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Article

Boreal Forest Prospects and Politics: Paradoxes of First Nations Participation in Multi-Sector Conservation

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Abstract

This article explores the prospects and politics of indigenous participation in multi-sector conservation—an integrative and proactive new approach to sustaining the integrity of vast natural ecosystems—by presenting the case of the Boreal Leadership Council (BLC), an initiative comprised of Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOs), First Nations groups, resource-extractive corporations, and financial institutions committed to collectively addressing issues impacting Canada's boreal forest. Drawing on multi-sited participant-observation and interviews with BLC members and affiliates, I show how the BLC challenges wilderness-oriented definitions of conservation by undertaking projects that intertwine resource use, land rights, cultural preservation, and political authority, but concurrently perpetuates dominant perspectives by adhering to discursive practices that limit how environmental information can be persuasively presented. Ultimately, I argue that multi-sector conservation creates both new possibilities for indigenous empowerment and new forms of marginalisation through the reproduction of a (post)colonial geography of exclusion in which indigenous participants knowingly and strategically travel from the centre of their own worlds to peripheral positions within a larger—and inherently inequitable—sociopolitical structure.

Keywords: boreal forest, Canada, First Nations, multi-sector conservation, participation

INTRODUCTION

Even as some of the world's indigenous peoples benefit from participation in collaborative conservation initiatives, social scientific research on formal co-management arrangements as well as ad hoc conservation alliances has revealed local citizens' continued marginalisation within the very projects that purport to empower them. This article considers if and how this paradox plays out in a new kind of conservation alliance. In the pages that follow, I explore the prospects and politics of indigenous participation in what I call 'multi-sector conservation'—an integrative and proactive approach to sustaining the integrity of vast natural ecosystems—by examining the case of the BLC, a coalition comprised of ENGOs, First Nations groups, resource-extractive corporations, and financial institutions committed to working together toward "solutions-based dialogue on issues affecting the boreal region of Canada" (BLC 2012: 2). As it happens in the BLC, multi-sector conservation is a conversation among intentionally diverse contributors in which the co-existence and potential complementarity of dissimilar boreal forest uses, values, and knowledges are explicitly celebrated and issues pertaining to First Nations rights and cultures are included as components of an emerging conservation agenda.

Non-Aboriginal BLC participants say they value First Nations perspectives and encourage Aboriginal representatives' continued contributions. As we will see, the group's ongoing discussion of political and cultural concerns indicates that it is taking important steps in this integrative direction. But, as we will also see, the BLC's patterns of information transmission, territorial representation, and interpersonal engagement remain

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limited by the surrounding settler society's expectations and dominant conceptual maps that place Canada's centres of political economic power apart from (and often above) its remote resource frontiers go largely unquestioned.

To bring the paradox of multi-sector conservation into focus, I merge socionatural anthropology's ontologically deconstructive approach and implicit valuation of diverse emic understandings of relationships between people and the places they inhabit with critical discourse theory's attention to how political inequality is constructed and maintained. First, I review the critical literature on indigenous 'participation' in order to set the stage for my consideration of multi-sector conservation within the distinctive context of the BLC and situate my qualitative ethnographic approach. I then offer examples from the BLC case that illustrate multi-sector conservation's ability to move beyond western-centric, wilderness-oriented definitions of conservation by undertaking projects that intertwine resource use, land rights, cultural preservation, and political authority as well as examples that reveal its concurrent capacity to perpetuate mainstream perspectives by adhering to productions and presentations of environmental information (as seen in operating procedures and land use planning processes) accepted as legitimate by dominant decision-makers. In this manner, I ultimately argue that multi-sector conservation simultaneously creates new possibilities for indigenous empowerment and new forms of marginalisation through the reproduction of a (post)colonial geography of exclusion in which indigenous participants knowingly and strategically travel from the centre of their own worlds to peripheral positions within a larger—and inherently inequitable—sociopolitical structure.

As I conducted multi-sited participant-observation and interviews with BLC members and affiliates, I found that while the coalition includes indigenous individuals and ideas and poses a challenge to the inequitable system within which it exists, it still simultaneously but subtly undermines the influence of indigenous participants who inevitably take part on terms that are not fully their own. Beyond my original objective of power-structural assessment, research in five First Nations communities affiliated with the BLC convinced me that indigenous participants are acutely aware of the political paradoxes that complicate and sometimes constrain their decisions and degrees of participation. This suggests not only that indigenous contributors possess a conscious strategic agency too frequently unacknowledged in the global collaborative conservation literature, but also that academic attempts to identify why alliances succeed or fail—which often hinges on indigenous citizens' decisions to accept or oppose imported initiatives—must attend seriously to indigenous individuals' immediate intentions and long-term goals. I consequently conclude by considering the implications and applications of the BLC case.

Participation and paradox

> It is precisely when multiple voices are made to speak in the name of the One that we need to be most alert to what has been left out (Braun 2002: 5).

Critical analysts have detected a contradiction at the heart of 'multicultural' and 'participatory' frameworks. As Cherokee indigenous scholar Andrea Smith (2008: 13) argues, the multicultural ideal encourages us to "include as many voices as possible," yet the dominant culture tends to embrace such inclusion only insofar as the knowledge and viewpoints of indigenous, minority, and other marginalised peoples can be incorporated into a predetermined mainstream politics or discourse. Charles Hale (2002: 490), a vocal critic of what he calls "neoliberal multiculturalism" in Central America, observes that even as it appears to respond to the demands of oppressed and excluded groups, multiculturalism structures the space cultural rights activists are able to occupy by "defining the language of contention," determining which rights are legitimate, and declaring which forms of political action are acceptable. Critics of participatory development have similarly suggested that the actual effects of efforts to encourage participation are often diametrically opposed to the stated goal of empowering local people, serving instead to facilitate outsiders' exercise of power and perpetuate systemic inequity (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2006).

Taken together, these assessments indicate that members of marginalised groups confront difficult questions not faced—and frequently not even recognised—by members of more dominant groups: 1) is more to be gained by achieving empowerment within an imposed system or by working independently outside of it? 2) does the path toward the best possible future lead through pragmatic compromise and willingness to discuss imperative (and inseparable) environmental, cultural, and political issues in terms dictated by the surrounding settler society or through a refusal to reinforce those terms' dominance?

Echoing the paradox posed by other participatory processes, examinations of conservation alliances have revealed complex combinations of benefits and limitations. Western conservationists' relatively recent realisation that local people often have a greater interest in using resources sustainably, are more aware of ecological processes and practices, and are better prepared to integrate local customs into resource management than any distant state or corporate entity (Brosius et al. 1998: 158) has encouraged the development of partnerships with indigenous groups. A wide variety of on-the-ground activities have followed, including cooperative supervision of protected areas and wildlife (Nadasdy 2003a,b; Natcher, Davis, and Hickey 2005; Natcher and Davis 2007), numerous regional manifestations of "community-based conservation" (Brosius et al. 1998; Berkes 2004; Brosius et al. 2005), and joint international media campaigns designed to combat the destruction of sensitive ecological systems (Conklin and Graham 1995; Brosius 1997).

Although collaborating with conservation groups has brought substantial gains to some indigenous communities, the ultimate goals of indigenous activists have frequently been found to differ dramatically from those of outsiders (Fisher 1994; Willow 2012). Focusing on the environment offers a narrative anchor that makes it possible for indigenous

communities to translate their concerns into a language of environmentalist symbols that inspires broad public support, but "these translations often involve important distortions of indigenous perspectives that eventually resurface and often create feelings of betrayal between former allies" (Blaser, Feit, and McRae 2004: 10-11; see also Conklin and Graham 1995). In the Canadian context, Paul Nadasdy has written extensively about the "mixed blessing" of land claims and natural resource co-management in the Yukon Territory; while these processes give the appearance of increasing First Nations citizens' ability to control their lives and land, Nadasdy (2003a: 9) suggests, they "may instead be acting as subtle extensions of empire, replacing local Aboriginal ways of talking, thinking, and acting with those specifically sanctioned by the state" (also see Natcher and Davis 2007). While a full review of the literature on this topic is outside the scope of this article, variations on the collaborative conservation paradox have been described by scholars working in Malaysia (Brosius 1997), Papua New Guinea (West 2006), India (Fortun 2001), Brazil (Conklin and Graham 1995), the Canadian Arctic (Nuttall 1998), and British Columbia (Howlett et al. 2009). Given that forming alliances entails presenting concerns in terms that are understood and accepted by outsiders, but which may be deeply at odds with their own ways of understanding the world and their place in it, indigenous decision makers in all of these cases have faced the challenging questions identified above.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS: MULTI-SECTOR CONSERVATION, MULTI-SITED RESEARCH

The BLC differs from previously documented forms of collaborative conservation. At the time of my research, the BLC had 21 members, including six environmental groups (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Forest Ethics, The Nature Conservancy, The Pembina Institute, World Wildlife Fund Canada), five First Nations groups (Dehcho First Nations, Innu Nation, Kaksa Nation, Poplar River First Nation, Treaty 8 First Nations), six financial institutions (Bâtirente, Calvert, Desjardins, Domini, NEI Investments, TD Bank Group), three timber companies (Alberta-Pacific, Domtar, Tembec), and one energy company (Suncor) (Figure 1). An Ottawa-based group called the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI) serves as the BLC's secretariat and convener. Although the BLC works at a national level with the goal of influencing public policy and legislative action, it deliberately does not include municipal, provincial, or federal government representatives.

First Nations BLC members include subarctic indigenous groups with diverse historical experiences and contemporary concerns. With the exception of the Poplar River First Nation (an Anishinaabe community on Lake Winnipeg's eastern shore), participants are organisations that represent multiple communities within a designated political, cultural, and/or geographical boundary.[1] It should be noted that only a small number of the hundreds of Aboriginal communities in

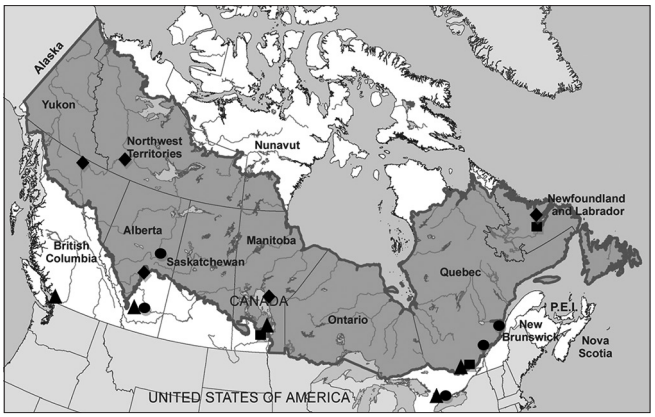


Figure 1

This map illustrates the geographic boundaries of Canada's boreal forest and the wide distribution of the Boreal Leadership Council, including First Nations groups (♦), private-sector representatives (●), environmental NGOs (▲), and CBI staff (■). Multiple private-sector and environmental NGO representatives are based in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal

Source: ***Base map adapted from Boreal Songbird Initiative, (http://borealbirds.org/publications/canadas-boreal-forest, used with permission acquired by the author)***

Canada's boreal region are represented within the BLC and that affiliated First Nations entities are heterogeneous, with significant diversity among community members concerning views of both collaboration and conservation. While this article emphasises First Nations involvement in the BLC and its internal dynamics, valuable future scholarship might constructively consider the factors that limit First Nations communities' involvement in such initiatives. To be clear, I do not claim to speak for indigenous individuals. This work is informed by ethnographic research conducted among First Nations BLC representatives, but should not be taken to represent the views of the BLC's past, present, or future First Nations participants. BLC participants were given the opportunity to review an earlier article draft and all who responded affirmed the value of this work. Still, the interpretations and analyses offered here necessarily remain my own.

The BLC has its origins in conversations that began in the early 2000s between leaders of the Pew Charitable Trusts' Boreal Conservation Campaign and Ducks Unlimited Canada about how to instigate change in the Canadian context. In most cases, BLC members got involved organically, with participation in the new coalition occurring as a logical outgrowth of existing projects and partnerships. Several environmental NGOs were already working on boreal conservation and were eager to come to the table. First Nations groups saw the initiative as an opportunity for networking and a chance to obtain support for ongoing and emerging projects. Resource-extractive companies were enthusiastic about a new way to demonstrate green credentials to an increasingly discerning public.[2] The BLC's founding members came together in 2003 to produce the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework, an eight-page document that articulates the goal of preserving half of Canada's boreal forest

in a network of interconnected protected areas and encouraging sustainable use of the remaining portion (CBI 2003). Endorsement of the Framework is implied in BLC membership, but participants are free to—and often do—emphasise one side of the equation.[3] Although its paramount purpose is the conservation of boreal ecosystems, respect for Aboriginal lands, rights, and cultures figure prominently among the Framework's guiding principles (CBI 2003, 2008). Reflected in its deliberate inclusion of indigenous and industrial contributors, the BLC is founded upon the conviction that a wide variety of human perspectives, uses, and values will play essential roles in a sustainable boreal future.

I purposefully use the novel phrase 'multi-sector conservation' to underscore the fact that the BLC differs from previously documented alliances. First, rather than a coalition formed by (usually non-local) conservationists and (often indigenous) local citizens to address a delineated set of environmental concerns, the BLC seeks long-term solutions that are political and economic as well as environmental. With environmentalist members who hope to protect as much of the forest as possible, First Nations members who wish to continue living in forest homelands and asserting their rights within them, and corporate members interested in developing boreal resources for sustainable profit, the BLC is designed to foster dialogue among diverse and distant groups. Second, while productive partnerships between indigenous North Americans and those of European descent have sometimes developed when a shared external enemy poses an immediate and urgent threat to a particular area (Grossman 2005), the BLC works at a national (as opposed to a local) level and in a proactive (rather than a reactive) manner. The BLC purposefully selects projects that enable the group to work at a high level, be pragmatic, and address cross-cutting themes relevant to all members. The immensity of its geographic area of interest—over 3.5 million square kilometres—ensures that ecological and cultural diversity is confronted constantly. Given these unique elements, focusing on the BLC case allowed me to consider whether the group's intentionality, proactive approach, national scope, and extra-governmental operation might produce a dynamic different from that of a paradoxical pattern documented in other kinds of collaborative conservation. In addition, while conservation partnerships in more southerly locales have received a considerable amount of critical anthropological attention, those in the North—which are contoured by dramatically different cultural and political realities, distinctive demographic and historical factors, and an exceptional climate and ecology—have gone comparatively unaddressed.

I conducted multi-sited research in 2012 and 2013 with the overlapping objectives of tracing the BLC network's internal interactions and learning as much as I could about the cultural and political dimensions of First Nations participation in the BLC. In a contemporary world characterised by constant circulations of people and ideas, the traditional ethnographic model (research in one place for an extended period) has become ill-suited for addressing many of our most pressing problems.[4] As proposed by George Marcus, recent changes in anthropology's prevailing "research imaginary" mean that "tracing and describing the connections and relationships among sites previously thought incommensurate *is* ethnography's way of making arguments and providing its own context of significance" (1997:14). Rather than seeking to uncover the holistic workings of life in one location, therefore, today's multi-sited ethnography follows connections, associations, and relationships through time and space.

While the BLC's secretariat, the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI), has offices in Ottawa, BLC members and CBI employees live and work throughout Canada (as illustrated by Figure 1). With the semi-annual exception of two-day BLC meetings, no single location exists in which the group's operations can be observed and its members engaged. Because I wished to position First Nations as centres of their own worlds rather than peripheral satellites of a centralised structure (Nesper 2002; Willow 2015)—and keeping with my implicit goal of challenging conceptual inequities rather than perpetuating them—I visited each of the Aboriginal BLC members within their home territories.[5] In these locations, I conducted focused participant-observation research, placing myself in situations relevant to the topics of human-environment interactions, conservation, and collaboration with external groups. I asked local residents to show me the land in order to gain an understanding of each region's territory and ecology and, even more importantly, of how First Nation residents comprehend and utilise the landscapes they inhabit.[6] I had opportunities to learn about local relationships to the forest, obtain a fundamental appreciation of specific cultural and political contexts, and conduct semi-structured interviews with individuals who have worked with the BLC. In addition to interviewing BLC representatives in each location, I interacted with family members of BLC participants, land/environment office staff and consultants, band councillors, elders, and various other community members. In order to facilitate a fuller view of the social and political dynamics that contour and complicate interactions between BLC members, I also attended a BLC meeting as an invited observer, conducted numerous telephone interviews with CBI employees and non-Aboriginal BLC members, and completed content analyses of documents produced by the BLC, CBI, and individual First Nations groups.[7]

My examination was guided by two interrelated questions and informed by two underlying—and also interrelated—theoretical perspectives. I began by asking how First Nations BLC members' conceptions of the boreal forest—and their correlated motives for taking action to protect it—converge and/or contrast with Euro-Canadian views. This inquiry arises from the notion (well-accepted within the humanistic social sciences, but still considered radical in some disciplines) that what we call 'nature' may be best understood not as a predetermined external given but as an intrinsically hybrid amalgamation of physical and social realities. Recent work in human geography, political ecology, and landscape anthropology has made this compelling case. As geographer

Erik Swyngedouw notes, "contemporary scholars increasingly recognise that natural or ecological conditions and processes do not operate separately from social processes, and that the actually existing socionatural conditions are always the result of intricate transformations of pre-existing configurations that are themselves inherently natural *and* social" (1999:445; see also Castree 2001; Braun 2002). Political ecological studies have also investigated these complex intersections to reveal natural environments as an inevitable "by-product of human conceptualizations, activities, and regulations" (Biersack 2006:4), while scholars in the landscape anthropology genre have explored the diversity of relationships between peoples and places as well as the culturally distinctive ways of comprehending the world that infuse these relationships (Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Feld and Basso 1996; Willow 2011a). By emphasising how people make sense of the worlds they inhabit, the socionatural anthropological approach that arises from this conceptual foundation is helpful for making sense of BLC members' diverse understandings of the forest they collectively work to conserve.

With its profoundly political and characteristically comparative stance, critical discourse theory compelled me to carry this question a step further. In anthropological parlance, 'discourse' refers to "a particular mode of communication; a field characterised by its own linguistic conventions, which both draws on and generates a distinctive way of understanding the world" (Milton 1996:167). Building on Foucault's major genealogical works (1979, 1980a,b), discourse has become widely recognised as a dynamic arena of social and political struggle (see also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Because powerful institutions are able to assert authority by determining what can be said and thought (Nadasdy 2003a:10), the hegemonic ability to direct and constrain the production of discourse—which includes how concepts are defined and how issues are discussed—serves as an important aspect and indicator of social power (Fairclough 1992). Most significantly, therefore, I wondered whose visions and valuations of the boreal forest prevail in the BLC's discussions and decisions. Does the BLC promote indigenous peoples' empowerment by giving an equal—or a nearly equal—voice to their distinctive ways of understanding the boreal forest or, conversely, are Aboriginal ideas more often inserted into a still-dominant Euro-Canadian conceptual framework?

People understand the environment (in general) and forests (in particular) in very different ways. In cases of cross-cultural encounter, it is not only individuals but also the ideas they carry that compete for acceptance and influence. "If nature is nothing if not social," Noel Castree notes, "it's also unavoidably political" (2001:18). Because culturally conceived natural worlds are both constituted and contested through discursive production and articulation (in both senses of the word), a socionatural perspective is inevitably also a political perspective. In subsequent sections, I intertwine theory and ethnography to illustrate how these interrelationships unfold in the multi-sector conservation context of the BLC.

ARGUMENTS AND ANALYSES

(Re)defining conservation

I sat at the kitchen table with Ray and Sophia Rabliauskas at Poplar River First Nation's Sagatay Lodge guesthouse, eager to learn what steps their community had taken to conserve the 5356-square-kilometres of intact boreal forest that comprise its traditional territory and figure out how membership in the BLC fit into a much bigger picture. We sipped decaf as the late summer evening slowly faded into night. Married for three decades, Ray and Sophia took turns telling me what they had done and why. Watching other Anishinaabe First Nations being adversely affected by logging, mining, and hydroelectric development, they said, elders and community leaders realised by the 1980s that their way of life would not survive unless it could be experienced out on the land. Today more than ever, diabetes runs rampant. The legacies of residential schooling have caused losses of language, culture, and confidence. The community's youth yearn to connect to their elders and their land, as they did at healing camps held for several years in the remote heart of Poplar River's traditional territory.

Realising that healthy forests and waters for future generations demanded some form of legal protection today, Poplar River's leaders initiated a decades-long planning process that entailed land use and occupancy studies, archaeological surveys, mapping, and collaborations with numerous consultants. The resulting 86-page document is called the *Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan* (Poplar River First Nation 2010). Sophia took a moment to reflect on the unfairness inherent in having to convince the Province of Manitoba that Anishinaabe presence in the region has a long history and that Aboriginal people are capable of competent land management—things Poplar River residents have known all along. It was sad, she lamented, that they were obliged to fit their knowledge and beliefs into someone else's framework. But, she and Ray concurred, it was worth it because it worked. Poplar River's territory is now legally recognised and new provincial legislation places the authority to manage and protect what is formally known as the *Asatiwisipi Aki Traditional Territory* with the First Nation, guaranteeing that resource-extractive development will not occur without Anishinaabe involvement.[8] Working with the CBI and becoming a BLC member helped Poplar River secure imperative logistical and financial support for the culminating decade of this process.

Our conversation began with queries about conservation, but flowed from fears for the environment and plans to protect it into a wide range of topics most outsiders would regard as unrelated to nature and its conservation. That night, I learned that Poplar River residents are well-aware of the trade-offs their multi-faceted strategy demands. Equally important, it became clear that controlling and conserving the land are means to an ultimate end of sustaining Poplar River's people and culture rather than ends in themselves. I recalled how, earlier in the year, a forester for the Innu Nation had eloquently explained

that the projects and tasks his organisation takes on may vary, but "the central pillar of the Innu Nation is ensuring the survival of the Innu people."[9] Indeed, whenever I asked First Nations BLC affiliates why they chose to take part in conservation activities and alliances, I heard first about treaty rights, cultural preservation, and land-based subsistence.

By the time I visited BLC representatives from Treaty 8, Dehcho First Nations, and Kaska Nation in the summer of 2013, I was not surprised to find that western Canadian First Nations likewise wish to control and conserve the lands that make their survival as culturally distinct and politically autonomous entities possible. In June of that year, Jim Webb (advisor for two different Treaty 8 First Nations) explained that the guiding vision of the groups he works with has long revolved around their ambition to "regain as much control or influence as they could within their territories by whatever means became possible."[10] In the far northern landscape of the Northwest Territories, too, where ongoing land, resource, and governance negotiations dominate the current Dehcho First Nations agenda, political leaders I spoke with conveyed the same desire to retain and/or regain control of their landbase and described alliances with conservation groups as valuable vehicles for protecting Dehcho Dene land and culture. And, among the Kaska Dena of northeastern British Columbia and southeastern Yukon, the struggle for survival inspires the same concerned citizens to assert their sovereignty through an active presence on the land, invest in language revitalisation and youth programs, and form strategic partnerships that promote Kaska control of sportshunting, mining, and oil and gas development.

Although their histories and contemporary challenges are diverse, the BLC representatives from Poplar River, Innu Nation, Treaty 8 First Nations, Dehcho First Nations, and Kaska Nation I spoke with all described the health of the environment as inseparable both from their own survival and from their political efforts to ensure their ability to practice the land-based subsistence on which they physically, culturally, and spiritually depend. This long-term goal informs and inspires First Nations participation in the BLC, even in the face of acknowledged asymmetries.

Conservation beyond wilderness

Customary First Nations environmental relationships contrast markedly with prevailing western approaches to conservation. Generations of ethnographers of Anishinaabe (Hallowell 1955), Innu (Speck 1935; Lips 1947; Henriksen 1973), and Northern Athabaskan (Mason 1946; Nelson 1983; Ridington 1988; Goulet 1998; Legat 2012) boreal forest inhabitants have revealed close reciprocal relationships between humans and non-human persons that include not only animals, but also plants, topographical features, celestial bodies, and supernatural beings. In this cultural framework, the lines outsiders draw around environmental and social subjects make little sense. Conversely built upon solid ontological separations of nature from culture and environment from humanity, western conservation has historically emphasised non-human species and proposed protected areas that bear little evidence of humans and their activities (Castree 2001). Recurrent clashes have been waged in the chasm between these dissimilar views (e.g., Keller and Turek 1999; Dowie 2009), leading Fikret Berkes to argue in his evaluation of the achievements and challenges of community-based conservation that building the broader conservation constituencies many now desire will demand the development of a "cross-cultural pluralist definition of conservation" (2004:629).

Taking a socionatural approach means exploring disorderly places where diverse conceptions of nature collide with asymmetrical sociopolitical structures; as Braun petitions, "the notion that nature is socially constructed, rather than a pure identity external to society, forces us to take responsibility for *how* this remaking of nature occurs, in *whose* interests, and with *what* consequences" (2002:13). At issue is not only the expedience of adopting—and thereby empowering—dominant ways of defining and doing conservation, but also the primacy of the socionatural worlds that give rise to them. Seen in this light, the paradox of indigenous participation appears rooted in a disjuncture between, on the one hand, a socialised natural world in which conservation is one component of a multifaceted agenda that interweaves environmental protection, cultural survival, and political autonomy and, on the other, a wilderness conservation model with a history of assiduously avoiding human concerns (Cronon 1995; Nash 2001).

Given Berkes' call and the troubled histories, reviewed above, that have confounded so many attempts to build effective and equitable partnerships, I would not have been surprised to discover that western definitions of conservation were limiting the BLC's scope, nor to find that the systematic exclusion of themes not sanctioned by standard state-scientific conventions was perpetuating patterns of political domination. I expected to see the paradox: should First Nations participants condone the exclusion of humans from 'nature' by highlighting only agenda items that fit neatly into western conservation's characteristic categories (thus increasing the likelihood that these aspects will be accepted and acted upon) or should they speak their own environmental/cultural/political version of conservation to power (at the risk of inciting misunderstandings that send their most urgent concerns to the sidelines)? In fact, I found that First Nations BLC participants are not asked to make this choice. Instead, it appears that non-Aboriginal members are taking steps toward the kind of (re)definition Berkes advocates.[11] By refusing to separate natural features from social realities, the BLC joins a growing group of global agencies working to push conservation beyond wilderness.[12]

Cognisant of the multi-sector model's self-conscious inclusion of multiple points of view, BLC members know before they arrive that others' perspectives will differ from their own. Non-Aboriginal members know that First Nations people see the forest as a source of subsistence from which their cultural identities and intergenerational histories cannot be disentangled. And Aboriginal members know that Euro-Canadians also look to the forest as a source of

economic sufficiency, mediated in most cases by the sale of natural resources for money. As former CBI director Larry Innes explained, "instead of being a uni-dimensional lens on an issue—an environmental perspective, or an economy perspective, or an Aboriginal perspective—it really requires all three perspectives to be looked at together and through each other."[13] The conversations I had with other CBI employees similarly indicated that there is room in the BLC for conserving the boreal to mean different things to different people. The BLC has no codified collective definition of conservation because it can't. Rather than engaging in explicit debates about what conservation should mean, therefore, it is in the group's chosen emphases that the implicit challenge to dominant versions of a distant 'nature' to be conserved lies.

Focus on FPIC (Free, Prior, and Informed Consent)

The BLC had existed for ten years. The anniversary was noted by a CBI staffer as attendees at the semi-annual BLC meeting—held this time in Thunder Bay, Ontario—shifted their attention from a PowerPoint presentation summarising affiliates' recent activities in Manitoba to the intense strategic planning session that would fill the remainder of the meeting's second and final day (Figure 2). The time had come to take stock of a decade of accomplishments, revisit and rethink policies surrounding membership and financing, and select the focal areas that would guide the coalition through its next three years. As the afternoon wore on, the BLC's current foci were written on a marker board: First Nations rights, species at risk (especially caribou), and sustainable development (including regional conservation assessments). Dave Porter, former chair of the Kaska Dena Council and current chief executive of the British Columbia First Nations Energy and Mining Council, was enthusiastic about finding ways to support land-based training workshops for young people. A suggestion to emphasise communication and public awareness completed the list. In the end, a straw poll revealed an inconclusive verdict, since members not present at the meeting would need to have their views accounted for. But, of the two areas that received the most votes—First Nations rights and sustainable development—both were current focal areas and both united social and environmental concerns.

Figure 2
BLC members and affiliates hear an overview of issues and accomplishments in Manitoba (November 8, 2012; photo by author)

Based on my conversations with First Nations BLC members (who say they are drawn to the group for its willingness to talk about Aboriginal and treaty rights) and non-Aboriginal members (who see the BLC's inclusion of First Nations participants within a multi-stakeholder group as a distinctive advantage that helps them stay abreast of a rapidly changing reality), keeping First Nations rights on the agenda seemed a sensible choice. In fact, one of the most active working groups in recent years has focused on free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), which advances the principle that indigenous people have the right to "participate in decisions affecting their lands and resources" (BLC 2012:3).[14] In September 2012, the BLC released a 34-page report intended to educate members' peer organisations about free, prior, and informed consent in Canada (BLC 2012). The group that produced this document began work on the topic of industry best practices, which contributors quickly realised was far too broad.[15] In 2010, the BLC commissioned The Firelight Group (a British Columbia-based consulting firm that offers research and technical support related to First Nations land and resource issues) to prepare a report on the current state of FPIC in Canada (BLC 2012:2). Working in close consultation with the firm's consultants, the BLC went on to produce and publish a concise document that introduces the council and its vision, places the FPIC concept in its international and Canadian contexts, and sequentially expounds on the meanings of FPIC's constituent terms.[16] A chart summarising dozens of lessons learned and four case studies describing diverse relationships between natural resource developers and First Nations communities are included as appendices.

Two months after the report's introduction, the FPIC working group gathered to reflect on what they had accomplished and plan their next steps. Among the one environmental, one First Nations, and four private-sector members in attendance, the consensus affirmed the project as a success—even, some felt, the most successful project the BLC had ever completed. Yet concerns remained. This was a project and a publication that could impact First Nations people directly. And theirs was a working group composed mainly of Euro-Canadian professionals. The imbalance seemed to weigh on everyone in the room. Equally troubling was the lack of First Nations feedback; they had circulated the FPIC document widely and heard nearly nothing in response. A copy had gone directly to the chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN)—the national organisation that advocates on behalf of Canada's 634 First Nations communities—and he had expressed appreciative support, but that was the extent of it. The question of how to gather feedback from First Nations communities dominated the rest of the 90-minute session. Ed Hudson, a band councillor from Poplar River and the only Aboriginal person in the room, was asked what they could do. Quietly, he proposed working

not just at the national level but "with" and "in" communities as well. Pressed by a private-sector member for more specific advice, he said "people are always willing to sit down."[17] As I looked around the room and later, as I reflected on the exchange, it was unclear whether or not the Euro-Canadian BLC members grasped what Ed was suggesting.

The inability of the AFN—or any other national body—to fully and accurately represent a unified First Nations perspective made more sense after a long conversation with Jim Webb the following summer. Unlike private-sector BLC members, for whom membership in national trade organisations and institutionalised operating patterns provide unambiguous sectoral nuclei, First Nations participants have no clear geographical or administrative centre (see note 7). In the BLC context, the absence of a cohesive centre has hampered First Nations participants' ability to determine the coalition's direction and set the terms of its debates. Not only are there simply too few First Nations representatives present at most BLC meetings, but as Jim put it, "because there's no centre in the Aboriginal participation it's hard to be able to manage what you're talking about." At the same time, Jim told me, for the majority of Aboriginal Canadians, their own First Nation is the largest political organisation with any semblance of reality. This conflicts with the BLC's intentionally and explicitly national focus. Discord arises, he explained, because "First Nations don't have issues at a national level…we have issues at a local level that sometimes can be elevated to a regional level."[18] While First Nations BLC members see both local projects and national engagement as critical to the future of land-based subsistence and self-determination, therefore, these activities transpire in largely separate realms.

At the end of the working group meeting, I was left contemplating two problems. First, what did FPIC have to do with boreal forest conservation? In fact, after the initial description of the BLC and its vision, the FPIC document contains no explicit reference to forest protection. Did it make sense to continue thinking of the BLC as a conservation initiative? The answer, of course, hinges on how conservation is defined. As I reviewed the group's history, examined CBI staff profiles, and reread the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework's long list of goals, principles, and commitments, I came to the conclusion suggested by the two previous section titles— '(Re)Defining Conservation' and 'Conservation Beyond Wilderness'—and summarised above. The overarching goal of the BLC is indeed the long-term protection of Canada's boreal forest. If we are willing to accept First Nations rights as a conservation concern—and, more specifically, to move beyond believing conservation means merely protecting this or that plot of land and instead acknowledge that, in the long-run, we may be better served by laying the groundwork for constructive conversations between parties with very different visions of the forest's future—it appears that the BLC is carrying conservation in imperative new directions.

My second question returns us to the paradox of First Nations participation. Given that the BLC is addressing issues of critical concern to Aboriginal members, what could be keeping them from contributing more actively? Even as the BLC expands the definitional boundaries of conservation in ways that increase First Nations participants' ability to take part on terms that are closer to their own, it appears that indigenous contributions are still sometimes undercut by wider societal expectations governing how environmental information can be effectively produced and presented, where and with whom centres of power and knowledge are located, and (to put it simply) in what ways important work should be done. It is to this topic that we now turn.

Crossing borders

Sophia Rabliauskas told me, "it was within our rights to continue to live here...we survived and lived in this area for thousands of years. Any First Nations [person] will tell you that's what they would have liked to have done, without any intrusion from the government."[19] She wanted me to know that indigenous people would like to occupy the centre of their own worlds rather than the margins of someone else's. Anthropological observers, too, have called for "alternative cultural histories" that place indigenous people not on the edge of "the modern world-system but at the center of local systems of the world" (Nesper 2002:6). Yet in contemporary Canada—as in other historically colonised regions—living without intrusion is rarely a viable option. With Aboriginal worlds altered by generations of coercive assimilatory policy (Miller 1991) and the pervasive presence of external cultural, political, and economic influences, the distinction between 'modern' and 'indigenous' has become increasingly blurred (Powell and Curley 2009; Willow 2011b) and the decision to refuse external engagement increasingly difficult.

In his treatise on the modern world-system, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) describes the inherently inequitable economic arrangement that permits raw materials and labour extracted from zones of 'peripheral' production to accumulate in consumptive 'cores.' Wallerstein was influenced by Andre Gunder Frank (1966) who, along with other dependency theorists, argued that the underdevelopment of some regions is directly linked to the development of others in a shared but uneven structure. The impoverishment of areas long referred to as the 'third' and 'fourth' worlds can, in this view, only be explained relative to the unprecedented wealth of the 'first' world's capitalist centres. The political imbalance of world economic interchange is now a standard element of social scientific theory, but it is only more recently that these concepts have been extended to address ideological flows. With local issues linked to dominant ideologies in ways that privilege core concerns (Doane 2007:452), the unequal articulation between powerful 'core' and marginalised 'peripheral' ideas parallel those traced by earlier economic models.

Human geographer David Sibley uses the phrase "geographies of exclusion" to refer both to the mechanisms of physical separation employed to distance different and/or dangerous 'others' from mainstream society and the processes

of ideological exclusion used to legitimise dominant forms of knowledge as authoritative statements about the world while dismissing the knowledge of marginalised groups as quaint ethnographic expressions (1995:122). Just as world-systems and dependency theorists demand that we understand wealth and poverty, empowerment and disempowerment as relative constructions, Sibley argues that ideological exclusion must be understood in relative terms. "Knowledge which has gained legitimacy" he suggests, "has often maintained its status to the exclusion of conflicting ideas" (1995:115). Important implications follow: when ideas meet and compete for primacy, the playing field is rarely even. And, whether encounters between members of differently positioned groups occur by choice or by necessity, it is through such encounters that peripheralisation is produced. This theoretical framework suggests that participation in core processes—including the participatory development and co-management projects noted above as well as the multi-sector conservation currently under consideration—would be poised to exacerbate the systemic inequity indigenous people and their supporters seek to counter.

Even as I found a broad and unexpected acceptance of an integrative conservation paradigm, I observed how this contrasting dynamic influences the BLC's interactions and core assumptions. The dominant conceptual map of Canada is premised upon a geography of exclusion that is both spatial and ontological. The roughly three-quarters of Canadians who live within 160 kilometres of the US border have alternately tended to view the vast northern forest as a sparsely populated wilderness or a remote resource extraction frontier (Bocking 2011). When First Nations participants come to the BLC, they speak proudly as boreal forest residents, but they also speak from places seen by most Canadians as peripheral and—sometimes quite literally—off the map. BLC participants sit at the same table, but they come from different worlds. The BLC brings them together for four days each year, but their lives are punctuated by different kinds of conversations and different temporal realities for the remaining 361.[20] In his discussion of exclusion, Sibley raises the issue of border crossing—moving, literally or figuratively, "from a familiar space to an alien one which is under the control of somebody else" (1995:32)—to argue that the enforcement of physical and conceptual boundaries has often served to exclude marginalised groups. In (post)colonial Canada, the question is no longer only about who *cannot* cross boundaries, but also about who *must* cross them.

If, as a collective entity, the BLC wishes to remain prominent and respected in Canada's political and economic centres, it must work in ways deemed credible, efficient, and effective in these settings. As a result, the desire to succeed in influencing government and corporate policy results in the subtle sidelining of contributions that appear irrelevant to the matter at hand or unlikely to be taken seriously by powerful outsiders. After experiencing the purposeful but unhurried passage of time with First Nations BLC participants in Labrador and Poplar River, I was struck by the contrasting *modus operandi* at the BLC meeting in Thunder Bay, where the group's sustained intensity and drive to accomplish as much as possible in a short period of time was palpable. When First Nations people working within the discourses and systems they seek to change encounter a goal-oriented style borrowed from the boardroom, they are the ones who cross invisible borders. In this context of dissimilarity and systemic sociopolitical disparity, the perceived need for efficient and effective operation helps explain why the FPIC working group would have been hard pressed to follow Ed Hudson's recommendation that they sit down to talk "with" and "in" First Nations communities.

It also helps explain why Aboriginal ways of producing and presenting environmental information sometimes get overshadowed or displaced. Throughout the North American subarctic, indigenous learning is rooted in personal experience. Drawing on fieldwork among the Dene Tha of northern Alberta, Jean-Guy Goulet suggests that for Dene and other subarctic peoples' true knowledge means firsthand knowledge and, conversely, knowledge gained through instruction alone is regarded as suspect. "To know is to perceive directly with one's senses or with one's mind," Goulet observes, therefore "what one has not experienced or perceived directly, one does not know" (1998:34; see also Legat 2012). This is in many ways antithetical to western notions of knowledge as an object that can be stripped of its original context, (re) packaged into digestible fragments, and sometimes even bought and sold. While the digital age has engendered a global citizenry accustomed to instantaneous access to nearly infinite information, emplaced and contextualised knowledge born of careful observation and personal involvement is extremely time consuming. It is not at all 'efficient.'

Plans and peripheries

CBI staff describe 'leadership'—the *L* in BLC—as an ability to take a proactive, pragmatic, and balanced approach.[21] This kind of leadership—along with a willingness to compromise in order to achieve political gains within the broader Canadian legal/regulatory structure—is evident in the land use/management planning undertaken by all five First Nations BLC participants.[22] A recent review of 12 First Nations land use plans (including those produced by Poplar River—noted in section 3.1—and Dehcho First Nations) revealed that although many plans "clearly articulated a cultural foundation, emphasizing their past history of planning, their culture and their concerns around representing and maintaining Aboriginal and Treaty rights and Title, in the end these Nations were thrown back into utilizing planning techniques that are utterly non-Indigenous in philosophy, tenets and application" (Booth and Muir 2011:435). The authors hypothesise a lack of available tested alternatives as the cause. While this explanation is valid, it is also partial.

Just as First Nations people cross invisible borders to participate in strategically significant meetings, borders are crossed when they translate their understandings of the environment into enumerations of what a territory includes and delimitations of where land-based activities can transpire.

Highly technical management plans—and the maps that accompany them—have proven to be powerful tools for achieving some measure of land-based self-determination in a (post)colonial societal context that offers few other options (e.g., Chapin et al. 2005; Willow 2013). While many First Nations communities have consequently adopted such strategies willingly, critical observers concur that modern management practices have little in common with customary ways of understanding and experiencing the land (e.g., Nadasdy 2003; Natcher and Davis 2007; Johnson 2010). As Howitt and Suchet-Pearson argue, planning and management discourse implicitly privileges western ways of thinking about human-environment relationships, with humans presumed to exist independent of natural ecosystems that are amenable to their control. Furthermore, they note, "planning is predicated ontologically on a linear, progressivist view of time and a bounded, static notion of space" (2006:329) that contrasts with indigenous ways of being. Indeed, the very idea of land use/management planning is for these reasons problematic—even unthinkable—for some First Nations individuals.

Many aspects of how indigenous boreal forest inhabitants comprehend their environments—stories, ephemeral and seasonal phenomena, land-based spirituality—cannot be quantified, codified, and compartmentalised and are not amenable to the types of translations that expedite successful insertion into planning documents. When such information *is* included, it often appears to outsiders as an externality, irrelevant to the crucial tasks of determining spatial boundaries, areas of zoned resource use, and resource harvesting schedules. Natcher, Davis, and Hickey discern the same problem in co-management arrangements, noting that First Nations representatives' knowledge and experiences are frequently muted because they do not fit the conceptual categories held by Euro-Canadians and that "when First Nation members do make recommendations based on prior experiences, their contributions are often treated as anecdotal accounts that, while perhaps interesting, have little relevance to the contemporary management process" (2005:247). This should sound familiar, for the repositioning of indigenous environmental understandings as data to inform planning practices accepted by dominant decision makers parallels the conveyance of 'peripheral' indigenous participants in 'core' Euro-Canadian processes from their own centres to others' margins.

As Aboriginal ethicist Willie Ermine sees it, "one of the festering irritants for indigenous people, in their encounter with the West, is the brick wall of a deeply embedded belief and practice of western universality. Central to the issue of universality is the dissemination of a singular world consciousness, a monoculture with a claim to one model of humanity and one model of society" (2007:198). Far from Canada, Mario Blaser observed a similar problem in the Paraguayan Chaco, where outsiders' attempts to involve indigenous Yshiro people in conservation programs were beset by misunderstanding and conflict. The trouble, Blaser argues, was that western conservationists "understood that the Yshiro had another 'view of nature', but its validity was dependent on its degree of equivalence with their scientific understanding of it. In other words, the Yshiro could 'believe' whatever they wanted to believe about how the environment operates, but the actions prompted by these beliefs could not run counter to what the biologists *knew* about the environment" (2010:224).

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS AND POLITICS

Indigenous peoples have few options other than to exist in a modern bureaucratic world—there is no other system in which their voice can be heard (Ross et al. 2011: 83).

The emergence of multi-sector conservation offers a valuable new vantage point from which to ponder dynamic entanglements of socionatural and sociopolitical relationships and thereby contribute to ongoing considerations of 'nature' as a constructed and contested category and 'conservation' as an arena in which power relations may be both reinforced and resisted. Based on my examination of the BLC case, I suggest that multi-sector conservation creates opportunities for First Nations involvement and empowerment but—like more established versions of collaborative conservation—cannot completely overcome political inequities intrinsic to the society within which it exists. Because my purpose in these pages has been constructive reflection rather than passage of judgement, I have endeavoured to demonstrate some of the distinctive ways this paradox comes to pass despite genuine intentions and abundant actions to the contrary.

Implications and applications

Because other coalitions that aim to bring diverse individuals with diverse perspectives and social positions into dialogue are certain to encounter comparably complex and paradoxical circumstances, it is my hope that this article will have relevance beyond academia. Although the BLC is unlike other collaborative conservation initiatives, the systemic challenges identified here were not created by the BLC and are not unique to it. In conclusion, therefore, I shift my attention to the practical implications and applications of this case. First Nations BLC participants I spoke with explained the attributes that attracted them to the group and inspired their sustained participation. For them, the chance to take part in a high-powered group that facilitates networking and information-sharing and the possibility of influencing the future of Canadian conservation so their needs get met have been important parts of the draw. The BLC's proactive stance and balanced composition makes the group a credible source of support for First Nations causes. That the CBI directly funds First Nations groups who are then able to independently manage projects and allocate resources was also seen as an advantage. Over the course of numerous conversations, however, First Nations BLC participants also shared suggestions. It is clear they would like to play lead roles in their cooperative engagements. They would like First Nations representation to remain equal rather than proportionally

diminish as new members come aboard. They would like the BLC to accept the fact that First Nations do not—and likely never will—operate according to a centralised institutional framework. And they would like others to always remember that the land in question belongs to Aboriginal people.[23]

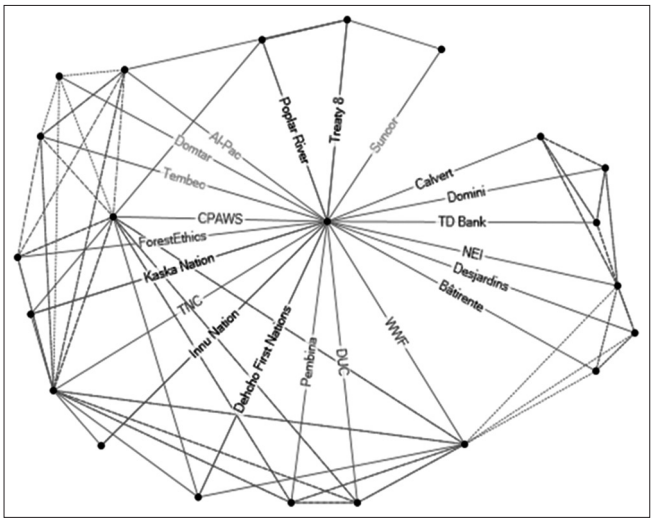
A major strength of the BLC lies in the fact that council members from every contributing sector and CBI staff recognise the encounter of divergent perspectives as fundamental to the group's *raison d'être*, with participants embracing as productive the tension that occasionally results. Rather than enforcing a unification of views—or making multiple voices "speak in the name of the One" (Braun 2002:5)—this tension creates a space in which contributors are pushed close to their limits as new projects and potentially transformative solutions unfold. My observations and conversations confirm that difference is indeed discussed openly and frankly within the BLC. Equally valuable, representatives of First Nations groups, environmental groups, and private-sector corporations and institutions all know what they are getting into when they come to the table. As Herb Norwegian, Dehcho First Nations Grand Chief, succinctly summarised, "we always came as ourselves."[24]

The fact that multi-sector conservation in Canada has not hitherto succeeded in rebalancing political scales tipped by generations of colonialism suggests that inequities within collaborative conservation alliances cannot be dismissed as attributable to failures of intentionality and proactivity, limited temporal and spatial scope, ignorant or authoritarian leadership, or structural impositions by non-Aboriginal governments, for the BLC possesses none of these elements. Conservation—even when it takes innovative and progressive forms—is part of the society in which it originates and operates. To extend Kay Milton's apt assessment of environmentalism, it is "part of the way in which people understand their world and their place within it" (1996:33). Because the structural politics that characterise conservation are reflective of wider societal contexts, attempts to ameliorate asymmetries are likely to be unproductive unless accompanied by broader campaigns for social and environmental justice. Even then, gradual advancement through calculated compromise (of the two-steps-forward-one-step-back variety) seems more plausible than any quick fix.

That the slow pace of systemic progress is well-known to First Nations BLC participants suggests the value of attending not only to power-structural calculations but also to the strategic agency of indigenous leaders seeking durable and pragmatic advancement. While outsiders frequently perceive First Nations communities' varied undertakings as unrelated or even contradictory, acknowledging external engagements as diverse as resource extractive economic development, land use planning and resource-mapping projects, and negotiations with non-Aboriginal governments as complementary ways of working toward an ultimate goal of survival through land-based self-determination (see Willow 2013, 2015) sheds important light on indigenous motives for participation in collaborative initiatives. First Nations people know they are crossing borders when they take part in multi-sector conservation. They know they are partaking in a system with a long history of marginalising indigenous comprehensions and concerns and that systemic change can be expected to occur only slowly and incrementally. While the terms may not be fully their own, therefore, the decision to participate—or not—most certainly is.

NOTES

1. Based in Sheshatshiu, Labrador, Innu Nation represents over 2,000 Innu citizens. Treaty 8 First Nations represents Chipewyan, Cree, Dene and Dane-zaa communities within the jurisdiction of Treaty 8 of 1899. Kaska Nation is composed of three First Nations in British Columbia, Yukon, and Northwest Territories. Finally, Dehcho First Nations represents the Dene and Métis of the southwestern Northwest Territories.
2. Valérie Courtois, CBI Senior Aboriginal Relations Advisor, shared this history during an informal interview on June 25, 2012.
3. In fact, some First Nations participants told me they would like to see a much higher proportion of protected land; as described in section 3.1, Poplar River First Nation recently instituted complete protection of their land from externally imposed development.
4. Although largely taken for granted by cultural anthropologists, interdisciplinary audiences may benefit from reviewing the field's broad goal as articulated by one of its founding fathers. While the questions anthropologists ask and the contexts they research vary considerably, the qualitative methods of participant-observation and interviewing are almost universally employed in order "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world (Malinowski 1922:24-25, emphasis in original).
5. I conducted research among BLC participants from Innu Nation in June 2012, Poplar River First Nation in August 2012, Treaty 8 and Dehcho First Nations in June 2013, and Kaska Nation in August/September 2013. Necessarily brief due to the multi-sited nature of my work, these trips averaged slightly over a week each. Prior planning and pre-arrangement of interviews and other research activities took place in advance, resulting in rich and targeted research experiences.
6. I was able to arrange trips into the bush in all but one location (a national assembly meeting coincided with my visit to Dehcho First Nations).
7. Following my field research, I analysed the BLC's social network utilising NodeXL software, with the interaction of coalition participants outside of the BLC context guiding data entry and a Harel-Koren Fast Multiscale Logarithm used to generate a network graphic. Identified relationships between members were based on my discussions with BLC participants and on internet research concerning sectoral/trade groups (e.g., Social Investment Organisation, Forest Products Association of Canada, Forest Stewardship Council Canada) and initiatives signed by multiple parties in Canada (e.g., Green Budget Coalition, Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, Carbon Disclosure Project).



This mode of analysis revealed 1) that the BLC facilitates networking and communication between individuals and groups who would not otherwise be in contact and 2) that the forestry and financial sectors have clear centres (represented graphically by tight clusters of interconnected lines), while environmental non-governmental organisations and First Nations are more independent and/or distributed in their interactions, a topic I address above in the 'Focus on FPIC' section.

8. In 2008, the Manitoba Legislature passed the East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Lands Act, which enables "First Nations and aboriginal communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg to engage in land use and resource management planning for designated areas of Crown land that they have traditionally used" (Manitoba 2008:2).
9. Fieldnotes, June 25, 2012.
10. Interview. June 17, 2013. Jim has worked for Alberta's Little Red River Cree Community for many years. More recently, he has worked for West Moberly First Nations, a predominantly Dane-zaa community in northeastern British Columbia's Treaty 8 Territory that been active in the BLC for several years. I spoke with him at West Moberly's Lands Office.
11. The idea of preserved places without people remains entrenched in conservation agendas in North American and beyond, but it appears that "fortress" conservation models (Brockington 2002) are gradually being replaced by more inclusive paradigms in many locations. This transition can be seen in the broad (but still politically problematic) implementation of the community-based conservation programs noted in the main text (see Berkes 2007) and in the fact that International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines now include categories that explicitly incorporate human uses of and rights to natural resources (see http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_quality/gpap_pacategories. Accessed on March 17, 2015.
12. While a conservation model that admits Aboriginal peoples and activities would seem a positive development, critical race scholar Andrew Baldwin identifies in this transition a parallel version of the paradox identified in this article, suggesting that ostensibly progressive versions of conservation that emphasise First Nations peoples' long emplaced history and seek to accommodate their continued usage of the forest serve to disaffiliate non-Aboriginals with Canada's colonial history and wilderness trope, thus constructing a new version of liberal whiteness that (re)legitimises boreal conservation as a white domain (Baldwin 2009).
13. Interview, July 4, 2012.
14. For BLC members who represent resource-extractive corporations and financial institutions, the desire to deal proactively with potential challenges to development projects is acknowledged as a key motive for tackling this topic. Carole Blackburn reviews the significance of 'certainty' in the Canadian context: with an economic base reliant on natural resources, vast public lands on which resource companies operate, and indigenous rights to claim, occupy, and/or use those same lands that are frequently ambiguous, the threat of disruption is a serious concern for developers and investors. In Canada, "achieving certainty in Aboriginal rights is a mechanism of security," Blackburn states, "because it removes a condition that interferes with the processes of the economy" (2005:587).
15. Fieldnotes, November 7, 2012.
16. I was told that Ginger Gibson of the Firelight Group Research Cooperative was instrumental in the development of the FPIC report. Gibson holds a PhD in Mining and Engineering from the University of British Columbia.
17. Fieldnotes, November 7, 2012.
18. Interview, June 17, 2013. Viewing the same reality from a different angle, a non-Native BLC member later informed me that First Nations members' prioritisation of issues affecting their own territories sometimes hinders their ability to tackle the overarching issues the BLC aims to address and makes the input of large Aboriginal associations essential (pers. comm. with author. October 10, 2013)
19. Interview, August 5, 2012.
20. As Innu Nation forester Guy Playfair told me in Labrador, he goes to the meetings and tries to pick up where they left off six months before, but his reality is here at home (fieldnotes, June 22, 2012). It should be noted that although First Nations BLC participants' daily lives range from those who spend considerable time hunting and trapping to those who take part in multiple meetings each day, all cross conceptual as well as physical borders to come to the BLC.
21. Fieldnotes, June 25, 2012.
22. Acting on the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework's commitment to "support effective land use planning exercises" (CBI 2003:5), the BLC provided nearly $3 million of funding between 2004 and 2008 (CBI 2008:3) to help First Nations groups take this strategic step.
23. In brief, the most essential lessons for emerging collaborative conservation initiatives to arise from this case include the following: 1) define key concepts—including 'nature' and 'conservation'—in a broad manner that admits non-western perspectives. 2) attend closely to cultural and political issues. Do not dismiss social concerns as outside the realm of conservation. 3) expect and embrace divergent opinions. Never force agreement. 4) operate in an open, transparent manner. 5) allow individuals and groups to participate (or not participate) on a voluntary basis. Accept that some groups do not operate according to a centralised institutional model. 6) give funds directly to local groups. Trust their capability to manage their own projects. 7) allow local people to play lead roles. Acknowledge that the land being discussed belongs to them.

24. Interview, June 25, 2013. Several BLC members used the term *transparency* to refer to this openness among members, which they cited as key to the group's success. Others noted that the BLC works hard to ensure problematic 'surprises' are kept to a minimum. Still others mentioned the voluntary nature of the group, emphasising that individuals and organisations truly want to be there and that membership has always been "based on a willingness to put your organisation's name to a group and then participate in the conversations and jointly advocate for the positions that emerge" (interview, December 3, 2012).

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