



Indigenous Perspectives in Urban Forestry

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Land Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that the City of Winnipeg has been built on ancestral lands. Canada entered into its first post-Confederation treaty—Treaty #1—in 1871 with Brokenhead, Sagkeeng, Long Plain, Peguis, Roseau River, Sandy Bay, and Swan Lake First Nations. These lands are also the heartland of the Métis people. I also acknowledge that Winnipeg's water is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation in the Treaty #3 territory in Ontario (University of Winnipeg)



Why are urban forests important to Indigenous people?

“The Indigenous population in Canada is young, growing, and largely urban-based. The early roots of the urbanization of Indigenous people in Canada began roughly in the early 1950s and has not slowed down” (NAFC 2021)

- Demographics
- Land/property rights
- Uses & values
- Engagement—Indigenous knowledge

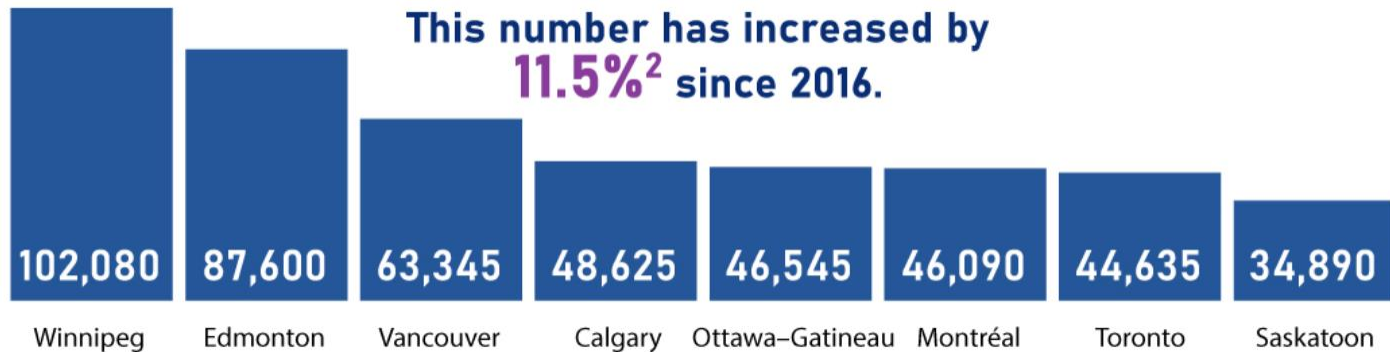
Demographics



How the Census counts Indigenous people in urban areas

In 2021, **1,090,240** Indigenous people were living
in urban areas¹ in Canada.

This number has increased by
11.5%² since 2016.



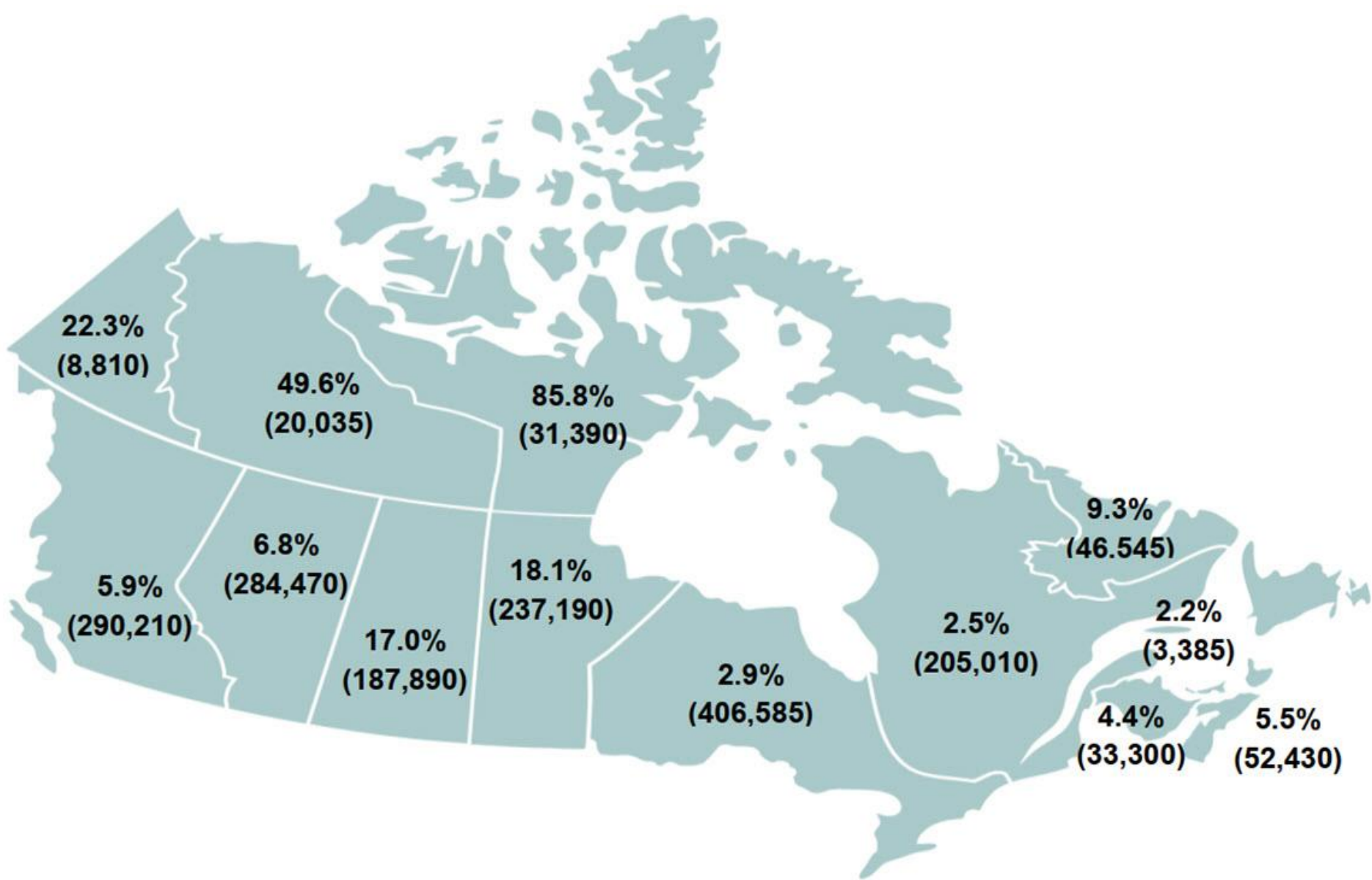
Source: Statistics Canada 2024

- 2021 Census: 1.8 million (5% of 37 million total population)
- Aboriginal Peoples defined in s. 35, Constitution Act, 1982: First Nations—1,048,405, Métis—624,220, Inuit 70,545
- > 60% of Indigenous population is urban
- Winnipeg has highest Indigenous population at >102,000—12% of the city's total population



Demographics (cont'd)

- 3 of 4 Canadians live in Census Metropolitan Areas (big cities >100,000)
- Indigenous population growing more rapidly
- 2016–2021: Indigenous population grew by 8.0% compared to 5.4% growth for non-Indigenous
- Indigenous population the youngest in Canada
- 2021: 41% of Indigenous people were < 25, compared to 27 % of non-Indigenous population
- 2011 Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study: *“urban-based Indigenous peoples are seeking to become significant & visible within the urban landscapes... 60% felt they could make their city a better place to live (NAFS 2021)*



Distribution & number of Indigenous people in Canada by province and territory, 2021 (Indigenous Services Canada 2023)



Forest Land Rights & Property Rights

State of Canada's Forests 2023

Provincial—75.4%

Territorial—13.0%

Private — 6.7%

Indigenous — 2.1%

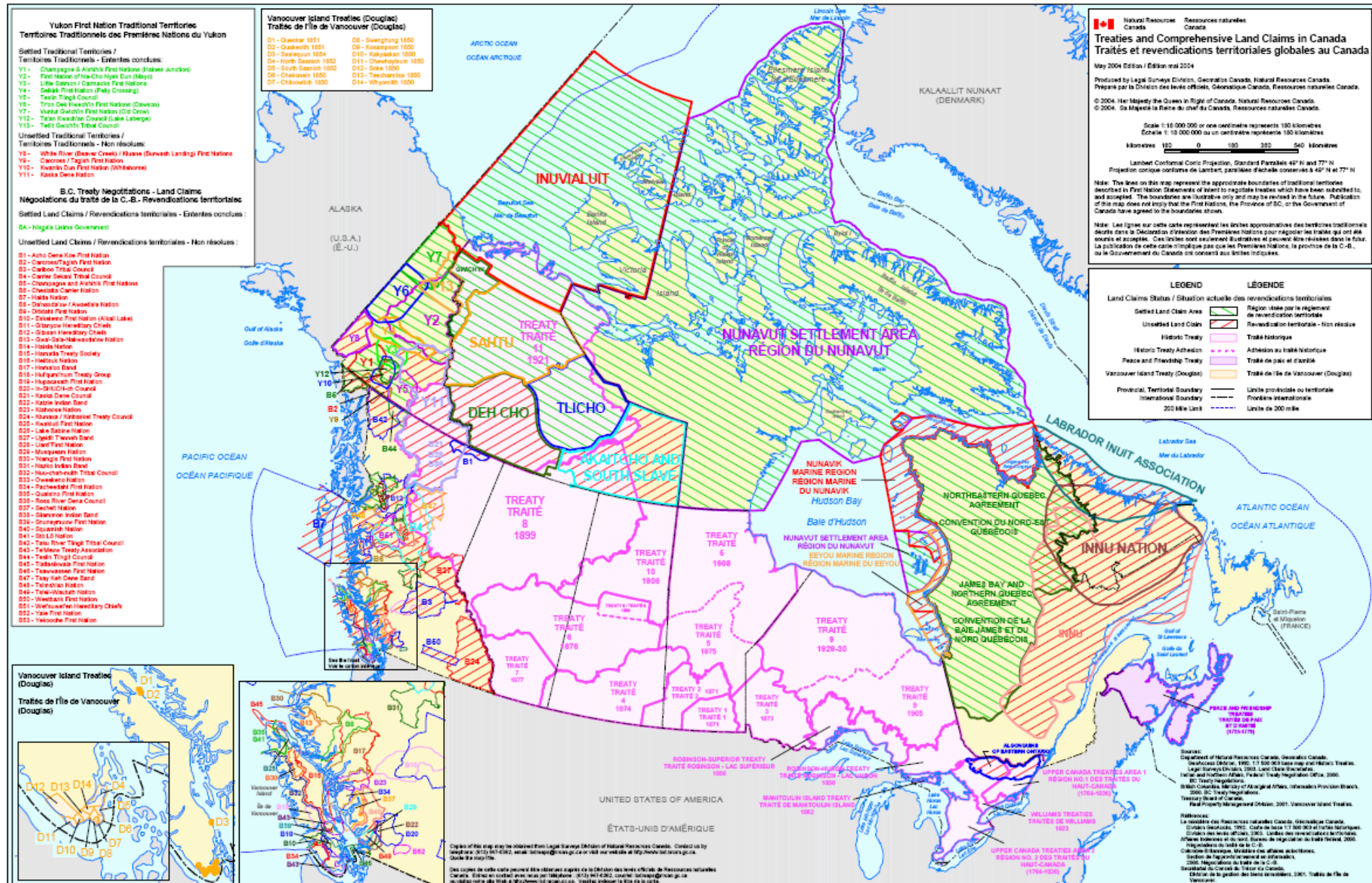
Federal — 1.7%

Municipal —0.3%

- All land in Canada is underlain by some form of Aboriginal and/or treaty right
- Urban reserves: > 100 (federal, provincial, municipal)

Inherent Indigenous land rights +
> 60% of Indigenous people in urban areas =
NEED FOR A NEW RELATIONSHIP

Indigenous Land Tenure across Canada



Key considerations re rights

- Legal cases clarify meaning of recognizing & affirming Aboriginal & treaty rights (s. 35, Constitution Act, 1982), including Duty to Consult & Accommodate
- Multi-level commitment from governments & citizens to implement the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015), especially the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples & free, prior & informed consent
- Ongoing work of Indigenous Peoples & organizations to have their inherent rights recognized

UNDRIP Article 3

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status & freely pursue their economic, social & cultural development.





Inherent Rights

- Indigenous rights—inherent to all Indigenous people, deriving “from their political, economic & social structures & from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories & philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories & resources” (UNDRIP 2007)
- Examples of inherent rights:
 - Rights to land (ancestral territory) & resources
 - Right to self-determination & self-government
 - Right to cultural integrity & practices, including language & spirituality
 - Right to economic development
 - Right to customary law
 - Right to honourable treatment by the Crown
 - Rights to negotiate treaties



UNDRIP, Article 32

1. Indigenous peoples have the **right to determine & develop priorities & strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories & other resources.**
2. States shall **consult & cooperate in good faith** with the indigenous peoples concerned **through their own representative institutions** in order to obtain their **free & informed consent prior to the approval** of any project affecting their lands or territories & other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.
3. States shall **provide effective mechanisms for just & fair redress** for any such activities, & **appropriate measures shall be taken to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact.**



Challenges with Rights-Based Approach

When you talk about the right to lands, territories and resources, what does that mean in concrete terms? Does this mean ancestral land mapping or delineation? Does this mean changing the laws of the land to conform to respecting and promoting that right?

- Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (in Belanger 2011)

Indigenous Uses & Values of Urban Forests

- Health/healing
- Recreation
- Foraging—food security
- Housing
- Land-based teachings—ancestral knowledge
- Cultural revival
- Ceremony
- Reconnecting with land
- Art/creativity—Helen Pelletier, Fort William First Nation

For Anishinaabe people, the birch tree is a cornerstone of the culture. For generations, birch bark has been used in many different applications. Learning about this tree, the seasons and how its parts all work together has re-connected Helen to the land and her community. Along with Audrey Duroy, a knowledge keeper, Helen strives for a deeper understanding about the tree of life: Wiigwaasabak. [#CBCShortDocs](#) [#StoriesFromTheLand](#) [#Wiigwaasabak](#)





ROBINSON SUPERIOR TREATY

THE TREATY BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE CHIEFS AND BROTHERS OF THE ANTI-COINTELOPE TRIBE OF THE THUNDER BAY DISTRICT

ARTICLE I

ARTICLE II

ARTICLE III

ARTICLE IV

ARTICLE V

ARTICLE VI

ARTICLE VII

ARTICLE VIII

ARTICLE IX

ARTICLE X

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ARTICLE XXI

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ARTICLE XXX



THE HEALING GARDEN

HONOURING NATURE'S APOTHECARY

The Healing Garden brings together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal traditions of horticulture that support both the physical and spiritual wellbeing of peoples from the Thunder Bay region. The plants grown in the Healing Garden were selected for their ceremonial and medicinal properties and include Sage (*Salvia*), Sweetgrass (*Hierochloa odorata*), Ceremonial Tobacco (*Nicotiana*), Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), Mint (*Mentha*), Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) and Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*).

Sage (*Salvia*)

Sweetgrass (*Hierochloa odorata*)

Ceremonial Tobacco (*Nicotiana*)

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

Mint (*Mentha*)

Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*)

Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)



Encampments are legal if indoor spaces unavailable: Ontario & BC Superior Courts



by [Alex Wideman](#) | Published Dec 19, 2023, updated Sep 16, 2024





Future: Finding a New Path

A Hierarchy of Land-Based Decision Making between the State & Indigenous Peoples

Self-determination	Indigenous Peoples make & implement their own plans with little interference from the State
Co-management	Joint decision making between Indigenous Peoples & the State
Consent	Indigenous Peoples approve State plans; required by United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007
Consultation	Indigenous Peoples comment on State plans; accommodation sometimes required as per Supreme Court of Canada rulings



Factors Supporting Indigenous Engagement

(Reo et al., 2017)

- Respect for Indigenous knowledges (IK)
- Control of knowledge mobilization (“data sovereignty”)
- Intergenerational involvement—youth, Elders, women
- Self-determination
- Continuous cross-cultural education
- Early involvement



Forms & application of Indigenous Knowledge

- Intergenerational knowledge on subsistence skills
- Collective knowledge re environmental dynamics
- Knowledge of ceremony & cultural protocols
- Indigenous languages
- Ancient teachings or prophecies
- Knowledge concerning stewardship responsibilities
- Human–non-human relationships
- Communally-held values



Acknowledging positive actions

- Tree Canada's Aboriginal Engagement Committee (2016) and restoration efforts with First Nations (2022)
- Nature Canada's 2022 report *Urban Forests: Bringing the Canopy to All*
- Conservation through Reconciliation Partnerships advocacy for Indigenous engagement in national urban parks initiative
- Indigenous organizations' efforts, i.e. Manitoba Metis Federation, National Assoc of Friendship Centres



How are Indigenous people engaged in urban forestry where you live? Is that engagement effective? If not, how would you improve it?

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Chi-Miigwetch