



# WAYFINDERS CIRCLE

THE WAYFINDERS FIRMLY FOLLOW  
THEIR OWN PATH  
OF GOVERNANCE

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*Prepared humbly by the Pawanka Fund and Nia Tero, with input and guidance from the International Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners and the initial members of the Wayfinders Circle.*

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**WAYFINDERS  
CIRCLE**

[www.wayfinderscircle.org](http://www.wayfinderscircle.org)

## Contents

- 3 Introduction
- 4 Wayfinders Circle Manifesto
- 7 Initial Members of the Wayfinders Circle
- 10 Governance Learnings from the Initial Members of the Wayfinders Circle
- 22 Toward Yet Stronger Leadership and Clearer Direction
- 25 Conclusions
- 26 Annexes - Diversity in Governance



WAYFINDERS  
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## Introduction

Created in 2019, the Wayfinders Circle was established to amplify Indigenous leadership that manifests a time-tested understanding of the interconnectivity between humans and Mother Earth, and our collective responsibility to Earth and each other. As of 2021, Wayfinders Circle currently includes 12 Indigenous members from around the world who are doing just that. In the following pages, you will learn the story of the Wayfinders members, their lands, and their contributions towards each others' shared learning and efforts in Indigenous guardianship.

The focus of this report is to demonstrate a diverse spectrum of governance systems and bioregional contexts in guardianship among the Wayfinders. Governance systems vary greatly among the Wayfinders, as do their ecosystems. It includes a diversity of tropical forest communities such as the Mayangna people in Nicaragua, the Achuar people of Ecuador, the Wampis people of Peru, and the Sungai Utik community in Indonesia. This diversity is found in temperate boreal forest communities such as the Udege People in Russia as well as the Heiltsuk in Canada; and in oceanic island communities such as the Rapa Nui in the Pacific. Other Wayfinders communities are situated in semi-arid areas, such as the lands managed by the Native American Land Conservancy in the United States, and by the traditional owners of the 36 different clan groups that manage the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area in Arnhem Land, Australia. Wayfinders live in grasslands and mountain communities such as those

occupied by the Blackfoot Confederacy in North America, as well as in pastoralist and herding communities such as the Gabbra people in Kenya and the Sámi in Sweden. In each case, the Wayfinders practice a broad array of self-governance formations rooted in their respective bioregions and in full realization of their own self-determination.

This document was prepared by the Wayfinders Circle host organizations Pawanka Fund and Nia Tero, with guidance from the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners, and with input from each of the Wayfinders. It includes the following: a brief overview of the Wayfinders Circle and its members; a review of differences, similarities, and shared knowledge about governance from the Wayfinders Circle members; and considerations for a path forward, as well as annexes that include varying levels of detail about each Wayfinders Circle members' territorial governance. Our hope is that it may lead to mutual inspiration among Wayfinders Circle members to learn from and celebrate each other, and share their experiences with other Indigenous peoples and allies interested in supporting their own work towards self-determination. Beyond the Circle, our hope is that the Wayfinders inspire individuals, communities, and world leaders alike to look to Indigenous guardianship as a much-needed source of knowledge and inspiration, as a path forward through the ways climate change forces all of humanity to rethink our roles and deeply interconnected relationship to planet Earth.

# Wayfinders Circle Manifesto

Wayfinding is a way of life shared by many Indigenous peoples throughout the world. It refers to traditional navigation methods used by Indigenous peoples, in which the relationships of people to the stars, weather, winds, and known navigational routes are shared through oral histories from one generation to the next.

Today, in a time of unprecedented global change, these wayfinding skills and practices are more important than ever. Reciprocal relations with community, a deep connection with Mother Earth, and Indigenous guardianship of traditional lands and waters are all forms of intergenerational knowledge systems that are shared across time, from ancestors to descendants. This wayfinding wisdom is a key to survival and resilience as we strive to support the maintenance and nurture of identity and self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

The Wayfinders Circle is a new collaborative initiative and platform created by the Pawanka Fund and Nia Tero, under the guidance of the Council of Elders of the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners (WUISP).<sup>1</sup> The Wayfinders Circle will support and gather together Indigenous guardians from around the world who are working to protect their lands, waters and territories. The Wayfinders Circle is a learning network dedicated to investing in Indigenous Wayfinders and sharing possible pathways for human societies to achieve ecological, social, cultural, and spiritual harmony.

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<sup>1</sup> The Pawanka Fund is an Indigenous-led grantmaking effort dedicated to supporting Indigenous peoples traditional knowledge, well-being, and rights for self-determination. Nia Tero is a not-for-profit organization established with the mission of working alongside Indigenous peoples to secure Indigenous guardianship of vital ecosystems. Nia Tero believes that if Indigenous peoples are thriving, the places they manage will also thrive. WUISP is an open voluntary association of Indigenous spiritual practitioners committed to ensuring cultural and spiritual continuity of Indigenous ways.

# INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION

emerges from generations of sacrifice, struggle, resilience & robust vision

a learning network of Indigenous wayfinders

## wayfinders

As of January 2021, we have 12 members from all major regions of the world

## practice...

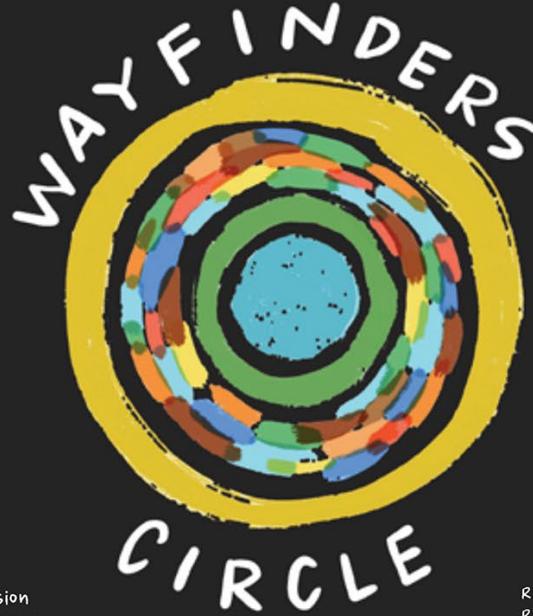
Reciprocal relations in community

Deep connection with Mother Earth

Guardianship of vital ecosystems

Intergenerational transmission of culture, language, traditional knowledge, & spiritual values.

Unleashing the transformative potential of Indigenous life-ways...



## CONVENERS

Council of Elders of the World  
Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners (WUISP)  
Pawanka Fund  
Nia Tero

inspiring all people to imagine & achieve ecological, social, cultural & spiritual harmony.

## co-create...

A strong & nourished membership with expanded guardianship responsibilities

Peer to peer mentorship & co-responsibility for Mother Nature

A constellation of diverse Indigenous holistic models

Indigenous self-determination in decision & policy-making

Respect for Indigenous Rights & territories by broader communities



The Wayfinders Circle highlights Indigenous leadership that manifests a time-tested understanding of the ways humans are an inseparable part of Mother Earth, and as such, have a responsibility towards stewardship and care for the Earth. Wayfinder members demonstrate continued resilience and maintain the cultural and spiritual continuity of their Indigenous communities. The Wayfinders Circle will inspire strength and courage for the transformative actions needed to protect Mother Earth and the wellbeing of all life.

We hope the Wayfinders Circle will provide a constellation of Indigenous holistic models to inspire people the world over to re-imagine development and conservation, and to shift their perspectives on their own relationship with the Earth. As Wayfinders demonstrate a deeply grounded interconnectivity to place, we hope this initiative and platform can provide positive alternatives to current forms of economic globalization and extraction. By investing in Indigenous traditional cultures' self-determination and guardianship traditions, the Wayfinders Circle will help unleash the transformative potential of Indigenous ways of knowing. To be clear: the Wayfinders Circle is not about romanticizing Indigenous ways through naïve hopes of magical solutions. Wayfinders seeks to strengthen Indigenous self-determination at its fullest realization, recognizing it is so often hard-earned through unrecognized efforts, labor, and struggle; but also amplifying the ways it is held together in community, resilience, and a shared robust vision.



# Initial Members of the Wayfinders Circle

The Wayfinders Circle members come from 12 Indigenous lands and waters communities across the world, home to 230,000 people. Their territories cover more than 37.5 million hectares of land (an area about the size of Germany), and 72.8 million hectares of oceans.





The **Achuar Nation** is in Ecuador and Peru. The Achuar of Ecuador have fearlessly defended their 800,000 hectares of traditional territory from oil extraction—including 680,000 hectares of legally recognized territory—following the guidance of their elders and of Arútam, the sacred source of the forest. Their great mission of caring for Mother Earth is a commitment that has been in place since time immemorial. The Amazon Rainforest is their home, the sustenance and source of ancestral wisdom.



The **Blackfoot people, Niitsitapi**, live in Northern Montana in the United States, and southern Canada. The US reservation is some 607,000 hectares—a fraction of the tribe’s traditional territory— with a population of about 17,321 members, and the territory in Canada is approximately similar in size. The Blackfeet see themselves as caretakers of much of North America’s water resources, as multiple rivers flow down from the Blackfeet reservation and Glacier National Park east to the Atlantic, west to the Pacific, and north to the Arctic. The Blackfeet have ample experience in reclaiming their traditional lands, and manage vast grasslands and herds of buffalo and cattle.



The **Gabbra** people are nomadic pastoralists in Northeast Kenya. The population of 141,200 Gabbra inhabit 3,500,000 hectares of semi-arid territory. Gabbra guardianship is based on customary tenure systems, local practices, livelihoods, knowledge, and procedures. It is grounded on the mutual adaptation between culture and environment.



The **Heiltsuk Nation** is in British Columbia, Canada, at the heart of the largest intact old-growth boreal forest in the world; a territory covering some 3,555,300 hectares. The Heiltsuk practice a longstanding system of governance based on their ḡv!ás (the laws of their ancestors), as a paramount principle that guides all resource use and environmental management.



The **Mayangna Nation** is in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region of Nicaragua. It articulates 75 Indigenous communities, organized across nine territories, with a territorial extension of 810,100 hectares. Their traditional governance system has three fundamental pillars: the community, the territory, and the Nation. Each of these pillars supports the Mayangna community regime and its cultural, spiritual, and territorial unity.



The **Native American Land Conservancy** is an organization located in Southern California. They directly own and manage 2,446 acres of tribal territory, including many sacred sites. The Native American Land Conservancy combines traditional environmental knowledge of the local tribes with a western scientific paradigm to protect and restore fragile desert ecosystems and revitalize Native communities.



The **Rapa Nui** Municipality is on an island of about 16,360 hectares, located in the southeast Pacific over 1,000 miles from Eastern Polynesia and some 1,400 miles west of South America. The Municipality of Rapa Nui is led by community leaders, each

working towards advancing territorial, environmental, and cultural development as well as the protection of the rights of the Rapa Nui people. Rapa Nui has the largest Marine Protected Multi-Purpose Area in Chile, covering 728,000 square kilometers. Its national park comprises 40 percent of the territory and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995.



**Sámiid Riikkasearvi** (the National Association of Sámi in Sweden) is located in Northern Sweden. Sámiid Riikkasearvi is an important protector and advocate for the recognition of Sámi rights to culture, land, waters, territories, and resources with a special focus on the protection and promotion of Sámi reindeer herding in a territory of about 24 million hectares.



The **Sungai Utik** Indigenous people are located in the Province of West Kalimantan, Indonesia, and are the recognized owners of 9,480 hectares of customary forest by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry and Environment. They have a strong customary system of resource conservation and management, which has proven effective in maintaining the sustainability of their ecosystem. For the Sungai Utik Indigenous People, Land is Mother, Forest is Father, and Water is their blood; and all must be preserved for future generations. The Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik were awarded the Equator Prize along with 22 local and Indigenous communities around the world from the UN Development Program in 2019 in New York.



The **Udege** People live on their ancestral territory on the Sikhote-Alin Mountain range, which is now part of the Bikin National Park in the Russian Far East. With the creation of the 1,600,000-hectare Bikin National Park, the Udege people established innovative organizational structures, such as the Permanent Council of Indigenous Peoples. The Udege are exercising their right to co-manage the Bikin National Park, and have become a model project of nationwide significance in Russia.

The **Wampis Nation** is in the Peruvian Amazon, along the border with Ecuador. Despite the lack of recognition of their territories by the national government, they exercise control of 1,327,760 hectares of Amazon rainforest, defending it against resource extraction and colonization. The Wampis are a strong example of Indigenous autonomy and guardianship, and their culture is rich in history, with stories about their peoples and landscapes going back thousands of years.



The **Warddeken** Indigenous Protected Area is in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia. Traditional owners of 36 different clan groups own and manage 1,394,951 hectares of territory, incorporating traditional knowledge and traditional fire management. The protection of their lands has allowed for the preservation of their traditional culture, governed by long standing ceremonial laws and custom.

# Governance Learnings from the Initial Members of the Wayfinders Circle

Representing 95 percent of the earth's human and cultural diversity, Indigenous peoples all over the world employ a myriad of formal and informal governance systems; and their forms of governance represent a unique global diversity as well. However, many Indigenous peoples also share common characteristics such as a shared sense of responsibility to nourish, protect, and defend their territory; as well as a shared sense of the responsibilities of guardianship. While the aspects of governance we examine and share here are neither uniform, nor equivalent among the Wayfinders Circle members, there are common threads contributing to a broader understanding of what territorial guardianship means to the members of the Wayfinders Circle. Prior to delving into a brief examination of the governance learnings themselves, it is important to reflect on the importance of self-determination and its relationship to governance.



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## 🎯 *At the Core of Self-governance is Self-determination*

For most Indigenous peoples, strong governance is grounded in the right to self-determination, as well as the essential right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. This core right is regarded as a prerequisite to exercise other collective rights, and is founded on consultation and consent, especially in development-related decisions at all levels ranging from the international to the local level.

Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination is recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms the distinct status and human rights of Indigenous peoples, and encompasses their right to fully and effectively participate in any decision-making on all matters that impact their rights, lives, communities, lands, territories, and resources. It requires the recognition of Indigenous forms of autonomy, self-governance, and ancestral authorities; as well as recognition of customary governance systems and land tenure systems over lands, territories, and natural resources.

## 🎯 *Shared Governance Learnings from the Wayfinders*

Indigenous peoples have survived ongoing and dramatic impacts of colonization, urbanization, and globalization by deploying their capacity for adaptation; on the one hand modifying traditional forms of governance to serve new functions, and on the other, creatively adapting introduced forms to their own ends and transforming both in the process. The dynamism and resiliency of Indigenous governance systems are some of the very reasons for the continuity and persistence of Indigenous peoples' survival throughout the world.

The Wayfinders Circle members demonstrate models of territorial governance that the rest of the world can learn from, as we consider some of the radical changes necessary for the diversity of life to continue on our planet. Many of the aspects of governance shared here can contribute to governance models in other parts of the globe, particularly among many of the world's Indigenous peoples. Equally valuable to these shared aspects are the differences and diversity among the governance models discussed.

Across various aspects of guardianship shared among the Wayfinders, some are central to what it means to be a member of the Wayfinders Circle. These include:

- 1. An intrinsic motivation to take care of Mother Earth on their ancestral territories and ecosystems, and proven wisdom and experience in leading processes that have led to robust guardianship for future generations. A deep connection to nature and territory is part of their identity, often confirmed and continually renewed through ritual and ceremony.**
- 2. An openness to learning and sharing, especially with regard to governance and guardianship of their territories, and recognition of the importance of sharing given the urgency of the changes to Earth that are already underway.**
- 3. Organizations are collectively led by Indigenous peoples and fulfill the vision defined by their constituency. They follow inclusive and equitable decision-making processes, including meaningful participation of women and youth, and are committed to continually strengthening governance structures.**
- 4. Actively working on the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and practices, culture, languages, and spiritual values.**

Bilingual intercultural education and Indigenous health are central elements of their governance.

5. **Constructive and respectful relations with the State regarding their sovereignty (even if they disagree with the State on some aspects). They are active in networks and build alliances with other Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous organizations, and actively implement conflict prevention and resolution measures.**

## **Similarities and Differences Among Wayfinders Territorial Governance**

The current Wayfinders Circle members employ various forms of territorial governance, and in some ways these models reflect the historical processes and land tenancy of each people. The following are not meant to be neat categories; indeed, many of the Wayfinders exhibit aspects involving multiple criteria, and many of the assumptions and groupings are subjective.

### **Autonomous Governments**

The Sumu Mayangna Nation in Nicaragua have maintained their land since time immemorial and have achieved a level of recognized autonomous governance that is relatively rare in Latin America. They are often looked to as a governance model by other Indigenous peoples of the region, as well as the rest of the world. Their main three levels of governance are similar to many others: community-level representative organizations, regional organizations, and a governance institution that represents them as a whole Indigenous nation. Yet their autonomy goes further, with their local government and territory recognized by the Government of Nicaragua as the legitimate local government that makes up part of the broader Government of Nicara-

## **Mayangna Governance**

The Nación Sumu Mayangna, or Mayangna Nation, in Nicaragua encompasses nine territories covering 8,101 square kilometers of tropical rainforests and pine savannas, with 45,000 people in 75 communities. The Mayangna have three levels of governance: (1) the Sulani Mayangna government, (2) the Asangni of the nine Mayangna territories; and (3) the Mapaki—the 75 community governments. The Assemblies are held at all 3 levels, where they make decisions on issues concerning their territory in accordance with their traditions and customs. The national assembly is led by the Council of Elders and Leaders, with participation of men, women, youth and elders from the communities.

The Mayangna strengthen and sustain their own self-government and fully exercise their spiritual life and worldview based on the principles of justice, reciprocity, equity, solidarity, innovation, respect, and discipline.

 **SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION**

gua; with rights to their own territorial management, justice systems, educational systems, and economic development.

Similar to the Mayangna Nation, Rapa Nui is its own Indigenous municipality, forming part of the state-level formal government, and operating alongside traditional chiefdoms which are represented in the municipal government itself. However, as an extremely remote island they operate more independently than the Mayangna Nation, which actively participates in the Nicaraguan government as its own autonomous region.

The Wampis nation also employs an autonomous government, operating their government entirely independently of the Government of Peru—the Wampis territory has not been recognized by Peru, and as a result they lack

collective title to their entire territory. Some of the Wampis communities within the territory do have collective title while others do not, disrupting the Wampis vision of their territory as a whole.

### **Recognition of Collective Land Rights**

The Wampis and Achuar peoples have occupied their current territories since time immemorial, yet have needed to continually defend their lands from outsiders—whether it be from the Incan empire 600 years ago, rubber barons a hundred years ago, or extractive industries and colonizers in recent years to this day. Their territories are self-defined and defended. For both the Wampis and the Achuar, the clear demarcation of their territory is central to their governance as Indigenous nations. Still, the full collective land rights of the Wampis have not been recognized, while the Achuar territory is recognized by the Government of Ecuador.

Similar to the Achuar, the Dayak Iban Sungai Utik of Indonesia enjoy recognition of their collective land rights, and maintain deep cultural traditions while resisting economic pressures from the outside. The Dayak Iban Sungai Utik stand firm in defense of their customary territories, while resisting pressure to extract resources from their lands and territories, and actively exercising their right to self-regulation. Because the Dayak Iban Sungai Utik believe there is no individual land and the territory they live on is from their ancestors, they assert their rights as a nation and are obliged to preserve it. They know they must pass the collective rights to the forest and the governance system to the next generation.

All of the initial members of the Wayfinders Circle note a collective ownership of their territories, although not all are recognized, and a few have some individual ownership within their ancestral lands (e.g. the Blackfeet). The

## **Wampis Governance**

The Wampis of Peru's northern Amazon have a culture rich with stories going back thousands of years, interwoven into the ecosystems and landscapes of their territory. The Wampis collectively built an autonomous territorial government, the first in Peru to encompass an entire Indigenous people occupying a single collective territory. Governance is based on a Statute that lays out the Wampis vision for the future in all areas of life including religion, spirituality, education, language, and recovery of ancestral places. The Statute requires that any activity that could affect Wampis territory must secure the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of the Wampis, and no Wampis community can take a unilateral decision that affects others.

The autonomous government is the result of a multi-year process including 50 community meetings and 15 general assemblies (with representation of all Wampis). There are leadership roles for the environment, women, and youth, and a "moral council" for elders with a proven track record who have sought visions in the sacred waterfalls through their ancestors. There are specific provisions to guarantee the participation of women in governance and the respect of women's rights in their communities. The statute includes environmental management with regulations for land use and planning as well as setting aside sacred sites. The Wampis example of self-determination and self-implementation of an autonomous territorial government is inspiring other Indigenous peoples in northern Peru to begin their own processes toward establishing autonomous territorial governments.

 [SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

Dayak Iban Sungai Utik of Indonesia note their territory is passed down to them by their ancestors, hence there are no individually owned lands. This is similarly true with the Achuar and Wampis, as well as the Mayangna and Gabbra. Some of the Wayfinders have a combination of a larger ancestral territory, some collectively held lands, and some privately held lands as well, which is likely true to some extent with Warddeken, the

Blackfeet, and Rapa Nui.

### ***Shaped by History of State-to-State Relations***

The Heiltsuk have relationships to land tenure, history, and legal ties to their territory that are quite different than those mentioned above. Having never signed a treaty with a colonial power (i.e. Canada), they are able to claim their entire ancestral territory and manage it as their own. The lack of outside legal definition of their territorial bounds (by a colonial power) means the Heiltsuk can claim and actively manage a larger territory than some of their treaty-bound Indigenous neighbors. The Heiltsuk regard this lack of state recognized territorial definition as a strength, which is quite different to how the Wampis, Achuar, Mayangna or Dayak Iban Sungai Utik see their clearly demarcated lands.

The Blackfeet exhibit yet another governance and land tenancy reality. Situated within a web of interwoven land rights and a traditional territory that spans vast expanses of Canada and the US, the territory has been shaped by a series of treaties signed with the colonial powers of Canada and the United States. The Blackfeet Confederacy includes representatives from Blackfeet governance institutions in both the US and Canada. Within that territory are the Blackfeet reservation/reserve lands, as well as Blackfeet-owned individual land and non-Indigenous private land; along with some protected areas and traditional lands. In the United States, the Blackfeet have a history of reclaiming rights to the traditional lands and regaining rights to rangeland while engaging actively with the United States government. Of particular interest are special rights to the Blackfeet sacred Badger-Two Medicine area, bordering both the Blackfeet Reservation and Glacier National Park. The Badger-Two Medicine area is deeply significant as home of the Blackfeet creation story, and has continued to be a place of refuge and healing for more than 10,000 years. These sacred

lands were slated to be leased to oil and gas companies, a move the Blackfeet were able to stop along with their allies. Alongside the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, which manages government to government relations with the US government, more traditional responsibilities are held by the Blackfeet Horn Society. As is common among some North American Indigenous peoples, the Blackfeet employ a number of governance entities—some responsible for representing them in nation-to-nation relations with the US or Canadian government, and others responsible for other elements of Blackfeet culture.

## **Blackfeet Governance**

The Blackfoot/Blackfeet traditional territory covers vast expanses of Canada and the United States, shaped by a series of treaties signed between the Blackfeet and the colonial powers of Canada and the United States. The reservation is one of the largest in the United States, and in Canada Blackfeet lands include a similarly large expanse. In Canada, the Blackfoot Confederacy serves as a Tribal Council for the Kainai-Blood Tribe, Siksika, and Aapatohsi (Northern) Piikani First Nations. The Blackfoot Confederacy serves as the international coordinating body for all the Blackfeet Indigenous nations in Canada and the United States. The traditional collective territory in the United States includes all of Glacier National Park and the Badger-Two Medicine Area.

In the United States, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council is the governing body responsible for state-to-state relations and for exercising powers of government under the Blackfeet Constitution and By-laws. More traditional responsibilities are held by the Buffalo Bull Children Horn Society. Today the Blackfeet are on the forefront of a movement to re-introduce buffalo to traditional rangelands, strengthening their ties to ancient traditional ways.

 [SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

### **Active Management of Territory with Little or no Formal Recognition of Land Rights**

For the Gabbra, as with the other Wayfinders, the land is sacred. They see the land as unowned by anyone, quite distinct from the Wampis, Achuar, and Mayagna claims to land. The Gabbra are a nomadic people, choosing to follow traditional patterns of movement dictated by the land, nature, and culture—for example, migrating to the highlands during the rainy season to allow the dry season pasture to replenish its water resources. The Gabbra economy is almost entirely based on reciprocity, which is reflected in the Gabbra traditional governance system, the Yaa, which manages the Gabbra customary rules and ensures Gabbra cultural values, traditional spirituality (spiritual obligations), and reciprocity are each followed.

### **Sámi Governance**

Established in 1950, the National Association of Sámi in Sweden is composed of 17 member associations and 44 Sámi reindeer herding communities in the northern 40% of Sweden. Reindeer herding is their greatest traditional livelihood as well as their center of Sámi culture and society. The association safeguards and promotes the economic, social, legal, administrative, and cultural interests of the Sámi with a special focus on their reindeer husbandry. At the annual “National Meeting” members elect the chair and members of the board, and approve finances and action plans. The organization is built on the principle that each reindeer herding community has the right to its area and right to decide its own matters. The reindeer herding areas are divided into regions, each with its own representative to the board.

Every Sámi community consists of families, each with their own small reindeer herding trade. The members of the community elect representatives to the board. There are 44 Sámi reindeer herding communities in Sweden—each an independent legal entity. Within the community, reindeer herding families have their own herds and the tradition passes on from generation to generation.

Similar to the Gabbra, the Sámi are a reindeer herding people with claims to much of far northern Scandinavia, but who have few recognized titled lands. The Sámi Council implements Sámi governance, notably deferring to each reindeer herding community’s rights to their areas and rights to decide their own internal matters. Considering the vast expanses of the reindeer rangelands across all the countries of northern Scandinavia, the Sámi Council employs a geographic representation model, while deferring to local decision-making.

The Native American Land Conservancy of the United States was founded by Indigenous leaders who were part of an intertribal cultural group interested in protecting off-reservation sacred sites in the Southern California desert. With a majority Indigenous board of directors, it exists to reconnect its Indigenous membership to their traditional lands. Today, in addition to the management and ownership of sacred sites, they focus on education, advocacy, and scientific research.

### **Protected Areas as a Strategic Aspect of Governance**

Warddeken in Arnhem Land, Australia, and the Udege in sub-arctic Russia, have both chosen to manage and govern their territories in part through nation-state protected areas systems, utilizing Indigenous-controlled protected areas as a central part of their governance. The Warddeken Land Management Company was formed by traditional owners of the lands to create and manage the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area. The Warddeken Land Management Company is a not-for-profit company formed and led by traditional landowners. It leads programs to bring traditional clan groups back onto country to manage the vast area, utilize traditional fire-burning to mitigate the largest and hottest fires that destroy lands, and to reinvigorate deep traditional cultural ties to the land.

## Warddeken Governance

The Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area is part of Arnhem Land, a vast Indigenous territory over twice the size of Switzerland in northern Australia, and home to Indigenous cultures dating back over 65,000 years. The Nawarddeken are the traditional owners of Warddeken, and make up 36 clan groups of the Bininj Kunwok language group. In 2009 they created the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, including 1,394,951 hectares of spectacular stone and gorge on the West Arnhem Plateau, immediately east of Kakadu National Park. The plateau is home to numerous threatened species, and is of great cultural significance as thousands of rock art sites tell stories and record the way Indigenous peoples lived tens of thousands of years ago—these are some of the richest density of rock art galleries in the world.

The Aboriginal peoples of Warddeken use ceremonies and kinship relations to govern how they live, which is interwoven into the traditional management of the Warddeken territory. Fire management plays a significant cultural and economic role. The Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area is managed by its traditional owners with the support of Warddeken Land Management Limited, a not-for-profit company founded in 2007. Its Board of Directors is comprised of representatives of the 36 clans and is responsible for the governance, strategic direction, and the operations of the ranger program. It does not speak for the traditional owners nor does it make decisions for them, but rather it manages the land according to their guidance. It employs up to 130 Indigenous rangers a year on a casual basis. Rangers work on fire management and carbon abatement, weed and feral animal control, rock art conservation, education, and cultural heritage management. Passing on traditional ecological knowledge to younger generations is a key role as rangers act as role models in their communities. Having an Indigenous Protected Area means the Aboriginal landowners develop their own partnerships and determine their own priorities and outcomes, and it means they remain the primary managers of their country.

 SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Udege community in sub-arctic Russia has resisted illegal and commercial logging and overfishing on their lands. They negotiated with the Russian government to create and co-manage the Bikin National Park, ensuring both the protection of the lands as well as the opportunity to legally apply their traditional management of the lands based on Udege traditional knowledge and customary law.

### **Leadership Models**

The most common leadership model among the Wayfinders is through community elections through a community-based organization, which is then often represented in an institution comprised of the entire Indigenous peoples (much like, but not exactly like the Mayangna, Wampis, Achuar, Blackfeet, Sámi, and Udege). For example, the Achuar leadership is elected by Achuar communities, with leadership taking turns between the representatives of the two main watersheds, the Pastaza and the Morona. Decisions are made through traditional Wayusa meetings that include the Indigenous communities and associations, then later through the Achuar Congress which necessarily includes women, men, elders, youth, and invited guests.

However, in some of the Wayfinders' governance models, leadership is passed down from generation to generation through hereditary bonds, such as with the Gabbra and the Heiltsuk. Among the Gabbra, leadership is passed on through a pilgrimage on sacred migration routes. In Dayak Iban Sungai Utik, some leadership is held by a respected elder before being passed on to another elder; while other leaders are elected and serve for a set time. Among others, leadership is held by groups of elders or other respected Indigenous leaders, who serve on a board of directors overseeing implementation by an institution; such as with Warddeken and the Native American Land Conservancy.

## Heiltsuk Governance

The lands of the Heiltsuk along the British Columbia coast of western Canada cover over 3.5 million hectares and are part of one of the largest tracts of unspoiled temperate rainforests in the world. The Heiltsuk practice a system of governance based on their *ǵviłás* (customary laws) that have been upheld by their *Yímás* (Hereditary Chiefs) since time immemorial. The *Haítzaqv* governing body is comprised of an elected Chief & Council, who make decisions in collaboration with the *Yímás*. For the past decade, the *Haítzaqv*, along with other coastal First Nations, have strengthened the connections between community, environment and economy. The people remain steadfast in their conviction that the environment should not be sacrificed to build a healthy coastal economy.

The Heiltsuk recently released the Heiltsuk Constitution. Chief Marilyn Slett noted, "The Constitution, for me, is a reclamation of our Heiltsuk governance. It's an exercise of decolonization: putting out there for the world our Heiltsuk laws and Constitution." The Constitution defines Heiltsuk principles, morals, values, responsibilities, and governance. It is a living document that includes Heiltsuk creation stories, homeland maps, membership rights, freedoms and responsibilities, lawmaking authorities, government structure and process, financial law, code of conduct, amendment process, and *givlas* – customary law. Community members describe the passing of the Constitution as a way to make concrete and permanent Heiltsuk jurisdiction over land and resources, along with all aspects of the Heiltsuk world. It puts into writing an inherited legacy of over 14,000 years of oral tradition and stewardship practices.

 SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION

For many of the Wayfinders, a governance structure based on elections was initially imposed by a colonizing power, to create an institution they understood and could negotiate with. However, what the western world sees as "democratic" often disregards the importance and clout that traditional forms

of governance provide to peoples who have had them since time immemorial. Therefore multiple and widely respected traditional leadership roles are found among the Wayfinders that operate outside of and beyond the governance structures that were imposed or created to deal with the outside world.

### ***Recognition by and Participation in Nation-State Government***

The Wayfinders demonstrate various levels of participation and collaboration with national governments, but each of them are engaged constructively; recognizing the nation-states where they are found, while still defending Indigenous autonomy and rights to self-determination and self-governance. The Mayangna Nation and Rapa Nui are both active participants in their national governments, and they are recognized parts of them. The Achuar are also recognized by the Government of Ecuador, and participate in some government discussions, but are not considered part of the national government. The municipality belongs to the Achuar Nation, and includes territories of both the Shuar and the Achuar, often with Achuar and Shuar elected mayors. The same is often true at the more local level, with the prefect.

The Wampis engage and collaborate with the Government of Peru, but their autonomous territorial government is not officially recognized. Warddeken collaborates closely with the government, and is responsible for the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, an official part of Australia's protected area system. Furthermore, they participate in a government sanctioned carbon trading arrangement, receiving funding for reduced carbon emissions from fire reduction gained through their traditional fire management. Similarly, the Udege work closely with the Russian Federal government and regional authorities as they co-manage the Bikin National Park. The Native American Land Conservancy has a less official engagement with the United States government, choosing instead to work closely with tribes as they protect

## Achuar Governance

The Achuar have been living for thousands of years in large territories in the Amazon of both Ecuador and Peru, along both sides of the border. In Ecuador the Achuar have a legally recognized territory of 680,000 hectares and their full territory is 800,000 hectares; located in one of the healthiest and most biodiverse tropical forests in the world.

Achuar governance includes 88 communities and 21 associations. Each community has its own elected representatives. The Achuar representative organization was formed in 2005: the Federation of the Achuar Nation of Ecuador (NAE), representing the Achuar communities and associations at the national and international level. NAE leaders are elected every three years in a congress where at least five representatives from each community participate.

Achuar governance, and all of Achuar life, is guided by Arútam—the sacred source. Arútam resides in sacred places; no one is born with Arútam, but each person has to find it. Arútam can come in visions from a powerful animal, a mountain or a natural phenomenon. Arútam gives the Achuar power, energy, skills and guidance.

 SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION

sacred sites, educate, and acquire sacred lands. The Sámi, Blackfeet, and Heiltsuk all have nation-to-nation relationships with the nation-states where their territories are located; though as they never signed a treaty, the Heiltsuk have a less formal relationship.

### ***Participation of Women, Elders, and Youth***

In different ways and to varying degrees, each of the Wayfinders Circle members acknowledge special recognition and honor towards women, elders and youth. For example, the Wampis and Gabbra have specifically created unique

roles in their governance structures for elders and youth.

The Sungai Utik Indigenous people live in a 216 meter longhouse with more than 25 booths and doors, which is led by a traditional house harvester. The longhouse has a "ruai" porch both inside and outside. Ruai is a communal space for the Sungai Utik, where decision-making is carried out by joint deliberation, led by the traditional house harvester, and involving all Sungai Utik residents including Indigenous women and youth. They also have a Traditional School for children and residents to transfer knowledge related to customs and culture, as well as the traditional community customs and values so they are maintained and sustainable. The youth act as knowledge recorders from the traditional elders, to maintain and document existing local wisdom and good practices in the Customary Territory. In addition, the youth also play a role in connecting Indigenous community

## Sungai Utik Governance

The Dayak Iban Sungai Utik community occupies 9,504 hectares and is one of seven villages of larger Ketemengungan Iban Jalai Lintang in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. They manage their territorial management according to land use and function.

The traditional long house serves as heart of the social, economic, cultural, and political life and is some 216 meters long with than 28 rooms accommodating more than 300 people. The long house terrace serves as a community center where women weave or make handicrafts, a place for traditional celebrations, deliberations for joint decision-making and is also used for drying rice, coconut, cassava or leaves. An elder in the long house serves as chief, and regulates the processes of cultivation, house building, harvest ceremonies and customary law. The decision-making process is carried out collectively and decisions are made by considering the ancestral customs, norms and rules.

 SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION

knowledge with external global issues.

Many of the Wayfinders have programs to engage youth in governance and guardianship work. Almost all have some type of bilingual intercultural education programs, some through the nation-state education system, and some independently. Many of the initial Wayfinders Circle members have noted strong values toward women participating equally in governance decision-making, but also recognize they have a long way to go—as yet women are not participating equally in the main decision-making governance structures, even if they are widely consulted at home and often lead household decision-making. Many of the Wayfinders agree this area has a lot of potential for overall growth and opportunities for learning.

Wayfinders members collectively recognize there are ever fewer elders present in their communities, and more youth seem to be drawn away from their traditional territories towards urban centers; many of whom never return to live at length among their people. Hence, youth engagement is an area of critical importance highlighted by many of the initial members of the Wayfinders Circle, and many are actively working to engage youth in activities rooted in their culture. The Heiltsuk formed the Qqs Project Society (Qqs are translated as eyes), focused on creating opportunities for Heiltsuk youth and families to explore and learn from the land. Warddeken employs Indigenous youth in its land management efforts, and organizes regular expeditions for traditional landowner families to explore the land and connect with sacred sites. The Wampis Autonomous Territorial Government runs the Sharian Leadership Academy, which provides training and cultural grounding for future Wampis leaders. The academy is named after one of the last Wampis warrior leaders, Sharian, who defended the rights of the Wampis people and brought

## Gabbra Governance

The territory of the nomadic Gabbra includes vast rangelands of some 35,000 square kilometers of Ethiopia and Kenya, and includes an estimated 50,000 people. The Gabbra are known as the people of the five drums, referring to the ritual and governance assemblies known as the Yaa, which uphold traditional laws that protect the environment and the community. Each of the five Yaa are independent and manage a traditional grazing area, following their own circuit, occupying and managing a core area. Each undertakes pilgrimages, trekking along prescribed routes at specific times determined by a combination of solar and lunar cycles of the Gabbra calendar. Important decisions are made at the Yaa, including when and how to undertake a mass cross-border spiritual migration that takes place in 15 year cycles. When water and pasture are dwindling, the Abuuru (a team of emissaries) is sent to potentially suitable locations to check availability and quality of water and pasture, and the willingness of the host community to accept 'visitors.' Elders discuss and assess potential sites, and eventually decide whether to migrate, when and where.

The Yaa is a living open school where knowledge for cultural survival is passed from generation to generation. It follows customary rules to manage time and activities governing ceremonies, rituals, migrations, environmental protection, social order and the rule of law. Decisions are usually made by consensus and all participants are given the chance to express their opinions. It is the ultimate decision-making body and does not bend its rules for internal or external pressures that do not conform to Gabbra cultural values. The Gabbra institute taboos on the cutting of culturally important trees and conserve sacred areas where all extraction is forbidden. These practices have contributed to the conservation of biodiversity in the arid ecosystems.

 [SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

them together to establish peace. The academy prepares leaders by instilling in them an integral, holistic, and broad cultural understanding of their communities and a future vision of their people.

## ***Role of Spirituality and Traditional Knowledge in Governance***

All of the Wayfinders deeply value their spirituality, as well as passing on traditional spiritual knowledge from each generation to the next; and often incorporate spirituality directly into their governance. For example, the Wampis have established a moral council for those who have sought visions with the ancestors in their sacred waterfalls, and who have completed specific spiritual challenges. The Blackfeet continue their traditions of the Horn Society, passing on sacred obligations to each new genera-

## **Native American Land Conservancy Governance**

The Native American Land Conservancy protects sacred sites, promotes education and advocacy, and does scientific research, guided primarily by tribes of the southern California desert regions of the United States. It acquires and protects sacred lands across southeastern California and currently owns and manages sacred lands at The Old Woman Mountains Preserve and Coyote Hole. It worked alongside other tribes, conservation groups, and agencies in order to protect the 1640-acre Horse Canyon in the Santa Rosa Mountains. It supports tribal engagement in public lands initiatives by directing tribes toward resources for sacred lands protection, providing expertise in tribal outreach, and initiating partnerships between tribes and conservation partners.

The organization was founded by local tribal elders and community leaders to strengthen the connection of local Indigenous peoples to their homelands. The governance board includes tribal elders, elected leaders, youth, cultural specialists, and ceremonial leaders from the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Cahuilla Band of Indians, Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, and the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians. Started in 1998 to protect off-reservation sacred sites in the Southern California desert, today it continues traditions and spiritual practices through youth and elder exchanges, spiritual ceremonies and community gatherings at sacred sites, and mentorship and training of young leaders and the next generations.

tion. The Horn Society functions as a cultural governance entity that operates outside the elected leadership that manages its relationships with the United States and Canadian governments. The Native American Land Conservancy includes traditional and spiritual practices in its work with youth and elder exchanges, and performs spiritual ceremonies and community gatherings at sacred sites. For the Sungai Utik, the forest is the father, the land is the mother, and water is the blood that must be protected for future generations; and this is considered in governance decision-making. They believe that if nature is not taken care of, then sooner or later disaster will surely strike. Similarly, Achuar governance, and all of Achuar life, is guided by Arútam—the sacred source. Arútam gives the Achuar power, energy, skills, and guidance.

## ***Common Threats, and Approaches to Defense of Territory***

Quite a few of the Wayfinders cite extractive industries as ongoing threats including oil, logging, and mining. Invasions by outsiders and even settlers within their territories were also noted; as were government policies that threaten territorial integrity such as new legislation in Kenya. Monitoring of territory, often including employment of Indigenous guards as a strategy of defense, is practiced by many including by the Wampis, Achuar, Dayak Iban Sungai Utik, and Mayangna. Active environmental management of territory is widely practiced among the Circle members, specifically the Gabbra, Udege, and Warddeken.

## 🎯 Rapa Nui Governance

With a population of 7,750 the Rapa Nui municipality and Indigenous territory on Easter Island, Chile, is the most isolated inhabited place on the planet—a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean some 3,800 kilometers from Chile and 4,000 from Tahiti. The Rapa Nui people have worked constantly to defend their territory, environment, culture, and rights as Indigenous peoples. In 1966, after ongoing uprisings and demands, the State of Chile recognized them as a people with rights, creating the Department of Easter Island and its Municipality. The Rapa Nui people then elected their first Mayor, and since then have chosen their own leaders.

The Rapa Nui people's governance structure has three traditional representative bodies: the Council of Elders, the Rapa Nui Parliament, and the *Honui* or Assembly of Clans, which represents the 36 families that make up the municipality. These bodies work in consultation and side by side with the municipality. The mayor is a member of the Rapa Nui Council of Elders, the highest representative and traditional body. The Municipal Council, whose members are all Rapa Nui, works on cultural, environmental, social and human rights initiatives. The Municipal Council, with the approval and support of the community, maintains the principles of traditional Rapa Nui customs and organizes conversations open to the whole community that tackle themes that affect the territory. They conduct consultations, identify needs and determine short, medium, and long-term planning. They execute programs, conduct dialogues with the State and plan for the future.

🎯 SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION



# Toward Yet Stronger Leadership and Clearer Direction

Wayfinders demonstrate ongoing advances and ways forward in their governance systems, as well as evidence validating the efficacy of traditional leadership in their respective communities and societies; yet too many hindrances, limitations, and challenges to the Wayfinders' pursuit and assertion of their self-determination remain.

There are many unresolved issues around legal acknowledgement or recognition of traditional areas and territories by states and governments that have long been occupied by Indigenous peoples. News of legal battles are distributed widely through various efforts from information dissemination and awareness-raising about Indigenous peoples' legal rights at the local levels; to high level negotiations with governments to assert rights to land ownership and traditional practices of resource management. This is the case with almost all the Wayfinders, who have varying levels of success in their continued quest for rightful control of the lands they inhabit.



Simultaneously, there is a pressing need to address and parry the rapid and aggressive expansion of extractive activities into Indigenous lands such as illegal and commercial logging, large-scale over-fishing; and hunting, mining, and industrial development such as those experienced by the Sungai Utik community and Udege people. These are all threats to their traditional sources of livelihood. Effective and firm state-enforced policing and protection can ward off much of the illegal intrusion into Indigenous territories.

The ongoing debate about public and private-led conservation on one hand, and sustainable land management by Indigenous peoples over their resources on the other, is an ongoing concern. Indigenous practices, though varying in different societies, have illustrated the time-tested wisdom of sustainable resource management by the inhabitants of high biodiversity remaining frontier and protected areas.

Time is of the essence to undertake the required research and documentation aimed at learning from the knowledge-holders of Indigenous guardianship best practices. The Sámi people, for instance, find the government's methods incongruent to their own strategy and expectations, thus continuing engagements and dialogues are necessary to come to an agreement or compromise concerning resource management.

With rapid development comes the lure of modernity and urban conveniences that Indigenous youths gravitate towards, causing concern about internal migration. Intergenerational transmission of knowledge and continued exchange between culture-bearers, elders, and Indigenous youth demand attention and perseverance. Cultural roots, Indigenous spirituality, and Indigenous history are at the core of awakening a consciousness in

youth to take pride in their identity, and responsibility for culture-bearing and future leadership. Thus nurturing and restoring Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices and values, as well as revitalizing local languages, are crucial aspects of empowering projects by members of the Wayfinders Circle for the perpetuity of their survival into future generations.

Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic introduced significant challenges, including health impacts and restrictions. The traditional modes of learning,

## Udege Governance

The Udege number about 1,600 people and inhabit more than 1.5 million hectares of pristine boreal forest of the sub-arctic Bikin region of Russia. Their territory makes up the Bikin National Park, which they co-manage with the Russian government. This model, unique for Russia, recognizes, respects and protects Indigenous peoples' rights to their territory and values their traditional knowledge of resource management.

The Udege agreed to the national park in 2013 to stop massive illegal cutting, commercial large scale timber production, poaching and overfishing at the Bikin river basin. The co-management agreement recognizes Udege traditional knowledge and customary law. The Permanent Council of Indigenous Peoples was established to lead and consult on all issues related to Indigenous peoples and their rights. Composed of 12 Indigenous members, it includes hunters, elders, women, and youth who hold weekly meetings to discuss relevant issues related to traditional activities, like hunting, fishing regulation, and traditional knowledge, and to ecotourism. The Chair is deputy director of the park in charge of Indigenous issues and oversees the 70% of the park territory that is reserved for traditional activities like hunting, fishing and non-timber forest production.

 SEE ANNEX FOR MORE INFORMATION

including community gatherings for decision making and rituals and ceremonies for specific purposes, needed to be adapted to imposed health protocols. The experience of US Native Americans showed that a transition to remote learning using technology is possible, especially among technologically adept youth who share this knowledge with their less technologically savvy elders. Still, virtual learning platforms have yet to reach many remote communities. Many Indigenous organizations have needed to reframe project implementation, and must continue to do so due to the uncertainty of the pandemic's end.

Indigenous women, who remain largely invisible in Indigenous communities' crucial governance and leadership concerns, are gradually participating in capacity building activities. As primary actors in child rearing, food production, and resource management; and as significant players in peace-building and conflict resolution, Indigenous women's voices and paramount roles require more amplification and recognition. Cultural practices and traditional beliefs in some societies among the Wayfinders may have impeded their growth and empowerment, but values are being reshaped as to the role of women in the protection and sustenance of life and resources. External influences are also at play as these change or clash with women's view or outlook of their roles, as per observation of Mayangna women who are conflicted about their historically established social roles and relationship with nature. Regrettably, they report these roles are weakened by the appropriation of Mayangna women's wisdom and knowledge by other cultures. Additionally, they desire more dynamism, communication, and interaction among members of different organizations of Indigenous women, which can possibly resolve their exclusion in community matters in some territories.

Perhaps meriting closer study is the Gabbra pastoralist people's observations that contributory to the weakening of their existing governance traditions are external factors such as education, religion, political influence, sedentary lifestyle, enforced government policies and lack of one unifying and traditionally owned institution. A unifying institution to bind them together is of paramount importance to their existence, and the preservation of Gabbra culture. Existing tribal and inter-tribal conflicts that destabilize communities need to be resolved through mechanisms that enhance peaceful co-existence of tribes. A viable traditional mechanism must be restored and complement the contemporary government system.

The twelve initial members of the Wayfinders Circle are dealing with challenges as they practice and assert their self-governance. They are aware these obstacles are not reasons to waver in their continuing journey to protect their land and resources generation after generation. Indeed, all the Wayfinders continuously make efforts to convey and pass on ancestral traditional knowledge to new generations, ensuring cultural continuity and ongoing resource management.



# Conclusions

The Wayfinders members each exhibit a longstanding and enduring interconnectivity to land, and a deep and meaningful sense of land guardianship. Members' self-determination and self-governance strengthen their ties to territory, and thus strengthen guardianship as well. And the stronger the self-governance and realized self-determination, the stronger the resolve to defend territory and uphold cultural values tied to territory, and the stronger the guardianship.

As Wayfinders, they are dedicated to sharing what they have learned as possible pathways for human societies to achieve ecological, social, cultural and spiritual harmony. But they can't do it alone. To support the Wayfinders in their efforts to strengthen their governance is to contribute to the guardianship of more than 37.5 million hectares of land and 72.8 million hectares of ocean, all biodiverse areas critical to the wellbeing of both the planet, and humanity.

All the initial members of the Wayfinders Circle express a deep cultural and spiritual connection to nature and territory that forms an integral part of their identity and ways of being, confirmed and enriched through ritual and ceremony. This commitment to guardianship is not learned or imposed; it simply is, as it has always been.



**WAYFINDERS  
CIRCLE**



# Annexes: Diversity in Governance

## 01 TROPICAL FORESTS

- a) Achuar Nation | ECUADOR
- b) Dayak Iban Sungai Utik | INDONESIA
- c) Mayangna Nation | NICARAGUA
- d) Wampis Nation | PERU

## 02 RANGELANDS

- a) Blackfeet/Blackfoot Confederacy | UNITED STATES & CANADA
- b) Gabbra People | KENYA
- c) Sámiid Rikkasearvi (National Association of Sámi) | SWEDEN

## 03 ARID AND SEMI-ARID

- a) Native American Land Conservancy | UNITED STATES
- b) Warddeken | AUSTRALIA

## 04 TEMPERATE FORESTS

- a) Udege People | RUSSIA
- b) Heiltsuk Nation | CANADA

## 05 ISLANDS

- a) Rapa Nui | CHILE

a) The Achuar Nation | ECUADOR

The Achuar people of the Ecuadorian Amazon have been living along the Pastaza and Morona Rivers for thousands of years. The Achuar live across an area which includes large territories in both Ecuador and Peru, along both sides of the border. The Achuar in Ecuador have a legally recognized territory of 680,000 hectares, and the full expanse of their territory is 800,000 hectares of tropical rainforest, lakes and rivers. This is one of the healthiest tropical forests in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and one of the most biodiverse in the world.

The Achuar of Ecuador have a clear governance structure organized across 88 communities and 21 associations. Each community is composed of family members and has its own elected representatives. Communities are organized in associations, which have their own representatives. In the 1990s, under pressure from oil companies, the Achuar formed the first Achuar overall representative organization. Over the years this organization evolved and in 2005 the Federation of the Achuar Nation of Ecuador (NAE) was established. The NAE represents Achuar communities and associations at the national and international level, and NAE leaders are elected every three years in a congress where at least five representatives from each community participate. The role of the leaders is to implement the decisions made jointly during the congress and the annual assemblies. For example, in the congress and annual assemblies, the leaders report on what has happened during the last year and receive guidance on policy, projects, and priorities of the Achuar people of Ecuador. This governance structure allows each community and association to maintain their autonomy, while simultaneously benefitting from the defense and maintenance of the Achuar territory and culture.

The sacred places of the Achuar are where *Arútam* (the sacred source) resides; and these places are treated with respect. *Arútam* is imbued everywhere in the forest, the plants, and the animals. Though no one person is born with *Arútam*, each person has to find it; and if they don't find it, they are unable to lead a fulfilling life. The Achuar receive *Arútam* wisdom by communicating with their ancestral souls, and all children are taught how to communicate and receive it. *Arútam* can come in many forms such as visions from a powerful animal, a mountain, or a natural phenomenon. These visions represent valuable lessons. *Arútam* gives the Achuar power, energy, and skills, and tells them how to live a good life. This is what guides them to this day.

ACHUAR  
NATION



## b) Dayak Iban Sungai Utik | INDONESIA

Found in the tropical rainforest of Indonesia, the Indigenous **Dayak Iban Sungai Utik** community occupies 9,504 hectares. The Dayak Iban Sungai Utik is one of the seven *Menua* (villages) which comprise the united Ketemenggungan Iban Jalai Lintang in Kapuas Hulu District, West Kalimantan. The management of the *Menua* is according to land use and based on territorial allocation and function.

The Dayak Iban Sungai Utik community has an autonomous institution called the *Rumah Panjae* led by a *Tuai Rumahayak Iban*. The majority of the community still practices their customary systems, including the *Rumah Panjang*, or traditional long house, which is 216-meters long and accommodates more than 300 people. The *Rumah Panjai* is the heart of the social, economic, cultural, and political structure; and is the reflection of unity in the community's daily life. With more than 28 rooms, called the *billik*, it is the expression of household unity and a system of decision-making. The long house terrace serves as a community center where traditional celebrations are held or deliberations for joint decision-making take place; and is a space where women weave or make handicrafts or where rice, coconut, cassava or leaves may be dried. The elder in the long house is called *Tuai Rumah*, who also plays the role of a chief. The *Tuai Rumah* holds the "*Kayu Burung*" which regulates the processes of cultivation, house building, "*Gawai*" or harvest ceremony, and "*Penti Pemali*" or customary law.

The institutional *Rumah Panjae* has the authority to regulate its territory and community-based on customary law. If the *Tuai Rumah* is absent or unable to attend, a *Sapit* (representative of *Tuai Rumah*) assumes its role and function, but is not authorized to make customary decisions. The decision-making process of the Dayak Iban Sungai Utik is carried out through *musyawarah adat* (deliberations) led by *Tuai Rumah* and invited traditional leaders. Decisions are made by considering the ancestral customs, norms and rules. *Ishwara* (decision-making) is carefully and collectively done through the community assembly, and the *Rumah* chief cannot make decisions alone for the community. Issues relating to the territory and social affairs are resolved through the institutional *Rumah Panjae* (and *Tuai Rumah*). If these cannot be resolved, these will be discussed and decided at the *Pateh* level. If the problem still cannot be resolved at this level, it is brought to the *Tumenggung* level. A *Tumenggung* who regulates customary justice facilitates the resolution of conflicts or problems between *Menua* (villages).

The community resists threats through collective decision-making and land monitoring. Their Indigenous Forest Guard groups are assigned to do territorial patrols through the forest and along the boundaries, looking for any trespassers, robbers, illegal miners or illegal loggers. Regular monitoring is done at least every three days.



## c) The Sumu Mayangna Nation | NICARAGUA

The Nación Sumu Mayangna, or Mayangna Nation, in Nicaragua covers nine territories, five located outside the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve, and four within it. The Bosawás Biosphere Reserve and its buffer zone is part of the Western Hemisphere's second largest area of tropical forest and the third largest in Central America. These nine territories cover 8,101 square kilometers of tropical rainforests and pine savannahs where 45,000 people live across 75 communities.

The Mayangna Nation has three levels of governance:

- The Sulani, or Mayangna Indigenous government
- The Asangni, which is comprised of nine Mayangna Indigenous Territories
- The Mapaki, which consists of 75 communal governments

Communities participate through the *Aslawanga* or community and territorial assemblies through discussion and analysis that approve standards for their communities. *Aslawangas* are formed by communities to defend their surroundings and habitat while reinforcing community principles. The Mayangna make decisions on issues concerning their territory in accordance with their traditions and customs through the communal, territorial and national *Aslawanga* assemblies. The national *Aslawanga* is led by the Council of Elders and Leaders who are representatives and *Wihta*. All men, women, youth, and elders of the communities participate. Each of the nine territories has a territorial government that represents the communities.

Mayangna self-determination is expressed through this community governance model from the grassroots communal structures up to the territorial authorities and the authorities at the national level. This allows them to govern through their own local autonomous community governance system and promote socio-economic development from their own identity and worldview.

The Mayangna Nation's struggle for the titling of their territories and the defense of Mother Earth is an example of how Indigenous self-government can engage directly with the State. The Mayangna people are pioneers at the national and international level regarding rights to autonomy and territorial rights. The self-determination of Mayangna communities is expressed through the administration of their own community and traditional justice. *Wihtas*, *síndicos*, and their council of elders lead conflict resolution processes, and promote harmonious coexistence of all the Mayangna communities.

Indigenous peoples were previously relegated and unrecognized by prior governments of Nicaragua, but since the creation of the territorial governments, their territories have since been restored. Today, government funds strengthen Indigenous territorial governments with an economic allocation from the national budget.

The Mayangna nation claim their territorial integrity as the basis of their origin as peoples, and proof of their continued existence. They have full exercise of their spiritual life and worldview based on the principles of justice, reciprocity, equity, solidarity, innovation, respect, and discipline. They continue to strengthen and sustain their self-government alongside multi-culturalism of the country.



MAYANGNA  
NATION

## d) The Wampis Nation | PERU

The Wampis territory is in the Peruvian northern Amazon headwaters near the Andes, one of the world's most richly biodiverse regions. The Wampis culture embodies a wealth of history and stories going back thousands of years, which are interwoven with the ecosystems and landscapes of their territory. Wampis territory spans the Santiago and Morona rivers, includes the Kampankis mountain range that divides the two rivers and rises to 1600 meters (rare in the Amazon), and is populated by swamps, lakes, waterfalls, and caves.

The Wampis are the first Indigenous people in Peru to collectively build an autonomous governance structure based on an entire Indigenous people occupying a single collective territory: The Autonomous Territorial Government of the Wampis Nation. Governance is based on *The Statute*, which lays out the Wampis vision for the future in all areas of life including religion, spirituality, education, language, and recovery of ancestral places. *The Statute* is based on Peruvian law, built strictly on the obligations of the Peruvian state to respect the rights and autonomy of Indigenous peoples. *The Statute* requires that any activity that could affect Wampis territory must secure the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of the Wampis Nation. Specifically, this means that the Government of Peru cannot authorize concessions that allow oil or mining companies to enter Wampis territory without a prior consultation and consent process.

The Wampis *Statute* and autonomous government were the result of a multi-year, bottom-up process including 50 community meetings and 15 general assemblies (with representation of all Wampis). *The Statute* delegates responsibility to the Wampis government so that no community may take a unilateral decision that affects others—for example, no one community can sign a deal with an oil company, as has happened with neighboring Indigenous peoples in the past. There are leadership roles for the environment, women, youth, and in other areas. There is also an elevated role in a kind of moral council for "visionaries," or people who have completed several challenges and sought visions through their ancestors in the sacred waterfalls. The Wampis have included specific provisions in *The Statute* to guarantee the participation of women in governance and the respect of women's rights in their communities. *The Statute* includes environmental management of their territory, including regulations for land use and planning, as well as setting aside sacred sites and other areas for conservation.

The Wampis example of self-determination and self-implementation of an autonomous territorial government is inspiring other Indigenous peoples in northern Peru to begin their own processes toward establishing autonomous territorial governments.



## a) The Blackfeet/Blackfoot Confederacy | CANADA & THE UNITED STATES

The Blackfeet traditional territory covers vast expanses of Canada and the United States, shaped by a series of treaties signed between the Blackfeet and the colonial powers of Canada and the United States. The Blackfeet reservation is one of the largest reservations in the United States, and Blackfoot lands include a similarly large expanse in southern Canada. The terms Blackfeet and Blackfoot refer to the same people—more commonly they refer to themselves as the Blackfoot in Canada and the Blackfeet in the United States. In Canada, the Blackfoot Confederacy serves as a Tribal Council for Kainai-Blood Tribe, Siksika, and Aapatohsi (Northern) Piikani First Nations. The Blackfoot Confederacy was established to bring together the three Blackfoot Nations of Canada to work on common issues with external entities. It also serves as the international coordinating body for all the Blackfeet Indigenous nations in Canada and the United States—where the Aamskapi (Southern) Pikani reside—and includes representatives from Blackfeet governance institutions in both countries.

Blackfeet lands have abundant natural resources, including vast forestlands, grasslands, and mountain areas. In the United States alone these lands are home to numerous species of fish and wildlife, and have more than 518 miles of streams and 180 bodies of water, including eight large lakes. The traditional collective territory in the United States includes all of Glacier National Park and the Badger-Two Medicine Area on US Forest Service land, as well; and the original United States reservation encompassed most of the northern half of Montana. The Blackfeet see themselves as caretakers of much of North America's water resources, as rivers flow down from the Blackfeet reservation and Glacier National Park east to the Atlantic, west to the Pacific, and north to the Arctic. Traditionally, Blackfeet women owned the homes and led religious practices, and the men were political leaders. However, this continues to evolve as women take on more public leadership roles.

In the United States, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council is the governing body of the Blackfeet Nation, responsible for state-to-state relations with the United States, and is responsible for exercising all powers of government under the Blackfeet Constitution and By-laws. They have a strong record of land management, grazing and agriculture rights, complex investments, and relations with the national and state governments. Alongside the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, more traditional responsibilities are held by the Buffalo Bull Children Horn Society. As is common among some North American Indigenous peoples, the Blackfeet employ a number of governance entities—some responsible for representing them in nation-to-nation relations with the US or Canadian government, and others responsible for other elements of Blackfeet culture.

Within the territory are the Blackfeet Reservation lands, as well as Blackfeet-owned individual land plots, and non-Indigenous private land plots, along with some protected areas and traditional lands. In the United States, the Blackfeet have a history of reclaiming rights to the traditional lands and regaining rights to rangeland while actively engaging with the United States government. Of particular interest are special rights to the sacred Badger-Two Medicine area, bordering both the Blackfeet Reservation and Glacier National Park. The Badger-Two Medicine area is the home of the Blackfeet creation story, and has continued to be a place of refuge and healing for more than 10,000 years. These sacred lands were slated to be leased to oil and gas companies, a move the Blackfeet were able to stop along with their allies.

Today the Blackfeet are on the forefront of a movement to re-introduce buffalo to traditional rangelands, strengthening their ties to ancient traditional ways.

# BLACKFEET TRIBE CONFEDERACY



## b) The Gabbra People | KENYA

The territory of the nomadic Gabbra people is characterized by its broad ecological diversity of grasslands, montane forests, semi-arid lands, deserts, rivers, and a desert lake (Turkana), with vast rangelands across some 35,000 square kilometers of Ethiopia and Kenya, and is home to an estimated 50,000 people.

The Gabbra have long been known as “the people of the five drums,” referring to the ritual and governance assemblies known as the *Yaa*. The community is governed by the *Yaa* assembly, the highest level of social organization responsible for the functioning of the social structure. Important decisions on critical issues that affect the larger community are made at the *Yaa*, and it promotes upholding the traditional laws that protect the very survival of both the environment and the community. It is a living and open school where knowledge that is important for cultural survival is passed from generation to generation. The *Yaa* is a culturally autonomous organization that strictly follows the community’s traditional customary rules to manage time and activities governing ceremonies, rituals, migrations, environmental protection, social order, and the rule of law. It is the ultimate decision-making organ that does not bend the rules for any internal or external pressures that do not conform to Gabbra cultural values.

The Gabbra society is divided into five sections, or *phratries*, called *dibbe* (drums) each with a large mobile village and a myriad of smaller mobile units called *Ch’eekeo*. The five *phratries* have regional assemblies, each of which include a council of elders, living holy shrines, and capitals where political powers and administrative and spiritual lives are centered.

Each *phratry* resides in a particular grazing area which is historically tied to the region. The five *Yaa* are independent of each other, each following their own circuit, occupying a circumscribed core area of their own that they utilize and manage across the Kenya-Ethiopia borders as they care for their expansive sacred landscape. Each *phratry* undertakes pilgrimage to their site, trekking along prescribed routes at specific times determined by a combination of the solar and lunar cycles of their calendar. Limiting access through local governance structures both contributes to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and ensures that a comprehensive and respected conflict resolution mechanism is in place when needed. The Gabbra also institute taboos on the cutting of culturally important trees and conserve sacred areas where all extraction is forbidden. These practices have contributed to the conservation of biodiversity in the arid lands ecosystems.

Decisions on lesser issues are made at individual village levels, which may include when a village is to set off on the next leg of migration in search of water and pasture. This kind of decision is based on information such as an alarm being raised by livestock herders, or updates from scouts based on their survey of the range land. Important decisions on critical issues affecting the larger community are made at the *Yaa*, the highest level of social organization. This includes the decision of when and how to undertake a mass cross-border spiritual migration that takes place in 15 year cycles. In all cases, decision-making includes the participation of youth, men (especially elders), and women after exhaustive discussions in open public meetings, guided by wise elders.

When planning for livestock migration in times of scarcity or drought, the decision to migrate is usually taken jointly by a community’s elders. This is determined on the basis of understanding the state of natural resources, and the host communities’ attitudes in potential areas for migration. When water and pasture are dwindling, *Abuuru* (a team of emissaries) are sent to potentially suitable locations for migration to check the availability and quality of water and pasture, and the willingness of the host community to accept visitors. On the basis of the emissaries’ feedback, elders meet to discuss and assess potential sites, and eventually decide whether, when, and where to migrate. During these meetings, decisions are usually achieved by consensus and all participants are given the chance to express their opinions on the matter discussed. Decisions are not taken hastily, but elders reconvene after one or two days to allow some time for reflection. During this important period of deliberation, elders also take this opportunity to discuss the issues with their wives at home, and the wives’ opinions and observations may also be incorporated into the final decision.



## c) The Sámiid Riikkasearvi | SWEDEN

Established in 1950, the Sámiid Riikkasearvi (National Association of Sámi) in Sweden is composed of 17 member associations and 44 Sámi reindeer herding communities who inhabit a terrestrial ecosystem in a sub-arctic and mountain/tundra region. Taking up vastly expansive areas, reindeer herding is the biggest traditional livelihood of the Sami people and their center of culture and society. Occupying 40 percent (180,180 square kilometers) of Sweden, the Sámiid Riikkasearvi safeguards and promotes the economic, social, legal, administrative, and cultural interests of the Sámi with a special focus on their reindeer husbandry.

Their highest deciding body is the annual *Riikkacoahkkin*, or “National Meeting”, where members elect the chair and members of the board. The members approve the finances and adopt the yearly action plans. The *Riikkacoahkkin* board meets five times a year. The organization is built on the principle that each reindeer herding community has the right to its area and right to decide its own matters. The reindeer herding areas are divided into regions, each with its own representative to the board. The *Riikkacoahkkin* also has a youth council of young reindeer herders, and they are represented at board meetings where capacity-building and activities for reindeer herding youth are given attention.

The reindeer herding communities consist of Sámi families with their own small family reindeer herding trade. The members of the community elect representatives from different families to the board that handles the member family’s common concerns. There are 44 Sámi reindeer herding communities in Sweden and all are *Riikkacoahkkin* members. The *Riikkacoahkkin* is a member organization of the broader Sámi Council. Each reindeer herding community is an independent legal entity. Within the community, reindeer herding families each have their own herds, and the tradition passes from generation to generation.

Sweden has not recognized Sámi rights to land and waters even though numerous state-appointed investigations by legal experts have stated that the Sámi right to their territories is valid. In 1993, Sweden issued a reform that deprived the reindeer herding communities of influence on hunting management systems. In 2006, the *Riikkacoahkkin* investigated legal options to sue the Swedish state in order to gain small game hunting and fishing rights. They decided to focus on the Girjas reindeer herding community, and in January 2020 the Supreme Court ruled that the Girjas had an exclusive right to small game hunting and fishing; and stated that the Girjas community had the sole right to manage the rights to hunting and fishing and to lease these rights to others based on possession of this territory since time immemorial.<sup>2</sup>

The Sámi show how governance is integrally linked to resource management, subscribing to their long-standing principle of not using more than one needs. The Sámi have progressed significantly at securing and protecting reindeer grazing, upholding sustainable management systems, ensuring local management based on the needs of local Sámi reindeer herding, and revitalizing Sámi societal structures and Sámi spirituality; all to secure the future of Sámi culture.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iwgia.org/en/sapmi/4248-iw-2021-sapmi.html>

SÁMIID  
RIKKASEARVI



a) Native American Land Conservancy | UNITED STATES

The work of the Native American Land Conservancy is focused on three key areas: protecting sacred sites, education and advocacy, and scientific research. Its work is representative of the desires of multiple tribes, and is guided by a majority Indigenous board of directors. Its members are found in the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts, Chaparral and Coastal Scrub, and Colorado Plateau in the Southern California region of the United States. The Native American Land Conservancy supports tribes and promotes tribal engagement in public lands initiatives by directing tribes toward resources for sacred lands protection, providing expertise in tribal outreach, and initiating partnerships between tribes and conservation partners.

The Native American Land Conservancy was founded in 1998 by local tribal elders and community leaders who understood firsthand the connection of Indigenous peoples to their homelands, and who were interested in protecting off-reservation sacred sites in the Southern California desert. It is administered and operated by both Native Americans and non-Natives.

The board represents members of the Indigenous communities it serves and members of federally recognized Indian tribes. A governing board of directors who represent different Native American leaders such as tribal elders and elected leaders, youth, cultural specialists, and ceremonial leaders, make decisions based on a collective process. The nine-member board of directors (seven of whom are Indigenous) include tribal members from five Sovereign Tribes: Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Cahuilla Band of Indians, Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, and the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians. The board also includes other Native American and ally experts in conservation and Native Studies. The Native American Land Conservancy embodies specialized cultural expertise among its board members, tribal elders and representatives, staff, and professional partners and organizations to perform the distinct work it does.

The organization works to continue their rich Native American traditions and spiritual practices through youth and elder exchanges, spiritual ceremonies and community gatherings at sacred sites, and mentorship and training of young leaders and the next generations. Over the 20-year period of the organization young leaders have apprenticed and worked with the elders on the Council to learn about the history and traditions of their tribal lands. Over time, the Elders become advisors or mentors and the younger generation become active members of the Councils. There is much emphasis on cultural continuity and intergenerational leadership of both spiritual values and governance practices.

The Native American Land Conservancy works closely with tribes, voices, and advocates for the lands they care for in a respectful way and has made significant contributions in mentoring other tribes and Native American organizations. The communities including elders, knowledge bearers, youth, families, and leaders directly participate in Native American Land Conservancy endeavors. They have working relationships with conservation partners who recognize the Native American Land Conservancy strong advocacy for the protection and preservation of sacred ancestral lands and tribal peoples.

The Native American Land Conservancy continues to protect and acquire sacred lands across Southeastern California. They currently own and manage sacred land at The Old Woman Mountains Preserve and Coyote Hole. The Conservancy also worked alongside other tribes, conservation groups, and agencies in order to protect the 1640-acre Horse Canyon in the Santa Rosa Mountains.

NATIVE AMERICAN  
LAND CONSERVANCY





a) Udege People, Bikin | RUSSIA

The Udege people number about 1,600 and inhabit more than 1.5 million hectares of pristine *taiga*, or boreal forest, of the sub-arctic Bikin region of the Russian Federation. Their territory makes up the Bikin National Park, implementing a co-management system. This unique model for the Russian protected areas system recognizes, respects, and protects Indigenous peoples' rights to their territory and values their traditional knowledge of resource management.

In 2013, the Russian government decided to create a national park on the Udege territory. A political negotiation process was initiated to discuss establishing a national park after three years of top-level dialogue between the Udege people, the regional government, and Moscow federal officials. The Udege people and the federal government came to an agreement based on an innovative concept of co-management, to share control over the natural resources and forest with recognition of the Udege people's traditional knowledge and customary law.

The Permanent Council of Indigenous Peoples was established under the National Park Management, to lead and consult as an advisory board and self-governance entity on all issues related to Indigenous peoples and their rights to the National Park. The Permanent Council is composed of 12 Indigenous members including hunters, elders, women, and youth who hold weekly meetings to discuss relevant issues related to traditional activities like hunting, fishing regulation, traditional knowledge, and promotion of ecotourism. The Chair of the Council is deputy director of the park in charge of Indigenous issues, and oversees the 70% of the national park territory reserved for traditional activities like hunting, fishing, and non-timber forest production.

The Udege people agreed to the idea of the establishment of a national park to stop massive illegal cutting, commercial large scale timber production, poaching, and overfishing at the Bikin river basin. After fighting for more than 25 years, Udege people have decided to create a more stable and sustainable situation, with most of their demands based on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and a co-management approach. The creation of the Permanent Council, the 70% of the hired staff that are Indigenous, and practice of traditional activities are substantial indicators of the Udege people's fulfilment of their self-determination rights and their self-governance on their traditional territory.

The Udege community controls and leads their own development and future, based on their own vision and values, to manage the sustainable forest use and natural resources. The approach of co-management is based on principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, dialogue, negotiation, respect of rights, and traditional knowledge. This strong example of a national government and Indigenous peoples working together promotes shared and sustainable management of the biodiversity of the Boreal forest.

UDEGE  
COMMUNITY



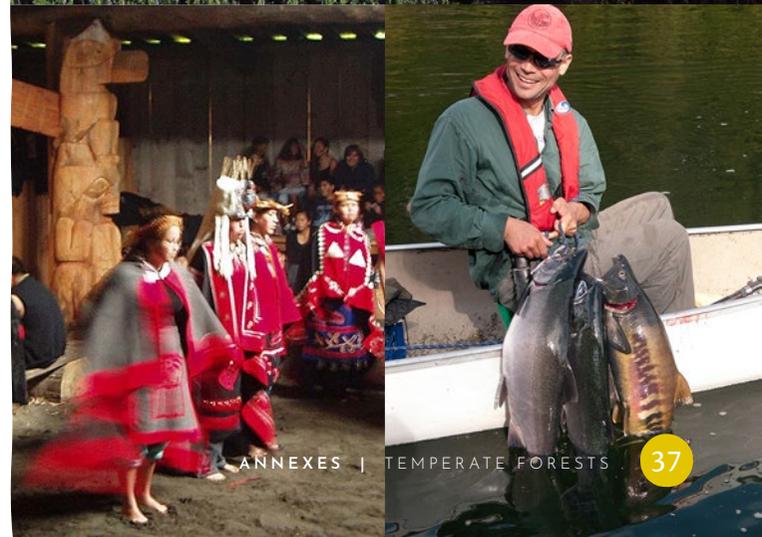
## b) The Heiltsuk | CANADA

The Heiltsuk First Nation are a proud people with a rich history and culture, which over 11,000 years has been woven into what is now British Columbia in western Canada. The lands of the Heiltsuk First Nation cover over 3.5 million hectares, extending from the southern tip of Calvert Island, up Dean and Burke Channels as far as Kimsquit and the head of Dean Inlet to the northeast, and up the Mathieson and Finlayson Channels to the north. The territory is part of the Great Bear Rainforest, one of the largest tracts of unspoiled temperate rainforests in the world. Its streams and rivers along the British Columbia coast sustain 20 percent of the world's wild salmon and more than 400 species of fish. The coast is home to three of British Columbia's five major herring populations—88 percent of spawning rivers for eulachon. Hundreds of watersheds in the region provide critical spawning habitat for approximately 58 percent of all anadromous salmon populations. In addition, over 100 species of marine birds and over 25 species of dolphins, porpoises, pinnipeds, and whales are found in the area.

The Heiltsuk practice a system of governance based on their *ǵvilás* (customary laws), which have been upheld to this day by their Hereditary Chiefs since time immemorial. The Haílzaqv governing body comprises of an elected Chief & Council, who make decisions in collaboration with the *Yimás* (Hereditary Chiefs). For the past decade, the Haílzaqv, along with other coastal First Nations, have strengthened the connections between community, environment, and economy. The people remain steadfast in their conviction that the environment should not be sacrificed to build a healthy coastal economy. The Haílzaqv have led the way in Land and Marine Use Planning, which is integral for the nation in asserting their rights and community values on developments within Haílzaqv ancestral territory. In 1999, the Hereditary Chief directed the people to build an organization focused on creating opportunities for Heiltsuk youth and families to learn on the land and from the land. This order led to the establishment of the Qqs Project Society. For the past 20 years, the society has strived to create and nurture projects, programs, and collaborations that meet community-identified needs and uplift community-rooted strengths and leadership. These activities are believed to be the path to a vibrant and resilient future for the people. The Qqs work benefits from decades and recent political and programmatic leadership, and millennia of strength and values have always been at the heart of Heiltsuk identity.

As part of a reclamation process, the people released the Heiltsuk Constitution. In an address, Chief Marilyn Slett said, "The Constitution, for me, is a reclamation of our Heiltsuk governance. It's an exercise of decolonization: putting out there for the world our Heiltsuk laws and Constitution." The Constitution defines Heiltsuk principles, morals, values, responsibilities, and governance. It is described as a living document that includes Heiltsuk creation stories, homeland maps, membership rights, freedoms and responsibilities, lawmaking authorities, government structure and process, financial law, code of conduct, amendment process, and *ǵvilás* – customary law. Community members describe the passing of the Constitution as a way to make concrete and permanent Heiltsuk jurisdiction over land and resources, along with all aspects of the Heiltsuk world. In addition, the Constitution puts into writing an inherited legacy of over 14,000 years of oral tradition and stewardship practices.

# HEILTSUK NATION



## a) Rapa Nui, Easter Island | CHILE

The Rapa Nui municipality on Easter Island, Chile, has a population of 7,750 who occupy a tropical rainforest of 164 square kilometers. The most isolated inhabited place on the planet, Rapa Nui is an Indigenous territory on a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean about 3,800 kilometers away from Chile and 4,000 kilometers from Tahiti.

The Rapa Nui culture historically belonged to what is known as “chiefdom society”, where clans or tribes worked hierarchically in a pyramidal structure. This structure emerged from each of the Rapa Nui families who recognized a family leader, generally the oldest person of each and the present Honui. This ancestral authority brought together the Rapa Nui families, as they complied with this family structure and ensured their representation in governance. Through the *Indigenous Law*, the people manage and contribute to the conservation of their natural resources, lands and territory, as well as their archaeological and historical heritage.

The Rapa Nui people have worked constantly to defend their territory, environment, and culture, and have long protected their rights as Indigenous peoples. It was only in 1966, after ongoing uprisings and demands of the Rapa Nui people, that the State of Chile recognized them as a people with rights, creating the Department of Easter Island and its Municipality. As a symbol of autonomy, the Rapa Nui people elected their first Mayor, and have since chosen their leaders of the municipality.

The Rapa Nui people’s governance structure has three traditional representative bodies: the Council of Elders, the Rapa Nui Parliament, and the *Honui* or Assembly of Clans which represents the 36 families that make up the municipality. These bodies work in consultation and side by side with the Municipality concerning their demands and needs. The municipal mayor is also a member of the Rapa Nui Council of Elders, the highest representative and traditional body of its people. Having held the position for more than two decades, the mayor addresses the needs of the community and listens to the representatives and traditional bodies of the Rapa Nui people when making decisions that affect them. The Municipal Council, whose members are all Rapa Nui, develops programs for the island. They work on cultural, environmental, social, and human rights initiatives with the cooperation of the Rapa Nui. The Municipal Council has the approval and support of the community, delivering solutions to its people, and maintaining the principles of traditional Rapa Nui customs. The Council organizes conversations that are open to the whole community to tackle the themes that affect the territory. They conduct consultations, identify needs of the people, and determine short, medium, and long-term planning. They execute programs, conduct dialogues with the State, and plan the future of its people.

At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government of Chile removed health restrictions on Easter Island without considering the impending health and humanitarian crisis that could develop, exposing the inhabitants of Rapa Nui to the virus. On the same day, the Municipality of Rapa Nui, to protect their people’s rights, filed a Constitutional Appeal with the High Courts of Chile, requesting that this measure be annulled. This was rejected by the Courts of Chile because a constitutional state of emergency had been declared, allowing the Government to take measures in violation of the rights of its inhabitants.

In a clear manifestation of self-governance, local leaders invoked the ancestral law of the Rapa Nui people, through a measure called *Tapu*, an ancestral concept based on a sacred order of coexistence and respect for the norms of nature, invoking total voluntary quarantine throughout the territory of Easter Island. The entire community in Rapa Nui responsibly abided by this ancestral measure and the disease was managed and controlled on the island.

RAPA  
NUI

