

Principles of Development

Ardoch Algonquin First Nation

Preamble

Human activity that alters the land to accommodate social, cultural, spiritual and economic interests is known as development. All communities engage in some form or level of development in order to secure advantages that sustain and enrich the community and its individuals. Altering the land requires conscious and moral decisions that recognise in practice responsibility for the spirit of the land and the future generations who will also be dependent on it.

Algonquin people are the first people of the Kijisibi watershed and therefore have a special responsibility to ensure that the land is cared for. Algonquin people can look to no other place in the world to find their origins. Kijimanito created Omamawinini (Algonquin) in this valley to give them life and purpose. The creatures with who we share this valley are our closest relatives. All that is Algonquin, our culture, spiritual practices, language, governance, honour and relationships is the “story” of this land.

Algonquin concepts of land are embedded in Anishnabemowin. Akì is the root word used for land and it is found in many Algonquin words. Anokìwakì means hunting-ground, combining the words for work (anokì) and land.(akì). Likewise the word for farmland is kitegewakì, a combination of gardening (kitege) and land (akì). The ground itself is referenced in both akì and in the word kamig. Kamig denotes the ground itself and is used to describe conditions of the ground, but it is also used to describe the earth, the world as a universal idea. Words represent relationships. One of the most important relationships for Algonquin people to the land is found in the word tanakìwin. The literal translation is “homeland”, but as in most Algonquin words more is going on in the word. A fuller translation of tanakìwin would be “being of a place and having the knowledge of that place”. The component of knowledge is important when we consider that Algonquin is a knowledge based culture rather than a material culture; in essence, to know something is much stronger than to possess it. The root word “tana” is an active word and when combined with “kamig”, as in “tanakamigad”, means happening now, being now, reality in practice. In understanding these relationships as they are defined in Anishnabemowin we can begin to understand that citizenship or proprietary ownership are not conditions that constitute “homeland”, but rather a complex relationship of knowing the land is essential to “being at home” in the land.

Language is one way of understanding the Algonquin relationship with the land. Traditional practice also embodied values that secured protection and prosperity for collective families and communities. Algonquin people used over 250 different plant varieties for food and medicine and understood intimately their seasonal succession, where to locate them in abundance and how to preserve their vitality. Likewise, the harvest of small and large game animals was managed in a sustainable way. Algonquin people have never regarded their homeland as wilderness, but rather as that part of

creation that sustains them as a people. Through maintaining respect for the other creatures and their spirits, using only what is necessary, and recognising the interdependency of all things, Algonquin people have been able to live in harmony with their environment.

The responsibility for protecting and preserving our homeland is still a greater part of Algonquin culture and values. Canadian law provides Constitutional protection of our Aboriginal rights and title as defined historically by the Crown in its own laws and declarations. As Algonquins, having never ceded or sold our Aboriginal rights and title, we enjoy the relationship of trust and protection offered by the Crown in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, trade conference promises, historical documents and the Constitution Act 1982. However, it is important to recognise that the laws of Canada do not supersede the intention of the creator in placing Algonquin people here and giving us a way of living and a sacred responsibility to this land. It is this relationship that is the highest authority and from which Algonquins must take guidance.

Our homeland is now occupied by people of another origin. These people have developed our homeland in such a way as to have it conform to European ideas of land and they have exploited the land's resources for profit. During colonial times Algonquin people have also been caught up in exploiting resources for profit. Little of our traditional land is left for the Algonquin people to develop in our own interests. The powerful governments of Ontario and Canada claim to own our homeland. For many years they have dictated a strategy of exploitation and regulatory control. They have made significant attempts to diminish our own use of our homeland and its resources; even to deny that we exist as a people. These governments have facilitated an ideology which places Algonquin interests behind all others and reinforces this ideology through paternalistic practice, attitudes and language. These governments, through their influence on mass media and education, inform the public that Aboriginal interests and claims are inferior to their own and in doing so reinforce historical racism, fear and hatred of Aboriginal people. These governments use their own best practices in environmental protection, conservation, education, social welfare and economic development to undermine Algonquin self-determination and enforce their claim to superiority. These governments work outside of the relationships of trust and honour that were developed historically with the Crown and they shun their own constitutional obligations toward Algonquin people. While these governments have improved regulations protecting the environment, the administration of these regulations is still a political process. The final objectives of government land policy are to secure private profit and state revenue.

Not all people support the ideology or actions of Ontario or Canada in relation to the treatment and subjugation of Aboriginal people. Many Canadians share common interests with Algonquin people in working toward justice and equity, a secure economy, and protection of the environment.

Under these conditions and with an understanding of traditional knowledge and values, the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation shall adhere to the following Principles of Development.

Walking lightly on the land

A human can not really possess the land, for when his time passes the land remains. Algonquin people must respect that the life of the land is independent of human existence and that creation has its own purpose beyond sustaining human life. Algonquin people should regard the land as a living creature and should interfere as little as possible with its expressions.

Taking only what is needed

A human can only take so much until he is full; taking more will ensure that his children starve. When using the land and its resources Algonquins need to be aware of the purpose of their use and consider how their use will affect the wider environment. Extravagant exploitation that is driven by self interest or to increase one's reputation should be avoided. An Algonquin community should measure the consequences of development with its long term dependency on the land. When the land is disturbed for development a plan of remediation and protection of natural processes needs to be developed and implemented as a condition of the completion of the project.

Listening to the Elders

It is easy to listen to an Elder when he or she tells you what you want to hear, but much harder when they tell you what you need to know. Elders are the keepers of our knowledge and have a more complete understanding of the world than others who are younger. Elders who have worked on the land and depended upon it for their life and livelihoods have developed a deep appreciation and respect for the living world. The creator has given Elders the capacity for wisdom. These men and women are the most experienced scientists, counsellors, and warriors. The community should listen carefully and actively to the Elders in regard to the development of land.

Knowing the land

One can assume anything in idle talk, but a warrior and provider must have knowledge and they must seek an understanding of what they do not know. A warrior and provider must often respond to the unknown so learning is the key to overcoming ignorance. It is essential to success to understand in both fact and concept how the world works. Before affecting change in the land for development, the land and its many relationships and processes should be understood and known. As well, the affects of any phase of development should be evaluated and understood.

Protecting the land

The time has past when Algonquin people can ignore their responsibility for their place in creation for it is more than evident that as the land is diminished so are the people. Algonquins have no choice but to protect the land of their origin for they too will disappear with the other creatures whose lives are threatened or have been extinguished. Algonquins must take leadership in the control of development that serves little or no purpose or that threatens to undermine the wellbeing of the land.

Honouring the relationship between the land and the people

The people are of the earth in form and the most dependent of all creatures; our spirits are connected in a great journey. Each creature within creation has a purpose. When we develop the land it is imperative that each person have a role and take responsibility for the consequences of our actions. Every member of the community should be included in the benefits that come from development through participation in the processes of evaluation, creativity, preparation, construction, leadership and decision making. Through the process of development the community as a whole should be developed for the better.

Protecting the people and the sacred relationship to the land

The role of the warrior is to keep the peace and protect the people. As long as there are peoples who would subvert the sacred relationship between the land and the Algonquin people there will be warriors. Algonquin warriors must act with respect for peaceful accommodation while ensuring the rights and wellbeing of the Algonquin people are not diminished or violated. A warrior understands the consequences of violent action and seeks non-violent means of achieving success. Expressions of control, racism or paternalism will be regarded as violence against the Algonquin people and will not be left unanswered.

Making relations

The beauty of this world is expressed in its many colours and forms and in the complexity of its meanings and spirits. There are many human beings beyond the Algonquin community who share recognition of the abiding responsibility we have to our homeland and the greater world. We need to respect these people as brothers and sisters and work with them in mutually supportive ways. We need to listen to good advice when it is given in a respectful way as though it is given by a brother or sister.