

A Vision of Environmental Excellence

2006

BY FIRST NATIONS, FOR FIRST NATIONS



The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources' (CIER) Environmental Excellence Vision is a 'By First Nations, For First Nations' plan to assist First Nations in their goals for environmental and sustainability excellence. CIER is implementing this Vision in partnership with First Nations to help communities meet key environmental needs. We developed our Environmental Excellence Vision (EEV), Mission, and plan of activities based upon the needs identified by participants from First Nations and related organisations in our national dialogues over the past two years.



CIER

CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Partnerships to Protect the Environment

Who is CIER?

CIER is a First Nation-directed, national, environmental non-profit organisation. It was created in 1994 by a group of First Nation leaders who felt it was critical for First Nations to have access to their own environmental research and education institute that addresses environmental matters using an integrated approach combining multiple perspectives and fostering collaborative relationships. CIER offers research, training and professional development, and advisory services in four interconnected areas: forests, climate change, water, and sustainability.

CIER is an independent organisation. We are not affiliated with any political bodies, nor do we receive operational funding from any source. Instead, we have grown and flourished by working on a range of projects within the scope of our Mission. To date, we have worked on over 160 projects aimed at helping First Nations across Canada understand and address their environmental concerns.



CIER's Mission: Assist First Nations with building the capacity to address the environmental issues they face

CIER's Environmental Excellence Vision

Since 1994, CIER has been working with and for First Nations across Canada on environmental research and education projects. Our founders envisioned that CIER would grow over time to provide more extensive, high quality, effective environmental research, advisory, and educational services to First Nations. In other words, they had a Vision of environmental excellence for CIER. Our Board of Directors believes that having a First Nation institution with a clear vision of

environmental excellence is fundamental to achieving a meaningful increase in the environmental governance capacity of First Nations.

To realise this Vision, CIER put forth the proposal "Towards the Development of a First Nation Centre for Environmental Excellence", to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada in 2003. The proposal requested funds to explore the concept of environmental excellence through research and dialogue with First Nations and

related parties. Based upon discussions with First Nations, and experience working with First Nations, CIER has many, but not all, of the capabilities it needs to better assist First Nations in addressing environmental problems. Since 2004, CIER has explored the possibilities to better assist First Nations, and is now ready to enter into exciting and innovative partnerships to support First Nations in their goals, and to achieve our Environmental Excellence Vision.

How CIER Developed our Environmental Excellence Vision

Over the last couple of years, CIER asked many people the following questions:

- 1 According to First Nations, what are their environmental needs?
- 2 What do First Nations think about CIER's proposed EEV?
- 3 What recommendations do First Nations have regarding the purpose, activities, priorities, and funding of the EEV?

People answered these questions in a few different ways. CIER heard from a total of 134 First Nations and 50 First Nation organisations through meetings, conferences, and mail-in questionnaires. A total of 247 people participated in these dialogues.

In 2004, information on environmental tools (frameworks, best practices, etc.) was collected to understand what tools exist that a First Nation could use to help it deal with environmental concerns, management, and planning. While there are many tools available, First Nations have only been involved in the development of a few of them.

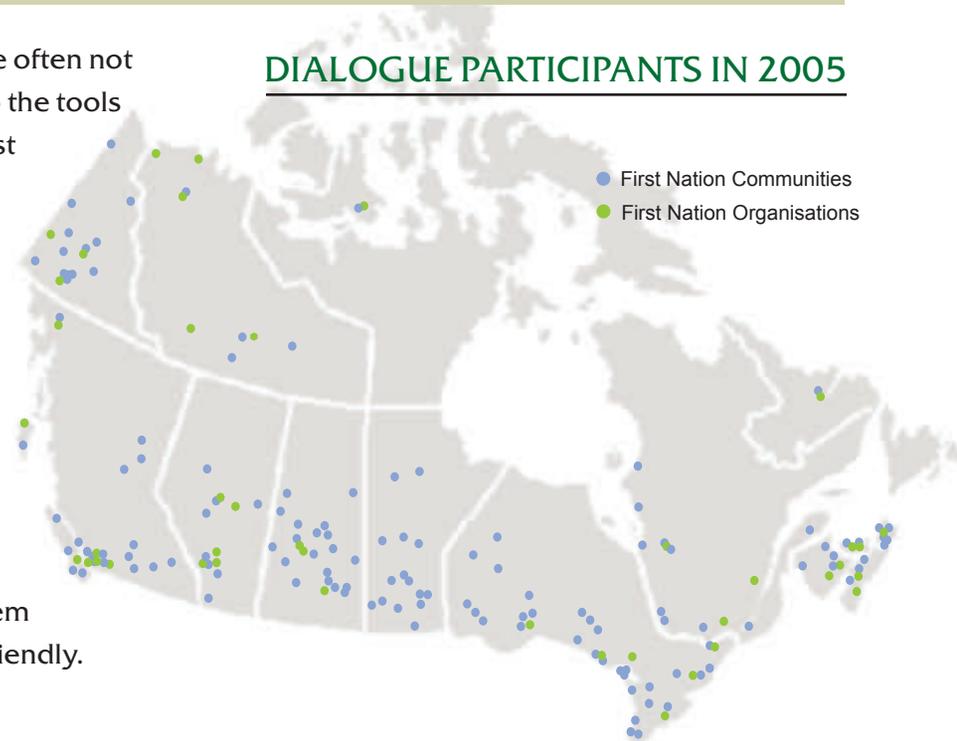
ENVIRONMENTAL TOOLS CIER REVIEWED:

- **Canadian Boreal Initiative: Boreal Conservation Framework**, setting out a balanced approach to engage in conservation and development
- **Environment Canada: Guide for Community-based Environmental Planning**, a comprehensive guidebook with step-by-step instructions
- **Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency: Cumulative Effects Practitioner's Guide**, Government of Canada's best practice guideline
- **Canadian Wildlife Service Environmental Assessment Series**, environmental assessment guidance documents using an "ecosystem-based approach"
- **The Aboriginal Mapping Network**, a strategic resource for Traditional Knowledge mapping
- **Institute on Governance: Understanding Governance in Strong Aboriginal Communities**, a policy and governance guidance tool
- **The Turning Point**, a set of protocols that address all aspects of sustainability

In addition, First Nations were often not the intended primary user, so the tools can be difficult to apply to First Nation needs.

In 2005, CIER conducted a more in-depth analysis of these environmental tools to gauge their potential usefulness to First Nations. This analysis helped to identify ways that CIER could work with First Nations to adapt these tools to make them more appropriate and user-friendly.

DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS IN 2005



The Working Advisory Committee

2006
CIER: A Vision of Environmental Excellence

To complement First Nations' voices CIER heard from across the country in our Dialogue Sessions, we consulted with well-respected and knowledgeable individuals who work with and for First Nations. CIER selected the following experts to participate in a Working Advisory Committee (WAC) to aid in the development of the EEV:

- Dr. Richard Atleo (CIER Board Member, Ahousaht First Nation)
- Reegan Breu (Project Coordinator, The Business Link, Aboriginal Business Service Network)
- Trevor Jones (Executive Director, Hupacasath First Nation)
- Dr. Dawn Martin-Hill (Academic Director, Indigenous Studies Programme, McMaster University)
- Dr. James (Chris) Paci (Yellowknives Dene Nation)
- Beverly Anne Sabourin (President, Beverly Anne Sabourin & Associates)
- David White (Director, Walpole Island Heritage Centre)

The WAC shared information, provided feedback, and made recommendations related to the EEV and to CIER's operations (e.g. long-term direction, opportunities & partnerships). The committee also helped CIER develop a formal project framework and an Indigenous Knowledge methodology that will be used to guide the EEV projects.



Principles of Environmental Excellence

2006
CIER: A Vision of Environmental Excellence

The following principles will guide CIER's activities as we work to achieve our EEV over the next five years. We will strive to be:

Innovative – CIER will value the co-production of new knowledge made possible by bringing together a multiplicity of knowledge, methods, and experts. We will value the application of this knowledge to solve real environmental problems facing First Nations.

Rigorous – CIER will strive to achieve the highest level of accuracy when working on environmental issues facing First Nations.

Responsive – CIER will work to meet the environmental needs of First Nations as identified by First Nations themselves.

Enhanced Capacity-Building – CIER projects will focus on strengthening the ability of First Nations to make effective governance decisions regarding their environment.

Conservation and Restoration-Oriented – CIER projects will work to protect and restore the environment, Indigenous Knowledge, and Indigenous languages.

Sustainable – CIER will engage in projects that are aimed at creating long-term, sustainable relationships with and between First Nations.

Effective – CIER will achieve the goals and outcomes of our projects. Every effort will be made to focus on projects that are solution-oriented, multi-disciplinary and carried out by the most effective team.

Ethical – CIER will act in accordance with the highest ethical standards and will work in a culturally respectful, empowering, and transparent way.



Principles are statements or descriptions of what should be strived for when carrying out projects at CIER. They reflect the values that govern CIER's project work.

Respecting Indigenous Knowledge

Over the last 12 years, CIER has engaged in numerous projects working with First Nations and Traditional Knowledge. The formal development of an Indigenous Knowledge or IK methodology to guide our work is a natural evolution in our approach.

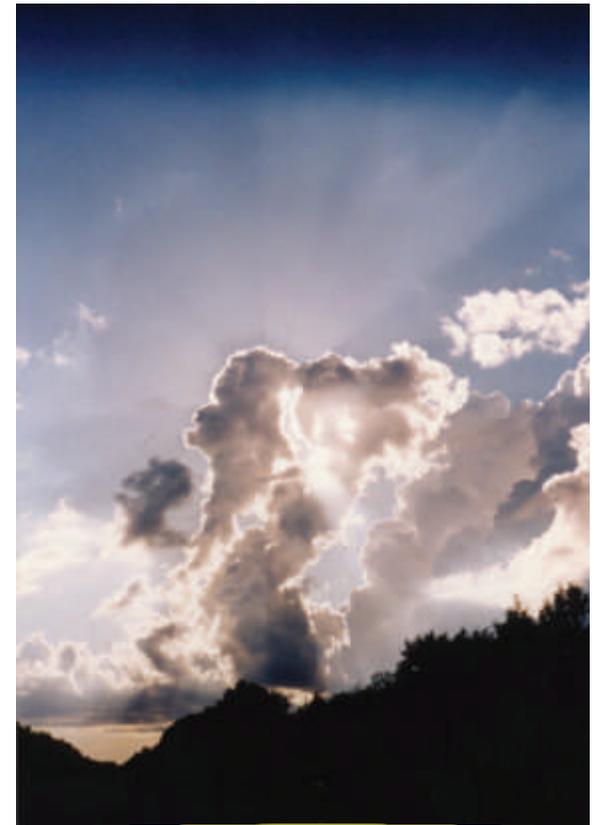
IK methodologies will be the framework within which CIER works. We use the term 'Indigenous Knowledge', rather than either Traditional Knowledge (which may imply that this knowledge doesn't change) or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (which may imply that this knowledge is solely related to ecology and doesn't change). We acknowledge that some First Nations may want to use the terms 'wisdom' or 'oral teachings' instead.

CIER will honour all perspectives and definitions of IK, especially those held by individual First Nations related to their 'ways of knowing' and expertise. CIER believes there is more than one definition of IK, and we will respect local culture, attachment to place, and each First Nations' own views. To provide direction on the use and protection of IK to our staff members and those working with us, CIER developed a list of commonalities present within most definitions.

CIER will adhere to these understandings of IK while doing project work:

- IK is a holistic paradigm that acknowledges the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being of people.
- IK is a complex and sophisticated system of knowledge drawing on centuries of wisdom and experience, associated with long-term occupancy of a certain place.
- IK is acquired through experience and observation, from the land or spiritual teachings, and is handed down from one generation to another.
- IK is dynamic. It constantly grows and changes with new information.
- IK includes knowing and understanding proper protocols and values of conducting oneself within the cultural norms of an Indigenous society.
- IK is unique to different Indigenous communities, reflecting cultural diversity.
- IK includes and is attached to the cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and subsistence ways of Indigenous peoples.

The interpretation of IK by CIER may evolve, grow and change as CIER engages in different projects or works with different First Nations.



Narrowing the Focus

Identifying Environmental Priorities of First Nations

An important part of the EEV includes the development of a five-year project plan based on the environmental needs First Nations told us about. EEV projects will be key components of CIER's future work and will help us achieve our Mission.

The goal of the EEV is to engage in projects that help to maintain or restore a healthy environment for First Nations through increased First Nation governance capacity.

Based on the two primary groups of needs identified by First Nation Dialogue Session participants, CIER developed the following main objectives for the EEV:

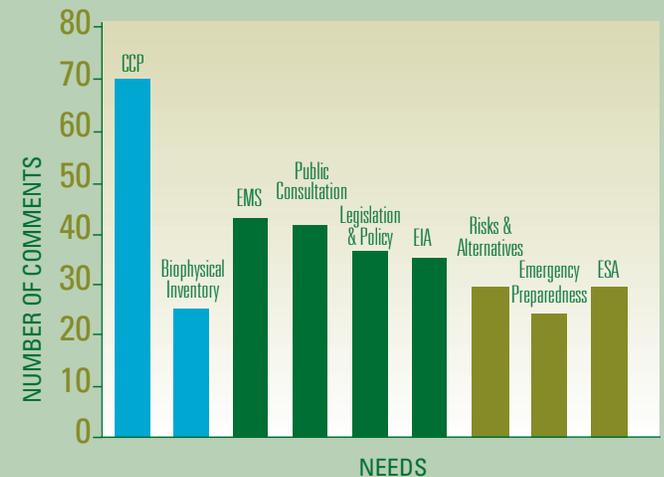
- 1. Environmental Governance:** EEV projects will support and build First Nations environmental governance capacity.
- 2. Sustainability:** EEV projects will support the sustainability of First Nation lands, waters, and air.

These two main objectives were divided into sub-objectives so CIER could develop the EEV projects. Like the main objectives, the sub-objectives were developed from the needs expressed by Dialogue participants. For example, to assist First Nations to achieve their Vision (sub-objective) of Environmental Governance (main objective), CIER will work with a number of First Nations on Comprehensive Community Planning (CCP) and Biophysical Inventories projects.

CIER Governance Framework



First Nation Governance Needs



Environmental Governance Sub-Objectives

CIER believes that First Nations have both the authority to set their own path and parameters, and a clear vision of what that path entails and where it is headed. However, in many circumstances, these goals need to be articulated. When this happens, First Nations can take action to implement their authority and vision to achieve community and environmental sustainability. The following sub-objectives describe what is needed from CIER to assist First Nations in building their environmental governance capacity.

AUTHORITY – To support First Nations authority to engage in environmental governance through articulating effective laws and policies.

VISION – To support First Nations in achieving their vision of sustainability through engaging in integrated community sustainability planning.

ACTION – To assist First Nations as they implement their authority and vision through the development and use of innovative and effective tools.

Sustainability Sub-Objectives

To move along a path towards sustainability, CIER believes people need to improve how they use the land and water, protect its human and ecosystem services and functions, prevent harm caused by human activities on both people and the environment, and continue to adapt changing needs to the changing environment. The following sub-objectives describe CIER’s understanding of sustainability.

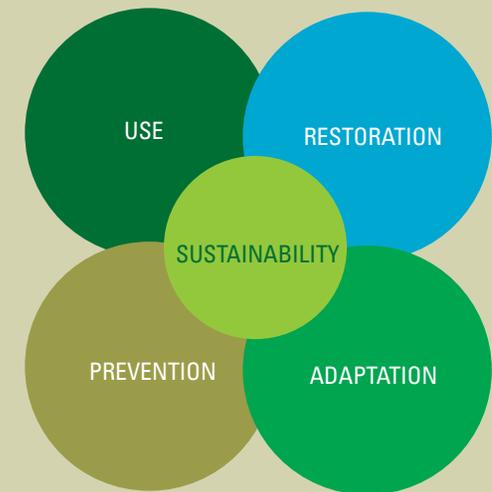
RESTORATION – To support First Nations in the restoration and protection of natural and human diversity.

USE – To assist First Nations in implementing sustainable use of First Nation territories.

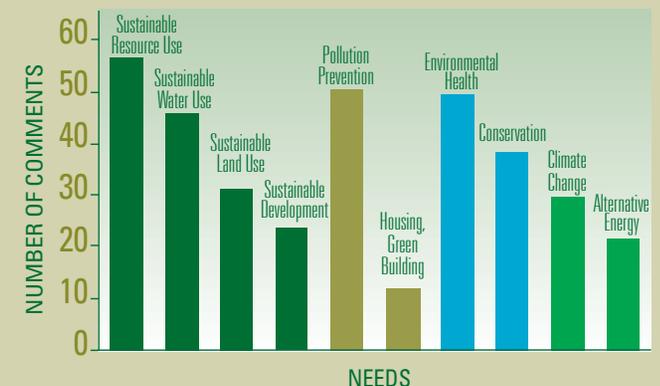
PREVENTION – To assist First Nations in the prevention of negative effects of human activities on their people and lands.

ADAPTATION – To assist First Nations in adapting to natural and human-induced changes in the environment, to allow for sustainable and long-term use of their territories.

CIER Sustainability Framework



First Nation Sustainability Needs



Environmental Excellence Projects

To meet the Governance and Sustainability objectives, CIER will implement the following projects in partnership with First Nations in 2006-2007

Environmental Law Phase I

This two-year project will explore how First Nations articulate and implement their laws to include environmental considerations in their decision-making processes. CIER will conduct a legal review, and meet with 10 First Nations working on articulating their environmental law, or who govern themselves by traditional laws (e.g. the Great Law, Natural Law). CIER will also convene a group of six Aboriginal environmental law scholars (both western and Indigenous knowledge-trained) to discuss examples of First Nations that have written (fully or partially) their environmental law, the process, and the required components.

Finally CIER will work with one First Nation to explore and apply its laws in an environmental context and in relation to western laws.



Environmental Governance Success Stories

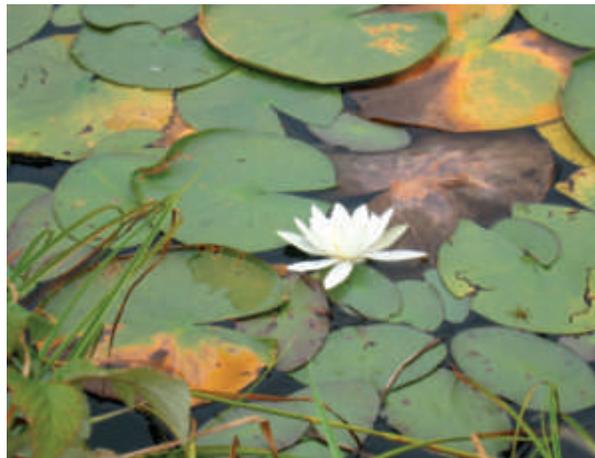
CIER will partner with two First Nations to research and document innovative and successful governance stories to help First Nations become aware of the different approaches to environmental governance that are being implemented by First Nations across Canada. To share this information with others, CIER will work with a videographer to develop a documentary profiling these innovative First Nations.

Integrated Community Sustainability Training

CIER will develop and deliver a collaborative planning program that offers training and support to six partnering First Nations that want to develop an integrated community sustainability plan. The program will span 18 months, with one-week training sessions scheduled every four months. Participants will learn about tools for developing their plan, engage in planning exercises, and share experiences.

Consultation Guide for First Nations

In partnership with two First Nations, CIER will develop a consultation guide that will provide First Nations with the background and information to prepare for and engage in consultations about government decisions that may impact First Nations rights. This comprehensive guide will be based upon the requirements set out in current case law and will relate these requirements to those in various pieces of federal legislation (for example, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act).



Indigenous Knowledge Project Phase I

CIER will work in partnership with two First Nations to develop holistic data collection guidelines and standards, a monitoring process, and software that enables First Nations to collect and track Indigenous and western knowledge about their communities. These tools will be directed at all aspects of sustainability so that a First Nation can develop sound baseline information on their environment, economy, society, and culture.



Information Projects

2006
CIER: A Vision of Environmental Excellence

First Nation participants and WAC members stressed the need for people to have better access to good environmental information. To meet this need, CIER will define our role in providing access to quality environmental information, and will assess the feasibility of or engage in the following information-related projects:

1. Enhanced Website – CIER will update and enhance our website to make it a more user friendly, searchable source of information on First Nation environmental governance and sustainability issues.

2. Environmental Hotline – In the first year of EEV projects, CIER will conduct a feasibility study and engage in the initial planning required to provide an environmental hotline service for people who are not able to access the Internet, or who want to speak directly with someone at CIER to find particular environmental information (e.g. What government department in my province

deals with environmental licensing issues? Where can I find information on what should be in an Environmental Impact Assessment?)

3. First Nation Dialogue Series – CIER will start the process of organizing four national First Nation Dialogues for First Nation leaders and experts to come together to discuss key environmental governance and sustainability issues. These Dialogues will serve as focused “think tanks” related to a particular environmental issue. The proposed themes of the four Dialogues are:

- A. Indigenous Voices and the Environment;
- B. First Nations and Environmental Jurisdictions;
- C. Indigenous Science; and,
- D. First Nations and the Economics of Sustainability.

The final products developed through EEV projects will be shared with all First Nations. Information on projects and their results will be made available in a user-friendly format on CIER's website.

As with First Nation partnerships, pursuing partnerships with other First Nation organisations, academic institutions, government institutions, and the private sector, are important for strengthening the development of CIER, sharing information, and eliminating duplication of initiatives. In the next five years, CIER will pursue a number of partnerships with several organisations and institutions to better meet the environmental needs of First Nations.



Next Steps

For many years, CIER has heard First Nations express the need for assistance in meeting their environmental needs through creative, innovative, and effective initiatives. We have been asked to provide services that range from community-specific and ground level, to national and policy related, as well as to provide and share meaningful information with First Nations across Canada on a regular basis. In the past CIER has engaged in projects that address First Nations' environmental needs and will continue to engage in these types of projects in the future.

The projects and initiatives that are part of the EEV will further guide CIER to assist First Nations in building capacity to achieve better environmental governance and community sustainability. CIER's EEV cannot be achieved without the participation and interaction with First Nations. It is very important to form meaningful partnerships with First Nations to carry out the EEV initiatives.



All projects embody a partnership approach and braid together western and Indigenous Knowledge and methods as outlined in CIER's project framework. Many projects are planned as multi-year initiatives to allow for significant capacity building and participation among the First Nation partners. Project and partnership updates will be available on our website.



If your First Nation is interested in partnering with CIER in any of the projects mentioned in this newsletter, please contact CIER by email at environmental_excellence_vision@cier.ca or by telephone at 204.956.0660



How Can You Get Involved?

2006
CIER: A Vision of Environmental Excellence

The “by First Nation, for First Nation” approach to CIER’s Environmental Excellence Vision means that feedback from First Nation communities and organisations is essential.

If you would like to provide your input, or comment on our Vision of Environmental Excellence, we would welcome the opportunity to talk with you. If you are interested in being involved in the EEV projects listed in this newsletter, please contact us environmental_excellence_vision@cier.ca



CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources
3rd Floor – 245 McDermot Avenue,
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0S6
Tel: 204.956.0660 • Fax: 204.956.1895
www.cier.ca