

Reconciliation in Action: Reflections on Reconciliation within the Georgian Bay Biosphere Region, Anishinabek Territory



(Photo credit: Arthur Gron)

A Reflection Paper prepared for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO
By JUDGE, Kyla & MASON, Greg
Georgian Bay, August 2019

To quote this article:

Cover image: *Anita Chechok, Wasauksing First Nation and founding member of GBBR's Cultural Advisory Circle*

JUDGE, Kyla & MASON, Greg. "Reconciliation in Action: Reflections on Reconciliation within the Georgian Bay Biosphere Region, Anishinabek Territory", the Canadian Commission for UNESCO's Idealab, July 2019.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

About the Authors



Zhowshkawabunokwe (Kyla) is an Anishinaabe Kwe from Shawanaga First Nation. She recently graduated in Indigenous Studies from Trent University and is employed by GBBR as a Land-Based Youth Education Coordinator.



Greg Mason is a lifetime resident of Georgian Bay and Parry Sound, Ontario and is the GBBR General Manager. He is educated in environmental science and land planning.

Introduction

The crafting of a story of partnership in the spirit of truth and reconciliation is not easy; no single person can represent the fullness of our experiences. Rather, we can look for and share patterns. However, the crafting of this paper has been valuable in helping staff at the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) understand where we have been and where we are on our journey together.

This article was commissioned by the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association (CBRA) and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, with support from the Community Conservation Research Network (CCRN). It is a collaboration of Kyla Judge and Greg Mason, both staff members of GBBR.

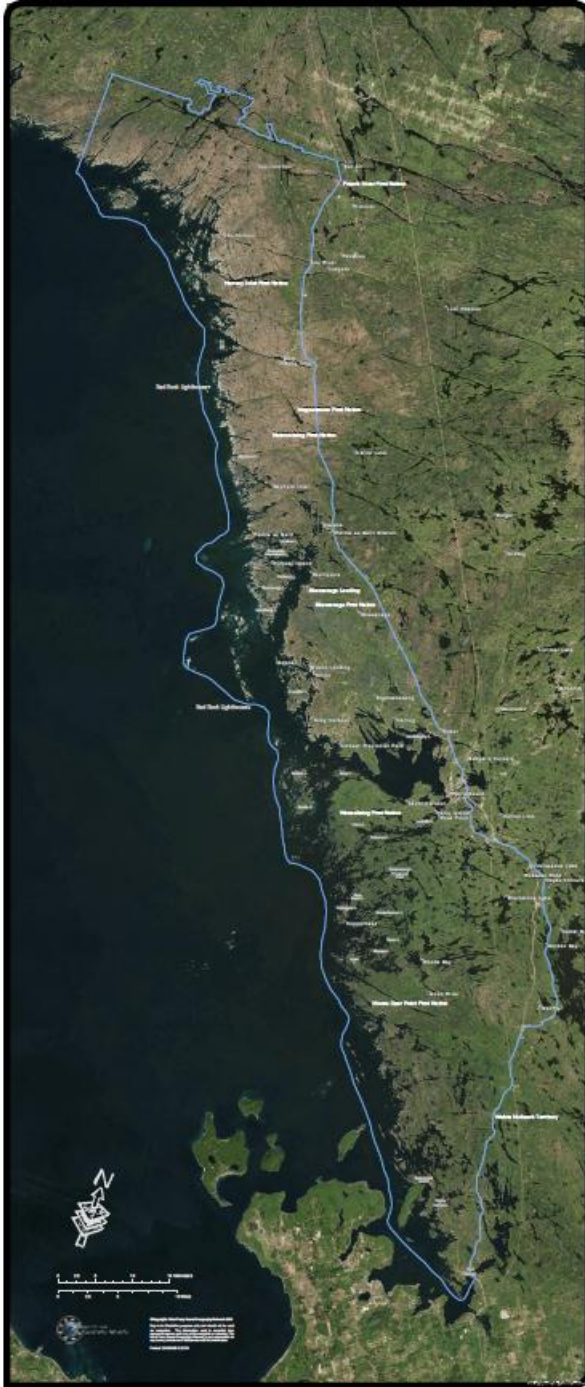
“We worked separately and jointly on the answers to questions provided by CBRA for this reflection. These were then provided to Becky Pollock, Executive Director (GBBR), and an Elder, Marilyn Capreol, for reflection and refinement. They were able to provide additional insights and perspectives on some of the GBBR history with reconciliation and partnership and on the structure of presentation.

Our hope would be to see this document as a living document in which we are continually updating the story with the lessons, challenges, and successes of co-building what this UNESCO designation means through its application to our region and strong relationships.

Moreover, the exercise has been helpful in highlighting the opportunity to refine GBBR’s external communications and the potential to develop a more media-oriented approach to communicating these important messages. Our intent is to follow up this exercise by explicitly seeking input from the GBBR Cultural Advisory Circle, Stewardship Gathering Network and the youth working with Kyla at the local high school.”

Acknowledgment of shared place: Unceded lands and traditional Indigenous territories

The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, designated by UNESCO in 2004, is located entirely on Anishinabek territory. Its boundaries extend north from the Severn River to French River, and inland from the provincial Highway 400 (formerly Highway 69) corridor and westward out to the Limestones and Western Islands. Locally, the area is known as the “30,000 Islands,” which captures the freshwater archipelago ecosystem that makes the GBBR unique in UNESCO’s [global network](#) of over 701 biosphere reserves in 124 countries. Our GBBR office is located where Ziigwaan (Seguin River) meets Mnidoo-Gamii (Spirit Lake), the traditional name for Georgian Bay.



“We at GBBR are partners in service of Mother Earth – her body, the water, the fluid in her veins and the air that she brings as she gazes to the sky world, to Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun. The UNESCO Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) is fortunate to be situated here.” (Kyla Judge)

The GBBR is grateful to our Anishinabek hosts – Dokis First Nation, Henvey Inlet First Nation, Magnetawan First Nation, Shawanaga First Nation, Wasauksing First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, and Beausoleil First Nation – for reminding us that we are accountable to all of our relations.

The GBBR also recognizes that we are situated on the territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabek, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. The Parry Sound area is currently home to diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Our work takes place against the backdrop of the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850, which includes and extends far beyond GBBR, and the Williams Treaty of 1923 that applies to areas in and beyond the south of GBBR. GBBR staff and regional residents recognize that education about treaties and traditional governance is widely needed.

“We recognize that there is much to be learned. The Anishinabek culture and language provide a strong sense of individual and collective responsibility and accountability to land, water and sky world, and each other. In our learning, we are called to acknowledge past and ongoing

harms (Truth) and actively seek means to support the community in the roles it defines for us (Reconciliation). To this end, we are starting to explicitly ask of ourselves and the community what specific Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action GBBR should be undertaking and how local Indigenous communities want to engage with GBBR.” (Greg Mason)

Question 1: What activities or initiatives have you carried out to learn about or work with Indigenous peoples in your BR region? What have you done with Indigenous peoples?

Beginning in 1998, the biosphere reserve formation committee sought Indigenous perspectives and support for the UNESCO nomination. When the BR was officially designated in 2004, the board of directors at the time included members of the Wasauksing and Henvey Inlet First Nations. Invitations to GBBR events and programs have been, and are still, extended to all Indigenous communities.

Various levels of engagement across groups, organizations and First Nations, exist at different times. The French River Visitor Centre's Cultural and Aboriginal Advisory Committee is made up of representatives and Elders from several area First Nations; they invited GBBR to co-host a conference in 2008 and organize annual community teachings, workshops and powwows at the French River Visitor Centre. Marilyn Capreol, Elder and committee chair, has provided guidance to GBBR staff over many years and from 2005 to 2010 attended each of the workshops that brought stakeholders together to design and launch an ecosystem-health reporting program called "State of the Bay;" reports were released in 2013 and 2018. Marilyn taught us that the choice and use of words were very important when it came to matters pertaining to land and waters. We also attended meetings and gatherings that created networks and new relationships with other First Nations and their projects.

Upon reflection, our efforts were not sufficiently intentional or consistent, although there was a fundamental awareness and respect for First Nations brothers and sisters sharing this place. We lacked the knowledge about how to connect with communities, to build awareness of GBBR, and to clearly listen to what our role could be. Using mainstream modes of communication such as letters of invitation and emails were inadequate. GBBR board and staff members did not go to the communities enough to explain our work and our availability to partner for and with communities, if they wished. We knocked on a lot of doors for many years, but the cultural divide seemed to be too wide to bridge. We did not always get a response. We also were extremely sensitive to the huge number of other issues that First Nations were dealing with and their often-limited capacity. We did not yet know how to make a respectful request (i.e. the need to present tobacco to signify the request for a relationship). In short, our efforts were neither active enough nor did we fully see the source of guidance all around us – the region's Indigenous members.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) was adopted by the United Nations in 2007 but Canada did not sign on until 2016. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission began in 2008 and reported in 2012. The colonial legacy of Canada was again exposed throughout the 150th anniversary year in 2017. Public awareness, the national discourse, and the policy landscape concerning Indigenous rights in Canada have been evolving; the discourse of "reconciliation," though relatively new, provides fertile ground to position this journey. But to reconcile, people require meaningful cross-cultural relationships and deeper, or transformational, personal understandings.

Over the years, we have steadily expanded our engagement efforts and made intentional requests for guidance to better include Indigenous perspectives. We have encouraged staff and board to attend events, network, and make GBBR accessible and responsive. We have produced maps, articles, place names and educational resources that acknowledge and celebrate Anishinabek culture. We created an Indigenous youth portfolio and want to extend it into other program areas.

Relationships began to grow from learning through these efforts and active participation. As our understanding and capacity grew, we worked more diligently to participate and support events with

Indigenous partners, as evidenced by partnership funding of the 2017 and 2018 Gchi Dewiin Festival to include a youth-oriented day. The GBBR's Periodic Review to UNESCO in 2014 helped to highlight that more attention and focus were needed for awareness and learning. Building from those insights and recommendations, we have worked to be more diligently present and available, to listen and learn, to share our experience and information, and to help others network with communities. A cultural change of the magnitude reconciliation requires will take time and the simultaneous efforts of many stakeholders.

Activities or approaches to relationship-building include:

- A cultural advisory group emerged out of networking with Indigenous women, and created informal meetings over tea centered on partnership-building between GBBR and area First Nations and Indigenous youth. These conversations led to expanded and slightly more formal meetings that resulted in advice and program ideas.
- Learning how to connect with First Nations' governance structures (Chief and Council, band and program staff) – a process that is individual to each First Nation
- Being present: attending pow-wows, community events, meeting with communities
- Collaborating on community ideas to develop projects and programs (e.g. Species at Risk monitoring in Magnetawan First Nation) and telling those stories (TVO documentary series *Striking Balance*)
- Making mistakes and then working with staff and community members to apologize and work through how to not make those mistakes again in the future - specifically around GBBR's responsibility and process to engage/consult on program ideas
- Showcasing First Nation community partners and projects in major "State of the Bay" ecosystem-health reports (e.g. Shawanaga First Nation fish hatchery in the 2018 report)
- When invited, attending and supporting as volunteers or partners/funders Indigenous-led events
- Organizing and sharing cultural-awareness training for staff and board and inviting groups to co-learn with us (high school teachers, national and provincial park staff, etc.)
- Having staff meet periodically with Chief and Council to share what GBBR is doing and what we can do to support Indigenous communities.

Question 2: What has worked well?

From a BR staff perspective, what has worked well has been to be more consistently present and active to listen to multiple voices of community: from Knowledge-Keepers and Elders to employees, residents and Chiefs and Council. We have sought advice and input on our programs and also have learned to seek multiple approvals/directions on specific projects rather than listening to just one voice. We have made mistakes (and will unfortunately continue to do so) but we acknowledge those mistakes, apologize and find ways to mend the harms caused by those mistakes and not to repeat them. Lastly, we were fortunate to employ an Anishinaabe Kwe to specifically advance GBBR's capacity-building role for Indigenous urban youth in providing more land-based learning opportunities. In all this work, and

despite our tendencies to do otherwise, we strive to listen to and learn from the voices of Knowledge-Keepers, and honour their wisdom and advice on how to care for the land, waters and people of this territory.

Question 3: What challenges have you faced?

One of our biggest challenges is the inherent perspective of a predominantly non-Indigenous staff and board. Because the majority are not of an Indigenous culture or have many cultural understandings of a different nature, and are “white” Euro-Canadians endowed with the privileges of post-colonialism, our identities and assumptions are a barrier to reconciliation. By questioning and challenging our familiar perspectives and knowledge, and by sharing cultural lenses and expanding our understandings, we reduce that barrier – but we don’t eliminate it.

As an organization, it is not clear what a biosphere reserve’s role and responsibility and identity as a partner and ally organization should be with community groups. As well, there is the false perception that, because of the UNESCO association, we are a government-led and -funded organization. This has led to various degrees of confusion and mistrust about our role(s).

From a purely administrative and organisational perspective, liaising and developing long-term understanding and relationships with many individual communities, each with its own Chief and Council and staff, is a significant challenge since GBBR lacks stable core funding. We are sensitive to the fact that building relationships and trust between organizations takes leadership and time, and that we don’t always have as much time or staff capacity as we would like. We strive to provide outreach equally to the 14 communities in GBBR (7 area First Nations and 7 municipalities), but realize that only certain people will take up the opportunity to initiate partnerships. We have yet to build any partnership with the Métis. Some communities will therefore be more active with GBBR and some less, and at different times.

The governance structures of each First Nation community are diverse and the processes for when and how to partner and with whom (e.g., Chief and Council, Healing Centres, teachers, Elders, individuals within organizations, community members, etc.) are dynamic and a constant learning process. This is also true of our work with non-Indigenous communities. GBBR and some First Nations see the need to establish consultation protocols for mutual partnership development in the interests of clarity, transparency, consistency and common ground. Treaty principles of friendship, respect and sharing are paramount.

Though not unique to First Nation communities, the speed at which GBBR staff can and want to work versus the possible pace of consultations and partnerships with more formal governance/government are quite different. In addition, respecting cultural practices and processes while building new relationships will, necessarily, take more time.

We have struggled with the challenging perception that a “non-Indigenous” organization like GBBR would be leading an Indigenous program and receiving funds that some see as intended for Indigenous groups (issues of legitimacy and accountability for use of federal funds). While this issue may never be

resolved, we rely on the diverse voices of the Cultural Advisory Circle, including Indigenous youth themselves, to provide guidance for us on our roles.

GBBR staff and board are moving into a bridging role. As staff and board, we are struck by the inherent racism in the non-Indigenous communities and the structural colonial legacies that we work with; we have faced some criticism of our programs. We are actively seeking training to learn about the *truths* of colonial trauma, and staff have asked for conflict-resolution and anti-racism training to be better equipped to speak to and transform the cultures we inhabit.

From a funding perspective, GBBR is still reliant on government program grants to support most of its Indigenous engagement and partnership work; changes in provincial and federal government priorities can jeopardize this critical work. We are seeking ways to build long-term stability into these program areas while weaving Indigenous perspectives throughout our work and communications.

Stewardship Gathering Network

In 2018, GBBR, in discussion with Consultation Officers and Lands Management staff from a variety of First Nations, identified the need to better communicate what activities GBBR is working on and to seek to understand our role(s) in supporting First Nations in matters of caring for the land and water. This has also been an opportunity for individual communities to share their approaches and needs with respect to land-management. These gatherings are hosted in collaboration between GBBR and a different First Nation for each meeting; this enables all of us to learn a bit more about each community with every visit. These gatherings are at an early stage of development and will continue as a means of listening to what is happening on the land and water and in the communities.

Question 4: How have you acknowledged and addressed challenges?

The challenges and barriers we have faced, and are continuously navigating, reflect GBBR's role as a non-governmental community organization that is predominantly operated by non-Indigenous peoples. GBBR benefits from the social, cultural and economic advantages of an organization of educated scientists, researchers, educators, and humanitarians. Learning about these inherent advantages and privileges and how we seek to rebalance relationships can be an uncomfortable process; it is, however, a necessary part of our growth.

Our role in reconciliation is, first and foremost, actively acknowledging our privileges and openly discussing them as a proactive way of ending systems of oppression. This is intended to begin approaching relationships with integrity and equity. Specifically, we need to listen more and speak less.

- **Integrity and direct communication:** We respect and honour the guidance shared by the people we seek to work with, as we are always learning.
- **Accountability:** We need to demonstrate and express our support in our relationships and partnerships. This includes transparency, reflection and participation.

We want to continue developing and encouraging integrity within our partnerships. Our intent and ambition are to participate and contribute in building a healthy economy, protecting the environment, and creating vibrant communities. It has been a necessary major learning curve for our organization to share time and space with our partners, to respond and reflect. Here is a summary of GBBR's ongoing learning:

- **Language and knowledge accessibility:** As a team of passionate and determined researchers, scientists, stewards, and educators, how we present and share knowledge, ideas and programming must be accessible to a multitude of audiences. We intend to continue our work as one piece of a larger community. We always greatly appreciate dialogue as to how we can respectfully ensure our work is most accessible.
- **Our intentions** with respect to projects, programs, and community engagements need to be clearly and explicitly identified (*Why now? Why this idea? What is GBBR's involvement?*). We also acknowledge the barriers that are created by our use of the English language. We are working diligently on speaking some basic Anishinaabemowin!
- **Building our capacity to model reconciliation:** Considering that GBBR is predominantly operated by educated and privileged people, it is important that our responsibility to the land, waters and original peoples directly acknowledges and confronts systems of oppression. We are continuously building relationships and doing our own research to begin to understand systems of oppression and colonization, to ground our sense of community, **and to understand our roles in building a community of reconciliation**. For our non-Indigenous partners, this also means sharing learning opportunities, such as cultural competency/sensitivity training.
- **Celebrating the work of our Indigenous partners: From time immemorial**, Indigenous Peoples have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of education, science and culture. The language we use, such as "stewardship" and "conservation," does not do justice to the much more robust and complex Indigenous understandings of those concepts. In Canada, colonial violence overshadows the celebrations of strength and resiliency of Indigenous Peoples.
- **We are continually exploring how to respectfully share our gratitude** for and admiration of our partners and networks, and celebrate cultural resilience and innovation in GBBR communications, newsletters, videos and social media. Two of GBBR's committees are intended to build relationships: The Stewardship Gathering Network (focused on land-based learning, ecosystem threats and protection, science and monitoring) and the Cultural Advisory Circle (focused on community engagement, youth and learning). Indigenous partners have expressed appreciation for the opportunity for dialogue and to provide guidance of 'best practices' for GBBR.
- **Prioritizing Indigenous knowledge throughout GBBR:** Recently, we have explicitly acknowledged that Indigenous knowledge is a fundamental priority for GBBR. We are still trying to understand our responsibility to this territory's original peoples. We are still learning about cultural protocols, as we do not want to perpetuate or recreate systems of oppression. **Specifically, this means continuing to ask partners what our role is rather than assuming or presuming our role.** One opportunity is to nurture ongoing dialogue within the Stewardship Gathering Network on how to honour and demonstrate our Indigenous partners and knowledge throughout the State of the Bay program and then report in 2023.

Question 5: How is GBBR growing?

The three pillars of our UNESCO Biosphere Reserve mandate are education, science and culture. GBBR has evolved as a not-for-profit by developing programs that are first focused on education, then science and now culture; these themes are layered and interconnect. We acknowledge that we have under-represented and sometimes misrepresented Indigenous Peoples and knowledge in our work.

For the past 10 years, GBBR has more actively engaged in partnership-building. Through intentional conversations, networks and respectful requests for guidance as well as through various forums and gatherings, GBBR has been reminded time and time again of our accountability to the original peoples of this territory, as the non-Indigenous members are visitors. While culture is a pillar in our mandate, we also honour the fact that culture and reconciliation are not isolated boxes on a checklist, but rather, a foundation and momentum for the work that we do. Below are some of the initiatives GBBR has undertaken in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Building Our Bridge

Building our Bridge is an award-winning book authored by local high-school youth, telling the story of Parry Sound high schools' journey through reconciliation. The students (Anishinabek and non-Indigenous) wrote and provided art for the book to document and portray the long and sometimes difficult path with respect to reconciliation that the high school has taken and continues to work on.



Two of the five student authors of *Building Our Bridge: Our Journey of Reconciliation*, Mackenzie Elwes and Gracie Crafts, with GBBR executive director Becky Pollock at the public launch when 300 people attended.

GBBR became involved when the students won a national award through the Me to We Innovate contest and wished to host a public performance of the book. With staff support to the student organizers and supporting teachers, as well as funds for the venue and gifts to Elders, the students presented the book on stage at a local performing arts centre to 300 people in November 2017. Displayed at the event was an archival collection of documents, awards, national apologies, and news clippings about cultural learning in the Parry Sound community over the past 30 years. GBBR staff continue to work with students on follow-up programming, using the book as a platform for teaching and discussing next steps for reconciliation.

See <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/parry-sound-high-school-reconciliation-book-1.4460567> for more information.

The 2017 performance was documented in three YouTube videos produced with financial support from CCRN:

Act I https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBDp3_yuRsl&t=22s

Act II <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UuU3FMvry8&t=7s>

Act III Acknowledgments <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3kVGhgziHc>

Question 6: How are these efforts of value to you personally? How do they help your BR address its UNESCO mandate?

"I value many of the cultural teachings as they provide perspective and approaches to relationships with each other and the land that are different than mainstream, neo-liberal approaches. While hard, learning about recent history, such as residential schools and the 60's scoop, is hugely informative in understanding the historic and current practices of colonization. This provides a context for understanding how to better partner and understanding of perhaps why partnership and trust is so hard to develop.

The knowledge that the Anishinaabek share is integral to understanding landscape changes and providing holistic perspectives on how ecosystems function; this is an awareness and understanding that traditional science approaches often struggle to demonstrate and articulate.

Specifically, we are finding that our relationships are able to clearly articulate the need for our BR to support two key activities: (1) promoting and supporting activities that build Indigenous communities and (2) activities that create bridges between communities to enhance reconciliation actions." Greg Mason, 2018.

Georgian Bay Anishinabek Youth

The need for Indigenous youth support has been continuously identified throughout various streams of community engagement. In particular, GBBR's Cultural Advisory Circle continued to remind us that GBBR has a role in building capacity for the work of cultural revitalization and connection. In 2017, GBBR applied for funding that would support Indigenous land-based education specific to the Anishinabek territory for youth at Parry Sound High School. Upon receiving funds from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), a coordinator was hired in the spring of 2018.

Originally called "The Mnidoo-Gamii Indigenous Youth Project," this initiative can also be seen as GBBR's responsibility to sustain a reciprocal understanding of reconciliation and convey a broader mainstream narrative. We recognize and understand the importance of acknowledging reconciliation as a community effort. The necessity of the Indigenous Youth Project, is an inherent process of Anishinabek aadziwin, mno bmaadziwin, (to live the good life), and that it is a human right for Anishinabek youth to be Anishinabek.

“Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games, and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.” (UNDRIP, Article 31, 2007)

The foundation of the project is to enhance cultural and land-based learning opportunities for Indigenous youth in partnership with educational and community partners. Specifically, the goals of this project are as follows:

- 1. Supporting Indigenous youth and enhancing cultural identity with increased cultural education and leadership opportunities, Anishinabek/Indigenous youth advocacy.*
- 2. Building capacity of mainstream educational accreditation to deliver enhanced cultural content. This aims to create space(s) for the flourishing of Anishinabek mno bmaadziwin (“good life”) and a cross-pollination approach to Indigenous science and land-based education. It is grounded in Anishinabek norms of language, land and reciprocity.*
- 3. Increasing our community’s understanding of Indigenous needs and building/enhancing capacity to respond to those needs.*

The project supports students’ travel to events, such as ImagiNATIVE, supporting funds for community events, partnering on the annual Gchi-Dewin Storytellers festival, supporting the project coordinator with land-based opportunities. The wiigwaasi jiimaanke (birch bark canoe) build in Shawanaga First Nation, is a major highlight. Another canoe build is scheduled for 2019 that will engage and empower Indigenous youth and be open to community participation. The project coordinator has unique access to the local high school and assists within Indigenous and mainstream classes. She has developed new programming, welcomed Elders and Knowledge-Keepers, and promoted languages, cultural activities and the arts. Indigenous youth leaders are benefiting from greater support and educational institutions (secondary and post-secondary) are creating greater opportunities for cultural learning.

Question 7: What are the take-aways? What suggestions would you make to other BRs on how to move forward?

The following list and examples are not intended to be a checklist for reconciliation, but rather a reflection of some of GBBR’s growth, learning, and reminders of accountability to the land, waters and original peoples.

- **Asking how GBBR can be involved and if GBBR involvement is wanted** - It is important to acknowledge that power dynamics are a reality, and to remember that we are ‘experts’ in our own fields and not everyone understands the GBBR mandate.
 - Showcasing First Nations in various GBBR projects such as State of the Bay and Amazing Places.
- **Reconciliation isn’t one isolated event or activity.** Rather, it is a process of building relationships and supporting community in a variety of ways:

- Having staff meet individually with Chief and Council to share what GBBR is doing and what we can do to support the communities.
- Navigating appropriate funding avenues to employ more Indigenous staff.
- **Being consistently present and actively participating** - attending pow-wows, community events, meeting with the community, and accepting community ideas and participation in projects and programs by
 - Supporting volunteer efforts.
 - Financially supporting Indigenous-led events.
- **Accountability when mistakes are made**, then working with staff and community members to apologize and work on a better approach in the future - specifically around GBBR's responsibility and process to engage/consult on program ideas.
- **Sharing learning opportunities of cultural and land-based education** with staff and board members, and inviting other community partners and individuals to participate with us.
- **Learning about and how to *translate*** cultural concepts, ideas and languages into signage, documents and publications, while simultaneously exploring the process by which cultural sharing should occur in a respectful manner:
 - Creating awareness of cultural appropriation: what is OK for non-Indigenous individuals to share and what is only appropriate for Indigenous people to teach/share.

The opportunities are significant. There is much work to do in terms of creating strong connections between what we hear is needed and wanted and the actions we carry out. Fundamentally, we need to explore with First Nations communities, both formally with First Nation Governments and less formally with community groups and community members.

Can GBBR support Indigenous communities in their work? How? What is our role in helping to bridge Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and provide teaching opportunities about the truth of how communities have been harmed and continue to be harmed? What are the best ways to work toward reconciliation?

Final Reflection and Recognition

“Georgian Bay Biosphere, as an organization of dedicated staff and volunteers, recognizes that we are located on Anishinabek territory. We want to acknowledge that we understand that our organization benefits from colonization, privilege, and the displacement of the original peoples of this territory, as our head office is located where the Ziigwaan (Seguin River) meets Mnidoo Gamii (Georgian Bay).

We respect and recognize the inherent rights and governance of the Anishinabek pre-confederation. GBBR also acknowledges the rights of the Anishinabek as legally recognized in the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850.

With respect to the territory GBBR calls home, we are committed to our responsibility of relationship building with Indigenous Peoples, knowledges, and ways of being. We want to acknowledge that the scope of work GBBR engages with/in, such as education, conservation and stewardship, continues to exist because of Indigenous resiliency, since time immemorial. We wish to express our gratitude to our Anishinabek relations for continuously leading the way in sustainability, respect, and reciprocity.

Miigwetchwendam, Ishkakiimakwe or We are grateful, Mother Earth.”