

This statement is part of the Indigenous focus group's contribution to the Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative, which is tasked by the Vermont State Legislature to develop a way to reach Vermont's "30 x 30" biodiversity goals. See <https://vhcb.org/our-programs/VCSI>

An Indigenous Vision of a Pathway to 30 by 30: Our Cultural Advantage

By Randy Kritkauskay May 1, 2024

Note: This statement is not intended to speak in any official capacity for Vermont Abenaki nor for the many other Indigenous Individuals resident in Vermont. We are a very diverse community. Our diverse perspectives are our strength. This statement is an effort to articulate my perception of common ground and where that might contribute to advancing the 30 x 30 initiative in Vermont.

Vermont's Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Plan (Act 59) is welcome and potentially of historic significance. However, we are not going to make real progress on biodiversity protection if our world view, our mainstream cultural concept of nature domination, is not replaced by an ethic of humility, respect, and caring for our other than human kin such as is found in Indigenous stewardship ethics. In other words, a spiritual transformation is a critical and necessary ingredient for getting to "30 by 30", protecting thirty percent of our state's natural landscape which is habitat for wild flora and fauna by 2030.

There is real hunger for such a shift in thinking and acting. Not a day goes by that I am not asked to comment on or speak about my Indigenous heritage, its views on nature, my experiences living in daily intimate connections with Vermont's forest kin and how this world view might be mainstreamed. There is a growing recognition that business as usual has gotten us into a massive ecological crisis and that clever business solutions, economic inventions, or financial instruments alone are not going to get us out of our situation. For some, this recognition is based in scientific reports. For many it is based on intuition and daily direct observation of the realities enveloping us (e.g., altered weather patterns, wildfire smoke from Canada, diseases caused by warming).

Indigenous Peoples are not exempt from the stress and fears associated with ecological crises. That which distinguishes us is a spiritual outlook that allows us to feel the hopeful embrace of Mother Earth who is continually extending a collaborative healing hand and urging us to practice the moral precepts of our Turtle Island Creation Story.

Some of us, such as the Abenaki, have lived here for millennia. Others, like me, are Indigenous People who have recently adopted Vermont as our home and then discovered that the landscape, flora, fauna have adopted and embraced us. In either case we rely upon and are motivated by our traditional cultures and teachings. And like non-indigenous people in the mainstream we are exploring ways to make our cultural values ever more relevant to challenging and emerging realities that are sometimes confounding. Indigenous Peoples do not live in the past; we are on a journey of discovery examining how best to live in a disturbed natural world in many ways unlike that known to our ancestors.

Making Indigenous People the leading edge of telling the story about how to get to 30 by 30 can offer hope inspiration and guidance to all. Merely inventorying existing conservation programs and producing new “plans” will quickly discourage a population grown cynical about ambitious grand schemes that too rarely materialize.

30 by 30 in Vermont will rise or fall depending on its ability to project a credible sense of a fresh vision. That vision is that all of us can, and should become “indigenous to place” by viewing our other than human kin and landscape through the lens of Native American culture. Let us show how to do this.



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