



Environment Newsletter

ONTARIO BIODIVERSITY SUMMIT



2025



On May 21st and 22nd Kenzie Tyler, Senior Policy Advisor with the Native Women's Association of Canada's (NWAC) Environment Unit, attended the 2025 Ontario Biodiversity Summit: *Our Turning Point for Nature*, hosted by the Ontario Biodiversity Council at Trent University in Peterborough-Nogojwanong, ON. The Summit brought together over 300 like-minded participants from diverse sectors, areas of expertise, and knowledge systems to identify common ground and build a united path forward for nature. Discussions focused on advancing Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy, which includes 13 targets and 43 priority actions.



NWAC attended the conference through its *Supporting Capacity of National Indigenous Representatives to Engage in Conservation* project. The purpose of this project is to amplify the voices of Indigenous women in all their gender diversity, highlight the systemic barriers they face in environmental and biodiversity decision-making, build meaningful partnerships, and gather and share knowledge presented at events with Indigenous women and gender-diverse communities.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND BIODIVERSITY

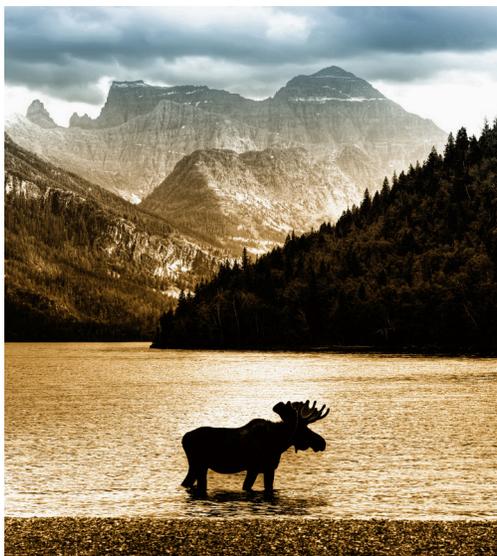


In alignment with NWAC's mission and vision to advocate for an inclusive world that understands and respects the diversity and uniqueness of Indigenous women, Kenzie participated in sessions at the Summit which centred on integrating Indigenous Knowledge, languages, and worldviews with Western science to cultivate a more holistic understanding of ecosystems and the vital role of biodiversity. One particularly impactful session, titled *The Importance of Indigenous Language in Conservation*, featured three Indigenous speakers who explored the critical connection between language and the relationship between people and the natural world.

The presenters emphasized how the loss of Indigenous languages, rooted in both historical and ongoing systemic injustices, has led to the disappearance of vital ecological knowledge embedded within these languages. They also highlighted the importance of being mindful when using English conservation terms in discussions with Indigenous peoples. One example they gave was the term "ecosystem services." As they explained, ecosystems are not here to serve humans; rather, humans need to adopt a mindset of kinship with the environment. Ecosystems don't provide a service, they offer us gifts. A particularly moving segment was led by a Knowledge Keeper and Language Teacher from Alderville First Nation, who shared how Indigenous communities name species based on their characteristics, uses, or behaviours.

For example, the plant known in English as Spotted Bee-Balm (Latin: *Monarda punctata*) is called Gaabizaanikweyaak in Ojibwe, a word that roughly translates to "a stick used by a woman to calm or quiet something." This name reflects the plant's traditional medicinal use for easing menstrual cramps during a woman's moomtime, illustrating how language carries deep ecological, cultural, and healing knowledge.

NWAC's participation in the Summit reinforced the essential role of Indigenous women in all their gender diversity in shaping biodiversity policy and practice. As Ontario moves forward with the implementation of its Biodiversity Strategy, it is critical that Indigenous Knowledge, voices, and leadership remain central to building a sustainable and inclusive future for all.



" Respect, Relationship, Reciprocity, Responsibility and Restoration - this is knowledge that comes from a place of spirit - a symbiotic relationship between nature and communities which creates a wealth of biodiversity " - Dr. Dan Roronhiakewen Longboat, Associate Professor and Director, Indigenous Environmental Studies, Trent University