

# New Tay Basin Plaque Recognising the Algonquin History

## Thousands of Years of Algonquin Homeland

Algonquin/Omàmiwini People have lived on this river and in this territory for thousands of years. These waterways were elemental to people's seasonal lives, moving into the family's territories in the upper watersheds for the winter and then downstream to the Kiji Sibi/ Ottawa Valley watershed for the summer. This was not empty land when the settlers arrived. Archaeological excavations in Lanark County have unearthed artifacts dating back at least 10,000 years to the time that the Champlain Sea receded.

### An Original Abundance

The vast forests, rivers and lakes provided spiritual relationships, food, medicine, clothing, transportation and shelter. Indigenous People could drink from the river; harvest fish including eels, wild rice and more from the lakes; feed and clothe their families from the plant world and abundant wildlife.

### Title, Responsibilities and Rights

In 1764 the British Crown and Indigenous Peoples met and exchanged wampum belts, using ceremonial protocols to confirm a nation-to-nation relationship in the Treaty of Niagara. Algonquin People agreed to share the land – within the terms of the Proclamation of 1763 that specified that non-Indigenous settlement could not take place north of the 45 degrees latitude. They did not surrender then nor have they ever surrendered their title, responsibilities and rights to the land. Subsequent treaties in eastern Ontario circumvented the commitments affirmed in the 1763 Royal Proclamation and the Treaty of Niagara. Townships were established on unceded land and grants of unceded land were given to non-Indigenous veterans of the war of 1812 and to settlers from Europe.

### Web of Life Threatened

Timber harvesting, potash production, land clearing to prepare farmland and the building of dams and canals changed the landscape significantly. The Web of Life was severely damaged. Wildlife declined and waterways were changed by the flooding of marshes and altering of river levels to achieve a measured flow of water to the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers. These impacts were so egregious that Indigenous Peoples starved.

Algonquin/Omàmiwini People continue to live in their traditional territory and are members of the local Ardoch Algonquin, Tay River and Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nations.

### Pimisi

Loss of biodiversity in the Kiji Sibi watershed has been significant. One species of particular note is the American Eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) known as Pimisi in Algonquin. Pimisi emerged 3.5 million years ago and was a source of great spiritual, cultural, material, medicinal and nutritional sustenance to Indigenous Peoples in North, Central and South America. Pimisi spawned in the Sargasso Sea in the North Atlantic Ocean and migrated up the St. Lawrence to Lake Ontario, the Ottawa River and to the other lakes and rivers in the ancestral territory of the Algonquin People, spending 17 or more years in fresh water before returning to the Sea. The great abundance of eels in Ontario rivers has been remarked upon since the 17th century. They consumed vast amounts of nutrients in the lakes and rivers, balancing the waterways' ecology.

The decline of this long-lived species can be attributed to colonization: dams, turbines, overfishing, pollution and environmental disruption. Pimisi was first listed as endangered in 2007 by the Ontario Species at Risk Act and remains in danger of extinction today. Algonquin People have been at the forefront in the conservation and restoration efforts for Pimisi.

### Algonquin Voices

"Today, the plight of the Eel must awaken us to the crucial need to transform our relationship with Mother Earth and All Our Relations, and to awaken us to the pivotal role of Indigenous Peoples in this process. Inherent in the prayer of the Indigenous Nations of Turtle Island is the deep knowledge that we are all connected [...] with each other, as well as with the chief elements, Mother Earth, Water, Air and Fire, the animate and inanimate, the plants, creatures of the waters, air and land, and the larger universe. The American Eel reanimates this prayer from ocean to river to lake and across the timelines. I pray for its return as that silver pathway into the future."  
William Commanda, Algonquin Elder, 1913-2011

"It was a vibrant Natural World with all life forming a web of interconnection including Indigenous Peoples who recognized that they were a part of the web, appreciated its entirety and celebrated the indivisible link between the health and vitality of the People and the health and vitality of all members of the web. The first responsibility that Indigenous Peoples accepted from Kiji Manitou (Great Spirit) was to honour the responsibility to care for the land and water, enshrined in Natural Law known among the Algonquin Peoples as GINAWAYDAGANUC."  
Larry McDermott, Algonquin Elder

"Our hunting grounds that are vast and extensive and once abounded in the richest furs and swarmed with deer of every description are now ruined. We tell you the truth, we now starve half the year through and our children, who were accustomed to being comfortably clothed, are now naked. We own, brother, that we are partly the cause of these present misfortunes; we were too good and generous; we permitted strangers to come and settle on our grounds and to cultivate the land; wood merchants to destroy our valuable timber, who have done us much injury, as by burning our rich forests, they have annihilated our beaver and our peltries, and driven deer away."  
Omàmiwini Grand Chief Francis Ka-on-di-no-ketch (Pepinau), 1841

Lanark County Neighbours for Truth & Reconciliation is excited to share with you this plaque that the Town of Perth has approved for installation in the Tay Basin. "Thousands of Years of Algonquin Homeland" speaks to the impact of colonization on Indigenous people. The plaque is the result of a lengthy period of collaboration with local Indigenous advisors.

The plaque will be installed in the spring of 2021 and an unveiling ceremony will take place then. We hope to raise \$4000 all of which will go towards the cost of the 36"x60" panel including its installation overlooking the Tay River bank at the Crystal Palace.

Donations can be made using this Go Fund Me link [gf.me/u/y7n8sv](https://gf.me/u/y7n8sv) or by e-transfer to [maureenbostock@hotmail.com](mailto:maureenbostock@hotmail.com), by sending a cheque to Maureen Bostock 1807 Highway 511, Balderson ON K0G 1A0 or dropping an envelope off at this address on your way to town.

Maureen Bostock  
on behalf of  
Lanark County Neighbours for Truth & Reconciliation  
December 4, 2020