Land Back and Rematriation: Issues and Controversies

"Indigenous Perspectives" - Monthly Broadcast on HealthyLife.Net

 # 25–December 22, 2022

For audio podcast: http://www.ecologia.org/news/25.LandBack.mp3 (58 min)

Poster in the Montreal Metro, December 15, 2022:

"1 Million species are threatened with extinction. Humanity is not immune.

COP15: the rights of indigenous peoples and 30x30 must be part of the plan."

Randy Kritkausky: Greetings, or may I say Bozho in Potawatomi, to those joining us for today's Indigenous Perspectives show. I'm Randy Kritkausky, an enrolled Potawatomi tribal member, and the co-host of Indigenous Perspectives.

Carolyn Schmidt: And I'm Carolyn Schmidt, the other co-host. Indigenous Perspectives originates from Vermont in the United States, and we're located on lands that the Abenaki people call N'dakinna. This is the unceded traditional territory of the Abenaki, who for thousands of years have been stewards of the lands found here and across the border in Québec province in Canada.

Today's show is titled "Land Back and Rematriation – Issues and Controversies." Randy and I will be discussing why, and how, Indigenous peoples are organizing around these ideas, and also how their concerns are playing out in this month's international negotiations on biodiversity – the COP 15, held in Montréal.

So Randy, can you start us off with some basic definitions? First, what does the slogan "Land Back" mean?

Randy: Before I do the definitions, let me explain the context for those words coming forward. They originate from Indigenous peoples having strong moral and legal claims to lands taken during the colonization of the entire Western Hemisphere, and also from the fact that Indigenous peoples were removed from these lands, which were often guaranteed to be in their control in perpetuity. We discussed this on previous shows about anti-Indian law. So that's kind of the big broad context. This is history that is in the front of the minds of Indigenous people all of the time, but is very often forgotten by mainstream society.

So let me get to the notion of Land Back. The idea is quite simply that Indigenous people deserve to have their land back. Now, that doesn't mean that, as some people fear when they hear the term, "Oh my gosh, they're coming after my house ! and the land on which it is situated!" That is not the case. What Indigenous people are looking for is access to some or large parts of their tribal lands historically, or those parts of those lands that are most sacred, where their ancestors are buried, where there are sites that they use for ceremonial purposes, et cetera. So they want sometimes to control and own that land in some cases - we'll discuss that further - and in other cases simply to have access to those lands. So Land Back is the big broad term.

Before Land Back appeared, there was this notion of repatriation. It's a very old concept in the English language of giving back something that belongs to people. And it comes from the interconnection of the notion of fatherland and nationhood. But of course, for Indigenous people, the land - Mother Earth - is female. So repatriating, re-fathering Mother Earth really doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Consequently, the term rematriation supplanted or replaced the notion of repatriation, and now the discussion is primarily about either Land Back or rematriation.

Carolyn: Randy, I'll just interject one thing that helped me give sort of extra meaning to these concepts. With repatriation I first heard it used a lot in reference to Indigenous peoples in the United States aiming to get literally the bones of their ancestors that were in museums repatriated - brought back home and respectfully buried. And then rematriation - the first time I heard that was in a discussion at a food summit about seed saving heritage seeds and rescuing the seeds, preserving them, and then planting them and making sure that they survived and prospered. And there is reference to rematriating the seed people. So these words have a lot of nuance, a lot of meaning, and they obviously show really important beliefs.

Randy: And as you're pointing out these, these terms tend to bleed into one another and they tend to cover an enormous variety of activities. And I think your point about repatriating - rematriating remains, sacred objects, you know, is part of the discussion, but of course, today we're focusing a bit more on the land as the primary focus.

Carolyn: I had one more, one comment I wanted to make on Land Back. To me an important component of it that I don't think you emphasized in your very comprehensive definition is to have Indigenous peoples be able to have control of the land to protect it from timbering, from mineral extraction, from damage brought about by outside forces.

So, why are these issues so much in the news right now?

Randy: Well, as, as you just indicated, right now the headlines in environmental publications and major news outlets across the entire globe are focused on an

international gathering that is taking place just north of us, in Montréal. And it's called COP 15 on Biodiversity. COP stands for Conference of the Parties, which is a meeting that occurs on a regular schedule to discuss the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. This is not a treaty *[Randy mis-spoke here; it is actually a treaty[1]];* it is an international non-binding agreement among those nations participating[2], and it indicates their desire and interest in addressing the problem of biodiversity, which is the response to extinction.

Biodiversity is kind of a positive approach to the issue. Instead of emphasizing what's disappearing, it tries to emphasize actions that can be taken to protect various species and their habitats. We were visiting it, just a week ago, and participated in a large public demonstration in support of these actions.

Randy Kritkausky talks with a representative from CPAWS, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, on December 10, 2022 at the march in support of Biodiversity and Indigenous Peoples Rights

[1] See the official UN website: https://www.un.org/en/observances/biological-diversity-day/convention

[2] Those who have signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity are known as the "parties". There are 196 parties; the United States and the Vatican (the Holy See) are the only United Nations members who have not signed.

So part of the interest in rematriation and land back is that when you talk about biodiversity and habitat protection, it is linked in the minds of Indigenous people, and now in the minds of biologists, with the fact that social justice or land back dovetails beautifully with the objective of providing protected habitat. The reason is the other aspect of this current interest. We now know from studies around the globe that Indigenous people who inhabit vulnerable important biodiverse regions are able to protect those regions. And some biologists and some environmental advocates and Indigenous advocates would argue that Indigenous people are doing a lot better on the territory they control than the mainstream and the developed world is doing on the territory it controls.

So these two issues are currently inextricably related and are mutually supportive in the minds of many people.

TechnoparcOiseaux is a citizens' group[3] that has organized to protect 215 hectares (531 acres) just outside Montreal. This wetlands and green space, inhabited by many species, is threatened by a large planned industrial development. Photo from the December 10, 2022 march.

[3] https://www.technoparcoiseaux.org/?lang=en

Carolyn: So I guess for mainstream people following this kind of issue, I think very often first, people's attention is caught by particular species - the monarch butterfly, the polar bear - that are endangered. And then when you look at how do we protect these species? And we look at - let me look at their habitat, where do they live? Where do they breed? Where do they need to have access to clean water, clean air, trees, food and so forth? And then it's this protection of the land or the ocean, wherever they happen to be. That is so important that the Indigenous peoples all over the world, not only in North America, have a very strong track record of having developed ways to coexist and to live in balance with all these other species. Did I sum that up accurately?

Randy: Yes, you got it. So, you know, just to kind of summarize here, what's going on is that Indigenous people are using a very practical argument supported by modern science to buttress and support their moral and legal claims to wanting their land back. Because they're saying, after all, if we get it back, there are benefits for everyone and not just us.

Carolyn: Okay. So if land back and repatriation are ways to support Indigenous peoples in their roles of protecting, how can this actually work?

Randy: Well, let me give you an example that we discussed on a - on a previous show, and we can put a link to that here[4]. One of my favorite examples is the Heiltsuk First Nation in the central coastal region of British Columbia, in Canada. They struggled for a very, very long time from the fact that they were dispossessed of enormous land holdings that they had on the Pacific coast and that they were literally shrunk down to very, very small villages. And they watched the fish stocks off the land, in the coast, plummeting. They tried working with the Canadian government, particularly their fisheries control agency, and were totally unsuccessful in getting a hearing. They finally went and occupied very visibly these offices and embarrassed the Canadian government at first into allowing the Heiltsuk to patrol the waters and to monitor what was happening to the fish stock.

[4] "Honoring Indian Law and Treaties, Part Two", Indigenous Perspectives January 2022, https://www.ecologia.org/news/15.PartTwoHonoringIndianLaw.pdf pp. 16-18

Because the Heiltsuk were saying, "You know, your scientific modern empirical data doesn't really address what's really going on. Let us show you what's going on!" Led to an enormous scientific conflict. And it turned out that the Heiltsuk knew more about what was going on than the scientists did, in part because the scientists were working in conjunction with the industry-controlled agency that didn't really want to limit fishing. When the Heiltsuk discovered that, they went out and they actually surrounded fishing ships, giant fishing trawlers, with their canoes and prevented them from trawling up endangered fish. Well, this made the news in Canada, and before any legal land back agreement happened, the Canadian government tacitly allowed the Heiltsuk to give input onto establishing what the fishing quota would be each year. And the Canadian government rather discreetly and hesitatingly accepted the Heilsuks' quota.

Well, this became such a part of the Canadian fisheries' regulation that finally the government had to capitulate and make it a formal agreement. And this is where the Land Back part comes in. As part of these agreements, the Heiltsuk First Nation was given back administrative control - not deed and property title, but administrative control - to 16,000 square kilometers. That's 6,432 square miles. This is a big example of rematriation. And now the Heiltsuk Nation co-manages the coastline and the seas and the seabed and the fisheries in conjunction with the Canadian government. I consider this to be one of the best examples of how rematriation can work.

Carolyn: Well, it's a - it's a great example and also, to me it indicates one basic idea that power never conceives anything without a demand. Obviously, the Heiltsuk had a struggle, and in this case also that the Canadian government was – and I guess the British Columbia regional provincial government - they were responsive ultimately to the concerns coming from this First Nations people.

So do you have any other example for us to think about?

Randy: Yes. Before I move on to the next example, I just want to mention that, as we have said in previous shows, the context of Canada is really important to bear in mind. And one of the themes in this show is we have to understand rematriation and repatriation in specific contexts. And Canada is embarked on a wonderful journey of

truth and reconciliation. And part of reconciliation is correcting past injustice. So giving the Heilsuk back, if not control and ownership of their land, but at least management control of their land is part of that, and that's why they won the moral battle and ultimately the legal battle.

So to answer your question, let me give you one more example of how rematriation - Land Back - works. And this is quite a different example. The whole world has read about the re-wolving of Yellowstone Park. People from all over the world come there; coming to hear and see the wolves is now like the major attraction of Yellowstone.

And this happened with great fuss and great publicity because the idea was, and you know, there are so many documentaries on TV and in newspapers, I can't even keep track of them any longer, about how returning the wolves and rewilding Yellowstone restored a natural balance that led to protecting biodiversity, to get back to one of the themes today.

Well, the argument went that the wolves will keep under control the elk and the bison who were overgrazing, which caused fish stocks and bird habitat to be depleted. Well, after the results were published of how wonderfully successful the re-wolving was, it turned out that a few years later when biologists looked, well, it didn't turn out to be a total success because (a) the wolves don't take down bison, and they were overgrazing, and (b) the elk were migrating off of Yellowstone. So somebody said, "Gee, you know, we've got a half a solution here, but how can we promote biodiversity all the way to the end?"

Turned out that bringing back indigenous people as hunters with an annual quota that would bring the wolf population - excuse me *,[I mean]* the elk population and the buffalo population - back down to sustainable levels was part of the solution. I consider that to be a kind of repatriation. No, they did not give the deed back to the Indigenous people who were forcibly removed from Yellowstone when the park was created, but they gave the Indigenous people access to co-management of the land. And that's very often what people who are Indigenous mean when they say rematriation: "We're not asking you to hand over the deed; sometimes we're just asking you to hand over control. "

Carolyn: And I'll just point out one of the many interesting sort of circular wrinkles on Yellowstone is that it was the world's first national park, established in the United States in 1872, and explicitly Indigenous people were removed, forcibly removed. The idea was this was going to be a national park with no people, just the world of nature. And of course, Randy too pointed out it didn't - didn't work out that neatly - that people are involved, would be involved and can be involved in good ways as well as harmful ways.

Randy: So, we'll - in the next segment we're going to touch on this controversy of forced removal because it continues in some parts of the world, and to a limited degree in the United States today. But I want to give you just a few more examples of rematriation to give you a sense of the incredible range and scope of what this is in practice.

So, one of the highly publicized examples was when Indigenous people in Oakland, which is a highly densely populated -

Carolyn: you mean Oakland, California -

Randy: - in this city, they were given what is essentially, you know, a little piece of parkland that was ceremonially important to them, and now they're erecting a structure where they can hold their ceremonial gatherings. Well, this is a really important development for these people. They weren't given the deed to the park; they were given the right to use the park. And again, when *[non-Indigenous]* people hear Land Back, they panic and think, "Oh, the deed to my house is going to be seized", more often than not, rematriation and Land Back means access to the land coming back. So the California example is, you know, literally a postage stamp - you know, piece of land that was of deeply significant import to the local people.

Other cases across the United States and Canada involve parklands, state, and more often federal, being either returned to Indigenous control and actual title or, once again, being put under co-management, just as with the Heilsuk, an Indigenous tribe, a council appointed by them works with park administrators, natural protection officials and biologists to develop a plan to protect ancestral lands. That's a really

important outcome for biodiversity and for addressing the moral and legal claims of indigenous people.

Carolyn: So would it be fair to say that Land Back has to be looked at in the context of what people are involved, where it is, and what other considerations are happening in a particular location?

Randy: Absolutely. And if there's a takeaway from today's program, I would put that at the top of the list because one size doesn't fit all when we're talking about Land Back.

Carolyn: Okay, well thank you. This wraps up Segment One of this version of Indigenous Perspectives. Stay tuned for Segment Two coming up in just a minute.

Segment Two

Carolyn: Welcome back to the next segment of Indigenous Perspectives, and *[on]* today's program we're talking about controversies and issues about Land Back and rematriation. So picking up from where we left off, Randy, it sounds great to make changes to support Indigenous peoples' abilities to manage the land. So why is this controversial? You talk - we talked - about controversies around these issues.

Randy: Well, as I alluded to in the case of the Heiltsuk they had to, you know, literally protest and force the Canadian government to comply with their requests. So you know, this so-called "win-win scenario" where biodiversity and you know, and Indigenous people both benefit isn't always the case. And the international publications on biological diversity and on Indigenous rights are full of stories - I see them daily - about accusations that efforts to protect nature are trumping and in some cases driving out Indigenous claims to get the land.

Now again, we keep saying in this program that rematriation and Land Back as we're discussing it here today applies to what's going on in the Western hemisphere. However, we can't really talk about this without at least momentarily looking at what's happening internationally, because it's framing and carrying over into discussions in the United States and in some cases, distracting people here by

thinking that, “Oh, those bad things that are happening in distant parts of the world are happening here.”

Carolyn: Yes, the concept of “fortress conservation” is the idea of big conservation organizations, particularly international NGOs working with various governments, setting aside land saying this land is going to become a nature preserve and then literally forcing the local inhabitants off the land. We've had specific examples of this happening in the present day, like right now - in Tanzania in East Africa, and also in the province of Assam in northeastern India. And in these cases, the people who may have - who've lived on the land for many generations are forced off it. And naturally they are not happy about the situation. And this is an example of they feel their land and their land use is being grabbed away from them by outside forces. But again, it's different in the United States and in Canada, but we have to be aware of what's happening in other parts of the world.

Randy: Yes. Just to elaborate on what you said. You and I both attended the Zoom conference on fortress conservation[5] and it was really shocking to hear, you know, why the term applies to what is happening in Africa and India. I mean, they literally are fencing in these nature preserves and then literally forcing at gunpoint in some case the people off the land. And in some cases if people go back onto the land, they are hunted down and they are occasionally shot. I mean, this is the epitome of creating a fortress. The irony here is the fortress is to quote, protect, indigenous species, not Indigenous people, and to eradicate and remove the Indigenous people.

So, you know, there, there's moral outrage across the face of the globe by Indigenous advocates when this happens. And it is the exact opposite of what we were discussing at the beginning of the program of where biodiversity, promoting biodiversity and promoting Land Back to Indigenous people can be combined.

So we can't let that international controversy - which is very real and needs to be addressed - we can't let it poison discussion in the Western Hemisphere about land.

[5] “Behind the fortress - colonial conservation and what to do about it”, November 29, 2022. New Internationalist https://newint.org

Back. When you and I were in Montréal a week ago, the controversy surrounding that COP meeting is in very large part created by the international delegations who are coming to tell their story. And they're getting a very sympathetic voice from Canada and Canada's Indigenous people. But the Canadians and people in the United States have a different story to tell. And within the United States and Canada, different nations have different stories to tell. So we have to keep coming back to this theme of, it's different in different places.

Carolyn: And again, to look at the priorities of whoever is managing some land. For example, just here in Vermont, the US Forest Service apparently has acquired - and a Vermont-based land trust - they've acquired a significant amount of forest land that they're announcing they are going to do rather extensive timbering on because there's a demand for wood. So they're managing the land in what they feel are their own or their government's or their company's best interests, not the best interests of the people wanting to use the land and its resources in a sustainable way. And not the best interests of the trees, the animals, the birds, everybody that's living on the land. So again, depends on the situation, what the dynamics are in terms of who's making these decisions on how to use the land.

Randy: So what you just pointed out is, again, the different so-called legal jurisdictions that are involved in Land Back. Indigenous people who are trying to negotiate this have to negotiate simultaneously with private landowners, conservation trusts, federal government, and they all have their own agendas and they all have their own connections to industrial economic interests that work at cross purposes.

One of the issues I want to bring up - one of the controversies that is almost invisible surrounding Land Back and the biodiversity discussions in Montréal - is that Land Back conjures an image of dry land. In fact, much of the world's biodiversity crisis is happening off the coast and in the oceans, on the seabed. And in the 5,000 word document that's coming out of the meetings in Montréal, the word oceans appears *[only]* twice. The reason is that the major convener in charge of this gathering is China, and they have the biggest fishing fleet on earth, and it predates on fisheries around the world. So we're dealing with enormously complex national and industrial interests, and we keep returning to this question of whose interests go

first? Is it the people or is it the species that we're trying to protect? And how can we get to the point of combining those two so that they're not competing with one another?

Carolyn: So why does biodiversity keep appearing and disappearing in discussions of land back?

Randy: Well, part of the reason is that in some cases, Indigenous people are frightened of the concept because of the way it's implemented under, you know, "fortress conservation". The other is that it's hard for many people in the mainstream to get their heads around the connection, which is exactly what we're trying to explain in this show.

Carolyn: Okay, thank you very much and we're going to take a quick break. See you soon.

Segment Three

Carolyn: Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives. Today's show is on Land Back and Rematriation - Issues and Controversies. So Randy, when Indigenous people talk about getting their land back, what does that mean to them? What do they experience? Can you develop this idea?

Randy: Well, I think what it means to Indigenous people is very, very different from what people in the mainstream think it means to Indigenous people. I sit on the board of a conservation organization and I've been attending seminars with several dozen people from conservation organizations. And I know for a fact that when they hear this, they think about Indigenous people now being able to do things with things on the land, such as getting bark off the trees to make baskets, making a sweat lodge, foraging, planting gardens, all activities that involve material reality. That's easy for people in the mainstream to understand. What is less easy for people in the mainstream to understand is what I refer to as the invisible part of the Land Back transition or transaction. And I think it's actually the bigger deal and the very foundation of what makes the material activities such as foraging and making baskets so healing and meaningful.

So let me - let me explain what I mean about the invisible part. For Indigenous people, it's all about place, but place is not just about them putting their feet on the place, it's about going to a place where they meet and interact with and communicate with their other than human kin. And where they reconnect with their ancestors.

For example, when people who are Indigenous go to a place where their ancestors have lived for thousands of years or where their ancestors have been buried, they feel they experience a connection of those ancestors being present. I can speak personally and say that having had such experiences, it's absolutely wondrous. And it's not about having your feet or your moccasins on the ground. It's about experiencing that connection that is so quintessentially Indigenous that it escapes the ability of many in the mainstream to understand.

Part of the reason is that *[mainstream]* people working on these issues of repatriation are biologists and other natural scientists dedicated to protecting the environment, and they've been trained in their empiricism to demand hard evidence of the reality of something. So if you want to say the forest is getting healthier, they want numbers, how many trees, diameter of the trees, how much biomass…. *[When]* someone comes along and says, "Well, gee, you know, what's really going on here is that people are communicating with the trees, they're communicating with their ancestors. " And the biologists, you know, it just blows their minds because it's like, how do we measure that? How do we prove that? We can't talk about that. It might not even be real.

Carolyn: Okay. So just to - to expand on this a bit, we know that controversies over hunting and fishing rights of Indigenous peoples have been a source of frustration with settler descendants who ask why do the Indigenous people not have to pay for a state hunting license? and so forth. So very often that focuses on the hunting and fishing as a way to gain - gain food and have an experience in the outdoors. But you're making the point that hunting and fishing for Indigenous people is also intimately connected with their sense of tradition, experience the spirits of the land and the whole respectful treatment of the animals that they are hunting and fishing. Is that, is that right?

Randy: You got it. It is about the material realm of physical sustenance. You know, my ancestors and many Indigenous people today still depend on the food supply of hunting and fishing. And in the case of my people gathering wild rice, it's really important food upon which the survival of many of them still depends. However, as you just pointed out, the activities, which are ceremonial and not just pragmatic, involved in each of these activities is reconnecting people with their heritage. It is validating a sense of who they are and have been for all of their memory. And it is a spiritual reconnection that is absolutely profoundly comforting. And I keep trying to explain to people in the mainstream that that's what Native Americans seek.

Wild Rice harvesting, 19th century[6]

Carolyn: I guess a good example of that is your Anishinaabe peoples - that's the Potawatomi, the Ojibwe and the Odawa, their larger group - they have a prophecy about migrating westward to the land where food grows on water. And this was part of the migrations that were going on among the Indigenous peoples in North America in the 1400s, 1500s. And the idea is that the land where food grows on water, that's the Great Lakes, and the food that grows on water is what's called Wild

[6] S Eastman and M Eastman, 1853 Public domain
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_rice#/media/File:Wild_rice_harvesting_19th_century.jpg

Rice. It's actually a grain, it's called Manoomin in Ojibwe. And it's an important being as well as an important food source.

Randy: Indeed. And in fact, I mean, to make a parallel, which is a pretty rough one, you know, gathering and consuming Wild Rice might be likened to Communion for people in the Christian faith. It is a - you know, you're consuming something, but it is a sacred act and that is what is involved in reconnecting our people with those lands. That's why there have been legal cases about protecting Manoomin. It's not just the food supply; it's sacred, and the ability of people to reconnect with the sacred.

Carolyn: Okay. So looping around to a whole issue of biodiversity - wild rice is a food source, it needs clean water, it needs harvesting and sowing and also human activities as well as being a source of spiritual connections.

So is there a bridge between the Native spiritual deeper connections and the work of more mainstream, Western thinkers like biologists and other scientists?

Randy: Yes. At long last, as many people know, there's more and more acknowledgement in scientific journals that Indigenous wisdom has a lot to contribute to biological protection. So we have people like Peter Wolleben and Suzanne Simard who've written about trees in the forest communicating with one another, suddenly opening up the doors to the notion of communications between our other-than-human kin - in their case, trees. And that's beginning to make it acceptable to begin to discuss the fact that perhaps if trees communicate with one another, they might be aware of us and they might in their own ways communicate with us.

And that's where we're coming from. And that's the point I'm trying to make in this segment. We as Indigenous people want to restore our ability to communicate with and participate with our other than human kin. It's not just about getting the thingy land back.

Carolyn: Thank you, Randy. We'll take another short break. Stay tuned.

Segment Four

Carolyn: Welcome back to the last segment of this version of Indigenous Perspectives on Land Back and Rematriation - Issues and Controversies. So we've been discussing the COP 15 biodiversity international negotiations happening right now in Montréal. We've been talking about national governments, parks, things like that on sort of a really large scale. Let's take it to the listener and listeners' communities. What can we, and anyone listening to this who's interested, do to support these concepts in a thoughtful and meaningful way?

Randy: So, the answers are, you know, sort of multifold. I mean, one of the obvious things is obviously encourage our state governments, our park officials, our national government, to begin to talk to Indigenous people about Land Back. Again, not giving the park back to, you know, a small handful of survivors of a population that lived there. But giving *[the Indigenous]* people access to and co-management of these areas. That's one thing you can do. I'm sure most of us live near a parcel of land, even if it's in an urban area as I mentioned in Oakland, California, where, you know, local officials can take some action that will be a healing action of reconnecting Indigenous people to those lands.

Carolyn: Actually, that's one thing that's happened. The Vermont Abenaki bands have successfully negotiated access for hunting, fishing, foraging, to lands that are, I think maybe state owned or in some cases private lands. I'm not sure, but definitely it was a really big deal on the news that they negotiated this access to use of the land.

Randy: Yes, and there's a - there's a movement in Vermont for, I mean, every town to literally give a parcel of land - it might be a fraction of an acre - and make it available to Indigenous people to have, a *[for example]* traditional medicinal garden there. I mean that's - that's very, very localized. I can give you another example to go back to my list of rematriations. You know, there are very generous individuals who aren't necessarily mega, mega, mega wealthy who are doing things like leaving their land in some cases. There's the farmer in Kansas who bequeathed his land to the tribe that had occupied it centuries earlier. It was his effort to use his own modest wealth and his legacy to correct what he felt was an injustice.

I'm not saying that everyone outside there listening today should rewrite their wills and give the land back to the tribe that was there, but I'm just trying to give you some ideas of the range of actions that people can take to correct a historical injustice. The word of caution, I think, is that people who engage in such activities should engage in due diligence and make sure that they're not just doing a feel-good ill-thought-out gesture of giving land back to people who actually may not have the capacity, the ability or even the willingness to protect the land. This can, this can backfire. And in my list of Land Backs, I have, you know, some horror stories of lands being returned to people don't do a very good job taking care of them.

Carolyn: Also, it's a bit unfair to expect someone who is of Indigenous ancestry living today to automatically know all of these things if they haven't been living and working on the land, you know, for generations or at least a couple.

Randy: So that, that raises I think, the most beautiful opportunity for all of us who are listening today, which is to recognize, as we have said so many times on this show, that *[many]* Indigenous people have become highly assimilated. We're very much, most of us, like people in the mainstream and have mainstream values. So Land Back can mean, ooh, a business opportunity. Some tribes immediately see the timber as, "Oh, let's harvest it. We've got money," or "Let's build a recreational facility and trample the place." Or, you know, some of the stranger examples, you know, "Let's build a casino on the unspoiled nature park."

So I - I think if we acknowledge that we are all relearning - both Indigenous and mainstream people - how to accommodate living in harmony with our other-than-human kin. And if we engage on a journey of mutual exploration and mutual discussions and we're honest about our human limitations and our cultural limitations, we have a lot to teach one another. It isn't the case that the mainstream has all the answers. Our mainstream scientists don't. And it is not the case that every single person who is quote unquote Indigenous has all the answers about how to protect a particular piece of land. We have to be open and we have to have the courage to have frank discussions with one another about what we can do, what we know and what we don't know.

Carolyn: So a lot of this involves discussing across cultural barriers and cultural expectations, maybe even language barriers.

Randy: Yes, yes. And as we keep saying in this program today, each of these discussions is place specific. So a formula or a partner that might work in the Pacific Northwest where the process of colonization arrived 150 or 200 years later than here on the East Coast, there may be more people who have been in permanent residence on their lands than in the East Coast where there are very few people, indigenous people who still occupy their ancestral tribal lands and they are trying to find a way of reconnecting. So again, the formula that fits on the West Coast may not fit in the central United States . My tribal homeland is *[includes]* Chicago; I don't think they're going to give it back. And it may not work here in the Northeast of the United States. And again, it may not fit what is happening in Africa and India. We need to be humble about listening to what the land has to ask of us. We need to be humble about what the Indigenous people have to ask of us.

Carolyn: Thank you, Randy. And I think that wraps up the content of our show for today. Before you make your closing statement, I just want to make sure we credit the group that organized the march and interviews in Montréal that we participated in last Saturday was Collectif COP15[7]. And the group that organized the Fortress Conservation webinar that we learned a lot about problems in Africa and India is the New Internationalist[8]. So we'll put links to those on our website.

Randy: And we'll also put up a link to a map[9] that will allow you to visualize the lands that Indigenous people once had in this part of the world and what they are now on. It's shocking to see it.

---

[7] Collectif COP15 https://collectifcop15.org/en/

[8] New Internationalist ,November 2022: "For Whose Protection?" https://digital.newint.com.au/issues/193/articles/5000 ; "Fortress Conservation is Driving Us From Our Homes", https://newint.org/features/2021/11/19/fortress-conservation-driving-us-our-homes

[9] Interactive Time-Lapse Map Shows How the U.S. Took More Than 1.5 Billion Acres From Native American https://www.slate.com/blogs/the_vault/2014/06/17/interactive_map_loss_of_indian_land.html
Historical Shrinkage of Native American Lands in the USA https://earthlymission.com/historical-shrinkage-of-native-american-lands-in-the-usa/
Native Land Digital – global interactive map of Indigenous nations and their traditional territories https://native-land.ca/

So I want to thank listeners for tuning in. I hope you'll take time to give yourself some space to reconnect with your roots in Mother Earth and with your ancestral roots. Before your busy day distracts you from this moment, I encourage you to take a few minutes to reach out and feel the presence of living flora and fauna and perhaps even that of your ancestors. I say that at the end of every program; I think it's particularly resonant today. Allow yourself to touch their presence, capture that moment and hold onto it. And if you will write to me and let me know about your experience.

I can be contacted through my website, at www.randykritkausky.com where you can also find transcripts and supplemental materials for all Indigenous Perspectives shows including today's. Again, I want to say migwetch, thank you, for being a listener.

++

"Indigenous Perspectives" monthly podcast is hosted by Randy Kritkausky and Carolyn Schmidt, and broadcast on the fourth Thursday of each month, 12 noon Eastern Time (US & Canada), on HealthyLife.net.

++