

For this issue, CPAWS Wildlands League invited Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig (KI) to share their vision for protecting the lands and waters of Big Trout Lake and the Fawn River, located within the Severn watershed, one of the last undisturbed watersheds of northern Ontario, almost 600km northwest of Thunder Bay.

This is an inspiring story of leadership and tradition, in a landscape of frenzied mineral exploration, and the pressures it can bring. It is also a story that is ongoing, and will require equal wisdom from all parties to resolve successfully.

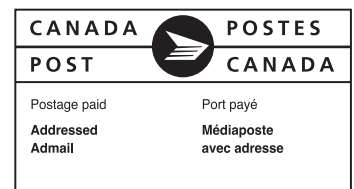


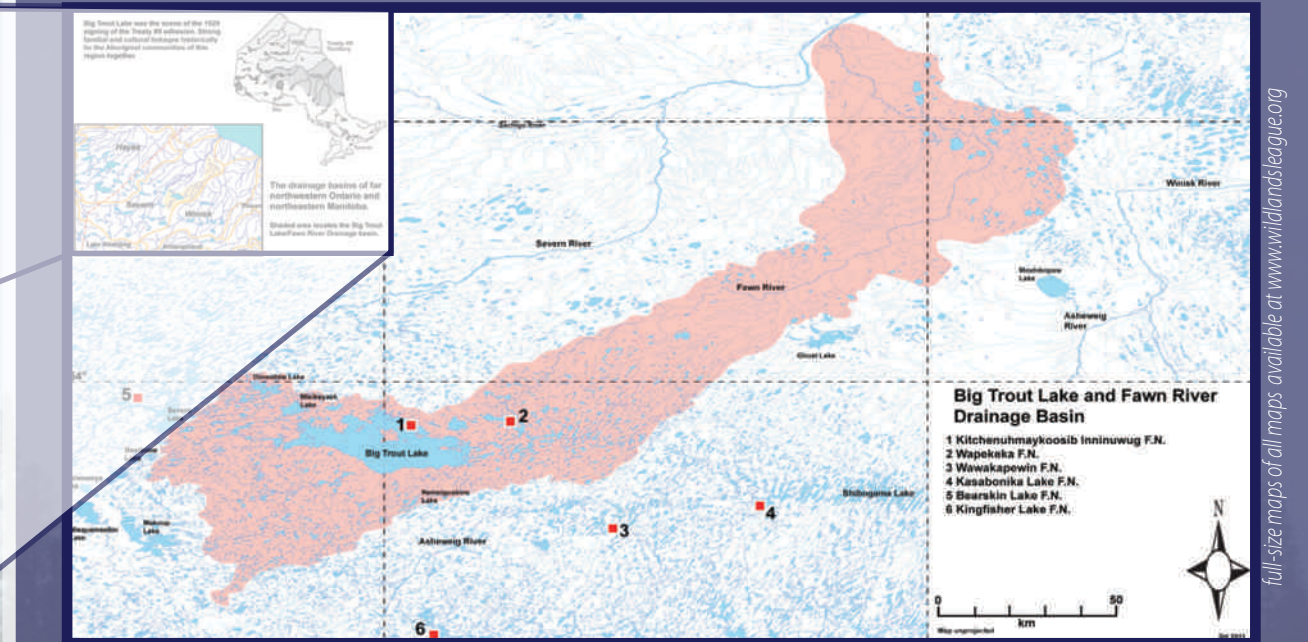
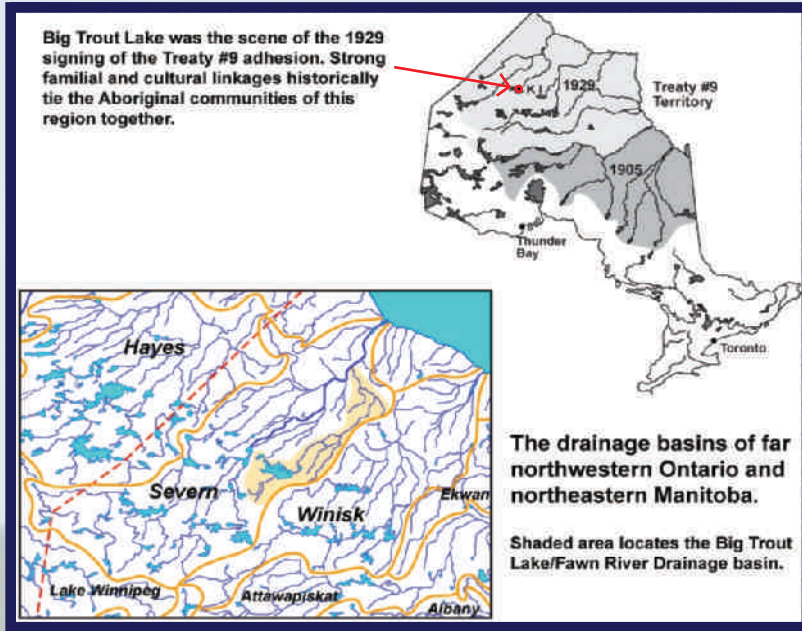
photo: Dan Tobias

"The Elders have repeatedly told us over the generations that we have to look after our lands and waters and we cannot destroy the lands. These are the lands our young people need to survive!" Mary Hudson – Elder

the KI Watershed Declaration

KI signed the Adhesion to Treaty #9 with commissioners of his Majesty King George V to share the land and not to surrender the land as the treaty document proclaims. Eighty two years later, it was the view of KI that no sincere efforts are being made to implement the original spirit and intent of the treaty, which was to share in the benefits from the lands and resources. Rather, the special bond to the land continues to be impacted to the detriment of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki (land) – and Niipiin (waters). So on July 5, 2011, supported overwhelmingly by the community membership, KI passed the **KI Watershed Declaration**.





water is the source of life
 water is a sacred gift from the Creator to heal and sustain all living beings
 water is alive and is life itself
 water connects all things in the sacred web of life



the KI Watershed Declaration

Kanawayandan D'aaki ... is what the elders say when passing on the original instructions to the next generation to look after the land. It is the spiritual mandate of KI to preserve and protect Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki or the KI homeland. Kanawayandan D'aaki governs and binds KI to fulfill the sacred duty of looking after the homeland.

The Elders vision guided KI in 2006 by preventing mineral exploration on Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki in an environmentally-sensitive area. It would have negatively-impacted KI's food and water source – the 661 square kilometer Kitchenuhmaykoosib – the big lake where the trout and other species of fish and animals can be found.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib, our home lake, is a living system that reaches far beyond its shores. It provides clean drinking water for all life, habitat for the fish and water life, food and travel ways for our people, and moisture for the air.

KI proclaims that it has the right and responsibility to defend and ensure the protection, availability and purity of the water for the survival of the present and future generations... and for all life. By the authority and responsibility given to us by the Creator:

We declare all waters that flow into and out of Big Trout Lake and all lands whose waters flow into the lake, rivers and wetlands, to be completely protected through our continued care under KI's authority, laws and protocols.

No industrial uses, or other uses which disrupt, poison, or otherwise harm our relationship to these lands and waters will be permitted.

At all times the use of KI lands and waters, and any related decision-making, will be subject to KI's free, prior, and informed consent following KI laws and processes.

This includes the right to say no!

The KI Water Declaration covers 13,025 square kilometers. A moratorium continues to apply in the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki watershed until lifted by community referendum.

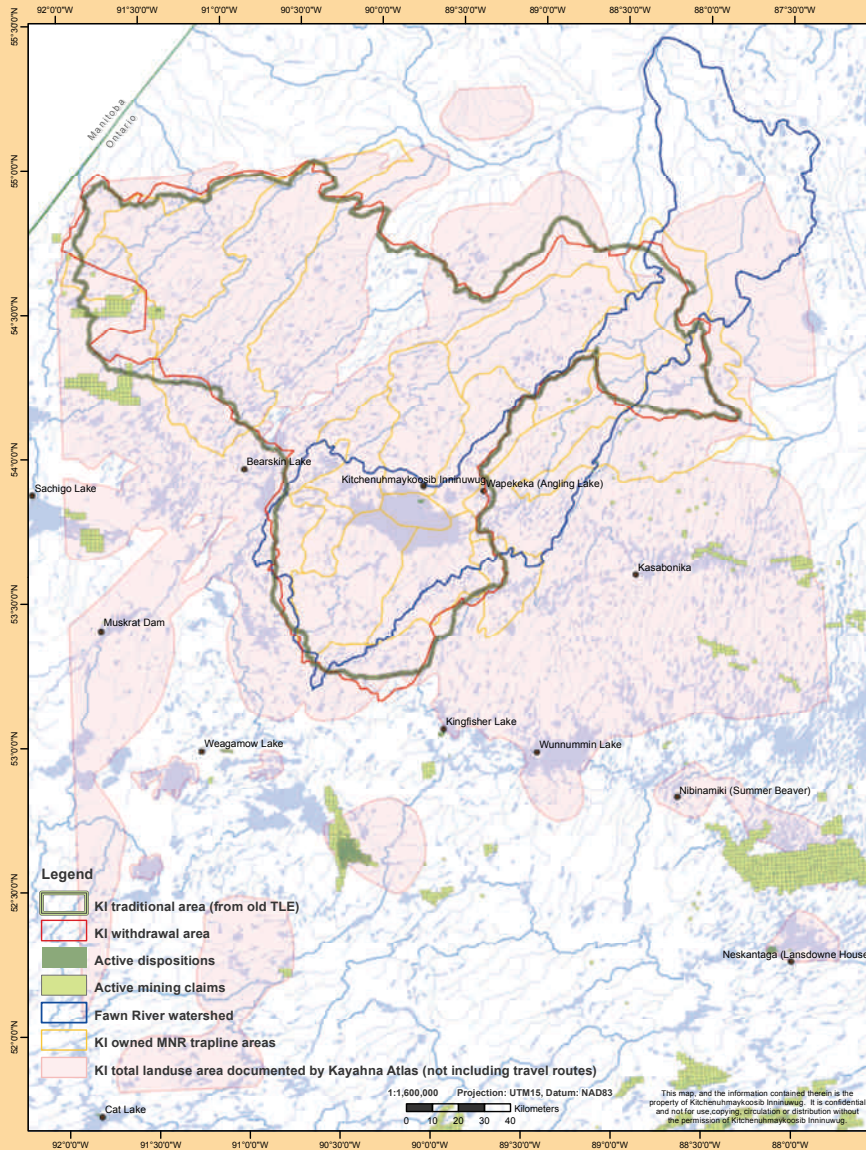
Throughout the generations at community meetings, the Elders have repeatedly stated that KI needs to protect the watershed and directed the development of the KI Watershed Declaration as a protection tool for the future generations, fulfilling part of the vision of Kanawayandan D'aaki.

On September 2011, KI evicted another exploration company from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki who did not consult or accommodate KI once again. Ontario paid out the mining claims and leases of yet another exploration company and unilaterally withdrew 23,181 square kilometers of land on Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki making it off-limits for exploration. More than five (5) times the size of Prince Edward Island (PEI), it is the largest such land withdrawal ever in Ontario.



"Our ancestors have made a living from the lake and the land and we need to respect that. I still make a living from the lands and waters. The food from the lands and waters are god-given. When the non-native food is no longer accessible, our emergency plan is to go back to the land. If there is mining or forestry, none of it will be around – it will all be destroyed!"

Sona Sainnawap – Elder



With Kanawayandan D'aaki in force over the homeland, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki, the unilateral withdrawal by the Province evoked this response from Chief of KI, Donny Morris:

"Ontario is trying to make decisions on our land without us and we need to end that."

KI under its authority and under its own laws will continue to exercise its sovereign responsibility to uphold Kanawayandan D'aaki across the homeland. Kanawayandan D'aaki expresses the inherent responsibility in the community to the land including the duty for maintaining the connection. KI's continued protection of the watershed will enable us to maintain, restore, and rebuild our relationship to the land and water within our homeland, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki.

All respectful people are welcome to visit this area to engage in fishing, hunting, camping, paddling and recreation providing they obtain a permit of permission from KI, and respect regulation by KI law and protocols.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! Tell us what you think about the KI Watershed Declaration and our work with First Nations to protect important watersheds. Email or write us a note at CPAWS Wildlands League.

Thank-you!



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