



Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent

Connecting People to Sustain & Enhance Culture, Community, & Conservation

SUMMARY

2024 Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent Annual Gathering

10th Annual In-Person Gathering
February 20 – 21, 2024
Sikookhtok | Lethbridge, Alberta
University of Lethbridge, Science Commons Building



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**ROUNDTABLE ON
THE CROWN OF THE
CONTINENT
ANNUAL GATHERING**
*Exploring Climate Change
and Conservation*

**FEBRUARY
20-21 2024**
IN SIKOQHKTOK
(LETHBRIDGE)
*A Two-Day Conference Celebrating
Indigenous Wisdom and
Collaborative Conservation Efforts*

IN COLLABORATION WITH KAINAI ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AGENCY AND THE OLDMAN
WATERSHED COUNCIL

City of Lethbridge

University of Lethbridge

OLDMAN WATERSHED COUNCIL

GATHERING SUMMARY

Over 150 individuals gathered in Sikoohktok - Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada for the 10th annual in-person Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent Gathering. Held at the University of Lethbridge, Science Commons building, the two-day cross border event was hosted in collaboration with the Kainai Environmental Protection Agency and Oldman Watershed Council.

The Gathering was a resounding success, bringing together stakeholders, researchers, policymakers, and community members to delve into critical issues facing this ecologically significant region. Over the course of the conference, attendees engaged in lively discussions, shared innovative ideas, and forged valuable connections aimed at advancing conservation efforts and sustainable development in the Crown of the Continent.

Speakers focused on climate change and conservation, examining these crucial topics from both Indigenous and Western perspectives, with a special emphasis on reconciliation. Key themes that emerged during the conference included the importance of collaborative conservation approaches, the need for increased climate resilience strategies, and the imperative to engage Indigenous communities as true partners in land stewardship.

Highlights:

- Celebrating and supporting Blackfoot leadership in land management.
- Sharing conservation and community-based successes across the region.
- Engaging with a diverse group of individuals who share a passion for this magnificent landscape.
- Fostering allyship and support for Indigenous-led initiatives, strengthening our bonds with Indigenous neighbours and partners.

Looking ahead, the momentum and connections generated at the gathering are poised to drive positive change throughout the region.



Photo Credit: Jon Martin

GATHERING AGENDA

DAY 1 | TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH

11:00 AM	Registration Opens	
12:30 PM <i>Atrium</i>	Gathering Convenes - Welcome & Introduction Master of Ceremony - Tony Delaney Elder Prayer - Charlie Crow Chief and Peter Weasel Moccasin Blackfoot Drum Group - Bull Horn University of Lethbridge - Dr. Matthew Letts - Dean of Arts and Science Kainai Environmental Protection Agency - Ninna Piiksi Dr. Mike Bruised Head Oldman Watershed Council - Shannon Frank Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent - Shawn Johnson	<i>60 min</i>
1:30 PM	<i>BREAK</i>	<i>10 min</i>
1:40 PM <i>BMO</i> <i>Auditorium</i>	Panel: Plant Sovereignty/Climate/Water /Innii <i>Speakers</i> Api'soomaahka William Singer III, KEPA Ninna Piiksi Dr. Mike Bruised Head, KEPA Dr. Leroy Little Bear, University of Lethbridge Justin Bruised Head, Blood Tribe Land Management Truman Big Swallow, Blood Tribe Land Management Elliot Fox, KEPA	<i>100 min</i>
3:20 PM	<i>BREAK</i>	<i>10 min</i>
3:30 PM <i>BMO</i> <i>Auditorium</i>	Panel: Private Land Conservation in Southern Alberta <i>Speakers</i> Tom Lynch-Staunton, Nature Conservancy of Canada Thorsten Hebben, Ducks Unlimited Canada	<i>45 min</i>
4:15 PM <i>BMO</i> <i>Auditorium</i>	Crown Cafe: Reconciliation <i>Invitation for Roundtable conference participants to share information about their organization and current happenings, needs, etc. Open mic, 1 - 3 minutes per speaker.</i>	<i>45 min</i>
5:30 PM <i>Atrium</i>	Reception and Dinner w/ Special Entertainment by Api'soomaahka William Singer III	

DAY 2 | WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST

7:30 AM <i>Atrium</i>	Coffee and Pastries	
8:00 AM <i>Atrium</i>	Good Morning Welcome Nathan Neudorf, MLA Lethbridge- East	<i>15 min</i>
8:30 AM	Panel: Watershed Councils - Milk River and Oldman River <i>Speakers</i> Shannon Frank, Executive Director, Oldman Watershed Council <i>Working with Nature to Combat Drought</i> <i>Life Aquatic: What the bugs are telling us about water quality</i> Tim Romanow, Executive Director, Milk River Watershed Council <i>Connecting Land, Water, and Biodiversity – Preview of the new</i> <i>Transboundary Milk River State of the Watershed Report</i>	<i>75 min</i>
9:45 AM	<i>BREAK</i>	<i>15 min</i>
10:00 AM	Presentation: Kitawahsinnoon Our Territory: The Blackfoot Place Map <i>Speaker</i> Souta Calling Last, Indigenous Vision	<i>45 min</i>
10:45 AM	Panel: Paahtómahksikimi Waterton Lakes National Park and Region <i>Speakers</i> Dylan Frank, Cultural Resource Impact Assessment Officer, Waterton Lakes National Park <i>Archaeology in Paahtómahksikimi</i> Bill Dolan, Waterton Biosphere Region	<i>45 min</i>
11:45	Lunch w/ Roundtable Awards	
1:00 PM <i>Atrium</i>	Crown Cafe: Climate Change <i>Invitation for Roundtable conference participants to share information about</i> <i>their organization and current happenings, needs, etc. Open mic, 1 - 3 minutes</i> <i>per speaker.</i>	<i>45 min</i>
1:45 PM	Panel: Innii Initiative - Blackfeet Nation <i>Speakers</i> Lauren Monroe Jr., Blackfeet Nation Rep. Tyson Running Wolf, Montana House of Representative Ervin Carlson, Director of the Blackfeet Buffalo Program	<i>90 min</i>
3:15 PM <i>Atrium</i>	Roundtable Discussion <i>In small groups, participants reflect on the central themes of the conference and</i> <i>how they can move forward with their work.</i>	<i>45 min</i>
4:00 PM <i>Atrium</i>	Conference Adjourns <i>Remarks</i> Ninna Piiksi Dr. Mike Bruised Head, KEPA Shawn Johnson, Roundtable Leadership Team	

THANK YOU

2024 Hosts

This year, the Roundtable was thrilled to collaborate with the Kainai Environmental Protection Agency and the Oldman Watershed Council to organize and host the 2024 Annual Gathering. Our deepest gratitude to our host committee:

- Shannon Frank, Executive Director, Oldman Watershed Council
- Ninna Piiksi |_Dr. Mike Bruised Head, Kainai Environmental Protection Agency
- Api'soomaahka | William Singer III, Kainai Environmental Protection Agency
- Dr. Leroy Little Bear, Kainai Environmental Protection Agency

2024 Speakers

(see agenda above)

2024 Volunteers

- Todd Eagle Child
- Wilma SpearChief
- Mindy Thompson
- Kit Livingston
- Andrea Watson
- Todd McCoy
- Jon Martin
- Emily Purvis
- Kallie Val-Zehan Desruisseaux

2024 Supporters

- City of Lethbridge
- University of Lethbridge
- The Conservation Fund
- Piikani Lodge Health Institute
- Heart of the Rockies
- Center for Large Landscape Conservation

2023-2024 Roundtable Leadership Team

- Emily Harkness
- Laura Caplins
- Travis Anklam
- Katie Deuel
- Shawn Johnson
- Dr. Mike Bruised Head
- Gerald Wagner
- Rich Janssen
- Dave Roemer
- Richard Klafki
- Len Broberg

Caterer

LA Chefs - Sky and Table Events

Thank you to all participants for joining us at this event and supporting local environmental organizations!

PRESENTATION NOTES

DAY 1



Photo Credit: Todd Eagle Child

Panel: Plant Sovereignty/Climate/Water /Innii

Api'soomaahka | William Singer III, KEPA

- Established Napi's Garden in 2021 to preserve Niitsitapi plant species.
- Advocated for teaching youth about plant sovereignty for future sustainability.
- Worked to raise awareness about the importance of seed banking for cultural resilience.

Ninna Piiksi | Dr. Mike Bruised Head, KEPA

- Advocates for reclaiming Indigenous place names and honoring cultural heritage.
- Emphasized the importance of preserving grasslands and advocating for water protection.
- Proposed drafting a Water Declaration to promote collective responsibility for water conservation.
- Encouraged intergenerational knowledge transfer through storytelling and cultural practices.

Dr. Leroy Little Bear, University of Lethbridge

- Stressed the interconnectedness of water conservation and human well-being.
- Promoted Indigenous perspectives on conservation emphasizing balance and relationships.
- Advocated for incorporating Indigenous ecological knowledge in conservation efforts.

- Emphasized the importance of humility and respect for nature in conservation practices.

Justin Bruised Head, Blood Tribe Land Management

- Highlighted the ecological benefits of reintroducing bison to their natural habitat.
- Emphasized the importance of grasslands in fighting climate change.
- Advocated for conservation efforts to protect both land and culture.
- Worked to empower Indigenous communities through sustainable land management practices.

Truman Big Swallow, Blood Tribe Land Management, Carnivore Species at Risk Technician

- Discussed various environmental projects including bison reintroduction and grassland conservation.
- Stressed the importance of protecting native grasslands as carbon sinks.
- Highlighted the role of Indigenous knowledge in land management.
- Advocated for policy changes to prioritize conservation and Indigenous land stewardship.

Elliot Fox, KEPA, Natural Resource Conservation and Land Management Consultant

- Leads the Native Trout Recovery Project and advocated for Indigenous-protected conservation areas.
- Emphasized the significance of trout and bison in ecosystem health.
- Proposed a Blackfoot IPCA to strengthen land conservation and restoration efforts.
- Works to foster collaboration between Indigenous communities and external stakeholders for sustainable resource management.



Photo Credit: Todd Eagle Child

Panel: Private Land Conservation in Southern Alberta

Tom Lynch-Staunton, Nature Conservancy of Canada

- Grew up on a cattle ranch in Pincher Creek, deeply connected to the landscape.
- Acknowledged privilege as a beneficiary of colonialism and honors Indigenous territories.
- Advocated for reconnecting people to the land and incorporating traditional knowledge into conservation.
- NCC conserves private and public land through partnerships and conservation easements, aiming for sustainable care of nature.

Thorsten Hebben, Ducks Unlimited Canada

- Traced DUC's origins to concerned waterfowl hunters in the 1930s.
- Stressed the importance of conserving grasslands and wetlands.
- Highlighted DUC's conservation easements, wetland restoration, and Indigenous engagement.
- Discussed challenges and successes in land conservation, emphasizing collaboration and overcoming misconceptions.



Photo Credit: Todd Eagle Child

Key Takeaways from panelists discussion with Dr. Mike Bruised Head:

1. Collaboration and Coordination among Conservation Organizations:

- Both Ducks Unlimited and Nature Conservancy of Canada acknowledge the importance of collaboration in achieving conservation objectives.
- Emphasis on learning from each other's experiences, avoiding competitive approaches, and aligning strategies to maximize impact.
- Discussions ongoing to ensure a unified approach and address potential overlaps in conservation efforts.

2. Facilitating Indigenous Connection with the Landscape:

- Recognition of the significance of incorporating Indigenous perspectives and traditional knowledge into conservation efforts.
- Efforts underway to incorporate cultural elements into conservation easements and prioritize Indigenous cultural and ancestral sites.

- Partnerships formed with Indigenous communities to support traditional activities, ceremonies, and knowledge exchange.
- 3. Mitigation Bank for Wetland Restoration:**
- Alberta's Mitigation Bank for Wetland Restoration discussed, with insights into mitigation ratios and valuation of ecosystem functions.
 - Efforts highlighted to restore drained wetlands and engage landowners in wetland conservation through provincial programs.
- 4. Durability of Conservation Easements in Rural Municipalities:**
- Concerns raised about potential threats to the durability of conservation easements due to proposed policy changes.
 - Importance stressed of advocating for permanent conservation and addressing misconceptions about conservation easements.
 - Emphasis on exploring alternative conservation agreements and maintaining collaborative relationships to safeguard conservation efforts.
- 5. Commitment to Continued Dialogue and Partnership:**
- Expression of interest in ongoing collaboration and partnership between conservation organizations and Indigenous communities.
 - Plans outlined to strengthen ties, exchange knowledge, and support each other's goals through Memoranda of Understanding and ongoing communication.
 - Recognition of the value of dialogue and collaboration in achieving shared conservation objectives and maintaining long-term relationships.



Special Entertainment by Api'soomaahka | William Singer III

Photo Credit: Todd Eagle Child

DAY 2

Panel: Watershed Councils - Milk River and Oldman River

Shannon Frank, Executive Director, Oldman Watershed Council

Working with Nature to Combat Drought

Life Aquatic: What the bugs are telling us about water quality

- Advocated for drought resilience strategies amidst the ongoing four-year drought.
- Highlighted the Council's inclusive approach with a diverse board representing various sectors.
- Emphasized the importance of neutrality in discussing watershed issues while providing comprehensive information for informed decision-making.
- Stressed the interconnectedness of water management between upstream and downstream communities within the Hudson's Bay watershed.
- Discussed historical climate data indicating the Old Man River's susceptibility to prolonged droughts.
 - Highlighted the significance of headwaters in providing water supply and the impact of land use changes on watershed health.
 - Provided current statistics on water scarcity, including low stream flow and reservoir levels.
 - Introduced ABwater.ca as a resource hub for drought-related information and conservation tips.
- Advocated for investing in natural infrastructure for drought resilience, citing its cost-effectiveness and multiple benefits.
 - Expounded on ecosystem services such as water filtration, habitat preservation, and air quality improvement.
 - Compared the cost-effectiveness of natural infrastructure to traditional grey infrastructure.
 - Cited examples of successful natural infrastructure projects and their tangible benefits.
- Highlighted the Oldman Watershed Council's efforts in restoring natural infrastructure and collaborating with stakeholders.
 - Discussed the Alberta Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program and advocates for increased funding.
 - Appreciated the inclusion of nature-based solutions in Alberta's emissions reduction plan.
 - Raised concerns about contradictory actions, such as incentivizing beaver dam removal despite advocating for water retention strategies.

Tim Romanow, Executive Director, Milk River Watershed Council

Connecting Land, Water, and Biodiversity – Preview of the new Transboundary Milk River State of the Watershed Report

- The report aims to address community concerns through science-based planning, research, monitoring, and stewardship, emphasizing collaboration across jurisdictions.
- Previous reports in 2008 and 2013 emphasized collaboration across jurisdictions but missed acknowledging landscape connectivity.
- Significant partnerships include the Blackfoot/Blackfeet Confederacy, Nekaneet First Nation, and various agencies from Alberta, Montana, and Saskatchewan.
- The updated report will integrate Indigenous knowledge, consider climate change impacts, assess biodiversity changes, and address challenges like discrepancies in data interpretation.



Photo Credit: Jon Martin

Presentation: Kitawahsinnoon | Our Territory: The Blackfoot Place Map

Souta Calling Last, Indigenous Vision

- Founder and executive director of Indigenous Vision, focusing on environmental and cultural preservation since 2014, officially established in 2015.
- Programs include the Blackfoot Place Map, IVmedia podcast, fee-for-service speaking engagements, custom mapping, environmental and cultural consulting, and workplace training in Cultural Humility.
- Blackfoot Place Map aims for habitat protection, cultural identity, and community education.
 - Home and habitat protection of Soiiitahpiiks
 - culturally appropriate watershed/environmental assessments and data security

- Methodology involves traditional knowledge, site visits, interviews, and data synthesis to address environmental stressors and preserve Indigenous heritage.



Photo Credit: Jon Martin

Panel: Paahtómahksikimi | Waterton Lakes National Park and Region

Dylan Frank, Cultural Resource Impact Assessment Officer, Waterton Lakes National Park
Archaeology in Paahtómahksikimi

- Provided background on personal journey into archaeology, influenced by family connections and early discoveries.
- Emphasized Indigenous engagement in archaeology projects, including hiring Indigenous staff and involving Elders and Knowledge Keepers in storytelling.
- Focuses on protecting Indigenous archaeological sites in Waterton through community involvement and establishing an Indigenous Archeology Advisement Committee.

Bill Dolan, Waterton Biosphere Region

- Has worked with Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association for 34 years, previously with Alberta Parks for 7 years.
- Gave an overview of biosphere reserves, including their goals of conservation, sustainable development, and community support.
- Discussed programs and priorities of the Waterton Biosphere Reserve, such as carnivore conflict reduction, species at risk programs, and youth environmental education.
- Outlined strategic plan for the next five years, focusing on community relations, landscape resilience, and educational opportunities.

Panel: Innii Initiative - Blackfeet Nation

Ervin Carlson, Director of the Blackfeet Buffalo Program

- Shared his journey from working as the Agriculture Director to overseeing the Bison Initiative, rooted in his passion for ranching and the Blackfeet tribe's connection to buffalo.
- Recounted the struggle to reintroduce buffalo, emphasizing their significance in Blackfeet culture and the need for their return to heal both people and land.

- Collaborates with organizations like the Intertribal Buffalo Council and Wildlife Conservation Society to facilitate the Inni Project, aiming to restore buffalo populations to their ancestral lands.
- Listed challenges, such as opposition from ranchers and bureaucratic hurdles, and highlighted successes like securing land for the buffalo and releasing animals on Chief Mountain, demonstrating resilience and determination in buffalo conservation efforts.

Lauren Monroe Jr., Blackfeet Nation

- Discussed the Bison Initiative and Chief Mountain issue, emphasizing the intersection of wildlife, culture, and the future.
- Highlighted challenges on tribal lands, including non-member ownership and cattle grazing, affecting wildlife and cultural practices.
- Listed successes in habitat preservation, with 26,000 acres reserved in 2020 for buffalo habitat, promoting wildlife conservation and cultural revitalization.
- Emphasized collaboration, acknowledgment of past leaders, and future prospects, including potential bison releases and partnerships for sustainable land management.

Rep. Tyson Running Wolf, Montana House of Representative

- Emphasized the historical and cultural significance of buffalo to the Blackfeet People, drawing parallels between their resilience and that of the tribe.
- Discussed grassroots efforts that are taking the lead in buffalo conservation, bypassing tribal councils and federal government bureaucracy to enact direct change on the ground.
- Underscored the importance of cultural integrity and sovereignty in buffalo conservation efforts, advocating for free-roaming buffalo and reclaiming traditional territories, such as the CMR game preserve. Additionally, the speaker emphasizes the need to preserve genetic diversity in buffalo herds, mirroring the diversity of the Blackfeet People.



Photo Credit: Jon Martin

GATHERING ARTWORK



Artwork Title: Sspomitápiiksi – Sky beings

Created by: Api'soomaahka | William Singer III (2024) for the 2024 Gathering

Artwork Description:

Reconciliation has many different aspects, as it's a continuing journey of various groups to create a balance and an understanding of each other's history and worldviews.

When we are removed from this colonial way of life, we are left standing or sitting on the ground, amidst nature, and what surrounds you is the original organic knowledge.

Learning the stories and secrets of nature leads us to the advancement of science, education, and the cosmos...

Our responsibility is to preserve and maintain the air, water, and land that sustains all life on the earth.

In the Blackfoot worldview, the iinnii (bison) is the staff of life and today is a representation of education that is our new buffalo.



To get more involved with the Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent please reach out to crowncoordinator@gmail.com
