



# Office of the Treaty Commissioner

Year in Review 2019-2020

Cover Acknowledgement: Photo taken by Angela Hill at the City of Saskatoon Reconciliation Flag Raising in May 2019.

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## Message from the Treaty Commissioner



It's an honour to greet you in the year in review marking the end of my second year as Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan. Despite the challenging times, my focus continues to be on increasing the understanding of the Treaties, not just historically, but what it means today.

In the 2019-20 the Office of the Treaty Commissioner celebrated its 30-year anniversary, with the unveiling of a new logo and a well-attended community round dance in the fall of 2019.

We continue to support reconciliation and Treaty education through classrooms, workshops and our speakers bureau. I was happy to support the launch of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner – Youth in Service project. The program brought students from around the province together to learn from one another and work on reconciliation.

COVID-19 has created a difficult time, with many people feeling stressed and concerned about the future. At the Office of the Treaty Commissioner we have continued to support our most vulnerable, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, by helping with the delivery of masks and ensuring our team takes steps to stay safe and health during this time.

I continue to see positive action towards reconciliation and treaty implementation in communities across the province. I know we still have a long way to go, but I am pleased that more and more people are joining the journey.

# 30 Year Anniversary of the OTC

In 1989 the Saskatchewan Office of the Treaty Commissioner was established to facilitate Treaty discussions between the members of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, the provincial and/or federal governments.

Over the past 30 years, we have had five Treaty Commissioners: Cliff Wright, the Honourable Judge David M. Arnot, the Honourable Bill McKnight, George E. Lafond, and the first female commissioner, Mary Culbertson.

The anniversary was celebrated on Nov. 22, 2019 with more than 100 coming together at a round dance and feast.

“As the fifth Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan and the first woman Treaty Commissioner, I am proud to celebrate 30 years of the office. It has been a catalyst for Treaty education both in the classroom and in the greater public,” said Mary Culbertson, Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan at the event.

The celebration also provided the office with the opportunity to unveil the newly updated logo. When deciding on the creation of a new logo the OTC looked to the future of Saskatchewan - youth - and sent a call for entries to all schools in the province

More than 100 entries were received and Tiegan, 18, from Medstead School had her design selected. Her written submission was moving because she talked about the spirit and intent of Treaty.

In her entry Tiegan wrote about the medicine wheel around the whole picture because it represents spiritual, emotional, physical and mental needs. She included sweet grass because through smudging it purifies body and soul and clarifies the mind. She talked about Treaties lasting as long as the grass grows, the river flows and the sun shines.

“The feather I drew because it symbolizes, truth, honour, strength, wisdom, power and freedom.”

The OTC team is so pleased to have the logo to take us into the future of the office



# The Treaty Table

Part of the mission of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner in Saskatchewan is to support a bi-lateral Treaty Table process between the Government of Canada and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations.

Today as it was 30 years ago the OTC team, led by the commissioner, sits at the Treaty table to facilitate conversation and negotiation between the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations and the Government of Canada.

The Treaty Table meets approximately three times per year and has a mandate “to identify options and make recommendations to assist in resolving issues that affect the Treaty relationship, in the following priority areas, including but not limited to: economic independence (including lands and resources; hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering; shelter (housing)); justice; education and child welfare; and health.”

## Treaty Education

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner is pleased to continue enhancing the Teaching Treaties in the Classroom program, and is in the process of revitalizing the Treaty Learning Network, a central hub for educators and education staff to access training, cultural, and education supports and resource materials about the Treaties.

“The office saw a need for more training for teachers, and heard from many school divisions and tribal councils across the province that they were hoping for more support in terms of resources, training and networking,” said Amy Seesequasis, Director of Public Education.

The network team, including coordinator Charmaine Gardiner, is working on enhancing the Teaching Treaties in the Classroom training, updating and adding resources to the Treaty Kit, and creating a network of resource people and trained educators to provide a place for educators to find support in their journey teaching this meaningful information.

The network is important because Treaties are the building blocks of the country, said Seesequasis.

After many years of service, the OTC said goodbye to long-time education director Brenda Ahenakew last year. She is now working with youth directly as the principal at Muskeg Lake School. During her time at the OTC, she saw Treaty Catalyst Teacher trainings become a reality and resources become available and used in classrooms across the province. We miss her, but her legacy in Treaty education continues

## **Bill McKnight Tribute**

It is with heavy heart that the Office of the Treaty Commissioner acknowledged the passing of one of the former Treaty Commissioners of Saskatchewan, Hon. Bill McKnight, during the past year.

“Bill McKnight understood the importance of land and the role of economic independence in reconciliation. His work on the Treaty Land Entitlement Framework allowed for more economic opportunities for First Nations,” said Mary Culbertson, current Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan.

“He worked to further the understanding that we are all Treaty people, and that economic partnerships and livelihood benefit us all. He will be missed,”

McKnight was Saskatchewan’s third Treaty Commissioner, holding the role from 2007 to 2012.

He will be remembered for his work supporting Indigenous communities. McKnight was the MP for Kindersley–Lloydminster from 1979 to 1993, and he was a driving force in the creation of the 1992 Saskatchewan Treaty Land Entitlement Framework Agreement, when about 2.5 million acres of land were identified that would set to greatly enhance the economic opportunities for First Nations in Saskatchewan.

McKnight was named honorary chief by the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, appointed as a member of the Order of Saskatchewan, and received an honorary law degree from the University of Saskatchewan.

## **Treaty Medal Repatriation**

A Treaty 6 medal was returned to Red Pheasant Cree Nation, 134 years after it was taken.

The official repatriation ceremony held at the George Benson Memorial Grounds on July 4, 2019, was attended by people from across North America.

“Lots of people came to celebrate with their relations,” said Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan, Mary Culbertson. She spoke at the event, sharing what she heard from Former Red Pheasant Chief Craig Wuttunee about how Elders felt with the medal’s return. They said they feel like “we have our heart back.”

“I had to stop talking a couple of times, it was very emotional to feel the treaty medal and the energy that was coming from it being back on the land it was taken from,” Culbertson said.

This Treaty medal was given to Chief Red Pheasant in 1876 at Fort Carlton. After his passing, the medal was removed from his body by the Indian agent who attended the funeral. The medal disappeared for decades, until a curator at the Manitoba Museum found it and a letter about it in 2002. This started the process of getting the medal returned to its rightful owners.

Culbertson called the return historic. The Office of the Treaty Commissioner offered congratulations to the Elders, leadership and the people of Red Pheasant.

## **Speakers Bureau**

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner continues to promote the Treaty relationship through various public information sharing sessions and public engaging initiatives, which is primarily supported by the Speakers Bureau.

The Speakers Bureau has been busy with over 2,900 people made aware of their identity as a Treaty person through our various educational events, information sessions and interactive activities from March 2019 to March 2020.

Our services promote and provide awareness and education that is to support the implementation and honouring of: Treaty history, Treaty rights, the Treaty relationship, culture of Indigenous Treaty partners, positive race relations, Reconciliation, and the Calls to Action. The bureau explores and engages in opportunities to bridge information gaps and dispel stereotypes and misconceptions about the Treaty history, the Treaty relationship and the Treaty partners, through educational information sharing.

We work to achieve good relations in the spirit and intent of Treaty through awareness and education sessions aimed at helping to understand the Treaty relationship and the Treaty responsibilities we as Treaty people all have.

The Speakers Bureau is a collective of Knowledge Keepers from various nations/communities across the province who share their teachings and wisdom. We have more than 20 active Speakers Bureau members, and are always looking to expand our bureau so as to broaden our reach and our perspectives on Treaty history, promotion and protection. These members come from various Treaty territories and language groups, and have a wide array of knowledge and expertise on a variety of topics related to Treaty Awareness, Protection and Implementation

With the COVID-19 pandemic impacting the ability to gather together, the office is adapting by offering presentations via Zoom and Skype.

## **Research and Archives**

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner is working to catalogue and move their significant archives online. Sheldon Krasowski has joined the team to begin this work. He first worked with the collection when it was housed at the First Nations University of Canada Saskatoon Campus in the early 2000s.

Krasowski will also complete research requests in support of communities. In early 2020 these requests included an environmental scan for Piapot First Nation, secondary sources on Ochapowace Nation, and primary sources on the Kinistin adhesion to Treaty Four and Chief's medal. This work is also allowing the OTC to update the Treaty Timeline available online and as a display.

# Chief Poundmaker Exonerated

On May 23, 2019, Chief Poundmaker was exonerated, 130 years after he died.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was at Poundmaker Cree Nation to offer an apology from the Government of Canada.

Amy Seesequasis, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner Director of Public Education, attended the ceremony.

"I was so happy to be there and so proud. I get emotional when I talk about it because I shared that with my family and forever we will remember that moment when Indigenous Treaty partners were recognized," she said. "It was so beautiful, I cried through that whole ceremony because it meant so much to me as an Indigenous person, as Treaty 6, having children that come from Poundmaker and come from a family that are decedents of him."

In his speech, Trudeau said, "The Government of Canada recognizes that Chief Poundmaker was not a criminal, but someone who worked tirelessly to ensure the survival of his people, and hold the Crown accountable to its obligations as laid out in Treaty 6."

The recognition that the unjust conviction of Chief Poundmaker has and continues to have an impact on the Cree Nation, was key for Seesequasis.

"This is that moment of real truth and reconciliation because our prime minister, our leader of this country took it upon himself to recognize that legacy and do something about it," she said.

OTC's Director Reconciliation and Community Partnerships, Rhett Sangster, travelled to the event with his family.

"I thought it was a great opportunity for my kids to experience a moment of history," he said, adding that Reconciliation is about shared understanding of history.

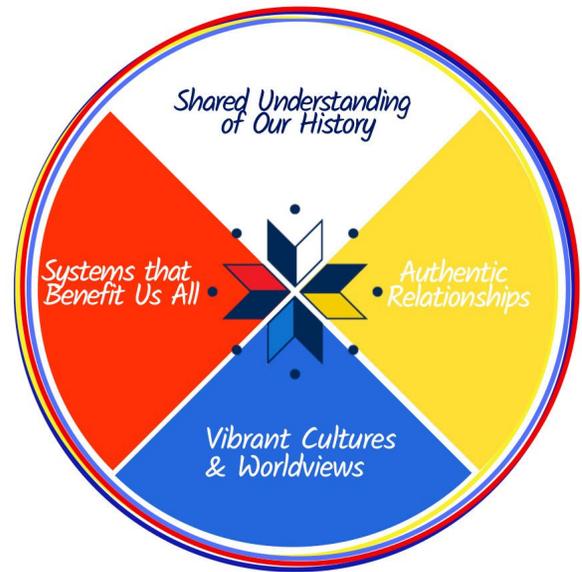
History is "more easily understandable when you're on the site."



# Reconciliation and the Treaty Relationship

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner and reconciliation partners in 10 regions across the province in September 2019 introduced a made-in-Saskatchewan Vision for Truth and Reconciliation through Treaty Implementation.

OTC has been working with partners since 2014 to develop the Vision for Reconciliation through Treaty Implementation. In this process, we've asked thousands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens from Saskatchewan about the reconciliation story they'd like to tell in a generation. The vision was created based on feedback from community leaders, Elders, Residential School Survivors, and the public.



Since that launch the team has been actively working alongside three Truth and Reconciliation Circles (Saskatoon, Yorkton, and the Battlefords), to undertake reflection and planning exercises to set out a future course for advancing Truth and Reconciliation in their communities.

In February 2020, the OTC celebrated alongside the Prairie Rivers Reconciliation Committee at their community MOU signing and in March, the OTC partnered with Reconciliation Nipawin to gather 110 community leaders to discuss Truth and Reconciliation in the Nipawin region.

We have started the process of measuring evaluation to inspire action, accountability and learning, to find out if our personal and organizations efforts are making a difference; to ensure we are including the voices of survivors and knowledge keepers, and to stay rooted in the TRC Calls to Action, MMIWG, and UNDRIP.

We are collecting stories and data from multiple complimentary sources including Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and our partners around the table. Our aim from this and other data will be to write reports on the progress of Reconciliation in Saskatchewan and ensure sustainability in our collective Reconciliation journey.

# Treaty Land Sharing Network

The Treaty Land Sharing Network is a group of farmers, ranchers, and rural people who have come together to begin the crucial work of honouring Treaties. In the spirit of sharing the land, they provide safe places for Indigenous people to access land and exercise their rights. They are committed to advancing land-based reconciliation, engaging in ongoing learning together as we practice being Treaty people, and establishing a different way forward for rural Saskatchewan. Throughout this work, they will continue to choose the path of justice and mutual respect within the Treaty framework.

Land is fundamental to Indigenous ways of life. Yet in Saskatchewan, the overwhelming majority of land below the treeline is privately owned, and only 15% of the original, uncultivated grassland remains. Reserve land constitutes only 2.8% of Indigenous peoples' traditional territory, which is not sufficient to sustain their cultural survival and livelihoods.

During Treaty negotiations Indigenous nations agreed to share the land with settlers – not to cede or surrender it. As part of these sacred commitments to live together in peace, take care of shared lands, and ensure one another's wellbeing, Indigenous People were guaranteed that their way of life would be protected, including the ability to move freely and hunt throughout their traditional territory.

In recent years, ongoing privatization of public land – combined with racism, systemic discrimination, and changes to trespassing legislation – have compounded historic land loss and made it increasingly difficult for Indigenous people to safely exercise their Treaty and inherent rights.

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner's Public Education team has partnered with the Treaty Land Sharing Network to facilitate understanding and ways of recognizing roles and responsibilities as Treaty Partners to the land and resources. The partnership will work to enhance their knowledge base, broaden the scope of network members, develop a website, and create a logo that accurately represents this identity and the responsibilities associated.

Our partnership with the network is educational support and guidance. The network is a collection of non-Indigenous land title holders (they don't say they own land, but hold title) who understand the importance of Treaties and land sharing.

## Youth in Service

The Youth in Service project was designed to engage youth from Saskatchewan, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in Reconciliation.

It started with two conferences, one in the north and one in the south of the province, with Elders, motivational guest speakers, round table discussions, group and individual activities. At the end of the two conferences, 36 youth were selected to continue working and traveling with the OTC in different capacities including as part of the Youth Advisory Council, OTC's Youth Speaker's Bureau, and Youth Cadre.

The OTC created opportunities for youth to participate in Truth and Reconciliation events all over the province.

At a culture camp in the winter, many of the youth had their first opportunity ever to try activities like dog sledding, ice fishing, setting a net with a jigger, checking nets, making fires, boiling tea, making dry moose meat, learning to speak Cree, filleting fish, skinning, snowshoeing, and entering a sweat lodge.

Some youth travelled with the commissioner and staff from the OTC to Fond Du Lac. The team saw the youth grow from the experiences, from driving on an ice road, to eating caribou, shopping at the local grocery store, working with other community youth, and attending blanket exercises.

"I believe they left with so much more than can ever be taught in a classroom, the cultural and traditional exchange is priceless," said Angie Merasty, Youth in Service project coordinator.

The Kairos blanket exercise was well attended by people in the community including RCMP and health workers from the Athabasca Health Authority and was very powerful, she said.



# Appendix A: Selections of gatherings & conferences

## **OTC staff attend the Witchekan Teaty Day**

On Witchekan Lake First Nation, Treaty day was celebrated with hours of activities for both youth and adults. Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan, Mary Culbertson, gathered everyone together to listen to the re-enactment of Treaty 6 and a re-enactment of when Witchekan adhered to Treaty 6. The play was orchestrated and co-written by two of the OTC's summer students.

## **Celebrating 140 years since Treaty signing at Fort Walsh**

On July 2, 2019, staff from the OTC joined people gathered outside Fort Walsh to commemorate 140 years since Chief Luckyman and Chief Little Pine signed their Treaty. The event called "Moving forward with reconciliation," was hosted by Clayton Mclain Memorial Museum, Little Pine First Nation, Luckyman Cree Nation, and Parks Canada.

During the event band members stayed in tipis outside the fort and shared stories. They spoke of how their ancestors would come to the area to pick medicine, and how communities would come together.

## **Treaty 6 Adhesion Commemoration**

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner with the Treaty 6 Adhesion 1889 Commemoration Committee celebrated 130 years since the signing of Treaty 6 Adhesion on Aug. 28, 2019 at the geographical centre of Saskatchewan, Molanosa at the Molanosa Cultural Grounds

The day began by honouring the spirit and intent of Treaty with a Pipe Ceremony. There was the unveiling of the Treaty 6 Adhesion plaque and flag.

"It was a proud day to be part of the 130th Commemoration of the 1889 Treaty 6 Adhesion. The work and effort into such a legacy project has been just amazing, it is an honour to be part of this group," said Mary Culbertson, Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan.

"The importance of the signing of the Treaty 6 Adhesion 1889 in building Canada has to be recognized. Commemorations are important to teach youth, celebrate Treaty history, and remind the parties of the signing that they have Treaty obligations that they need to fulfil."

## **Buffalo People Arts Institute event**

On Oct. 1, 2019, the Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan, Mary Culbertson, spent the day at Mother Teresa school with Buffalo People Arts Institute and students.

They did an honour song on the first buffalo hide drum they made, and Culbertson participated in scrapping the buffalo hide. Buffalo People Arts Institute is about sharing traditional Indigenous teachings and knowledge and nurturing it every day so culture thrives.

## **Commemorating sombre history**

The Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan, Mary Culbertson, along with OTC staff attended the commemoration ceremony of the November 27th, 1885 hangings of eight First Nations men in Battleford.

It's somber history, but we must never forget them: Walking the Sky, Bad Arrow, Miserable Man, Iron Body, Little Bear, Crooked Leg, Man Without Blood, Wandering Spirit.

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