

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Collaborative Environmental Governance and Indigenous Peoples: Recommendations for Practice

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Collaborative environmental governance scholars have increasingly recognized the need to engage Indigenous peoples in environmental decision-making processes. Barriers to doing so effectively are well known. Recognizing these barriers, some scholars have discussed recommendations from practice in regions where Indigenous lands have been colonized and where there are complex environmental problems. This article explores assumptions regarding Indigenous engagement in the practice of collaborative environmental governance and contextualizes these assumptions relative to the perspectives of Indigenous peoples. Concrete advice for environmental practitioners is offered that builds on findings from a previously published systematic review and empirical multi-case study of governance for water in British Columbia, Canada. Recommendations for practice offered here include the following: approach or involve Indigenous peoples as self-determining nations rather than as one of many collaborative stakeholders or participants; identify and engage with existing or intended environmental governance processes and assertions of self-determination by Indigenous nations; create opportunities for relationship building between Indigenous peoples and policy or governance practitioners; choose venues and processes of decision making that reflect Indigenous rather than Eurocentric venues and processes; provide resources to Indigenous nations to level the playing field in terms of capacity for collaboration or for policy reform decision making; and find

ways to support Indigenous nations in their own continued environmental decision making and self-determination.

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Collaborative approaches to addressing environmental challenges are being used in countries around the world. Broadly speaking, these approaches are characterized by deliberation among participants and a desire to achieve consensus (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Fish, Ioris, and Watson, 2010; Frame, Gunton, and Day, 2004). The rationale behind collaborative, multi-actor approaches to environmental problem solving emerges from the idea that decision-making power can be shared among stakeholders who negotiate face-to-face and reach consensus on a decision and that “those best suited to decision making are the individuals or groups most impacted by the potential planning outcomes” (Morton, Gunton, and Day, 2012, p. 507).

Indigenous peoples live in many places in the world where collaborative approaches are being used or promoted as a way to address environmental problems relating to forestry, fisheries, mining, and water use. When these approaches are designed to engage Indigenous peoples, it is commonly suggested that Indigenous peoples or communities are one of several “stakeholders” (Bark et al., 2012; Cronin and Ostergren, 2007; Fraser et al., 2006). Advocates of engaging Indigenous peoples in this way offer many recommendations for doing so more effectively. For example, Jackson et al. (2012) propose principles that will improve Indigenous participation in water planning. These include addressing the “diversity of Indigenous interests” (p. 62) and drawing on “available Indigenous knowledge” (p. 61). Other recommendations for improving Indigenous participation found in the practice-oriented literature include a two-tiered collaborative planning process (Morton, Gunton, and Day, 2012), the diversification of “governance arrangements

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for Aboriginal engagement” (Fortier et al., 2013), and developing partnerships between Indigenous enterprises or communities and industry (Hickey and Nelson, 2005).

The assumption that Indigenous peoples simply can be included as stakeholders in collaborative environmental governance processes that take place on their traditional territories is problematic (Singleton, 2009; von der Porten and de Loë, 2013). Specifically, the idea of Indigenous peoples as stakeholders (e.g., Cimo and Dobson, 2004) conflicts with how some Indigenous peoples see themselves: people who exist in nations that have not been relinquished to colonial governments (Alfred, 2009; Borrows, 2005; Simpson, 2008). The global Indigenous governance scholarship addresses topics such as self-determination (Coulthard, 2008; Simpson, 2008), Indigenous knowledge (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001), legal and inherent rights (Borrows, 2005; Turner, 2006), colonialism and decolonization (McGregor, 2004; Ortiz, 2011; Smith, 1999; Youngblood Henderson, 2000), environmental decision making (LaDuke, 2005; Paci, Tobin, and Robb, 2002; Spak, 2005).

The specific ways in which Indigenous peoples around the world articulate these concerns vary widely based on their own histories, cultures, and relationships with the colonial society in the places where they live. Relevant legal doctrines also differ from country to country. In this article, our perspective is strongly grounded in Canadian experiences. Hence, we are particularly concerned with concepts relating to Indigenous self-determination. These include Indigenous nationhood and *sui generis* rights.

Diverse perspectives on Indigenous nationhood and self-determination exist, all stemming from differing contextual, academic, and empirical interpretations. Nonetheless, a common thread is the consideration of Indigenous peoples as members of, or existing within, self-determining nations. For example, Alfred (2009, p. 70) asserts that “Indigenous nationhood is about reconstructing a power base for the assertion of control over Native land and life.” Since assertions of nationhood and rights relate to authority, jurisdiction and governance of lands, waters, and natural resources, these concepts provide a useful baseline for comparing assumptions in the Indigenous governance and collaboration literatures.

The Indigenous governance perspective provides an important lens for understanding the challenges that result from engaging Indigenous peoples as “stakeholders” in collaborative process. In this article, we draw on findings from a larger research project that critically evaluated the extent to

which principles and practices of collaborative environmental governance are compatible with Indigenous perspectives on self-determination. Empirical findings from the research, which took place in British Columbia (BC), Canada, revealed that using a stakeholder-view of Indigenous peoples while advocating their role in collaborative environmental decision making is problematic (von der Porten and de Loë, 2013). In this article, we build on these findings to distill recommendations for practice that address the interface between collaborative environmental governance and Indigenous governance. Importantly, our recommendations are based on the perspectives on self-determination contained in the Indigenous governance literature and on the emerging Canadian legal reality (e.g., *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014 SCC 44), which is reinforcing those perspectives.

Methods

In this section we outline the methods used in the larger study on which we are building. Full findings from that work are reported elsewhere (von der Porten and de Loë, 2013; von der Porten and de Loë, 2014a; von der Porten and de Loë, 2014b). Here we provide an overview of the methods used in these publications and explain how we built on this work to derive the recommendations for environmental practitioners presented in this article.

The conceptual foundation for the arguments advanced in this article are grounded in a systematic literature review that compared core underlying assumptions in collaborative environmental governance scholarship and Indigenous governance scholarship (von der Porten and de Loë, 2014a). The systematic review method allows analysts to identify patterns and trends in literature identified through consistent keyword searches (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). A total of 82 journal articles published between 2003 and 2012 that addressed collaboration with Indigenous peoples in countries around the world were analyzed (e.g., Booth and Skelton, 2004; Cimo and Dobson, 2004; Cronin and Ostergren, 2007; Takeda and Ropke, 2010). The analysis considered the extent to which the 82 articles reflected or were consistent with key concepts from the Indigenous governance literature (Alfred, 2005; Cornthassel and Witmer, 2008; Coulthard, 2008; Simpson, 2008). Key concepts from this literature that provided the basis for evaluation related to self-determination or self-governance, Indigenous nationhood, and Indigenous rights. For the most part, the analysis revealed significant incompatibilities (von der Porten and de Loë, 2014a).

The empirical foundation for our arguments in this article is a qualitative, multi-case study of the roles of Indigenous peoples in collaborative water-governance processes in BC (von der Porten and de Loë, 2013; von der Porten and de Loë, 2014b). The study used three regional cases (organizations involved in collaborative water governance in BC) and a stand-alone case at the provincial scale that provided insights into larger water policy reform processes. In each of the case studies, the jurisdictions of the organizations involved in water governance overlapped with the traditional territories of one or more First Nation (Figure 1). The three regional scale cases were the Friends of the Nemaiah Valley (FONV), involved in a watershed planning initiative; the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT), involved in facilitating participation in decisions related to water governance; and the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), involved in water management and advocacy. The stand-alone provincial scale case was the Water Stewardship Division (WSD) of the BC Ministry of Environment. This agency plays the leading role in the provincial government regarding water policy, planning and statutory administration of water rights (British Columbia Ministry of Environment, 2008). The WSD case provided a larger context for the analysis of the three regional scale cases. Major characteristics of the four cases are outlined in Table 1.

Data used in the case study research that provided the empirical foundation for this article (von der Porten and de Loë, 2013; von der Porten and de Loë, 2014b) were drawn from interviews, document analysis, and personal observations. Interviews, document analysis, and personal observations by the first author were undertaken during the field research period of August 2011 to January 2012. In total, 49 interviews were completed across the four cases with Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals involved in collaborative water-governance processes. Interviewees were recruited using a purposeful sampling strategy that emphasized their knowledge and involvement in governance for water in BC. All of the interviews were conducted, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim by the first author (Table 2). Draft interview transcripts were returned to interview subjects so that they could be verified—a process known as “member checking” (Carlson, 2010). Documents and personal observations provided additional data and a basis for triangulation with interview data. A total of 183 documents relating to the four cases were collected. The documents analyzed included documents and websites published by each of the case study organizations as well as pertinent documents from academic, organizational, and online sources. Personal observations

were collected throughout the interviews and at two public forums related to collaborative water governance.

Data from interviews, documents, and personal observations were coded to reveal the rationale behind collaborative environmental governance, how collaboration is approached (processes), underlying assumptions regarding Indigenous peoples relative to other actors, and the extent to which Indigenous concerns relating to governance and self-determination were recognized. Open and axial coding techniques were used. These themes were combined in a conceptual framework that guided initial coding. However, emergent themes were also coded during data analysis; these often related to practical considerations more relevant to environmental professionals. We draw heavily on these emergent practical considerations in developing the recommendations for practice presented in this article.

Foundations: Key Findings from the Larger Study that Underpin the Recommendations

In this section, we highlight key findings that resulted from this work and which underpin the recommendations in this article. The findings summarized here are elaborated as needed in the next section, where they are linked to the specific recommendations.

The systematic review revealed that contemporary collaborative environmental governance literature tended not to incorporate concepts related to Indigenous self-determination, nationhood, and inherent rights. Rather than being discussed as Indigenous nations, Indigenous peoples were commonly discussed in collaborative environmental governance scholarship as stakeholders (Bark et al., 2012; Fraser et al., 2006; Spellegacy, 2009), interest groups (Brown, 2009; Cullen et al., 2010; Robins, 2009), or minorities (Erazo, 2010; Shmueli and Khamaisi, 2011). Few articles in the pool of literature analyzed incorporated or reflected ideas of Indigenous self-determination, nationhood, or inherent rights.

Findings from the systematic review were consistent with findings from the empirical portion of the larger study that focused on the three regional cases (von der Porten and de Loë, 2013). In two of the three regional-scale cases, the CBT and the OBWB, the organizations involved in collaborative water governance (1) tended to operate with the assumption that Indigenous peoples were roughly equivalent to stakeholders, rather than nations; (2) did not reflect strong understandings of Indigenous concerns related to self-determination, nationhood, or inherent



Figure 1. First Nations Traditional Territories and Regional Case Study Locations in British Columbia, Canada.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Four Cases that Provided Empirical Evidence

Characteristic	Regional-Scale Cases			Provincial-Scale Case
	CBT	OBWB	FONV	WSD
Geographic Scope	Columbia Basin Watershed	Okanagan Basin Watershed	Xeni Gwe'In Territory	BC (whole province)
Type	Statutory regional development corporation under provincial authority	Board overseen by three Regional District governments; legal status conferred by provincial government	Independent non-profit society	Division of BC Provincial Ministry of Environment
Size ¹	Medium (33)	Medium (20)	Small (7)	Medium (31+) ²
Rural/Urban	Semi-rural	Semi-rural	Rural (remote)	Urban & Rural
Overlap with traditional territories	Five nations	One nation	One nation	203 bands, one "extinct" band

¹ Size is the number of people in the organization including staff, managerial, board members and technical advisors.

² The WSD is an agency of the provincial government. Thus, its staff are embedded in a much larger organization (the Government of British Columbia).

Table 2. Type and number of interview participants

Type of Participant	Number Interviewed
Member of water governance organization	18
First Nations leader	27
Key informant	19
Total Interviewed¹	64

¹ A total of 49 people were interviewed. Some participants were qualified to speak about more than one case where there was overlapping jurisdiction.

rights; and (3) tended to approach collaboration in a way that was disengaged from Indigenous approaches to collaboration linked to reasserted self-determination. Results from the third regional case, the FONV, revealed an approach to collaboration with Indigenous peoples that was informed by nuanced understandings of Indigenous self-determination, nationhood, and inherent rights; importantly, interviewees from the collaborating First Nation supported this finding. The findings from these cases challenge a common characteristic in the collaboration literature analysed which portrays Indigenous groups as simply another stakeholder to be incorporated into the process (Bark et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2012; Morton, Gutton, and Day, 2012; Tan, Bowmer, and Baldwin, 2012).

Insights derived from analysis of experiences at the regional level complemented the provincial-scale case, which focused on the water policy reform process implemented by the WSD of the BC Ministry of Environment (von der Porten and de Loë, 2014b). This case found (1) that the WSD tended to approach First Nations as one of many stakeholders, as opposed to unceded nations (which is how some First Nations viewed themselves); (2) that the processes being used for policy reform by the WSD were generally perceived by First Nations as inappropriate for engaging First Nations about water on their traditional territories; and (3) that the difference in views, approaches, and assumptions held by the WSD and by First Nations prevented the realization of a process of water policy reform that was satisfactory to either. This finding was particularly unfortunate because we concluded that apart from the specific issue of compatibility with First Nations perspectives, the public engagement processes used by the WSD would likely be considered highly effective based on current collaborative practices (von der Porten and de Loë, 2014b). Instead, First Nations were manifestly unhappy with the process and its outcomes. The findings from the WSD case challenge the assumption identified in water policy reform literature that Indigenous peoples can be discussed in the context of water policy reform without addressing asserted

Indigenous self-determination, unceded traditional homelands, and nationhood (e.g., Heaney et al., 2007; Huitema and Meijerink, 2009; Pigram, 1999).

The larger study on which the recommendations in the next section are based is definitely “Canadian-centric.” However, we are confident that practitioners in countries around the world will be able to relate to the research described above and thus, to our recommendations. First, BC’s First Nations are connected to Canadian, North American, and global networks of Indigenous thinkers and activists and are well aware of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). Thus, while some of the issues Canada’s Indigenous peoples emphasize are not as central in other parts of the world (e.g., sui generis rights), the Canadian Indigenous perspective is informed by the same global perspective that informs Indigenous peoples’ arguments in places such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Latin America. Second, the collaboration literature we analyzed is global in scope. Hence, it reflects collaborative practices in exactly the kinds of places where the practitioners to whom we are directing our recommendations do their work.

Recommendations for Practice

There are countless real-world contexts where collaborative environmental governance and Indigenous governance practices intersect. For example, the Fraser Basin Council in BC engages in water governance through collaboration among First Nations and Federal, Provincial, and local governments (Fraser Basin Council, 2011). In Australia, collaboration for natural resource management includes environmental regulators, Indigenous peoples, local government, non-governmental stakeholders, and interested local citizens (Gunningham, 2009). This is another jurisdiction where Indigenous peoples have asserted rights to be involved in policy frameworks pertaining to water (Godden and Gunther, 2010).

Our research demonstrates the need for reconciliation of the perspectives evident in the realms of collaboration and Indigenous governance. The larger research project on which this article draws supports six recommendations for collaborative practice in settings where Indigenous traditional homelands are affected. The cultural, legal, and historical contexts within which Indigenous peoples exist around the world are fundamentally different from place-to-place. Hence, we emphasize recommendations that are broadly relevant.

1. Approach or Involve Indigenous Peoples as Self-Determining Nations Rather than as One of Many Collaborative Stakeholders or Participants

An underlying premise of this article is that Indigenous peoples are not “stakeholders.” Indeed, all of the other recommendations flow from this one. Indigenous peoples’ “right to self-determination” has been affirmed by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). Thus, this premise can be viewed as a “fact on the ground” as much as a normative position. For environmental professionals, this research revealed the benefits of treating Indigenous peoples as nations rather than one of many stakeholders, minority groups, or interest groups. A constructive example of the significance of this difference is the FONV case where the organization involved in water governance and the First Nation of the affected traditional territory collaborated closely without any difficulties, according to interview respondents. Notably, both First Nations and non-Indigenous respondents in this case emphasized the importance of respect for the reasserted and unceded, traditional Indigenous homelands. The FONV provides an example of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples sharing land and water resources can collaborate constructively despite significant structural, legal, and constitutional hurdles.

Findings from the FONV case, as well as from the other two regional cases and the provincial case, demonstrate the importance of assumptions surrounding the role of Indigenous peoples. Where practitioners of water policy reform or collaborative environmental governance are considering how to approach Indigenous involvement or collaboration regarding policy or environs that pertain to Indigenous traditional homelands, Indigenous peoples should first be approached as self-determining nations. Particularly in the case of state governments carrying out policy reform and where political tensions regarding colonial authority exist, meaningful measures should be taken to consider the long-standing relationship and authority of Indigenous peoples to traditional homelands. The position of various Indigenous nations worldwide on matters of self-determination and nationhood will vary and thus, must be researched and understood. This variability leads directly to the second recommendation for practice.

2. Identify and Engage with Existing or Intended Environmental Governance Processes and Assertions of Self-Determination by Indigenous Nations

There is ample documentation on the importance of the engagement of Indigenous peoples specifically in

collaborative processes that address water issues (e.g., Jackson et al., 2012) and in the larger context of water policy formulation (Boelens, Getches, and Guevara-Gil, 2010). However, the vast cultural, political, and social variability among Indigenous nations is a reminder that just as much variability will exist in how engagement is conducted. Where Indigenous nations have asserted themselves as self-determining, attempts at engagement that treat them as stakeholders or interest groups will not be well received. The WSD case provides an excellent example of the difficulties of this disconnect in the realm of water policy reform. Following the WSD's processes of public participation over Water Act reform, 15 formal letters from First Nations or First Nations advocacy organizations were submitted to the WSD; these letters outlined the importance of First Nations' role as nations or inherent rights holders, rather than as stakeholders. Despite genuine efforts on the part of the provincial government to engage First Nations, it was clear that many First Nations believed that they were being treated as stakeholders in the WSD's water policy reform process. This points to the need for practitioners to develop a clear understanding of the Indigenous nations they are approaching.

Those intending to engage with Indigenous peoples should gain an understanding of the position of the Indigenous nation regarding self-determination as well as their internal environmental governance processes. For example, one First Nation in BC (Xeni Gwet'in) follows an internal written protocol that protects the lands and environment within the Aboriginal Wilderness Preserve Declaration area (Xeni Gwet'in First Nation, 1989). In another BC example, the Simpcw First Nation has issued a water declaration outlining the nation's rights to and responsibilities for water in their traditional territory (Simpw First Nation, 2010). An international example is the Indigenous Peoples' Kyoto Water Declaration (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003), which outlines Indigenous peoples' right to water and self-determination worldwide.

Properly analyzing and understanding existing or upcoming environmental governance measures that are underway within Indigenous nations on their traditional homelands, and how these fit into their broader objectives regarding self-determination, has dual value. First, engagement with Indigenous peoples over matters of policy reform and collaboration is likely to be more effective. Second, this approach to engagement can support the governance goals of Indigenous nations. Relationship building is essential for building understanding and often begins with dialogue. This leads to the third recommendation for practice.

3. Create Opportunities for Relationship Building Between Indigenous Peoples and Policy or Governance Practitioners

In collaborative models of environmental governance, the importance of relationship building is well established (Booth and Skelton, 2011; Cullen et al., 2010; Innes and Booher, 2010). The findings from this research indicate that a meaningful relationship building between practitioners of collaborative environmental governance and water policy reform and Indigenous peoples may result in better mutual understanding and meeting governance objectives. The FONV case provides a useful example of where trust built between a First Nation and the organization involved in water governance has allowed the two to collaborate over matters of environmental governance without misunderstandings of the role of Indigenous peoples. This organization stood out from the other three cases because FONV members started from the position that the lands in question were the unrelinquished territory of the Indigenous nation. FONV's members also supported the environmental goals of the nation and deferred to or engaged with the environmental governance processes of the Xeni Gwet'ins. FONV also fundraised to support the Xeni Gwet'ins environmental projects. FONV's approach was subsequently reinforced by the Supreme Court of Canada decision that the Xeni Gwet'in's "declaration of Aboriginal title over the area requested [within their traditional territory] should be granted" (Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia, 2014 SCC 44).

The FONV example can be applied to other instances of collaboration between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous entities working toward collaboration and/or participatory policy reform. Findings from the FONV case indicate that practitioners engaging or attempting to engage with Indigenous peoples should create opportunities for relationship and trust building prior to launching into collaborative processes. This will support mutual understanding and awareness. The notion of relationship building for practitioners emphasizes the need for recommendations one, two, and three to be implemented together for the realization of meaningful Indigenous engagement.

4. Choose Venues and Processes of Decision Making that Reflect Indigenous Rather than Eurocentric Venues and Processes

In settings such as North America and Australia, the predominance of Eurocentric over Indigenous ideology has been clearly documented (Gibbs, 2010; Ladner, 2004;

Pierotti and Wildcat, 2000; Youngblood Henderson, 2000). This ideology extends also to venues and processes of decision making. For example, a Eurocentric venue for collaborative dialogue calls for a room or hall with decision makers around a table, whereas an Indigenous venue may be grounded in conversation among leaders travelling or hunting together on the land. While there is wide variability in how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples choose venues and implement processes of decision making, the dominance of one way of doing things over another is an important consideration. Different understandings of values, practices, and knowledge create communication barriers between non-Indigenous organizations and Indigenous peoples (Ellis, 2005).

First Nations interview respondents who participated in the empirical research on which we are drawing indicated that the selection of venue and process was important for processes of collaboration. Suggestions by respondents to achieve this recommendation included (a) supplying translators for Elders who communicate in Indigenous languages, (b) following pertinent Indigenous practices regarding how in-person meetings are conducted, (c) following Indigenous research and process protocols where established, and (d) utilizing collaborative venues selected by the Indigenous nation. This recommendation builds on recommendation three in that identifying the venues and processes appropriate for an Indigenous nation may first require understanding and relationships to be built between collaborative parties.

5. Provide Resources to Indigenous Nations to Level the Playing Field in Terms of Capacity for Collaboration or for Policy Reform Decision Making

The capacity disadvantage for post-colonial Indigenous peoples and organizations, relative to non-Indigenous peoples and organizations, is well understood and documented (Council of Australian Governments, Working Group on Climate Change and Water, 2008; Hunt, 2008; Lane and Hibbard, 2005). Taking these into account is essential. For example, the approach to engagement advocated here is likely to place additional financial and human resource burdens on what may be already capacity-challenged communities. Findings from this research suggest that this imbalance of capacity plays an important role in shaping (and undermining) collaborative processes where Indigenous engagement is sought by non-Indigenous organizations. This research revealed a cautious attitude on the part of Indigenous peoples regarding their participation in collaborative environmental governance processes

external to their nations. This hesitation stemmed from reasons other than just capacity and included political positioning and lack of adequate relationship building between collaborators. For instance, in the OBWB case, First Nations leaders emphasized the need for significant added capacity to be able to participate effectively in collaborative water governance external to the nation. These findings lend support to the recommendation that practitioners should engage Indigenous nations in collaborative processes in ways that ensure equal capacity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators. Addressing these capacity challenges is widely recognized to be a significant challenge. For example, Phare (2011) suggests that philanthropy directed to First Nations governments is needed to address “out-dated [sic] and restrictive legal regimes that severely limit...the governmental-level choices of First Nations.” Also in the Canadian context, the Assembly of First Nations (Assembly of First Nations, 2010) has suggested that strengthening unity within and among Indigenous Nations in Canada will lend support to First Nations capacity building. Which of these, and other suggestions that have been proposed, would be most effective in addressing the capacity challenges pertinent to collaborative governance represents an important topic for future inquiry. Equalizing capacity between collaborators has the potential to lead to more mutually satisfactory collaborative environmental governance and to better realize recommendations one through four.

6. Instead of Trying to Bridge Existing Non-Indigenous Collaborative Strategies with Indigenous Peoples, Find Ways to Support Indigenous Nations in Their Own Continued Environmental Decision Making and Self-Determination

There is widespread support for ideas such as empowerment, inclusion of new knowledges, inclusion of Indigenous peoples, and better environmental decision making in collaborative environmental governance (Jackson and Robinson, 2009; Jones, Rigg, and Lee, 2010; Takeda and Ropke, 2010). However, the research on which we are drawing in this article challenges the assumption that Indigenous peoples ought simply to be included in collaborative environmental governance regimes—at least ones led by colonial governments or non-Indigenous peoples. The results from both regional and provincial-scale case studies revealed that Indigenous peoples felt alienated from collaborative processes, were frustrated with the lack of understanding by those approaching them for collaborative processes, and were hesitant to collaborate should it be seen as the relinquishing of their own authority

to make decisions about their traditional homelands. These findings suggest that assumptions about Indigenous engagement should be revisited through people using collaborative approaches to governance for water. For example, rather than trying to engage Indigenous peoples in existing environmental governance decision-making, practitioners could seek opportunities to participate in and/or demonstrate respect for existing environmental decision making processes initiated by Indigenous peoples. The research on which this recommendation is based clearly reveals the importance of being open to this approach as a way of showing respect and understanding.

Conclusions

Collaboration among diverse actors has become an essential and defining characteristic of contemporary environmental governance. Few serious environmental problems can be addressed effectively by one actor alone. Achieving success through collaboration is challenging on its own, but it is much more challenging in cases where decision making involves territories held or claimed by Indigenous peoples. Treating Indigenous peoples as “stakeholders” in collaborative processes is likely to lead to resistance, resentment, and failure. This work provided support for six recommendations for practice. These emerged from a study that took place in Canada, but these recommendations should be relevant to practitioners working in numerous other jurisdictions around the world where Indigenous peoples live. This reflects the fact that even though every Indigenous community is distinct, a global consciousness about Indigenous rights has emerged.

There are ways to move forward for environmental practitioners who genuinely want to engage in successful, mutually respectful collaboration with Indigenous peoples within their traditional homelands. Equally, Indigenous nations that are open to collaboration with other actors need not view traditional, stakeholder-framed approaches as the only alternative for collaboration. The research we report in this article demonstrates that successful collaboration requires a different approach grounded in new assumptions. The recommendations offered here are rooted in the adoption and acceptance of a perspective on Indigenous peoples that seeks to reconcile assumptions underlying contemporary environmental governance with the growing assertion of their distinct rights by Indigenous peoples around the world. These recommendations are not simply minor adjustments to practices, and they are by no means guaranteed to lead to success. In circumstances

where power differentials are too extreme, or a history of extremely poor relations exist, the approach outlined here may have to be deferred until other steps are taken to build a more positive relationship. However, examples such as the collaboration between the Friends of the Nemaiah Valley and the Xeni Gwet’ins offer hope that positive, constructive engagement is possible.

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