

American Eel - Statement on the Project

The American Eel is a juggernaut of a fish that can travel up to 15 kilometers a day and whose traditional home ranges from the Sargasso all the way to what we now call the Kawartha Lakes region. This fantastic fish is the pound for pound king of omega-3, the super acid, and kept First Nations in the land between well fed and in shape for what some estimate to be over 4,000 years¹. This fish brought peoples who would war with each other to peace, this fish created friendships out of those were foreign². However this fish is no longer found in the region and is may never return as a result of industrial developments along the St. Lawrence Seaway and Trent Severn Water system³.



Photo: Rob MacGregor

The historic abundance of the American Eel and its ultimate extirpation from The Land Between merits a spotlight and some involved story telling from both Indigenous and Settlers perspectives to educate Canadians of all backgrounds about this extraordinary Eel. An unflinching look at Indigenous infrastructure such as the fishing weirs will challenge narratives that lead the public to view First Nations as not technologically inclined. This will contrast with the Canadian governments move to industrialize the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Kawartha's via dam construction which many credit as leading to exodus of Eels from the environment we call home.

These comparisons will supply us with questions that may not have an answer, but will provide us with dialogue that encourages education through two way seeing that seeks to reconcile differences between the settler Canadians and First Nations. What would First Nations Reserves like Alderville and Curve Lake look like if they still had access to the American Eel as not only a source of food but a spiritual link to their creator? What would settler Ontario look like without the easy and emission free electricity that hydroelectric dams provide? We may never know these questions but by exploring this discussion First Nations and Canada can learn from the past in a way that will allow both to learn how to coexist and share the land that we live on.

Another part of this project to create awareness about the American Eel is to reconcile the historical actions of the Canadian government against the environment. A major disconnect in Canadian culture is to view ourselves as separate from our environment. The story of the American Eel can show how actions against the environment are synonymous with actions against the people that live within said environment.

Most importantly, this Eel and its history presents to us an opportunity to examine the cultural and spiritual practices of First Nations in this area in a way that raises profile, understanding, but most importantly, respect for these peoples. It is in the interest of all those who inhabit The Land Between to learn about life paths from the First Nations who lived here before and after settlement. This diversification of knowledge and narratives will create more nuanced understandings of life in The Land Between.

Stay tuned for more from The Land Between and our upcoming project on the American Eel.

¹ The Land Between.

² *Idib.*

³ Macgregor, R. *et all.* 2013.