

A visit to local historical sites will be used to inform new Chinook's Edge land acknowledgement

As a part of the process of developing a new land acknowledgement, Chinook's Edge School Division staff members and Indigenous partners visited two local sites of historical significance at the end of October. A handful of staff, who serve as Indigenous Leads in each of their schools, as well as division leaders and Indigenous partners, visited Fort Normandeau and Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park. As well, they stopped for an informational visit with Indigenous Elder John Sinclair.

A land acknowledgement is a statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous peoples who lived in an area prior to the arrival of settlers, and expresses support for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.



School Indigenous Leads, Division leaders and Indigenous partners at Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park in late October

“Our new land acknowledgement will be customized to our region, reflecting the land and the peoples who have lived, worked and learned in this area over centuries,” said Karyn Barber, Associate Superintendent of System Services, Chinook's Edge School Division. “We are being intentional about listening, connecting with Indigenous partners, and with students, staff and communities. As we consider words and phrases, our goal is to ensure the land acknowledgement is meaningful, and aligns with actions we take as we walk the path of Truth and Reconciliation in Chinook's Edge.”

A visit with Elder John Sinclair

Barber said, “We appreciated some time with Elder John Sinclair as he shared his perspective on Truth and Reconciliation, and the importance of taking action by acknowledging the land where we live, learn and grow.”

During the visit Elder John Sinclair advised the group, speaking of the work of reconciliation, “What can we do to make our small steps every day? Look at people through the same eyes - equal eyes. Develop friendships, and relationships, develop understanding, and experience ceremony.”

Fort Normandeau

Barber said, “At Fort Normandeau we reflected on the rich historical space. There is currently a sweat lodge used by Indigenous peoples on the site, and we learned about its healing properties. Also, we reflected on the medicine wheel and the Industrial School that was located there. There was much to learn about the past and present uses of this site.”

Dry Island Buffalo Jump

This site represents untouched and protected lands. “It was easy to envision what the valley looked like years ago, and how Indigenous peoples would have thrived in these spaces,” said Barber.

“I’m grateful it has been preserved in this way. I picture my people camped down here,” said Clare Butterfly, an Indigenous partner. “We need to respect the land. We think about seven generations [in the past] and the seven generations that are going to inherit the land. What we do today matters.”

Reflecting on the day

Patrick Mitsuing, an Indigenous partner, spoke of the need for reconciliation to be based on understanding. He said, “We’re just asking for people to listen and understand, and from there, let’s make a plan moving forward.”

“As we journeyed together, the teachings and time together formed a bond of understanding amongst our group,” said Barber. “Clare Butterfly and Patrick Mitsuing shared historical truths, but also painted a vision of hope and compassion. It was an honour to learn from them, and we appreciate our increased understanding as a result of the day.”

Next steps

As part of the process to develop a new land acknowledgement, the division has collected input from its Teachers Matter, Support Staff Matter, and Students Matter committees and its school based administrators group. That information, along with the understandings gained while visiting Fort Normandeau, Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park, and with Elder John Sinclair will be considered.

A draft statement will be circulated back to the same groups, and once the second round of feedback is complete, Chinook’s Edge will settle on a final land acknowledgement. The division will then work with Indigenous artists to create a graphic representation to go with the land acknowledgement.

In January 2024, schools will have the opportunity to consider creating their own land acknowledgement, based on their local context. They can also choose to utilize the one developed by Chinook’s Edge.



Above: at Fort Normandeau, learning about Indigenous sweat lodges.

Below: A visit with Elder John Sinclair (at the end of the table wearing black and white plaid).



“We recognize that in addition to having a meaningful land acknowledgement, we must also take meaningful actions,” said Barber. “In all of our schools, and in partnership with communities, we see action being taken. We see Indigenous artwork, the use of Cree language, flag displays, and medicine wheels, for instance. All of these are thoughtful actions taken to move forward reconciliation.”

“A special thank you to Indigenous partners, helpers, knowledge keepers and Elders,” said Barber. “We appreciate your participation in leading the learning happening in our schools.”

