

Reconciliation in Action

Working towards Reconciliation in the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region



Snaw-naw-as First Nation Preschool children singing “This Land is Your Land” during tree planting at Top Bridge Community Park. Photo credit: Lauren Shaw

A reflection paper prepared for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO,
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About the Authors

Graham Sakaki

Graham Sakaki is the Research and Community Engagement Coordinator of the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Research Institute (MABRRI), and a temporary instructor in the VIU Master of Community Planning Program. Graham is also a member of the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Roundtable, Canadian Institute of Forestry, Canadian Institute of Planners, Planning Institute of BC, BC Truck Loggers Association, and BC Lake Stewardship Society. His academic background includes a diploma in Forestry, an undergraduate degree in Natural Resource Geography, and Master's degree in Community Planning. Graham's main research focus is working on reconciliation issues with local First Nations, and his major project through his academic career was to assist Snaw-naw-as First Nation design, fund, and construct a garden of Spiritual Healing adjacent to their community Health Centre. Graham has established relationships with many of the First Nation communities on the east-coast of Vancouver Island through his work with both MABRRI and VIU. A secondary focus for Graham is public engagement and community capacity building. Graham works with many of the local municipalities, NGOs, and environmental stewardship groups in the surrounding region on projects relating to environmental, social, cultural, and economic sustainability.

Ashley Van Acken

Ashley Van Acken is the Coordinator of the UNESCO-designated Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR). Her academic background includes a Bachelor of Science in Geoscience with a major focus on groundwater management. Ashley is the principal contact and spokesperson for the MABR at local, national, and international levels. Responsibilities include community and Indigenous engagement, facilitation and public speaking, partnership development, project management, media relations, marketing, and communications. Ashley has worked with various First Nation communities in British Columbia such as Xa'xtsa, Snuneymuxw, Snaw-naw-as and Qualicum. Overall, she has acted as the liaison for all Indigenous relations with the biosphere and has facilitated and developed various collaborations with Aboriginal communities. As the MABR Coordinator, her position also requires her to develop and edit all print materials regarding the MABR, from reports and press releases to posters and general communications with partners. She has strong facilitation and public speaking skills, and represents the MABR in an open, positive, and confident manner. Further, Ashley's experience directly contributes to the development of collaborative projects with First Nations, all of which advance the Indigenous engagement mandate for UNESCO biosphere reserves.

Lawrence Mitchell: 'Ćumqwa:tun'

'Ćumqwa:tun' has been a Councilor for the Snaw-naw-as government for over ten years and has also acted as the Cultural Planner for Kw'umut Lelum, which is a child and family services agency for Aboriginal youth aged 0-19 years old that are currently in the foster care system. His work at Kw'umut Lelum includes the promotion of Aboriginal culture, history and values through events, literature, and storytelling. His devotion to support and provide opportunities to youth has been reflected throughout this program and his community. It is not only through his professional work that 'Ćumqwa:tun' has increased cultural awareness, he has created a song and dance group that aims to honour his community's heritage and way of life. Through these initiatives he has shared his passion through stories, dance, and new partnerships ensuring traditional knowledge is not lost for future generations.

Larissa Thelin

Larissa Thelin is the Assistant Research and Community Engagement Coordinator of the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI). She completed her Bachelor of Arts at Vancouver Island University in June of 2017, with a major in Geography, specializing in Natural Resource Management, and a minor in Languages and Culture. Larissa's primary research focus involves the conservation of vulnerable species and ecosystems and she has spent years volunteering with environmental groups focused on sustainability, climate change, and community engagement. Through MABRRI, she has had the pleasure of leading a variety of environmental-focused research projects, many of which involve collaboration with local environmental stewardship groups and First Nation communities. She has also had the pleasure of assisting in the development of the Snaw-naw-as Garden of Spiritual Healing and looks forward to continue developing her relationships with the First Nation communities in the area.

Introduction

Since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have inhabited Vancouver Island. Caretakers of the land, and disciples of Mother Earth, they are the original stewards of the lands on which our United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) biosphere reserve is situated today. Stories from elders indicate an abundance of clean fresh water and symmetry between biotic and abiotic land on life and sea that we will likely never again see in our generation. Post-Indigenous colonization has changed the lands in which we live – they are becoming fragile and disconnected. Throughout the past century, Indigenous Peoples from Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth, and Kwakiutl territories living on what is today known as Vancouver Island, have been mistreated in ways we can only hope no other peoples will be in our future. The Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR) acknowledges the need for reconciliation, and we are striving to do our part to ensure relationships are rebuilt through acknowledgement, understanding, trust, respect, and transparency.

The Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region

The MABR received its UNESCO biosphere reserve designation in 2000. The timing of the designation aligned with growing regional concerns regarding urban growth and sprawl, natural resource use and extraction, fresh water quality and quantity, changes in biological diversity, and loss of traditional knowledge, language and culture. Although it may not be correct to say that the focus of the initial designation was to help amend these concerns, it is these exact concerns that are the focus of our current governance body. Today the MABR is governed by a Roundtable that includes representatives from Snaw-naw-as First Nation, Qualicum First Nation, Vancouver Island University (VIU), Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI), City of Parksville, Town of Qualicum Beach, Parksville-Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce, Islands Trust, Ministry of Environment, TimberWest Forest Corp., and Island Timberlands. We, like all other biosphere reserves globally, follow a mandate under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), but much of our recent efforts are focussed on regional reconciliation that is critical to effectively meeting this broader mandate in our context.

Building Trust & Mutual Respect

In 2014, VIU hired an MABR coordinator to engage with Indigenous Nations and Peoples, large-scale regional landowners, stakeholders, and multiple levels of government in an effort to join them together and form a Roundtable governance body to direct the efforts of the MABR. Two Coast Salish Nations, Snaw-naw-as and Qualicum, were initially approached to join the governance board. These two Nations were chosen due to the location of their current reserve lands being adjacent to the MABR, and also because their traditional territories exist within. Chief Michael Recalma (Qualicum) and Chief David Bob (Snaw-naw-as) were both asked to represent their Nations at the Roundtable.

A lack of transparency and undeveloped relationships with local levels of government and other stakeholders caused a hesitation to engage. Chief Recalma and Chief Bob met together for the better part of a year to

determine if they wished to get involved¹. During this time, the MABR Coordinator met with them often to discuss who was being invited to represent the Roundtable and why.



The location of the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region. Map Credit: MABR

In February 2015, the first Roundtable meeting took place with both Chiefs in attendance and taking the lead on establishing protocol. During this first meeting Chief Bob said “...We need to leave our feelings on a hook outside the door before we enter this room, so we can all engage respectfully”². This was the start of a new effort towards reconciliation within our biosphere region. To ensure transparency, trust, and comfort we created two documents: Guiding Principles for Collaboration with First Nations (Appendix A) and a Roundtable Culture of Engagement (Appendix B). These documents are referred to at the start of each Roundtable meeting and guide our protocols for working together within the bounds of respectful dialogue.

Moving Towards Reconciliation

Neither trust nor respect are simply given, they must be earned. The Roundtable partners have now worked respectfully with one another for just over 3 years. We are all continually trying to earn one another’s trust and respect. At times, the fragility of relationships can still be felt, but we are working towards bettering our relationships and creating a unified future for all those inhabiting our biosphere region. With each meeting we attend, each project we collaborate on, and each visit with one another, we are taking another step

¹ As told by Chief Michael Recalma of Qualicum First Nation.

² As remembered by Graham Sakaki

towards reconciliation. Reconciliation in our region is not simply working towards the 94 Calls to Action produced by the The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC 2015), but creating a new sense of place for all, inclusive of all peoples, plants, animals, and our water and lands. This sense of place must start with respect for our lands and waters and extend to all those we share them with.

From the mountains to the rivers, to the ocean and back to the lands that embrace all your resources, it's up to you to ensure the environment is maintained.

~From Snuneymuxw Elders told to Elder Geraldine Manson³

Reconciliation is a word that tends to have various meanings, depending on who you are, where you come from, and what you value. For the MABR, reconciliation is key to building unified, resilient communities – it is a way to better connect people and nature and to preserve culture and ecosystems. More specifically, it is a way of being that aims to learn and heal with Indigenous communities to move forward as a unified people. The MABR's governing Roundtable body has been an integral part in this pathway towards reconciliation. Prior to 2015, the MABR Roundtable governance body⁴ did not exist and the MABR team believed that they would not have one until Indigenous Peoples were at the table. For the biosphere region, it was only once all members came together and established the Culture of Engagement (Appendix B) that trust, partnerships, and healing could take place. The formation of the Roundtable and Culture of Engagement had various meanings to our members; for Snaw-naw-as First Nation government member, 'Ćumqwa:tun', this pathway forward started with his Uncle David Bob joining the table.

Through his wisdom he helped set a foundation for respect, integrity, and cooperative decision making. Entrenching ancient philosophies, morals, and principles through the Culture of Engagement, he was able to set the tone for all future gatherings. This was not only for a piece of paper or for meeting candor, but a glimpse into a way of thinking, living, and being that has sustained our people since the beginning of time.

~'Ćumqwa:tun'⁵

By working together to establish appropriate protocols, the co-governance⁶ approach to the management of the MABR has allowed for various entities to come together and work collectively on reconciling a dark, colonial past between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. Chief Recalma argued in the "Reconciliation in Action" documentary for the MABR, "the Roundtable could be and should be a model for other groups, everywhere" (Rivers Voices Productions, 2017).

Roundtable Joint Initiatives

To date, the Roundtable has acted as a platform for all partners to come together and work on local initiatives. In the spring of 2018, the MABR partnered with the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association,

³ Geraldine Manson is a Snuneymuxw First Nation Elder in Residence at VIU

⁴ Prior to the newly formed Roundtable governance body, the previous governance structure was an elected group of community members following bylaws for Canadian not-for-profit society.

⁵ As stated in an interview in June of 2018

⁶ Co-governance refers to all Roundtable members having equal say, and no one has veto authority over anyone else.

Snaw-naw-as First Nation, the City of Parksville, local forestry companies – Island Timberlands and TimberWest – School District 69's Rivers Oceans and Mountains School, and VIU to participate in the National G7 tree planting initiative. Through this initiative, all partners had the opportunity to work together to identify suitable lands within the MABR for the planting of 1,040 Douglas fir trees. Once lands were secured, the City of Parksville Council passed a resolution to support the planting of 1,040 trees within Top Bridge Regional Park, ensuring the trees would receive 50 years of protection. Over 45 youth from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities had the opportunity to participate and plant these trees, which will sequester approximately 143 tonnes of carbon dioxide. The impact that this project has on youth is immeasurable, as it triggers a deeper connection between young people and nature.

'Ćumqwa:tun' was in profound support of this National G7 tree planting initiative, and excitedly gathered youth, Elders, and preschool children from Snaw-naw-as to participate in the planting. Further, he argued that these types of projects not only demonstrate our sacred obligations to this area of the world, but are also necessary to living a balanced way of life and enriching the quality of life for all generations.

By planting 1,000 trees this activity plays a significant role in our survival as humans, not just as First Nations. We brought our youngest children forward to enhance their connections to not only the people, but to the universe, and most importantly themselves. We had all walks of life coming forward in the pursuit of a strengthened relationship with the environment, and to help repair its impact on the world. Through prayer, words, and songs we prepared ourselves for the sacred work taking place, and through the action of putting our hands into the earth we are literally transforming the environment, and enhancing a sacred connection that brings healing into the world. From infants to elders, and students to professionals, we all came forward as one, to show the world what matters most, and that is Mother Earth.

~Ćumqwa:tun'⁷



Snaw-naw-as children planting trees in the MABR in 2018. Photo credit: Lauren Shaw

⁷ As stated in an interview in June of 2018

The Roundtable's support of and commitment to work on initiatives such as the G7 tree planting has sent waves throughout the major MABR communities, including Parksville. It has led to more partnerships being formed with First Nation communities that have traditional territories stretching into the MABR. Following the tree planting, Snuneymuxw Elder Geraldine Manson (Auntie Geraldine) approached the MABR to work with TimberWest and Island Timberlands to harvest Devil's Club, a traditional plant, from their forestlands. Upon harvesting, Auntie Geraldine taught members from Snaw-naw-as First Nation and students from VIU how to peel Devil's Club, and shared stories about its medicinal properties. Because of this experience, Auntie Geraldine decided that it was time to gather with the greater Vancouver Island community to share traditional knowledge about native plant species and their medicinal properties. In collaboration with the MABR, a workshop was later hosted at VIU and over 60 people from the community gathered to learn about the medicinal properties of traditional plant species from various Indigenous knowledge holders. In these ways, the Roundtable has demonstrated its ability to facilitate and develop collaborative partnerships that aim to understand Indigenous ways of life and how we can all work together to enhance our way of being.

Time to Grow: A Healing Garden

Although our relationship with Snaw-Naw-As Nation began with the development of the Roundtable, our road to understanding Coast Salish peoples and their waters and lands started with the initiation of the Snaw-Naw-As Garden of Spiritual Healing. In 2016, Chief Bob brought the idea of a community garden to members of the Roundtable, explaining that his people once knew the traditional names of many coastal native plant species, but that this knowledge was being lost in time⁸. His hope was that the garden would help to increase traditional language knowledge, as well as increase food security for his community. By the end of that year, through a collaborative effort between a Garden Committee consisting of Snaw-naw-as community members and dedicated MABRRI employees, the design process had begun.

Today, the garden hosts a toolshed, a greenhouse, and over a dozen raised garden beds full of both coastal native plants as well as fruits and vegetables plants that have just supplied the Nation with a second year of harvest. The most recent development, the traditional smokehouse, has become a place where the Nation can practice traditional cooking methods. In addition, educational workshops that will teach gardening techniques and traditional knowledge are being developed. Members of the Roundtable have donated supplies and funds, while MABRRI staff and students of VIU have spent countless hours working alongside the Nation to bring the now late Chief Bob's vision to life. All involved have had the humbling opportunity of seeing what a space such as the Snaw-naw-as Garden of Spiritual Healing can mean for a community.

And the Spirit Garden...the endeavors that are taking place because of our relationship with the biosphere and with everyone involved, is really a testament to how our MABR Roundtable operates. We can now reawaken a historical relationship with many differing species of plants and begin to understand how to heal ourselves for many generations to come, which directly connects us back to the First Peoples. It's just another starting point of how to recreate sacred relationships with the world around us... to us it's not just a fruit or vegetable, or just a plant, it is a sentient being that has

⁸ As remembered by Graham Sakaki

a life and a spirit; they are our ancestors. We have sacred obligations and we have to be of a certain way, so that when it comes time to harvest those beings they give the best of themselves to fully heal not only our cuts, scrapes, but also our actual spirit. And you guys helped with that.... The people of the biosphere...I can only imagine how many different things are going to come from that in the future.

~Ćumqwa:tun'⁹



Snaw-naw-as Elders Debbie Bob (left) and Bonnie Jones (right) harvesting vegetables from the garden. Photo credit: Alison Drennan

Ćumqwa:tun' maintains, however, that this story is bigger than a garden. He explained that the Garden is just one part in a larger narrative, one that speaks to the relationship with the people, the land, the water, and to the universe; it is a way to reconcile Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Peoples' shared colonial history.

Since the beginning of time we have always had a sacred, intimate connection with Mother Earth, and throughout history we have been able to exercise our responsibilities and live this way of life until times changed, and things happened in history that fractured our way of life.

Fast forwarding time to 2018, and our work with the biosphere, this relationship is playing a significant role in restoring this way of life for us as First Nations, or Indigenous [Peoples]. Through the Biosphere we are moving forward in a very positive way, and how we've based our relationship on ancient philosophies, values, and beliefs I believe we are going to impact this world in a very

⁹ As stated in an interview in June of 2018

meaningful way. Through our efforts, our actions and endeavors, the Snaw-naw-as will once again get a taste of what life was like prior to contact, thanks to the biosphere.

~Ćumqwa:tun'¹⁰

The Garden has become a place where reconciliation is being visualized within the MABR. It is a testament to what can be accomplished through collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, not just in physical constructs, but in open and mutual respect between different cultures.

Looking to the Future

The MABR Roundtable is confident that the biosphere region can continue on the path towards reconciliation, with more projects planned and opportunities to link to National and International initiatives. Funding was recently acquired to develop a mobile youth program that aims to educate young people about the biosphere. The program will be based on the premise of land-based learning. Early discussions have identified the potential to work with Indigenous knowledge holders from the MABR to develop programs that teach the region's youth about native plant species and their traditional uses. Through this initiative, the MABR will continue to seek opportunities to expand on Indigenous knowledge sharing, where appropriate.

The global *Year of Indigenous Languages* is in 2019, which will aim to revitalize culture, history, traditional knowledge, and ways of thinking and expressing as a society (UNESCO, 2018). Through the Roundtable, the MABR has prioritized new programming that investigates traditional place names within the biosphere region. Through conversation with 'Ćumqwa:tun' we have learned traditional names for Mount Arrowsmith. Looking at the mountain from the west coast of Vancouver Island, the Indigenous peoples called it Kulth-ka-choolth (or Jagged Face). Here on the east coast, the Coast Salish refer to it as either A'alh'hume' or Ts'xuliqw. Emphasis was put on the sacredness of traditional languages from many of our Indigenous partners. During an interview, 'Ćumqwa:tun' expressed the sacredness of their language, hul'qumi'num:

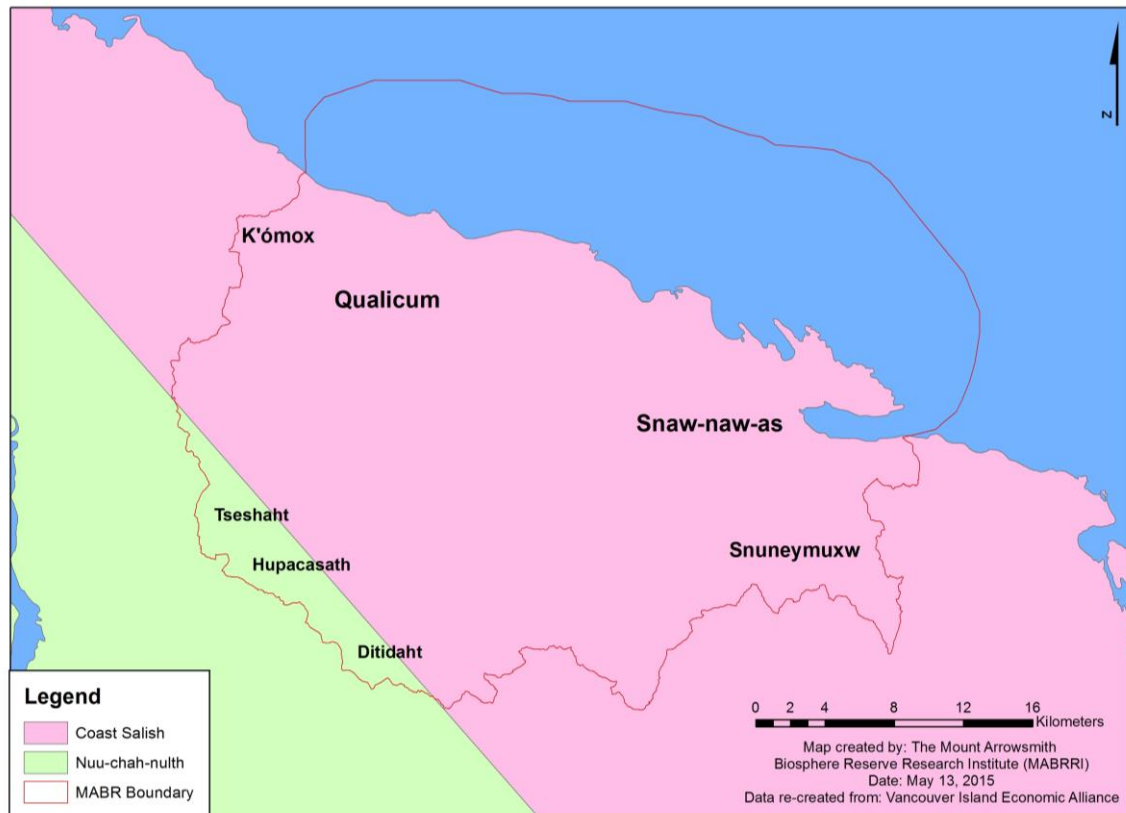
It is remarkable times that we live in when mayors, councils, towns, and municipalities recognize the sacred language of these lands that is truth in action, especially when they want to learn how to speak it. Through our biosphere we are learning to bring things back into harmony and restoring relationships, which brings healing, balance, and wellbeing into accord. By planting trees, speaking our language, understanding the sacredness of water, contributing to building a bighouse, acquiring wisdom of sacred healing plants and resources, and engaging in meaningful relationships, we are truly getting back to a place of respect and equality amongst all walks of life—human and non-human forms. If it weren't for the biosphere this level of work may have taken us another 100 years to achieve, so we are in total support of the biosphere program and the vision of UNESCO. We raise our hands to everyone across the world for acknowledging that Snaw-naw-as has a voice at the table, and that we as Coast Salish people matter.

~Ćumqwa:tun'¹¹

¹⁰ As stated in an interview in June of 2018

¹¹ As stated in an interview in June of 2018

The MABR Roundtable will continue down the path towards reconciliation by working with Snuneymuxw, Snaw-naw-as and Qualicum First Nations. There are other Nations near our biosphere region that we are hoping to create relationships with over time and are optimistic of the opportunity to work with them. The MABR Roundtable is confident that this innovative approach to co-governance can be a model for other biosphere reserves across the country.



First Nations with Traditional Territories located inside the MABR Boundary. Map Credit: MABRRI

A Brighter Future for All

It is clear that since the formation of the MABR Roundtable in 2015, Reconciliation has been a top priority in our region, and it will continue to be into the future. While we recognize that much progress has been made over the past few years, our work towards reconciliation has only just begun. We hope that others can learn from our modest successes and we look forward to learning from other success stories across the world. We are grateful for the partnerships we have created, relationships that have been made, and unwavering support of all the Roundtable partners and communities. Reconciliation is in action within our biosphere region, and we are extremely optimistic of a bright future for all who live within the MABR.

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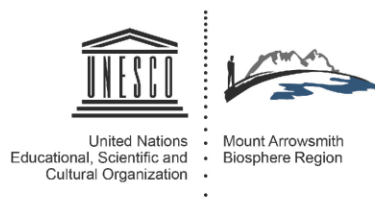
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Appendix A



Collaboration with First Nations

First Nations have lived on the lands that encompass the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR) since time immemorial. The First Nations of the Salish Sea have a unique relationship with the lands and waters that transcends time. It is a relationship rooted in a deep, rich cultural connection to nature; a connection and relationship that has informed their way of life.

Through its Man and Biosphere Programme, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recognized the MABR for the outstanding qualities of the traditional territories of the First Nations.

MABR's institutional partners, initiated by a collaboration between Vancouver Island University and the City of Parksville, want to work with First Nations in a respectful and supportive relationship that recognizes the special association that each Nation has with its traditional territory, including the MABR. As a UNESCO biosphere region, MABR should complement the interests of the First Nations; not compete with them. To that end, all institutional partners will be directed by the following Guiding Principles in their MABR-related work.

Guiding Principles

The MABR's work will be premised upon processes, procedures and protocols that reflect a collaborative, comprehensive and collegial course of action with First Nations that is rooted in Guiding Principles that:

1. Honour the deep, rich, cultural connection to the land and the sea; a connection and relationship that informs First Nations way of life;
2. Honour the fact that First Nations have lived from time immemorial in their traditional territories and, through that special relationship as stewards of the land, have a unique association with the MABR;
3. Explore and promote ways and means of enhancing the role of the MABR within the region while being respectful of First Nation interests;
4. Continue to develop a trusting and respectful relationship with First Nations and support appropriate projects that First Nations would like to collaborate on, protecting the confidentiality of knowledge or culturally sensitive information of First Nations communities;
5. Establish respectful processes that value First Nation perspectives, methods of decision-making, cultural values and historical connections to the land;
6. Identify First Nation community engagement opportunities and associated research that relates to the mandate of the MABR;
7. Ensure that the interests and perspectives of First Nations frame future discussions about the MABR;
8. Work with First Nations to identify potential sources of funding to undertake MABR-related initiatives of interest to First Nations;
9. Promote the Mandate and Goals of the UNESCO designation in general and the MABR in particular while recognizing that First Nations have a special relationship with the MABR lands that transcends time and creates a special bond with the MABR.



Appendix B

Culture of Engagement MABR Roundtable



At the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Roundtable, we engage with one another and with the land and culture around which we gather in the following ways:

- 1) We acknowledge the Traditional Territories within which our meetings are held.
- 2) We demonstrate respect for Indigenous protocol as individuals and as a group, upholding the MABR's Guiding Principles for Collaboration with First Nations.
- 3) Our communication is open, honest, transparent and unemotional, and we are comfortable and willing to discuss potentially sensitive topics.
- 4) Before entering the gathering place, we hang bad feelings on a nail outside the door.
- 5) We work together to reach common goals for the betterment of our region.
- 6) We leave personal wants outside.
- 7) We are open to new perspectives, we seek to understand where each person is coming from, and we share information and beliefs in an environment of trust.
- 8) We listen to each other and work together to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak.
- 9) We keep personal stories that are shared in confidence inside this room.
- 10) We arrive and depart feeling at ease, and we look forward to meeting again.