

02/12/2024

Dear Members of the Research Ethics Board,

Request for Ethics Approval for Research Interviews with Indigenous Communities

I am writing to request your approval to have Moses Elleason, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Natural Resources Management at Lakehead University conduct interviews with Indigenous communities in Ontario as part of my research titled “Forest Change and Wildlife Conservation: Insights from Indigenous Communities in Ontario.”

This research is funded by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to develop caribou habitat management strategies for the Slate Islands in collaboration with the Biigtigong First Nation. Expanding on this project, Mr. Elleason been awarded funding from the Digital Research Alliance of Canada (DRAC) to broaden the scope, examining forest and habitat changes through the perspectives of traditional knowledge holders across a wider audience.

Below, I have provided a summary of the study information. I kindly request your review and approval to proceed with interviews, ensuring adherence to ethical standards and respect for the communities involved. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Study Purpose and Approach

This study aims to explore traditional knowledge holders’ perspectives on forest change in Ontario, focusing on its impacts on biodiversity and sustainable management. It seeks to document traditional knowledge on forest changes and biodiversity, analyze ecological insights related to ecosystems and land cover, and assess the cultural, socio-economic, and spiritual significance of forests to the Lake Superior area First Nations and members of the Métis Nation of Ontario associating with Lake Superior communities. The research will also examine community-led conservation practices and recommend strategies to integrate Indigenous perspectives into sustainable forest and wildlife management, promoting culturally informed and inclusive conservation approaches

Semi-structured interviews will be used to gather qualitative insights from 40 participants ideally during January and February 2025. Interview responses will be analyzed thematically,

identifying patterns such as community concerns about management and policy gaps or socio-cultural connections to specific species. The analysis will utilize a "Descriptive-focused coding" strategy, adhering to the principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession). Indigenous knowledge of forest plant species and ecosystems (e.g., "Black Spruce–Birch transitions") will be integrated with ecological data using GIS and remote sensing technology to create visual representations of forest dynamics.

This research will enhance our understanding of forest dynamics from Traditional Knowledge holders' perspective by documenting Indigenous observations of ecosystem changes, complementing scientific data for a comprehensive view of drivers and impacts of forest change. Community-suggested policy changes will be highlighted to ensure better integration of Indigenous perspectives into sustainable forest and wildlife management strategies.

This research follows the First Nations Principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are respected and safeguarded throughout the process. The research promotes Indigenous-led conservation and co-management models in Ontario, strengthening collaborative approaches aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). By prioritizing Indigenous knowledge, this work fosters cultural preservation, community empowerment, and equitable conservation outcomes, contributing to both local resource management and interdisciplinary academic advancements.



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