence the availability of clean water * Increasing erosion around the roads
* People have changed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increasing amount of waste in the community * Lost connections with traditions; less communication and sharing of knowledge and experience with elders * Weather-related health issues in the community (more frequent colds, heat strokes)

Participants were concerned about the magnitude of the changes and their speed in the muskeg (peatlands), water, land and air. They emphasized that *“some of the community activities contributed to these changes, such as more waste and hunting in areas around the community, while before we used to do this over the larger area.”*

Possible Ways to Cope with Future Changes in the Weather

With respect to potential changes in future weather conditions, participants of the sharing circle offered a number of ways to cope and adapt. Among the suggestions were the following:

- Help to adapt to our key species such as moose, fish so they are still available
- Buying more water (however, quite a number of families buy water already)
- Promote skill and knowledge sharing between elders and younger generations to enhance the capacity of younger generation to live more in sych with nature
- Creating strategies to cope (transportation and local economic challenges that are both important)
- The trapping site locations need to be revised
- Improvement of communication with the government
- Need more information on what is safe (how serious is the water pollution; presently the choices for healthy food is limited)
- Create information on expected changes in ecosystem services due to climate change
- Create information on potential adaptations
- Use lessons learned from initiatives focused on health
- Support youth camps where elders can teach traditional skills and knowledge
- Support young leaders in promoting change
- More focus on schools and education (also in traditional languages)

About the Researchers and Funder

Researcher and Facilitator: The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Website: www.iisd.ca

IISD contributes to sustainable development by advancing policy recommendations on international trade and investment, economic policy, climate change and energy, measurement and assessment, and natural resources management, and the enabling role of communication technologies in these areas. We report on international negotiations and disseminate knowledge gained through collaborative projects, resulting in more rigorous research, capacity building in developing countries, better networks spanning the North and the South, and better global connections among researchers, practitioners, citizens and policy-makers.

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IISD's new Natural and Social Capital Program is about people, places and planning for sustainability, and its innovative IISD Foresight Group researches, develops and applies integrated and forward-looking assessment tools and processes for local, regional and sector-based planning.

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For More Information

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