

## “Put It Near the Indians”: Indigenous Perspectives on Pulp Mill Contaminants in Their Traditional Territories (Pictou Landing First Nation, Canada)

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### What Is the Purpose of This Study?

- To share what we have learned about the impacts of pulp mill pollution on A’s’e’k / Boat Harbour and Mi’kmaw peoples in Pictou Landing First Nation (PLFN) in Canada.
- The oral histories from Elders in the PLFN helped to conceptualize Mi’kmaw well-being in the context of environment and human health connections from Indigenous perspectives.
- To document and preserve intergenerational knowledge sharing through the creation of an archival record of Elders’ stories about A’s’e’k before contamination (according to OCAP® principles\*).

### What Is the Problem?

- A’s’e’k was once a culturally significant place and a central resource for Mi’kmaw peoples living in PLFN, but became a dumping site for contaminated pulp mill effluent, raising serious environment and health concerns in the community.
- The Pictou Landing Native Women’s Group was concerned that, as Mi’kmaw Elders pass away, their stories and knowledge about A’s’e’k before contamination and their perspectives on the subsequent changes were at risk of being lost.
- Indigenous perspectives on environmental contamination have been dismissed repeatedly by industry; local, regional, and federal governments; and other decision makers.

### What Are the Findings?

- Oral histories gathered from 10 Elders in PLFN and analyzed using a re-storying approach showed four story layers: (i) what A’s’e’k originally provided, (ii) the historical and cultural context of PLFN, (iii) changes to land and health after the mill, (iv) and the future of A’s’e’k.
- There is a deep connection between Mi’kmaw livelihood, local ecologies, health, and well-being.
- The relationship building that took place and the ongoing relational ethic of responsibility between the Pictou Landing Native Women’s Group and the academic members of the research team may serve as an example of balancing power, generating mutual trust, and decolonizing academic research.
- The oral history interview process has generated intergenerational knowledge sharing and is providing an important teaching resource for PLFN.

\* OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). Please refer to ([www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP](http://www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP)) for more information.

## Who Should Care Most?

- Federal and provincial decision makers and health authorities working with Indigenous peoples.
- Indigenous advocacy and health organizations interested in strengthening their research capacity.
- Environmental justice activists and organizations working on environmental impacts affecting Indigenous and other communities.
- Researchers (settler and Indigenous) seeking to develop research relationships with Indigenous communities based on trust and shared decision-making power.
- Teachers and educators with responsibility for educating researchers about methodologies, which promote decolonization, responsibility, and trust, and understanding of Canadian history.

## Recommendations for Action

- Encourage principles of community-based participatory research between Indigenous and academic communities, through on-going dialogue based on mutual trust and respect.
- Honor and illuminate the voices of Indigenous partners, and privilege the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge holders and Elders.
- Understand the impacts of environmental contamination on Indigenous communities and how these are experienced differently than non-Indigenous peoples as a first step to reconciliation.
- Assess environmental health with more than just biophysical markers; include local perspectives of change from social, mental, and spiritual health perspectives.
- Encourage an understanding that Indigenous health and well-being is deeply linked to the health and well-being of the land.