

# Becoming Great Ancestors

workshop outline and materials

1. Welcome, honouring the land we are on, and thanking everyone for their time.
2. Group introduction with each person sharing: their name, what brought them to this workshop, and an example of an INTENTION that a Great Ancestor may have when caring for water.
3. Comparing ways we think about water. This thinking shapes how we take care of water. (see diagram on this page)
4. Small groups (2-4) each read 1 of the 5 intentions (see examples below) and discuss the questions.
5. Small groups share back with the larger group with a brief summary of the intention they focused on AND any interesting part of the discussion the group can learn from.
6. Feedback and comments about all 5 of the intentions, including the question: "what intentions are missing?"
7. Use the One Dish One Spoon agreement (below) as an example of how different water relationships can be (option to draw these 2 agreements and use discussion questions).
8. Invitations for more feedback and follow up.

3. how do the ways we think about water shape how we care for it?

## 'COMMON' WAYS

- as a resource (a thing that is useful to us and managed as an asset, a tool, a service, and product)
- as a playground (as a beautiful place for our recreation)
- as H<sub>2</sub>O (as a chemical element to purify)
- as a treasure (as a wealth mysteriously left for our enjoyment)

## 'COMMONS' WAYS

- as a public trust (a wealth we share in common and to be protected for generations to come)
- as sacred (a source of life that makes our blue earth a home)
- as a gift (an offering from the past or from the divine. Our care honours this unending relationship)
- as a living system (as an inter-connected home for many species)



# gratitude

A Great Lakes Commons grows from a source of deep gratitude. The word 'commons' has 2 root words: GIFT & DUTY.

Did you know that only 1% of water in the Great Lakes is replenished through the water cycle? Left by glaciers, God, the Creator -- these waters are truly a gift. We give thanks through ceremony and respect as ways to fulfill our personal responsibility and shared duty.

Think of your most cherished things. How many of them are gifts? We respect the giver by honouring the gift.

- What stories do you have that share gratitude for the Great Lakes?
- If you were to honour this gift, what would do, what would you express?



# belonging

A Great Lakes Commons fosters and recognises the power of belonging. How would you complete this sentence: The Great Lakes belong to

\_\_\_\_\_.

Have you ever considered the perspective that you may actually **belong to** the Great Lakes? Each of us is 70% water so what we do to Lake Ontario we do to ourselves. Communities on the Great Lakes are there specifically because of the lakeshore or ravines. GLC fosters belonging at a bioregional and local level. We are children on our mother earth.

GLC also recognises the long ancestral lines that tie us together. How many generations back does your family history go? How many generations forward does your commitment go when caring about the health of the Great Lakes. We use the phrase '*becoming a great ancestor*' since we ground our work in this long lineage of care.

Belonging also triggers issues of ownership. Too often governments and corporations pollute and threaten water because they believe it belongs to them (through politics or permit). GLC promotes shared use, shared benefit, and shared governance to honour the power of belonging.

- Where do you call home?
- What makes that place home for you?
- How can you be a great ancestor?

# agreements

Agreements come in many forms such as: customs, laws, treaties, permits, policies, campaigns, and contracts. They can be formal or informal. They can be imposed from above or fostered from below.

A Great Lakes Commons is based on a mix of social, legal, sacred, economic, ethical, and cultural agreements. Some of these will be new and some need to honour past agreements -- most importantly Canada's Treaties with the First Nations of Turtle Island. Through a 2-year collaborative process, the Great Lakes Commons Charter is that mix of agreements.

- What kinds of agreements do you think are most effective for the perpetual care of a commons -- the Great Lakes?
- What agreements already exist for the Great Lakes?
- Which ones have the most power and which ones have been largely forgotten?

# boundaries

A Great Lakes Commons respects boundaries. Our vision is defined by the living boundaries of the water rather than political or economic zones. For those who live in this bioregion, you have more in common with those up/down stream than those who share your currency, flag, or fashion. Turtle Island (an Indigenous name for North America) has many boundaries shaped by ecology, culture, trade, and history. Which ones do we respect the most?

Boundaries are needed to reinforce sustainable limits and sovereign rights. A commons is a social agreement to protect all that we share, inherit, and pass on to future generations. But it is not a free-for-all. Treaties and customs are foundations to defend the commons since they are based in equitable and respectful relations between different people who depend on the commons. Otherwise a commons is converted into a resource, a commodity without fair relations.

- What limits concern you for the long-term health of the Great Lakes?
- How many political boundaries (states, provinces, reserves) in the Great Lakes bioregion can you name?
- What do you know about Toronto's Indigenous past and present?
- What connections do you have to the Great Lakes beyond Toronto?



# caution

A Great Lakes Commons is a celebration of a gift we all share and is also grounded in caution. Water is a source of life and not a resource. If you believe your food comes from the grocery store, then you will defend that store for your survival. If you believe your food comes from the river, then you will defend that river. Many of our current laws to protect water distort our caution. We worry about the growth of the economy as we watch our life-support systems shrink and weaken.

We know our current system creates monumental wealth and yet creates 'sacrifice zones' of poverty and pollution. A GLC would reorient this imbalance of risk and reward. We would also reorient the burden of proof. How can companies sell products with plastics in them (think about the microbeads in some beauty products) that pollute the water?

Why do people (with the fewest resources and the most to risk) have the burden to prove that a project or proponent (with many resources and the most to gain) will harm the water? Why isn't it up to proponent to prove they WILL NEVER harm the water?

- Where is some of your food is grown, raised, or spawned?
- If water and communities are sacrificed to allow for your consumption, what responsibility and caution can you take?
- How can the burden of proof be used to better protect water?

# how we think about water shapes how we take care of water

**One Bowl, One Spoon** was a treaty between various First Nations surrounding the Great Lakes. Leaders would sit in a circle and share a bowl of beaver tail. They would take only what they needed, knowing that the bowl had feed the entire circle. This agreement demonstrated the collective responsibility to share equally.

**One Bowl, Many Straws** is an metaphor on the current agreement governing the Great Lakes. The official governing body of the Great Lakes is the IJC (International Joint Commission) with 6 Commissioners appointed by Canadian and American governments. The IJC does not represent leadership from any First Nations in the region and considers itself a 'bi-national' organization. Lake Michigan is outside the IJC's jurisdiction since it's completely within the USA's borders.

- What assumptions do each of these agreements make?
- How do these agreements differ?
- What kind of agreements between people are the most effective?
- If a new agreement to protect and restore the Great Lakes was being written, what would you include?



