
Calgary Wetlands Clean-up and Preservation Proposal

Submitted by University of Calgary, Department of Political Science
Indigenous Studies 317 “Ecological Knowledge” Summer Semester

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Figure 1. Photograph of a Grandfather Rock at 45 Bridlecreek Park, Calgary, Alberta. From Kyla Mowat, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikuni, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations, including Chiniki, Bearpaw, and Wesley First Nations. These Nations are our family, friends, faculty, staff, students, and peers and we should aspire for our learning, research, teaching and governance to respect Indigenous knowledge and traditions in order to work towards a decolonized future. We would also like to note that the University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, and that the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is “Mohkinstsis” which we now call the City of Calgary. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.¹

We would also like to express our deepest gratitude to our teacher and guide Professor Line Laplante, who provided us with the knowledge and opportunity to pursue this project. Her valuable input and ideas helped us to successfully complete our research and encouraged our participation in this important group exercise. This project would not have been possible without the supportive and collaborative efforts of our class. We are so thankful to have shared this incredible experience with each other.

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¹ *ii' taa'poh'to'p.* (2018). Indigenous Strategy. University of Calgary. Retrieved from https://www.ucalgary.ca/indigenous-strategy/files/indigenous-strategy/indigenous-strategy_publication_digital_feb2018.pdf

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Introduction

The University of Calgary, Indigenous Studies “Ecological Knowledge” (INDG 317) taught by Professor Line Laplante aims to educate students about ways that the environment communicates using traditional Indigenous ways of knowing. Throughout the course, students learn how to apply traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge, philosophies, and teachings to modern issues. The overarching goal of the curriculum is to provide students with tools to address environment and climate changes that integrate the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report recommendations, as well as influence urban planning to include a renewed focus on promoting and preserving biodiversity.

The 2018 Ecological Knowledge summer class developed this proposal to incorporate experiential knowledge acquired this semester to contribute towards Calgary’s growth as a culturally respectful, biologically ethical, and thriving city. This proposal supports and enhances the *Our BiodiverCity* (2015) strategic plan and the City of Calgary’s fundamental principles of “protecting, developing, and managing” natural environments (p. 3).

Many environmental spaces in Calgary deserve consideration for preservation and maintenance, however this proposal recommends the selection committee strongly consider the Bridlewood wetlands area as a source of diverse ecological systems and the location of culturally and biologically significant monuments. This proposal aims to provide the City of Calgary with an unparalleled worldview and conservation plan. Proposal goals reflect the importance of preserving the Bridlewood wetlands for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens in order to encourage ongoing cultural and environmental education.



Figure 2. A photograph of a Grandfather Rock from the pathway in 45 Bridlecreek Park SW. Calgary, Alberta. From Alexandria Baird, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

Project Background & Focus

Calgary's Glacial Erratics

A narrow belt of glacial erratics (pebble-size to three-storey high stones) were deposited in the foothills of southern Alberta during the melt of the Cordilleran and Laurentide glacial ice sheets 15,000 to 18,000 years ago (Stalker, 1956, p. 5). Indigenous populations have attached numerous cosmological stories to these rocks where various mythical beings are said to have played a role in their movement; *Napi* (Blackfoot), *Iktomi* (Stoney Nakoda), *Wesakechak* (Cree), and *Nanabozho* (Ojibwe)—some of which are recognized in a scholarly article under an Algonquian concept of *manitow* (Westman & Joly, 2017). Blackfoot stories such as *Napi and the Rolling Rock* (Glenbow Museum, n.d.) and *Napi and the Rock* (Bullchild, 2005, p. 167) tell of the relationship between *Napi*, the rock, and other animals. Within these stories are embedded lessons of ethical human behavior with various forms of Beings (e.g., rocks, water, trees, and animals) encountered in the natural world. *Okotoks* is a Blackfoot word meaning Big Rock.

As the Laurentide ice sheet retreated eastward, numerous erratics were also deposited across Saskatchewan and Manitoba; again, these rocks are said to possess spiritual powers and have become sites for spiritual healing (McLeod, 2007). The erratics travelled with the melting glacial waters to the Calgary region (Stalker, 1956). Over time, glacial erratics have been identified as Grandfathers for they are one of the four cardinal life building blocks—rocks, water, sun, and wind; “All life begins with rocks” posits Dr. Reg Crowshoe (*Piikuni*) (pers. comm. 2016). These Grandfathers are especially connected to the buffalo spirit on the Plains of Alberta. It is said that when the buffalo shook their bodies, the dust that sprinkled on the ground blessed the land, revering, and revealing its sacredness for all beings to experience.

Glacial erratics are also known as buffalo rubbing stones. In springtime, buffalo would rub against the rocks to rid themselves of their thick winter fur leaving behind a high marble-like polish on the rock. Years of such activity created deep ruts around the erratics, some of which are referred to as buffalo wallows. In Indigenous circles, it is said that the buffalo's energy were embedded into the rock, thus these rocks can absorb and emit energy, both from themselves and their environment. As a result, these buffalo rubbing stones have created a “personality of place” (Laplante, U of C, “Aboriginal Spirits & the Natural World,” INDG 397, 2015).

Whenever glacial erratics are found, especially when included in the development of Calgary communities, they take on a sentinel role—the area becomes a gathering place because the erratics “evoke a mythological time, as sentinels from an age when the world was set into its current form by the deeds of tricksters and manitows” (Westman & Joly, 2017, p. 369). Human beings and animals are attracted to these Grandfathers oftentimes without knowing their cultural and spiritual significance to Indigenous Peoples.

Many erratics remain buried in the ground or are underwater to this day (Stalker, 1956). However, their unique strata of pebbly quartzite, thick veins of coloured quartz, and fine traces of granite await as they are exposed, “unearthed or birthed” (Laplante, 2015)—such an occurrence took place in the community of Mission, Calgary (Fortney, 2015). Deloria posits, “People must always be ready to experience new revelations at new locations” (2003, p. 83). Indigenous ways of knowing and cosmology view Mother Earth as a living entity, thus glacial erratics are considered rock people that are birthed, live a life, and experience a release of their spirit often during sweat lodge ceremonies.

While these erratics can be found in many different biologically diverse areas, several erratics currently reside in and near wetland spaces in Calgary. These wetland habitats are not only important for continued biodiversity within the city, but also contribute to the creation and maintenance of open spaces and habitats for wildlife. These erratic sites are cultural landscapes because they contain both ecological and aquatic components “that are vital in the present and retain a link to the past” (The City of Calgary Parks, 2013, p. 4). The *Wetland Conservation Strategic Plan* indicates that 90% of the traditional wetlands areas in Calgary no longer

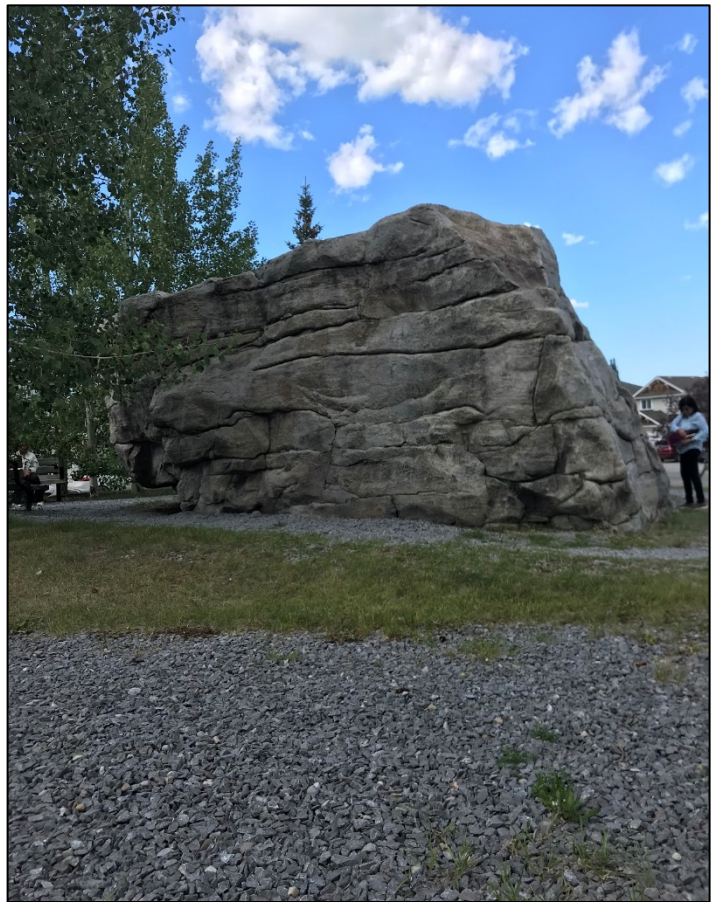


Figure 3. A photograph of the glacial erratic located at Panorama Hills, Calgary, Alberta. From Alexandria Baird, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

exist, and highlights that the remaining 10% wetland habitats are at risk and must be protected from further harm (The City of Calgary Parks, 2004, p. 6).

Wetlands Preservation and Calgary's *Our BiodiverCity Plan* (2015)

Based on the City of Calgary's strategic plans, *Our BiodiverCity Plan* (2015) and *Cultural Landscapes* (2004), this proposal seeks to highlight the ecological, cultural, and spiritual significance of the glacial erratics found throughout Calgary. This includes emphasizing the importance of protecting, preserving, and maintaining the habitat surrounding the glacial erratic found in the Bridlewood Wetlands location at 45 Bridlecreek Park SW. Particular concern is attributed to the site directly north of the adjacent residences, marked by a constructed wooden boardwalk and educational wildlife signage. Currently, the pathway is dilapidated and in desperate need of repair. There is visual evidence of toxic and harmful waste draining directly into the wetlands from the residential enclosures along Bridlecreek Park SW. The ancient and unique glacial erratic is covered with overgrown foliage and surrounded by refuse and other forms of debris.

Project Focus

The following proposal demonstrates how and why glacial erratics must be incorporated into the City of Calgary municipal parks *Our BiodiverCity Plan* (2015). According to Indigenous philosophies, cosmologies, and traditional ways of knowing, glacial erratics or buffalo rubbing stones are historical repositories of cultural teachings, ecological knowledge, and act as educators for human behaviour. *Mistasiniyak*, meaning "big stones" (McLeod, 2007, p. 19) hold cultural and spiritual significance to the Indigenous people of Treaty 7 land, as they are physical reminders of the relationship between people and the rest of the Creators' work. Indigenous teachings refer to these stones as Grandfather Rocks and remain integral parts of ceremonial prayers used to thank the Creator for the abundance of buffalo on the plains (McLeod, 2007, p. 19). Most of these sacred stones have a close proximity to significant biocultural corridors in our landscape such as rivers, streams of water, or wetlands. These areas often sustain diverse wildlife and can also cohabit with residential communities such as the erratic location at 45 Bridlecreek Park. Highlighting the cultural, spiritual and ecological importance of these areas will support the vision of providing a culturally inclusive, biodiverse protection plan with

the aim of “preserving rare landscape features and critical habitats within and between our neighbourhood” (McLeod, 2007, p. 28).

The glacial erratics and wetlands must be identified as a significant part of Calgary’s cultural and ecological landscape, as they remain a unique and thriving example of this city’s diverse natural land features. The historical importance lies within the journey of the ancient glacial erratics and their redistribution over the southern Alberta landscape. The spiritual significance of glacial erratics is tied to these areas since time immemorial considering that the “First Nations occupation of the region extends to the close of the last Ice Age, over 10,000 years ago” (City of Calgary Parks, 2013, p. 46). All ecological elements of this land are essential in shaping Indigenous culture, imparting wisdom, and providing ecological knowledge that strengthens communities and leads towards a sustainable future. The City of Calgary must develop strategic plans that address the protection and maintenance of at-risk environments as well as respect areas with significant historical and cultural meaning.

Indigenous Perspective & Project Objective

Respect, Reciprocity, and Preservation

Most of the foundational principles of Indigenous creation and ceremonial stories focus on teaching how to live and commune with all beings based on principles of reciprocity. These teachings include providing knowledge and wisdom regarding relations between all beings, animate and inanimate that reside in all areas of the natural world (Auger, 1997). These connections include developing relationships with water, land, trees, insects, animals and rocks. Indigenous Peoples look at large rocks, such as the glacial erratics, as embodiments of Grandfather Spirits; this is observed in relational stories such as the Blackfoot stories of the *Iniskim* or the *Buffalo Rock* (Grinnell, 2003, p. 125-126; Wissler & Duvall, 1995, pp. 85-89). For Indigenous peoples, glacial erratics signify ancient educators who provide sacred teachings that are passed down through the generations. These Grandfather Rocks provide wisdom and holistic healing through prayers or ceremony.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action & Calgary's Role

Calgary is situated within Blackfoot territory and is located in the Treaty 7 region. Within this vast territory there are several historical landmarks which are spiritually significant for the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. However, unbeknownst to a large majority of Calgarians these sacred sites go unrecognized. From an Indigenous perspective, there is a lack of education regarding this region's collective spiritual history.

In 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was tasked with developing a complex restorative process that included listening, sharing, researching and collecting statements and experiences of survivors and communities affected by Canada's Residential School System.² This process also includes the development of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* which includes a series of mandates that specifically address Canada's legacy. The TRC Report (2015) provides recommendations to amend education and curriculum to include Indigenous

² Watch *Beyond 94 Truth and Reconciliation in Canada* for detailed information on the impacts of residential schools, CBC video, <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-single/beyond-94?&cta=1>

voice as well as preserve language and culture. This proposal brings to light Indigenous relationships to the natural world, cosmology, and cultural significance of Grandfather Rocks to all Canadians.

The TRC Report (2015) features a section regarding the need for education for reconciliation, which includes a call to action for, “building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (p. 11). This call to action involves educating all Canadians of the importance of environmental protection, while also ensuring the equitable representation of Indigenous Peoples worldviews within our community landscapes. More specifically, this education should include reference to important spiritual areas and landscapes such as the glacial erratics which are spread throughout this territory. These Grandfather Rocks place associated communities in a unique position to direct the implementation of many of the *Calls to Action* by promoting community initiatives that focus on biodiversity and environmental education. This municipal direction must be intentionally aimed at long-term sustainability and include knowledge sharing between Indigenous Peoples and their non-Indigenous neighbours. This proposal highlights the particular importance of maintaining and preserving natural areas of cultural significance such as the sacred Grandfather Rocks within Calgary’s wetlands and other historical sites situated within Treaty 7 territory. Furthermore, these initiatives are based on mutual understandings and shared interests, regarding a community’s active participation in the decision-making process on environmental issues. Through interactive consultation and open dialogue, there can be an equal partnership between community members and Indigenous communities across Canada.

The *Calls to Action* outline that the preservation of spiritual land is integral for future education and reconciliation to develop between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples that reside within Canada; this is recognized and honoured by restoring the Bridlewood wetlands site. The site remains a cultural gathering place for people to reflect and connect with one of Calgary’s diverse ecosystems. To regard the site as a culturally distinctive and sacred space is an opportunity for municipal schools and residents to incorporate principles of the *Calls to Action* that acknowledge the utilization of “land as teacher” (Raffan, 1993).

Restoration Project Rationale and Findings

Background and Goals

The Bridlewood glacial erratic's are located in a vulnerable wetland environment where toxic chemicals can run off of residential properties and directly into the ecosystem. This area is located in a high traffic area which is often littered with human refuse, thus detracting from the cultural and spiritual significance. Such negative interactions with the erratics severely impacts this unique space. There are several areas of concern within the Bridlewood wetlands park including, but not limited to, the treatment of the glacial erratics at this location. The Grandfather Rocks in this park were engraved by the residential and commercial property developer, Lamont Land Inc. This area has incredible significance to Indigenous communities due to the presence of the

Grandfather Rocks and their spiritual magnitude. Additionally, this environment is the natural habitat to many diverse species of animals and plants. Therefore, this area must be shielded against any further harmful anthropogenic impacts to protect the future biodiversity of this space. In doing so, the City respects Indigenous cultural and spiritual beliefs.

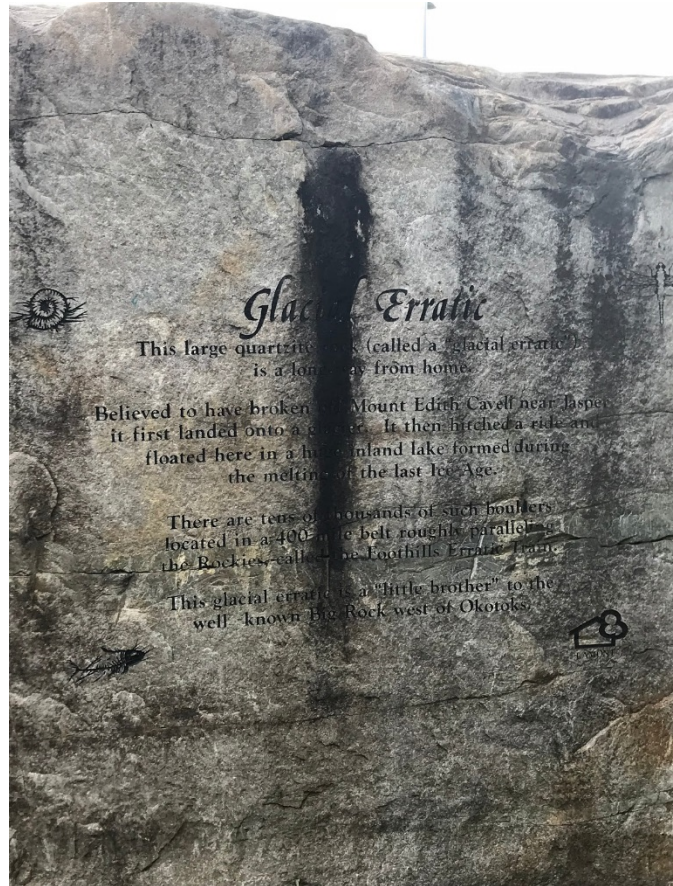


Figure 4. Photograph of the engravings found on one of the glacial erratics in the Bridlewood community. Note Lamont Land Inc. symbol engraved into the rock, Calgary, Alberta. From Alexandria Baird, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

Chemical Pollution into the Wetland

The residences that border the Bridlewood Wetlands have been developed to slope downwards into the wetlands, thus funnelling rainwater into the aquatic area. This aids the wetland in sustaining adequate water levels, however it runs the risk of destructive water pollution from pesticides and herbicides used for daily lawn maintenance in the community of Bridlewood. In addition to nearby residential property risks, this wetland also borders several busy roads including James McKeivitt Road, which has a storm drain that flows directly into the wetland. Any road salts or chemicals used to maintain and service the roadway inherently drain into the wetland, and will have a detrimental impact on this susceptible habitat (Trombulak & Frissel, 2001, p. 22-23). The following recommendations are made to minimize the environmental impact from the leaching of these contaminated waters into the ecosystem. Property owners, community members, and the City of Calgary must ensure that pesticides and herbicides remain prohibited. In addition, offer more frequent snow plowing rather than the use of road salts in the affected areas that border wetlands.

Remediation of the Grandfather Rocks

The glacial erratics within the Bridlewood wetlands are irrevocably altered due to the large engraving placed by the residential and commercial property developer Lamont Land Inc. The decision to place the inscription on the rock remains questionable as a separate sign could have easily replaced the message rather than desecrating a culturally and spiritually significant monument. Such a sign appears at a glacial erratic in the community of Panorama Hills, where the environmental integrity of the rock is not impacted. Likewise, similar signs could appear at other glacial erratics within Calgary and surrounding areas. The Bridlewood erratics feature a stamped business logo of the property developer, which suggests a form of advertisement for Lamont Land Inc.; essentially commodifying an ancient and respected sacred space. This act is reminiscent of colonial worldviews in its effort to mark territory and capitalize on all aspects of ownership. Historically, violent protests have been fought over such ways of thinking and continue to remain an issue as evidenced by the 1990 Oka Crisis. Raffan (1993) states that, “these conflicts are not so much fights about land use, per se, as they are a dramatic difference in points of view about what land means. To the developer, land may be a commodity that can be bought and sold; [but]...to the aboriginal, land, in all its dimensions, may be an integral part of a god-centered universe” (p. 39). Given the spiritual and ecological significance of the Grandfather

Rocks, engraving any information or advertising strategies is inadvisable, even offensive. This proposal recommends that future land development initiatives consult Indigenous Elders and communities with regards to the handling of sacred spaces and any glacial erratics.

Parallels can be drawn between the remediation of the Grandfather Rock at the Bridlewood location and the graffiti remediation sites on the petroglyphs and pictographs at the *Aisinai'pi*, or Writing-On-Stone National Park, outside of Lethbridge, AB (Mask, 2018). Both are sacred places of the local Indigenous Peoples, and therefore both should be respected as such. A cleansing ceremony similar to the one conducted at the “Big Rock” outside of Okotoks, Alberta, could be done to repair human inflicted damage to these Grandfathers (Roth, 2006).

Signs as Important Deterrents, Educators, and Protectors

The placement of concise and clear signage stating the rules and behavioural practices expected of visitors at each entrance of the Bridlewood wetlands is recommended. After consultation with Indigenous Elders, the establishment of a separate sign to identify the cultural and spiritual significance of Grandfather Rocks to the Indigenous Peoples of Treaty 7 territory reflects educational principles outlined within the *Calls to Action*. Additionally, the placement of a wildlife crossing sign on the main road to prevent hazardous roadside occurrences. Many signs that were placed along the path are obscured by overgrown foliage in the space. The site features one sign stating the guidelines of the park, however it excludes any mention of littering and is easily overlooked as it is not at eye level. Recommendations include that damage to the path from the 2013 flood also be remediated.



Figure 5. This sign at the entrance to 45 Bridlecreek Park is low to the ground, and thus easily averted by human eyes, Calgary, Alberta. From Luc Mackay, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

Personal Connections

We appreciate the City of Calgary's effort to honour biodiversity and to protect our natural resources and heritage. We are inspired by the space the City has created for the residents and the Grandfather Rocks. The following excerpts highlight some of our own stories and personal connections while visiting this space.

Excerpt #1

"I saw small stones within the main body of the rock. These small stone were cemented together to form the whole rock. From this I interpreted that many people that are bound together by a force can create something great and powerful. This was also reflected in the environment the rock was in, a community. A community with like-minded people can accomplish great things giving me some inspiration for the upcoming project in this class for the Calgary BiodiverCity plan. At that moment I thought of a quote from a reading, "the stone was also a concrete reminder of some of the most treasured Cree culture, such as the attempt to care for those who have no one to provide for them" (McLeod, 2007, p. 23). We are going to uphold this Cree value of caring for someone who cannot do so for themselves, a Grandfather Rock. I too believe in this Cree value and try to uphold it whenever possible. This Cree value further expands to a role that I believe I have in life as a steward for the environment. As I was thinking of this sitting down in the grass, a fellow student was picking up litter from around the rock and a smile came to my face. This was a sign that this class has many little stones which can do great and powerful things." - Luc Mackay

Excerpt #2

"The other aspect of the Grandfather that was very apparent to me was his immediate surroundings and his connections with other Grandfathers. On the last field trip, the class discussed how some of the erratics seemed to be connecting with other erratics. I actually felt it more so with this Grandfather than the other ones. I could feel this Grandfather emitting energy to other Grandfathers all over the city. I could not see the other erratics from this Grandfather, yet I still felt it radiating energy and communicating with other erratics in the city. The view of the city from the erratic was incredible, and I could feel the erratic watching the city- making no judgments, just watching." - Mikaela Johnson



Figure 6. Photograph of glacial erratic in the community of Dover, Calgary, Alberta. From Alexandria Baird, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In summary, this proposal has outlined the cultural, ecological, and spiritual importance of preserving locations that include glacial erratics. The City of Calgary has a vested interest in protecting and maintaining parks and ecosystems within the City; the Bridlewood Wetlands area is no exception. These complicated and diverse ecosystems provide an immense array of scientific and Indigenous ecological knowledge systems to educate and enrich Calgary's cultural landscape. The recommendations within this proposal fall within the City of Calgary's existing *Our BiodiverCity* (2015) strategic plan and also adheres to several aspects of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Implementing the following recommendations would put Calgary in a unique position of both prioritizing the economic longevity of Calgary's parks and preserves, while also taking measurable steps towards Indigenous reconciliation and cultural acceptance.

Recommendations:

- Property owners, community members and the City of Calgary must ensure that pesticides and herbicides remain prohibited in the area.
- The City of Calgary must ensure that use of road salt in the affected areas be changed in favour of more frequent snow plowing.
- Educate the public on the cultural and spiritual significance of these Grandfather Rocks.
- Prevent future desecration by eliminating the practise of engraving Grandfather Rocks.
- Clear the area of all litter. The utilization of signs, waste receptacles, and routine maintenance will ensure the area remains garbage free.

The Ecological Knowledge 2018 class wishes to thank the City of Calgary for considering our proposal in regards to the Bridlewood Wetlands area. Our hope is to see the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing reflected within Calgary's *Our BiodiverCity Plan* in order to address several important areas of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Our vision includes putting student scholarship into practice observable as positive environmental change.

Dedications

This proposal is dedicated to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. Our appreciation goes to the University of Calgary, Department of Political Science, and the City of Calgary Urban Conservation for considering our recommendation towards remediating a sensitive wetland environmental area within the city that has Indigenous cultural significance.

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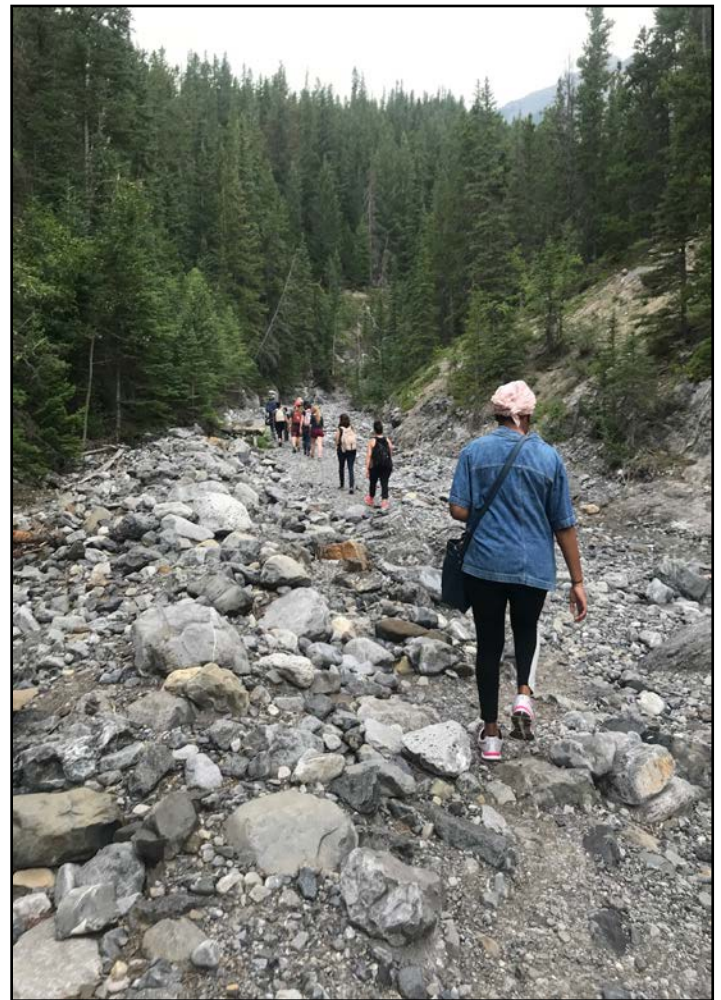


Figure 7. A photograph of the class on a group excursion to Grotto Canyon, Exshaw, Alberta. From Kyla Mowat, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

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