02/12/2024

Dear Members of the Research Ethics Board,

**Request for Ethics Approval for Research Interviews with Indigenous Communities**

My name is Moses Elleason, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Natural Resources Management at Lakehead University. I am writing to request your approval to 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 being conducted under the supervision of Professor Brian McLaren, who has secured funding from 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, I have been awarded additional 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**

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 Biigtigong Nishnaabeg First Nation and the Métis Nation of Ontario. 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

**Methods**

Data Collection

The study will be conducted in Ontario, focusing on the Biigtigong Nishnaabeg First Nation and the Métis Nation of Ontario. Semi-structured interviews will be used to gather qualitative insights from 40 participants (20 from each community) between January and February 2025.

Data Analysis

Interview responses will be analyzed thematically, identifying patterns such as community concerns about management and policy gaps or socip-cultural connections to specific species. Traditional knowledge of forest plant species and land types (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, focusing on regions like the Slate Islands Provincial Park.

The analysis will also explore alignments and conflicts between traditional knowledge and conservation frameworks. Community-suggested policy changes will be highlighted to ensure better integration of Indigenous perspectives into sustainable forest and wildlife management strategies.

**Research Significance**

This research will enhance our understanding of forest dynamics from traditional knowledge holders’ perspective by documenting Indigenous observations of ecosystem changes, complementing scientific data with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) for a comprehensive view of drivers and impacts. It will inform wildlife conservation by examining how forest changes affect species like caribou and moose, aiding in targeted strategies that support biodiversity and Indigenous livelihoods. The study values Indigenous knowledge, validating its role in addressing modern environmental challenges, and emphasizes cultural preservation by highlighting how changes impact traditions and empowering Indigenous voices in resource management. It will identify policy gaps and advocate for inclusive, ecosystem-focused policies informed by Indigenous perspectives. By promoting Indigenous-led conservation and co-management models in Ontario, this study will foster Canada’s contribution towards collaborative approaches that align with Sustainable Development Goals, while advancing interdisciplinary academic contributions to resource management.

**Data Usage and Storage**

The collected data will be used for academic purposes, including policy recommendations. Findings, including land cover maps defined by traditional knowledge, will be submitted as part of the research report to EDIA DRI. The data will not be commercialized and will remain accessible only to the researcher (Moses Elleason), the supervisor (Brian McLaren), and co-supervisor (Dr. Lance Robinson). Data will be stored on a secure computer and Google Drive and deleted five years after the thesis completion.

**Researcher Contact Information**

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