

Walpole Island First Nation and the Rt. Hon. Herb Gray Parkway: A Case Study in Relationship and Capacity Building



Walpole Island Prairie. Photo credit: Jared Macbeth

The relationship that exists today between Walpole Island First Nation (WIFN) and the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) on the Rt. Hon. Herb Gray Parkway (the Parkway) began in 2004 during the early planning stages for a new end-to-end border transportation system in the Windsor-Detroit Gateway. The relationship has broadened to now include the Windsor Essex Mobility Group (WEMG) and Parkway Infrastructure Constructors (PIC), the companies designing and building the Parkway.

The Parkway, the \$1.4 billion Ontario access road portion of the new transportation system, is 11 kilometres long and located in Windsor-Essex. The Parkway consists of three main components – a below-grade extension of Highway 401, an at-grade extension of Highway 3 and an approximately 20-kilometre multi-use trail system set within 120 hectares of green space. What began as an obligation to consult WIFN has led to a dedicated partnership with a shared vision for the Parkway. For more details on the Parkway visit www.hgparkway.ca and for information on the relationship between the Parkway team and WIFN click on the [sustainability](#) tab.

“Our engagement wouldn’t have happened unless our partners were aware of who we are as a First Nation community and what we could bring to the table. Ontario and the Windsor Essex Mobility Group understood our value and worked hard to develop a relationship with us over the years.”

Dean Jacobs, Consultation Manager, Walpole Island First Nation External Projects Program
Footprints: A Newsletter from the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs - Spring 2013

Walpole Island First Nation

The Parkway is located in the traditional territory of WIFN. WIFN is also known as Bkejwanong which means “where the waters divide.” The territory is situated at the mouth of the St. Clair River, northeast of Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario. It supports a unique ecosystem with some of Ontario’s greatest biological diversity.

WIFN has been recognized internationally for its work with a variety of partners to facilitate natural heritage protection and restoration efforts within the traditional territory. This work includes the formation of the Walpole Island Land Trust to support these initiatives (www.walpolelandtrust.com).

Through consultation, WIFN has influenced policy and infrastructure projects to include opportunities to share First Nation history and culture with neighbouring communities.

WIFN works with private industry and government to support environmental stewardship and promote economic and employment initiatives.



Ecological Connections Between Walpole Island and the Parkway

The Parkway and Walpole Island both feature remnant Tallgrass Prairie, one of the rarest and most endangered ecosystems in the world. The species at risk that are found on Parkway restoration areas are also found on Walpole Island. Species at risk on the Parkway are protected by permits issued under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA, 2007)*. WIFN encouraged the Parkway team to consider the protection of the entire shared ecosystem, and not just individual species. This ecosystem perspective has guided MTO's environmental approach for the Parkway.



Island Prairie on Walpole Island.
Photo credit: Jared Macbeth



Parkway restoration area.
Photo credit: MTO

“WIFN’s philosophies, values and practices of interacting respectfully with the natural world and not separating themselves from it, has directly contributed to the continued existence of the natural areas and many wildlife species, both common and rare, found on Walpole Island.”

Walpole Island Heritage Centre (2006). *E-Niizanag Wii-Ngoshkaag Maampii Bkejwanon/Species at Risk on the Walpole Island First Nation*. Bkejwanong Natural Heritage Program

Benefits of Collaboration



A hummingbird on Walpole Island.
Photo credit: Jared Macbeth

MTO has engaged WIFN not just as observers, but as active partners and valued contributors to the project. WIFN community members have been present at Parkway events such as Public Information Open Houses and Species at Risk Annual Meetings. The Parkway team has participated in WIFN's Ecosystem Circles, which are a venue to engage the community, learn about nature and the environment, share knowledge and facilitate community involvement and action.

WIFN community members contributed to the archaeology and natural heritage investigations for the Parkway, and have played an important role in restoration and species at risk transplanting efforts. Through Ecosystem Circles, opportunities to integrate First Nation culture into the aesthetic and small scale public art elements of the Parkway landscape and urban design were identified.

Business Development Opportunities for WIFN

Danshab Enterprises, a Walpole Island-based business, created an ecological division to build on skills developed during the first species at risk transplanting program for the Parkway. Danshab's employees have all grown up living in and learning about Tallgrass Prairie and this traditional and cultural knowledge has been integral to the success of the company's transplanting and restoration efforts. Since 2010, PIC has awarded Danshab several contracts to undertake transplanting efforts on the Parkway. The capacity that has been built through delivering these contracts has allowed Danshab's ecological division to grow and take on other projects.

The Ontario Aboriginal Procurement Pilot program was created in 2012 by the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs to facilitate connections with Aboriginal businesses by creating opportunities for procurement on government projects, to advance economic and business development and to promote partnership opportunities. This pilot program provided a procurement mechanism that facilitated MTO's engagement of Danshab Enterprises to work on a number of ecological restoration projects on the Parkway. This includes the propagation of Colicroot, a rare prairie plant that is found on Walpole Island and the Parkway restoration areas.

"I am very proud that the Parkway was one of the first provincial projects to take advantage of the Aboriginal Procurement Pilot program. The program provided an opportunity to further develop a mutually beneficial relationship between MTO and WIFN."

Garfield Dales, Director, Windsor Border Initiatives Implementation Group, Ministry of Transportation



David Suzuki (middle) presenting David White (left) and Eric Fields (right), both from Danshab Enterprises, an award for their role in transplanting species at risk along the Parkway (April 2013).

Photo credit: Walpole Island Heritage Centre



David White and Paul Williams, of Danshab Enterprises, completing species at risk transplanting work on the Parkway.

Photo credit: MTO

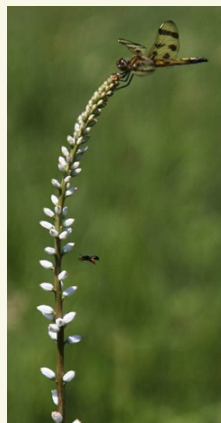
The Language of the Prairie: A Reflection of Traditional Knowledge

The Anishinaabemowin language is part of the traditional knowledge which teaches respect for the prairie. For example, the word used for prairie is "mshkode" which translates as "the place where the fire went through." Insects that are vital to the ecosystem are known as "mnidoonsag" which means "little spirits."

Left: A controlled burn on a mshkode (prairie) at Walpole Island.

Right: Mnidoonsag (insects) on Colicroot.

Photo credits: Jared Macbeth



Reflecting Aboriginal Culture and Tradition in Aesthetic Elements of the Parkway

WIFN has ecological, cultural and historical ties to Windsor-Essex that are reflected in the aesthetic elements of the Parkway.

The Parkway Pedestrian Bridges

Three themes have been interpreted and applied to the Parkway's seven pedestrian bridges. The inspiration for the themes came from the significant colours, teachings and clans of the local Anishinaabe First Nation (Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi people) and applied as interpreted by community members and elders from WIFN.

Homage to Safe Passage

A symbolic marker, "Homage to Safe Passage," is being placed within the Parkway lands in close proximity to the Detroit River. The inclusion of this marker recognizes the importance of the crossing from Lake Erie to Lake St. Clair for First Nation peoples. A limestone glacial erratic found during excavation was salvaged and will be integrated as part of the installation to represent the original Grandfather Stone that was destroyed by missionaries in 1670.

The pedestrian bridge aesthetics and the Homage to Safe Passage have been well received by the public and will serve as a teaching tool for present and future generations.

Spotlight on Teresa Altman



Teresa Altman, a WIFN artist, has been commissioned to design the animal symbols interpreted from the seven original Anishinaabe clan treaty signatures. Teresa has also designed elements of the Homage to Safe Passage, including an interpretation of the Great Turtle which carries the Grandfather Stone.

Teresa is an Ontario College of Art and Design graduate and recipient of an honorary fellowship.

Teresa Altman at the unveiling of the First Nation Welcome Sculpture at Point Pelee National Park (October 2012). Photo credit: Jared Macbeth

"These features of the Parkway will provide teaching elements for Ojibwe culture and for all of us as human beings."

Teresa Altman, Walpole Island First Nation Artist

Pedestrian Bridge Themes

Colours

The seven bridge colours (black, blue, white, purple, red, green and yellow) come from the four colours of the Medicine Wheel (seen below) and the three colours that represent life on Earth.



Teachings

The Seven Grandfather Teachings are universal values to guide us in our day-to-day living and interactions with the natural environment. Together, they create a balance of spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well-being. The Seven Grandfather Teachings, to be displayed on Parkway trail markers in Anishinaabemowin, English and French, are:

Debwewin-Truth-Vérité

Dabadendizwin-Humility-Humilité

Giyakwaadziwin-Honesty-Honnêteté

Zoongde'ewin-Bravery-Bravoure

Gchi-Piitendaagziwin-Respect-Respect

Zaagidwin-Love-Amour

Nbwaakaawin-Wisdom-Sagesse

Clans

Each bridge will be marked by an animal symbol that is an artistic representation of one of the original seven clans of the Anishinaabe people. The turtle image below, created by Teresa Altman, is one example.

