



***Research Information Form and Consent Form for Participants***

Dear [Name of Potential Participant or Title and Name of Community Leader],

You are/your community is invited to participate in a research study titled “Forest Change and Wildlife Conservation: Insights from Traditional Knowledge holders in Ontario.” This study seeks to gather insights from 40 participants from First Nation communities from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg First Nation east to Michipicoten First Nation and members of the Métis Nation of Ontario. Participation is voluntary, so please read this letter carefully before deciding to participate and feel free to ask any questions.

**PURPOSE**

This study aims to explore Traditional Knowledge holders’ perspectives on forest changes in Ontario, focusing on impacts on biodiversity and sustainable management. It will document Traditional Knowledge, assess the cultural, socio-economic, and spiritual significance of forests, analyze land cover changes, and explore community-led conservation practices. The goal is to document traditional ecological knowledge and recommend strategies for integrating Indigenous perspectives into sustainable forest and wildlife management.

**WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?**

The interview will collect information on the following topics:

- General Knowledge on Forest Change:
  - Observations of forest changes around your community over time.
  - Beliefs about the causes of these changes.
  - Descriptions of the forest using Indigenous language.
  - Impact of forest changes on the health and biodiversity of local forests.
- Impacts on Wildlife Conservation:
  - Observations on changes in caribou, moose, and deer populations.
  - Identification of species most affected by forest changes and the reasons why.
  - Effects of forest changes on traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering practices.
- Cultural and Socio-Economic Implications:
  - Impact of forest and wildlife changes on community cultural practices and traditions.
  - Identification of species or forested areas of cultural significance.
  - Economic impacts of forest change on the community.
- Forest Management and Future Directions:
  - Conservation strategies or practices used by the community to protect forests and wildlife.
  - Community contributions to the management or conservation of caribou, moose, and deer.
  - Evaluation of the effectiveness of current forest management and conservation policies.

- Barriers and challenges the community faces in influencing forest and wildlife policies.
- Desired changes in forest and wildlife conservation policies.
- Critical steps for protecting forests and wildlife for future generations.
- History and importance of islands:
  - Knowledge of the formation of the Slate Islands (Biigtigong residents).
  - Knowledge of the formation of Michipicoten Island (Michipicoten and Pic River residents).

### **WHAT IS REQUIRED OF ME/MY COMMUNITY AS A PARTICIPANT?**

Participants must be over 18 years of age and will be expected to join a one-on-one conversation with the researcher to share perspectives on conservation-related questions. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes, with additional time allowed upon request. Participants should provide appropriate, respectful responses. Offensive or degrading language will not be tolerated.

### **WHAT ARE THE RIGHTS OF A PARTICIPANT?**

- ✓ Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences.
- ✓ A decision to participate or withdraw will not affect participants in any way.
- ✓ Participants can refuse to answer any question.
- ✓ Participants may request to have Their data withdrawn at any point during the study.
- ✓ Participants and the community leaders will receive information throughout the research to support the decision to continue or withdraw.

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING?**

There are no known risks associated with this study. The research focuses solely on perspectives about forests, wildlife, and their management. No biological or personal data, such as names or gender, is required unless voluntarily provided. Participants will have the opportunity to share their knowledge, contributing to the development of sustainable forest and wildlife management strategies that incorporate Indigenous perspectives. By documenting the cultural, spiritual, and socio-economic connections to forests and wildlife, the study will help preserve Indigenous traditions and practices for future generations. Participants will have full ownership of the research findings, including maps of the dynamic forest around them with quantitative and qualitative descriptions using local terms. Participants will share in the formation of policy recommendations, which may support their community's conservation initiatives and resource management efforts.

### **HOW WILL PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?**

Both name and gender are entirely optional and are not key to the research objectives and will be used only as summary information describing the project. A data sharing agreement will be developed and maintained to ensure all data collected are securely stored on encrypted platforms (mainly Google drive), with access restricted to the student (Moses Elleason), supervisor (Dr. Brian McLaren), and co-supervisors (Dr. Lance Robinson and Mr. Williams Stolz) during the study. All are associated with Lakehead University, which adheres to high standards of research involving human subjects and principles for engaging in research with Indigenous communities.

**WHAT WILL THE DATA BE USED FOR?**

The collected data will be used for academic purposes and as a shared resource with the participating communities. It will be used to build policy recommendations. With permission from participants, a summary report of the findings on forest changes, their impacts on wildlife, and policy recommendations based on their perspectives will be shared with the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Digital Research Alliance of Canada (DRAC) and be submitted in a summary format to an open-access journal for publication.

**WHERE WILL PARTICIPANT DATA BE STORED?**

All data will be stored securely and handled in a way that reflects each community's cultural values. Initially, the data from interviews will be stored on a Google drive folder shared only with the researcher (Moses Elleason), the supervisor (Dr. Brian McLaren), and co-supervisors (Dr. Lance Robinson and Mr. Williams Stolz). After review for errors, the data will be checked for accuracy individually with interviewees by sending to a secure email address identified by the interviewee only this interviewee's data. After the step of interpretation, visits to the communities will be arranged when interviewees from that community are available for an opportunity to review all interpretation for the project. This information will remain with each community. After joint publications and the completion of the student's PhD dissertation, a secure computer will store data and any interpretation. The information will be deleted seven years later.

**HOW CAN I RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS?**

This research follows the First Nations Principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) to ensure that your knowledge and perspectives are respected and safeguarded throughout the process. The knowledge participants share belongs first to them and then with their permission to their community. As a result, the study results and findings will be emailed to all participants who have opted to receive them on this consent form. Participants and the community, via follow-up community meetings and a report sent to Chief and Council, will have access to the research findings at the end of the study.

**WHAT IF A PARTICIPANT OR COMMUNITY WANTS TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?**

The contact information of the student (Moses Elleason), supervisor (Dr. Brian McLaren), and co-supervisors (Dr. Lance Robinson and Mr. Williams Stolz) will be made available to allow any participant or community, via Chief and Council, to request to withdraw at any point during the study without any consequences.

**RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION**

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#### **RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL:**

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8010 ext. 8283 or [research@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:research@lakeheadu.ca).

#### **FOR PARTICIPANTS: MY CONSENT**

I agree to the following:

- ✓ I have read and understand the information contained in the Information Letter
- ✓ I agree to participate
- ✓ I understand the risks and benefits to the study
- ✓ That I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time and may choose not to answer any question
- ✓ That the data will be securely stored at the University in a secure place for a period of 7 years following completion of the research project
- ✓ I understand that the research findings will be made available to me upon request
- ✓ I will remain anonymous
- ✓ All my questions have been answered

By consenting to participate, I have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Email)

**Please circle YES or NO to the following questions:**

- Do you allow the identification of your participation if warranted? **YES NO**
- Do you allow audio recording during the interview? **YES NO**
- Would you like to receive a report on the results of this project? **YES NO**
- Do you allow summary report of the findings on forest changes, their impacts on wildlife, and policy recommendations based on your perspectives to be shared with the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Digital Research Alliance of Canada (DRAC) and submitted to an open-access journal for publication **YES NO**