Introductory Remarks

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I want to share the land acknowledgment that was authored in collaboration with the Tribal Nations in this, our territory. The first and most critical is our location here on Marsh Island, the homeland of my tribe, the Penobscot Nation. We recognize that issues of water, territorial rights, and the encroachment upon our sacred sites are ongoing. You need not be that aware to recognize the ongoing takings by the state of Maine, among others. We also recognize that the Penobscot Homeland is connected to other tribal nations the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, Mi’kmaq and Abenaki through kinship, and the confederation we began long ago.

The University recognizes that the Penobscot Nation and the other Wabanaki tribal nations are distinct sovereign, legal, and political entities with their own powers of self-governance and self-determination.

When we brought this acknowledgment through in 2018, it was part of several other actions on campus including signage in Penobscot language, as well recognizing the Penobscot and other tribes’ sovereignty over the cultural heritage items held at the University of Maine.

We have a duty to our lands, to seek them back and to think that the land wants us back to steward them. Toward that end, our work on climate adaptation started in 2015. We were asked to help with a grant to build climate adaptation plans. In 2012, all the tribes here engaged with the federal emergency management agency (FEMA) in writing hazard mitigation plans for the first forecasting around climate change will bring -- in particular, sea level rise. What we really wanted to address were the potential impacts on Wabanaki health, such as increased pathogens, lack of infrastructure, loss of habitat and subsistence resources that will be caused by climate change.

This research is community based and mobilizes Indigenous research methods. We use sustainability science frameworks, but center community, community engagement, action-based research, and the Indigenous knowledge as the core of research. We understand that the key to climate adaptation is community, social, and cultural resilience and that the collective actions taken by the tribes have been focused on valuing our language, traditions and understanding our past adaptations to climatic and other changes.

Key to our resilience as a Wabanaki people is about how we act collectively in response to challenges or problems that affect us across our tribes. Climate change is only one of these challenges, there are quite a number. One sees in our history that our confederacy among nations becomes important because we're dealing with the collective colonial challenges of settlers. Located in what is now known as Maine, though his is misleading when we think about our land as we have lands beyond the boundaries of colonial governments. We are the Dawn-Land, and most land in our homelands are in what is now known as Canada.

Our Confederacy has always had a multicultural, multinational orientation, addressing problems through protocols of engagement with each other. We are tied to our wampum belt traditions and how we formulate our relationships with each other, humans and non-humans alike. Scholars do recognize this, that the Confederacy is adaptable and always close to the hearts and minds of our people, especially when we work cross-culturally across nations to address issues. Our problem solving is consensus oriented, reflecting the will of the many and of how we engage [in contrast to representative democracy].

Consensus is critical to solving problems related to the threats to our health and our well-being We already see, for example, a significant is the increase in winter ticks, which is leading to loss of moose and other culturally important species. The tribes here have been involved in several studies to track and try to understand. Primarily, it's because our winters are not as cold as they used to be, so ticks are killed. Increases in water temperature impacts our fish and forests. Lakes across the country are warming and adversely affecting native species of fish. Increases in air temperatures increase invasive species. The emerald ash borer is an example and we have been working on this since they were first discovered in Detroit in 2002. We feel these increased temperatures in on Turtle Island.

We fight the loss of native language(s) in our stories. This is because stories [are how we keep and access the knowledge] of previous climatic changes and adaptations from those stories. In our language, emphasis on food sovereignty and connections to our food across both land and water spaces. A commitment exists to engage across the confederacy in adaptation planning and for political and cultural action, while recognizing that each nation is doing its own work.

Language and stories are of course connected to clan mothers and their families, stories, and identities. Clan identities are what define our responsibilities to our non-human relations and proscribes how we need to reengage and reinvigorate. For tribal nations across Turtle Island, part of this work is protecting cultural sites threatened by sea level rise, and important to that understanding the history of our collective action through previous climate changes while we politically mobilize around the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These help us to link and work across artificial and imposed international boundaries to create collective action.

The COVID pandemic is difficult because we like to write together and engage in collective thinking as we mobilize our traditions for stewarding our lands. We create hands on projects involving our children in community climate projects and our tribal governments and our spaces so they can act informed by our wisdom. There is a real need to do integrated community planning across the different silos: transportation, social services, health, emergency response, environment, wildlife, to do what’s right in adaptation for and around climatic change. One example sharing our wisdom is in our song traditions where there is untapped potential in our relations with non-human beings that are traditional.

We have very little of our land remaining under our control. That's sad because we are no longer able to steward a ‘right relationship’ to our territory. The four townships of our tribal nations emerged in an act of the Maine legislature in 1833. It is unjust, reflecting prior illegal treaties. And even the lands that we still retain were sought by settlers. Our lands taken without compensation, but worse without any consideration for our understanding and our relationships to these places.

Of course, colonial systems of property have a history traced to the doctrine of Christian discovery and domination, a notion of religious and racial supremacy limiting certain groups of their ability to own and transfer property stretching back to papal bulls from the 15th and 16th centuries. This structure is one with which we are live today.

Land reflects, or should reflect, the right relationship between humans and non-humans.

My teachers remind me that our first treaties and agreements are with non-humans.

And those are what are fashioned through and define our right relationships. For Indigenous people, language, ceremony, medicine or kinship systems, stories, and remediation which is really about centering our women and traditional of stewardship in a relationship with the land and other non-humans.

We struggle to get away from the patriarchal systems of property land relations that define

the settler nations, with which they try to [re]define us. Ours is a very conscious shift against the colonial status quo, which de-emphasizes our healing relationships, often through food systems and food sovereignty, kinship, and ceremonial communities across our territory. When women are once again the center of our communities, we right our relationships that exist between all systems in creation.

As we decolonize our stories Olivia Moore, who is a Two spirit activist who references our shared future for all people states, we must acknowledge that the matriarchy sets the human law of our land. Thus, we have established the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship. The goal is to restore Wabanaki prosperity through intentional, sustained efforts to expand our stewardship of land. The mission is to improve the health and well-being of Wabanaki people through a sustained effort to expand their access, management, and ownership of lands; to practice our land-based cultures across our homeland. To date we have had 1500 acres of land returned. It connects our nations to some of our landholdings west of the Pleasant Point River, and these are important territories for things including the Atlantic salmon habitats that we hope will recover with the removal of dams in the last decade.

We cannot understate the importance of returning the people to the land. We ache for our land to be returned, but it also wants us back. The core of this work is the recognition and respect for our ability to self-govern and manage our own resource and create pathways for land community healing. I'm not going to say I'm optimistic, but I am heartened work that is happening, and I think there are increasing opportunities for land reclamation. We are, as Indigenous people, the core of the climate justice movement at this moment in time. Indigenous people are in control of 5% of lands across the planet. Those lands hold 80% of biodiversity. Our practices in protecting these places, stewarding them as an active and engaged cultures is powerful, protects biodiversity, and leads to more possibilities around climate action and mitigation for the entire planet.