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# BLACK DUCK WILD RICE



## A Case Study

August 2018

Compiled by Paula Anderson  
based on participant observation and interviews

with

James Whetung



Centre for  
Sustainable  
Food Systems



*Nourishing  
Communities*



James Whetung harvesting manoomin on Little Bald Lake, 2016



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The Social Economy of Food:  
Informal, under-recognized contributions to  
Community prosperity and resilience

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## Author's Note from Paula Anderson

I was first introduced to wild rice (manoomin) about 20 years ago, when James Whetung took me and a friend harvesting for the first time. I had no idea what to expect, we gathered the equipment we needed and off we went by canoe into Little Bald Lake. As a settler-Canadian I had never been introduced to this plant before, even though I was and continue to be a local organic vegetable grower and deeply involved with developing a more sustainable food system within the Kawartha Lakes Region.

As we paddled James told us about this plant and his community's connections with this plant, how it had helped save them from starvation, how it was the foundation to their health and that they had a responsibility to maintain its presence within the ecosystem. We had lots of questions, but rather than telling us all the answers, he asked us to drop him off on a tiny island and told us to go experience and build a relationship with manoomin for ourselves; paddle through it, figure out how to harvest it, talk to it, listen and observe what goes on around it. So we did. It was amazing. The rice beds were teeming with life from millions of insects, to flocks of red-winged blackbirds and many ducks and geese. There was evidence of muskrats and beaver using the space and plenty of fish coming to the surface to snack on the water bugs. A whole food system. A whole place-based food system that was quite different from the one I was familiar with and that arrived here with my ancestors.

When we returned to pick James up from the tiny island, he was beaming with the biggest smile. He said he was just so happy to hear the voices of women in the rice beds once again. He explained how these rice beds were within the traditional hunting, trapping, and harvesting area of his grandmother, and that they were some of the last remnants of manoomin within the region. We spoke of the disappearance of almost all of the manoomin in the area, his community's disconnection from it, and how this has impacted the health of the people within his community, Curve Lake First Nation.

This was the start of a long journey that required me to think deeply about what a sustainable food system could and should look like within this territory. It required me to think beyond the farm and my own community, and re-think my responsibilities as a treaty person within Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory. It required me to acknowledge and take responsibility for the impacts colonization has had and continues to have on the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and how this process has transformed the land in ways that have privileged settler-Canadian food ways, development needs and preferences at the expense of the people and food systems native to this place.



It was as a long-term friend of James and his family – and within the context of moving beyond the words of reconciliation to reconcili-action<sup>1</sup> – that I started to take a more active role in the work of Black Duck Wild Rice. For 10 years I worked with James and his family, having the privilege of participating in the yearly harvest and processing of the wild rice and deepening my learning and understanding of this incredible food system each year. By way of reciprocity, I was able to contribute my time, experience, skills and community connections to organize and facilitate much of the community outreach and educational aspects of Black Duck. I also offered my social enterprise planning, grant writing and reporting, financial management, and marketing skills, which I had developed within the wider sustainable food movement, to assist with the facilitation of the community revitalization aspirations of Black Duck. It has been quite a journey, filled with all the successes and challenges of sharing experiences and exchanging knowledge(s), skills and support.

## Project Overview

When I started I was just interested in providing my family with a source of good, local, traditional food. So I started gathering wild rice and bringing the seeds back to plant, to regenerate the traditional areas that my Elders recounted were once good viable wild rice beds that supported their families. Since then BDWR has been trying to re-establish and protect the remaining wild rice and promote its growth and use so that people and the environment can once again benefit from its many life-sustaining attributes.

*James Whetung, BDWR*

Black Duck Wild Rice is a family owned and operated social enterprise that focuses on wild rice harvesting and processing, seed bank development, green seed distribution, education and community development. It is located in Curve Lake, Ontario.

Black Duck is dedicated to restoring wild rice (*manoomin*) and the ecological diversity that thrives in relationship to it, within the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. At the same time, Black Duck is committed to the re-vitalization of wild rice as a healthy, culturally significant, sustainable and accessible food source for the people of the Curve Lake First Nation, other Williams Treaty First Nations as well as surrounding Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

<sup>1</sup> The term reconcili-action came out of the ‘calls to action’ outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. It refers to the need to do more than merely speak about reconciliation and the wrongs of the past; it requires us to move to meaningful action.



### Main Activities:

1. **Wild Rice Harvesting and Processing** – Black Duck harvests green rice from the Kawartha Lakes region and processes (cures, roasts, dances, winnows) it into high quality wild rice for local consumption. This can be purchased in half, whole or 5 lbs amounts at the Peterborough Farmers Market, By the Bushel Community Food Cooperative and directly from Black Duck in Curve Lake First Nation. Regional chefs, restaurants, resorts and local Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions, organizations and event planners use wild rice from Black Duck. For residents of Curve Lake First Nation, Black Duck subsidizes the price, to make it a more affordable food option for community members. Black Duck also donates quite a bit of wild rice to community organizations, community events and ceremonies.
2. **Wild Rice ‘Green’ Seed** – Black Duck harvests and prepares ‘green’ wild rice seed that is used to restore traditional wild rice beds around Curve Lake First Nation and within the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. It is also sold to other First Nation communities and groups to re-establish wild rice in their communities. Other regional stakeholders, such as anglers and hunters who wish to improve fish and wild life habitat on their property can also access the green rice. Black Duck is also in the process of developing ‘living’ wild rice seed banks for extended restoration projects.
3. **Wild Rice Education and Community Development Consultation** – James Whetung has over 30 years of experience in collecting and processing wild rice. He was trained in this by his Elders and holds an immense amount of traditional knowledge in regard to this food source and the ecological and social systems that support it, and has innovated from there. This experience and knowledge is the foundation of Black Duck’s education and consultancy work. In 2016 Black Duck Wild Rice acquired ten canoes and associated equipment to expand their educational offering. Educational activities include:
  - a. Hands-on educational experiences and workshops during the harvest season for many different types of groups and organizations ranging from the Curve Lake Primary School, to community groups and university classes.
  - b. A by-donation “community” wild rice day open to anyone interested in learning more.
  - c. Community engagement at the Curve Lake Pow Wow.
  - d. Speaking to regional schools, local food groups, sustainable agriculture programs and organizations, as well as organizations working on reconciliation.

Black Duck's knowledge, skills and experience have also been the foundation from which other First Nations communities have planned and implemented the re-introduction of wild rice in their communities.

4. **Seed Processing Services** - As surrounding communities re-connect with wild rice as a staple traditional food and start to re-establish the wild rice beds within their communities, Black Duck is working towards having the capacity to provide wild rice processing services for these communities. This is a way to increase local consumption of community harvested grain (as the processing has been found to be a limiting factor) as well as provide local economic development opportunities for individuals and families interested in harvesting and selling their wild rice to Black Duck. Scaling up Black Duck's ability to process regionally collected wild rice is part of Black Duck's holistic long-term vision.



Mechanical Wild Rice Roaster



## Background

James Whetung started gathering wild rice using traditional methods over 30 years ago. His goal was to provide a source of local, healthy, traditional food to feed his family. He took the time to learn the locations, knowledge and methods of traditionally gathering the wild rice and much of the life that it supports including fish, ducks, beaver and muskrat. James learned from his Elders, as well as family and community members who had been hunting, trapping and gathering within their territory's wild rice beds for generations upon generations.

### The Ardoch Wild Rice War

Mud Lake is a widening of the Mississippi River in southeastern Ontario, near Ardoch and within the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation traditional territory. The Ardoch Wild Rice War was a conflict over one of the last remaining regional stands of wild rice at Mud Lake. The community developed this stand to provide a needed source of food, using seed provided by an Elder from Alderville First Nation, who saw the decline of wild rice happening within Mud Lake and wanted to protect it and ensure its future.

Under the Wild Rice Harvesting Act, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), issued a harvesting permit for the commercial harvesting of the approximately 50 ha of wild rice within the Mud Lake Marsh to a non-Indigenous entrepreneur in 1979. The traditional harvesters, composed of local First Nation Members and Métis, had never before heard of or applied for harvesting permits. With support from the local non-native community, the traditional harvesters convinced the OMNR to revoke the commercial permit for the 1980 season.

However, the entrepreneur appealed to the minister, and the permit was re-issued in 1981. During the late summer of 1981, First Nation Members, Métis, local settlers and supporters non-violently blockaded all the roads and water access points to Mud Lake and prevented the entrepreneur's airboat from being launched.

Following this conflict, the community was granted a community harvesting license for Mud Lake. James Whetung and his family as well as other Curve Lake community members supported the Ardoch Community's blockade to keep non-Indigenous commercial harvesters out of their traditional manoomin beds. (James Whetung, personal communication, October 2014, Paula Sherman, personal communication, February 2018; Cezik, 1998; DeLisle, 2001).



However, by the time James was trying to learn about wild rice much of the wild rice in this region was already greatly diminished and the knowledge on how to process wild rice into food was limited due to colonization. So James spent years piecing together the knowledge from Elders and Knowledge-holders in other communities – many of whom are no longer with us today.

It was during the Ardoch Wild Rice War that James first learned how to traditionally process wild rice into food and brought this knowledge back to Curve Lake First Nation.

A few years later James attended a conference at Lakehead University on wild rice and he overheard some non-Indigenous men from the Kawartha Lakes Region saying how they were going to apply for the region's wild rice licences and develop a commercial wild rice operation.

James did not want what little wild rice was left in this region to be controlled by non-Indigenous people(s). James returned and used his knowledge of the region's wild rice beds to apply for the commercial licences and to start an Indigenous-controlled commercial wild rice operation in this region, using a market-based business model. He purchased, with help from family, a specialized air boat for harvesting and started to mechanize his operations.

However, once harvested, wild rice cannot just be eaten it needs to be processed. First it must be cured, then roasted, and then the chaff needs to be taken off (hulled). It then needs to be winnowed and cleaned. Unfortunately, there were no commercial-scale processing facilities for wild rice in this part of Ontario, so James had to take his harvested and cured rice to the only processing facilities in Ontario which is located near the Manitoba boarder. This trip is a very expensive, time consuming and unsustainable endeavour.

At this same time, James also started to recognize the need for Curve Lake First Nation and the wider community to have access to the health benefits of traditional foods. Wild rice was traditionally a staple food item within the Anishinaabeg diet and provided them with good health. The lack of access to healthy traditional food was impacting the health of every family in his village, as food related-diseases such as diabetes were reaching epidemic proportions.

In the 2000's, James started to re-think what motivated his plan for the restoration of wild rice in the region. James decided to expand Black Duck's goals to include more than just the economic benefits that a commercial wild rice business could offer him and his family. With almost no capital but a lot of ingenuity, James started to design and build his own community-scaled processing equipment out of local, predominately recycled, resources. He had noted that many people in his community would harvest



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the rice but then it would sit in the cupboard not being eaten because the traditional “dancing your rice” method of processing is very arduous. In this way, he could provide an avenue for his community to access the health benefits of their traditional diet. James’ idea was that if the processing equipment were available on a local level, people (himself included) would be encouraged to harvest wild rice for themselves and have a place to process it locally.



### Mechanical Wild Rice Harvesting

Over the next 10 years James transformed his business model from one grounded solely in the market economy to a social enterprise that could more appropriately incorporate the growing health, social, cultural and environmental values of Black Duck’s work. The emergence of the multi-dimensional nature of the work, coupled with a more community-based set of values, required James to cultivate a wider set of social relationships outside his immediate family. This transition would also require accessing public and private funds, as well as exchanging skills and knowledge with like-minded Indigenous and settler allies. He would also need to increase the educational

opportunities within his own community as well as with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, through hands-on workshops, experiences, training, talks and engagement with the media.

Black Duck's long-term education and advocacy for wild rice and its place in re-establishing a more local/regional diet is based off of what this "place" has to offer, coupled with the growing understanding within Anishinaabeg communities of the health, environmental and social benefits of this traditional food. At the same time that there was an ever growing interest in and demand for the restoration of local wild rice beds among local Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg communities, the manoomin cultivation and harvesting also fueled full-blown resistance within settler cottage communities<sup>2</sup> who in their ignorance and place of privilege see the restoration and revitalization of *manoomin* (wild rice) culture in opposition to their vision of shoreline living in the Kawartha Lakes region.

## Geographical Context

Black Duck Wild Rice is located in Curve Lake First Nation, and is dependent on the surrounding waterways within the Williams Treaty (Treaty No.20) Territory (see Figure 1), also known as the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory.

In particular Black Duck operates in the traditional hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering areas of James Whetung's family which include Pigeon Lake, Pigeon River, Bald Lake, Chemong Lake, Buckhorn Lake and the connecting waterways. James also holds in trust the provincial licenses to commercially harvest wild rice from Emily Lake, Emily Creek, Nogies Creek and Crows Line.

It is important to note that these areas also correspond to the Kawartha Lakes Region, the waterways of which are now highly developed with cottages and are 'managed' in conjunction with either the Ontario Provincial Government through the Ministry of Natural Resources or the Canadian Government through Parks Canada and the Trent Severn Waterway.

## Historical Context

Prior to colonial settlement most of the wetlands and waterways of southeastern Ontario were home to profuse stands of manoomin, which were cultivated and harvested by the area's Indigenous peoples. These stands were held as the common property of the local Indigenous communities (Cizek, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Pigeon Lake Wild Rice Conflict – for more information see Lisa Jackson's February 20, 2016 article in Aljazeera called Canada's Wild Rice Wars.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/02/canada-wild-rice-wars-160217083126970.html>





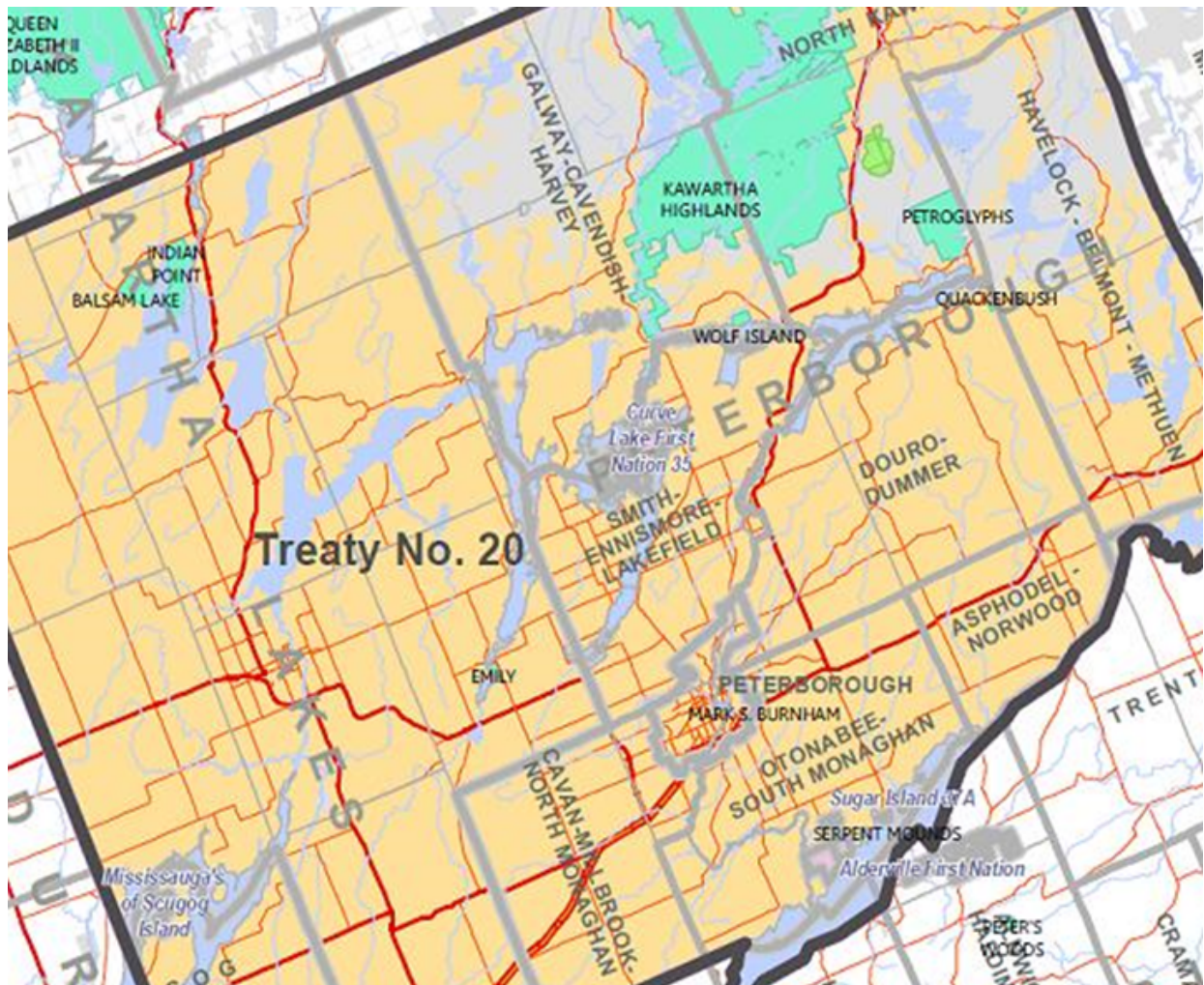


Figure 1: Location of Curve Lake First Nation and the traditional wild rice harvesting waterways within the Williams Treaty (Treaty No. 20) Territory. (Williams Treaty First Nations, 2017)

Rice Lake, located in the southern portion of the Kawartha Lakes Watershed, was known as the rice bowl of southeastern Ontario. However, over the past century, the changes made to the region's water courses and levels from the development of the Trent Severn Waterway, the development of polluting forms of industrialized agriculture along the waterways edge, the lake front and waterway developments to accommodate tourism and lake front living, the increase in motorboat traffic on the lakes and the introduction of foreign aquatic plants and fish species have led to the depletion or destruction of most of the wild rice stands in southeastern Ontario (James Whetung, personal communication, October 2013, Cizek 1993). By the 1920's there was almost no manoomin to be found in Rice Lake, and as such Elders resorted to taking some of the



remaining seeds and planting them in Mud Lake, (Mississippi River) near Ardoch (150 km away) as a way to resist the total loss of manoomin from the region (Cizek, 1993).

This process of claiming land through transforming the landscape was further entrenched through the treaty making process. Through the 1923 Williams Treaty negotiations, the Anishinaabeg lost access to much of their traditional land and food system base, limiting their direct control of land to reserve lands, which are more often than not too small to support and sustain current populations.

According to James Whetung (2017), Curve Lake First Nation is a food desert. “Since the reserve was created access to our traditional foods and our food economy has been legislated out of our existence, and where we did have access to our traditional foods, quite often the foods themselves are no longer there because of colonial activity.”

Within Ontario, manoomin first became regulated under the Wild Rice Harvesting Act in 1960. In northwestern Ontario, where settlement pressures are less, under the Wild Rice Harvesting Act the Anishinaabeg have been able to maintain more of their harvesting rights within their traditional manoomin harvesting territories (Tom Johnson, Seine River First Nation, personal communication, February 2014) than in southeastern Ontario where settlement, development, contamination and ecosystem degradation have been high.

However, the colonization of manoomin and the Anishinaabeg’s relationship to it did not stop at the limiting of access or the destruction of habitat. The systematic process of colonization also included the removal of an entire generation of Indigenous children from their families, homes, communities and landscapes into the residential school system. In this way, governments effectively cut off the ability of Indigenous communities to transmit the integrated knowledge and skills required to maintain their culture of manoomin.

At the same time as the government of Canada was systematically eradicating the Anishinaabeg ability to maintain their relationship with manoomin a whole new form of colonial structures moved in to appropriate manoomin for the benefit of the colonizers. This appropriation systematically ignored the values, interests, access to and authority over this resource that the Anishinaabeg traditionally held (DeLisle, 2001). In 1950, the State of Minnesota initiated a program to domesticate manoomin; in doing so the genetic diversity that allowed manoomin to flourish in multiple habitats needed to be controlled. This was done so that the growth of manoomin could be adapted and brought within industrial agricultures’ system of commercial production (LaDuke, 2005). By the 1970’s the increase in the production of manoomin grown on commercial paddies allowed it to become available to ever widening circles of consumers. This increase in demand attracted the interest and investment of larger corporations which



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permanently altered the market for traditionally harvested manoomin from natural lakes and waterways.



Contested Wild Rice Beds on Pigeon Lake (photo courtesy of Larry Wood)

However, the level of appropriation goes deeper than this. For the Anishinaabeg manoomin is considered a sacred food and a gift from the Creator. It is a food source that has sustained them for generations upon generations, to which they have a sacred responsibility to provide acknowledgment, care and attention so that the manoomin will flourish. However, as the commercial production of wild rice increased, manoomin was transformed into a commodity, with its value reduced to the whims of the global commodities market.

At the same time the interest in wild rice increased by industrial agriculture's multinational giants and university research partners, including the seed, fertilizer and pesticide conglomerates DuPont, Monsanto and Syngenta. They mapped the wild rice genome, experimenting with the genetic structure of wild rice and patenting it, which according to Winona LaDuke (2005) and Vandana Shiva (1997) is claiming "legal" ownership over it and can be considered an act of biopiracy or biocolonialism. To date, through the genetic manipulation of wild rice, the company NorCal Wild Rice of California has put a patent application in for a male-sterile variety of wild rice to be used in the production of hybrid wild rice seed. However, there are concerns that these male-sterile seeds could genetically contaminate, by pollen drift and pollen transfer by

ducks, the seed within natural stands and virtually wipe out the capacity of natural stands of wild rice to reproduce. This is an issue that has been raised by the Anishinaabeg across their traditional territory and goes against the fundamental Anishinaabeg understanding of their role and responsibility towards ensuring the continued life and vitality of manoomin. It also undercuts their ability to maintain their traditional food systems and therefore their communities' health and well-being.

## PROJECT RESOURCES

### Human Resources

Black Duck Wild Rice is predominantly run by James Whetung. Although the work of Black Duck occupies much of his time, it provides him with only a modest income which he has to supplement with other seasonal work. However, over the past 10 years as Black Duck has scaled up its harvesting and processing operations and expanded its outreach and educational aspects, James has required additional paid seasonal help during the harvest season of August through the end of October. This position is often filled by his youngest daughter Daemin or other family members.

In addition to James and Daemin, Black Duck also relies on the skills and talents of other family members. For example James' son has overseen the construction of the buildings on site and assists with boat mechanics and equipment maintenance, while his eldest daughter facilitates wild rice sales in Toronto. Black Duck also relies on both long term and short term volunteers and support systems. Long term volunteers include friends of the family (i.e. co-author Paula Anderson). Other friends of the family that have been involved over the mid to long term and have been integral in supporting Black Duck include Gary Williams, John Dixon and Peter Calvert. Each support person contributes their unique knowledge, skills and physical as well as financial resources to the endeavour. Black Duck also relies on short-term volunteers, including student volunteers and interested local community members and settler-allies as well as groups such as Wild Rice Revitalization Network (WRRen). Such volunteers help with increasing cross-cultural understanding as well as the tasks associated with the safe harvesting, curing, roasting, cleaning and packaging.

### Knowledge Sources

Manoomin means the good seed or sacred seed in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibway language). The Anishinaabeg have maintained a relationship with manoomin, caring for it, harvesting it, eating it, trading it, honoring it for generations upon generations. It is considered one of the central lifeways of the Anishinaabeg and in essence has defined



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who they are for millennia. Their intimate reciprocal relationship with this plant is affirmed in their ceremonies, songs and stories and integrated into their practices.

Although James Whetung is presently considered a manoomin Knowledge holder in his community, he has had to spend many years searching out manoomin knowledge, often outside his own community due to the impacts of colonization and the multifaceted attempts by the Canadian Government to eradicate the Anishinaabeg as a people, and their ability to transmit their knowledge within their families and communities and ecosystems that supported them. As a young man he often found himself paddling his Elder Uncles around to fish, hunt and trap and this is where he was first introduced to manoomin, as the best fishing, hunting and trapping grounds were often in the remaining small patches of wild rice. However, his knowledge base was limited and he found himself learning how to traditionally process manoomin into food for the first time from Elders in the Ardoch community during the Wild Rice Wars in the early 1980's.



James Whetung identifies the remnant manoomin beds within Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory



Since that time, he continues to gather knowledge and experience as he re-kindles his reciprocal relationship with this plant. He returned to his community and spoke with his Elders to gather what knowledge remained about where traditional wild rice beds were located. He gathered knowledge from other Anishinaabeg communities in North Western Ontario where more aspects of traditional manoomin culture has been maintained. He has also learned from some Northern First Nation communities that have developed manoomin as part of their economic and self-determination plans.

It is from these sources that James has cultivated his manoomin knowledge and as he would say he is always looking to learn more, as he has only started this process of re-learning and applying this knowledge, as best he knows how, within his community. According to James the re-vitalization of manoomin culture will need to involve the entire community (Indigenous and settler) and he has started this process by sharing his knowledge with his family, especially his daughter Daemin, as well as long-term friends and interested community members. Black Duck also provides many opportunities for others to learn through their education and consultation work.



Manoomin: Floating Leaf Stage



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Black Duck has coupled James' traditional knowledge with western biological and ecological science, technology and allied-cultural knowledge regarding social movements and sustainable food systems in this process of revitalizing and restoring manoomin. In this way Black Duck has become a site for knowledge exchange and innovative collaboration not only between knowledge systems but also between Indigenous and allied peoples.

### **Natural Resources**

As we all are, Black Duck is reliant on natural resources to function—including clean water, access to wild rice within their traditional territory, sustainably harvested wood for roasting and a sustainable source of energy for harvesting and processing the wild rice.

The most pressing issues regarding natural resources for Black Duck include unfettered access to Michi Saagiig traditional territorial water ways, jurisdiction over the wild rice, and the revitalization and protection of the wild rice beds in these areas that have been destroyed due to past and present colonial activities such as flooding, poisoning, dredging, plant harvesting, waterway and shoreline development, increased boat traffic and the deterioration of water quality. Black Duck needs to be able to have points of access and would benefit from being considered and consulted as William Treaty First Nations as well as Parks Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources develop regional management plans.

### **Physical Resources**

Black Duck is located on family land in Curve Lake First Nation. Initially, Black Duck was more of a family endeavour, scaled to meet the traditional food needs of James' immediate and then extended family. At this scale James could harvest and process enough manoomin using traditional methods. However, as Black Duck moved towards scaling up operations so that community members could also partake in accessing the benefits of wild rice, the physical infrastructure required to do this increased.

As noted earlier, James with help from family purchased an air boat and trailer about 20 years ago, to enable him to harvest manoomin on a community-scale so that he could start providing it to his community. With more wild rice being harvested and no place regionally to process it, the need to design and develop community-scaled processing equipment, including a maple wood roaster, dancing machine, and winnowing machine became evident. Black Duck has also built a 2000 sq ft facility to house this equipment and provide a food safe space for curing, processing and packaging the wild rice.

In 2015, Black Duck acquired 10 canoes and associated equipment and has all the traditional equipment needed to harvest and process wild rice. This equipment is central to their educational programs. They also encourage community members to borrow or rent their equipment so that they can go out and harvest their own manoomin, in the wild rice beds adjacent to the Black Duck facilities or elsewhere.

These resources have been developed predominantly out of the small 'profit' (before wages are paid to James himself) created from the sale of wild rice, honoraria and/or fees paid for educational services.



Black Duck's fleet of canoes parked outside their processing facility.  
(Photo courtesy of Ryan Edwardson: Jackson, 2016)

## Financial Resources

For many years Black Duck functioned financially on very little as the main purpose was to grow, harvest and process enough for James' immediate and extended family. However, once James moved towards scaling-up his endeavours so that he could supply the wider community with access to regionally grown wild rice, he found himself re-investing much of the money from sales back into Black Duck to further develop the capacity to grow, harvest and process wild rice.





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Initially, James relied on supportive family members and friends to assist with the financial challenges of yearly operations as well as scaling up Black Duck, through personal donations and yearly and multi-year loans. These allowed James to purchase an airboat, design and develop his initial processing equipment and marketing materials as well as cover annual operational costs such as boat maintenance, fuel and wood.

However, although reluctant at first, James realized that for Black Duck to become a viable community-scaled wild rice operation he needed “community” funds to support his community-based endeavours. The funds to support this scaling up process have come from a variety of sources, including: the Curve Lake First Nation business loan program; the Carrot Cache who supported Black Duck’s innovative equipment development; and Canada/Ontario Resource Development Agreement (CORDA). The latter supported Black Duck in designing and building a new wild rice roaster, laid the foundation of a building for the site, and kindly supplied the funds to purchase a set of canoes—and all the associated equipment, including moccasins—to support Black Duck’s educational programs. Finally, the most comprehensive funding came from the Indian Agriculture Program of Ontario. It supplied Black Duck with multi-year funding to complete the on-site processing facilities, business planning and financial training, expanded marketing materials, and much more.

Although these funds helped to scale-up Black Duck’s capacity to harvest and process regional wild rice, and increase its education and outreach capacity including consultation and training, they did not and do not cover all the costs associated with doing this revitalization work in the community. Two main issues still remain. First is that James still finds himself re-investing much of his time and earnings into the business to complete and maintain the facilities and equipment so that he can operate the next season. Second, due to the limited protection and limited amount of wild rice in the region, James refrains from harvesting too much wild rice and allocates much of his time and resources to the restoration of the traditional wild rice beds in the territory rather than making more wild rice available for sale.

According to James, he tries to balance the short and long term economic, social and environmental benefits.

*You have to balance how much you are going to take and how much you are going to leave for the future. One of my practices, my gathering practices, has been to leave more than I take. I don’t feel that I own the rice, I have to share it. I don’t know if you could ever actually take all the wild rice ... the biology of the plant itself has protection measures in itself to help ensure its presence in the environment, but it has been having a hard time and so I try to enhance that by using the knowledge my Elders gave me and the locations they told me about where rice was once abundant.*



## The Black Duck Approach

For the most part James says he has not had a master plan for Black Duck and the revitalization of the manoomin in the region. Instead, he has had to react and adjust his plans year by year based on the human and financial resources he can muster up as well as in response to the realities happening within the surrounding community and the regional wild rice beds.

However, even with these yearly uncertainties, Black Duck has taken a particular approach, which in two main ways has been different than others that are taking a more traditional approach towards the revitalization of manoomin in the region. First, Black Duck has made it a priority to work on the restoration of traditional manoomin growing areas within Curve Lake First Nation's traditional territory, based on the knowledge passed down to James from his Elders.



Second, Black Duck has made it a priority to increase the community's access to manoomin to eat, providing a way for community members to increase their personal and family health, to the point that they can once again engage with manoomin culture. By prioritizing these aspects, Black Duck is restoring the base on which his community can engage and further restore their multifaceted relationship with manoomin. These priorities emerged as a response to the continued genocidal program embedded in settler colonialism where Indigenous people's access to their traditional healthy food and food-based economy and lifestyle have been taken away and as such Indigenous communities are experiencing epidemic rates of diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, related to western food and lifestyles.

### **Building Adaptive Capacity**

#### **Ecosystem Restoration – Upholding Responsibilities**

Human beings are fully dependant on the gifts of the natural world for our life and vitality. How we care for and interact with the natural world has a direct effect on the bounty she can offer. Over millennia the Anishinaabeg have fostered a way of knowing and doing in relationship with this specific place on the earth and it has allowed them to sustain themselves and the ecosystem of which they are a part—through a deep understanding of the interdependent nature of being, that requires the development of reciprocal relationships with the natural world. These reciprocal relationships do not revolve around 'rights' but rather responsibilities – the responsibility of the Anishinaabeg to take care of all their relations and ensure their vitality, and in this way creating the opportunity for all their relations to uphold their responsibility and take care of each other and the Anishinaabeg; this is the enactment of reciprocity in an ecosystem sense.

Responsibility and reciprocity is the foundation on which Black Duck bases its ecosystem and therefore cultural restoration work. Prior to colonization the Anishinaabeg lived in balance within their territory. However, the process of colonization—which continues today as globalization—is characterized by a one-way taking relationship with the earth. The latter has not only degraded natural ecosystems and decreased bio-diversity, but has also separated the Anishinaabeg (and all people) from the land and water, and therefore disrupted their ability to uphold their relational responsibilities. This process of forced separation and ecosystem decline is understood as the foundation of community ill health.



## Rebuilding Ecosystem Resilience

### Ecosystem Health = Food System Health

Manoomin has long been one of the foundational pieces of the ecosystem within the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, and as such it is also one of the central elements of their food system. According to James, in this region the lake without wild rice is a desert; once the wild rice is established, everything just multiplies, from the bugs to the birds, muskrats, beavers, otters and fish. The whole environment benefits because wild rice provides safety and security to the swimmers, the flyers, the four-legged and to us the two legged.

Therefore the restoration of manoomin puts into action a whole set of reciprocal relationships that are central to the Anishinaabeg way to knowing and being. It provides an opportunity for the Anishinaabeg to re-kindle their relationship with the



Manoomin: Emerging Leaf Stage



land and waters of their territory and to take up their responsibilities once again. In this way, the care taken to restore manoomin provides the foundation to support the vitality and diversity found within their traditional food system and diet.

By upholding the responsibility to care for manoomin, James and Black Duck are creating the opportunity for the community to benefit from the gifts of manoomin for future generations. According to James, wild rice is an amazingly diverse and hardy plant community—just look at what it has been through, where it has persisted even while people have tried to eradicate it. It is adaptable and has built-in mechanisms to persevere. For example, the summer of 2016 was so dry, the farmers were crying that their ponds and wells were going dry, and yet the wild rice was flourishing. If our climate is going to change, possibly becoming more variable, wild rice will be one of the last plants to leave us if we take good care of it. The restoration of manoomin also provides an opportunity for the settler community and newcomers to Canada to re-align their relationships with the earth in this specific place, following the lead of the Anishinaabeg, moving away from a one-way taking to a responsible relationship of reciprocation and care.

### **Re-claiming Knowledge and Expertise: Re-learning, adapting and fostering innovation**

#### **Living Knowledge**



I have learned lots along the way and my ideas about having a business or gathering wild rice has changed as I moved along and learned, but underneath it all has been reclaiming the food, the good food, the lifestyle and the environment.

According to James, when he started he didn't know much of anything, except that the fish liked to hang out in the small remaining patches of wild rice. The goals of regaining and rebuilding knowledge are critically important to BDWR, and will not be achieved in isolation—requiring the participation of the whole community and across communities as well. For example, James says he couldn't even find out in his own village how to process wild

rice into food. He had to go someplace else to learn this, as this knowledge was lost within his community. He had to go to many places to learn, to piece together enough knowledge and the skills needed, because he and his community had lost the land, the waters and most of their foods, including wild rice. They have had to create the opportunities to share the pieces of knowledge that their Elders and communities were able to retain, and then apply that knowledge to the situation they find themselves in today. James says he also learned by observing and interacting with the manoomin for many years and it is from these multiple knowledge(s) that he innovated and



developed the recipe he uses today for making wild rice, as well as the approach he takes to upholding his responsibilities to manoomin and his community. In return for the knowledge gifted to James, he has shared a lot of what he has learned with whomever made the effort to come to learn. Depending on how long they stayed or how dedicated they were, they had the opportunity to learn not only from him but the manoomin itself. However, James feels that he himself still has a lot to learn, especially the cultural components. James wants to learn and sing the wild rice songs, and participate in the ceremonies. This continual sharing, learning and re-claiming process will deepen his and his community's relationship with manoomin. However, it will take generations to regain what his community lost in such a short period of time. But according to James seeing the wild rice growing outside his home, within his community, gives him hope that this process is possible.



Getting ready to dance the rice



### **Making Manoomin Knowledge Accessible within and between Communities**

Black Duck shares manoomin knowledge pieced together and applied over the past 30 years, but there are a variety of barriers to the revitalization of this knowledge within and between communities. While the methods for sharing are as varied as the barriers, Black Duck uses three main approaches.

First, whether through countless talks to regional groups, organizations and institutions, or increasing presence of manoomin in the lakes, Black Duck's work in the community is making the issue(s) around the revitalization of manoomin more visible. Black Duck's engagement with multiple forms of media has also played an important role in expanding the visibility of the issue and, according to James, has been instrumental in creating support for the revitalization of manoomin knowledge across the territory and beyond. Media has also helped to bridge divides within his own community, and made people more aware of the issues. Although the media attention increased dramatically because of the conflict—centered on the increase of wild rice on Pigeon Lake—it created other opportunities for people to think about and engage with manoomin in different ways.

For example, the television program *Moose Meat and Marmalade*—which highlighted James and wild rice—was so engaging, light hearted, fun and supportive, that it allowed people to connect in a positive way with manoomin. After it aired, many people—particularly within in his own community—were more comfortable to come up and talk with him and show an interest. Prior, James felt like a lot of people were scared of him, the knowledge he holds, what he does and the conflict that tends to surround him. That, coupled with maybe feeling a little bit ashamed of no longer holding this knowledge themselves, creates a barrier which the media, in the form of *Moose Meat and Marmalade*, has helped to dissolve. They could re-connect manoomin with a love of life and not just continual conflict.

Second, Black Duck takes the time to create spaces for others to learn and provides opportunities for first-hand knowledge transfer, including training and skill development as well as hands on experiences with manoomin. Through their free Community Wild Rice Workshops, their hands-on activities at the Curve Lake Pow Wow, and the Peterborough Children's Water Festival, as well as their many group workshops and individualized experiences, Black Duck moves from talking to doing.

Third, Black Duck provides support and consultation services as well as knowledge, skills and resources (such as seed for planting) for communities to revitalize their own relationship with manoomin.





Wild Rice Processing Demonstration at the Curve Lake Pow Wow



Many First Nation communities are searching for knowledge to facilitate their own path of revitalization, not necessarily like Black Duck's path—in fact, it would be surprising if they tried to duplicate. In reality each person and community will apply the knowledge they acquire in their unique way to their specific place and situation, and in this way continue the knowledge sharing, learning and re-claiming circle.

### **Increasing Food Sovereignty through Sustainable Self-determination and the Revitalization of Traditional Food Economies**

The Indian Act and the reserve system robbed the Anishinaabeg of sovereignty over their food system. It created a system of food dependency that was and is rooted to the colonial and now global food system, as their traditional foods—and the economy they generated—were legislated out of existence.



When people come I always got this thing in the back of my mind that the government isn't going to take care of us, the capitalistic food system is not sustainable and therefore will not always be in place. So I am hoping that when I teach people, that they will have the essential knowledge and skills to engage with this place's food systems in a good way if things collapse, so that they can survive and thrive in a more balanced way... and even better if they can make these changes before things come to that!

According to James, food was and continues to be scarce on reserve.

*Our reserve is very small so the land base for animals and plants is ... well it wouldn't sustain current populations on the reserve. Ever since I was a kid, food gathering was difficult and we resorted to the few foods that were left – deer, ducks and animals that we could trap. All those foods in a provincial sense are illegal to buy and sell, so that eliminated a big part of our economy or at least the economic factor of the foods we once enjoyed.*

The plants they once enjoyed were barely accessible to them anymore. The primary reason was the privatization of land, which decreased access to those lands and

waterways. This privatization has had a huge impact and even where his community continues to have access to their traditional food, quite often the foods themselves were no longer there because of ecosystem degradation due to colonial activities.

Traditionally, wild rice was a major source of food security for the Anishinaabeg and a major economic factor for communities across their traditional territory. However, wild rice has been degraded almost to the point of elimination, occupying a much smaller area. The difference is extreme: at one time, not so long ago, many reserves like Curve Lake could support themselves with wild rice as their major source of subsistence food,



as well as having enough to be shared, gifted and traded. According to James it was not until modern treaty making that the collection of manoomin was limited to amounts needed for ceremonial purposes only.



Dancing the rice

Black Duck's role in the restoration of traditional manoomin economic activities—such as the restoration of regional wild rice beds and reclaiming the rights to, and responsibilities for harvesting, processing, eating, sharing, gifting and selling of manoomin—is a direct response to the systematic inequalities inherent in colonialism, which continually puts the Anishinaabeg people at an economic disadvantage. However, it is important to note that, although Black Duck engages with manoomin in an economic way, it does so at a community-scale, where other community values and ecosystem needs are considered and prioritized, rather than at a commercial scale where the central value is of making money.





The mainstream society has given up their right to good food through work or participation with their food and the systems it comes from... They will go and work for somebody else that has nothing to do with food in order to BUY their food, therefore removing themselves from this intimate relationship with the earth and their food and waters and replacing it with the capitalistic system. It has been quite a few years now and people have become accustomed to that, Canadian and Indigenous health is going downhill because of the lack of accountability in this relationship.

For James and his long-time friend and supporter Gary William, as well as other engaged Anishinaabeg, they would like to feed their families good healthy food, traditional food. They are interested in restoring ecosystems, cultural revival and regaining their independence. Whether you call that sustainable self-determination, revival of traditional food economies, or food sovereignty, they want to be make their own decisions about their food, where it comes from and how it gets to them, and the relationships it upholds. They want to be able to go out and get their own food and feed their families and communities and have a good time doing it. No drudgery, as James would say. It should be fun to go out and gather wild rice, if you are so inclined.

## Increasing Food Security

James would say that the work he has undertaken has not really increased his community's food security per se, as one person can't do that alone, it takes a community. However, Black Duck has helped to raise awareness of the value of traditional foods for good health, and has started the process of restoring the systems needed for regional Anishinaabeg communities to reduce their reliance of the global food system and replace it with their traditional place-based manoomin food system. There is a lot of work still to be done—right now there is still not enough wild rice growing regionally to support even one community fully.

In the short term manoomin is still considered a specialty food. It is relatively expensive and is often reserved for ceremony. But through the restoration of the regional manoomin beds and the revitalization of the knowledge and skills within the community, the long-term access to manoomin as a sustainable source of traditional food is doable, through active participation and the resurgence of traditional economies.



Black Duck's product line

## Increasing Prosperity

### Community Revitalization through social, cultural identity, health and well-being

Black Duck is not just about generating money, although that is part of it. It is also about creating collective prosperity and wealth through enriching the social, cultural, spiritual and environmental aspects of the community. There are so many benefits that come from the revitalization of manoomin. For the Anishinaabeg, health and well-being comes from eating and interacting with those seeds, as their bodies have been trained to honor, harvest, process, take care of and eat this food over thousands of years. For Black Duck, it starts with re-introducing manoomin into their diets to regain strength. Then depending on how much people want to and are able to get more involved, Black Duck provides opportunities for people to reclaim their manoomin knowledge and skills through their educational programs. In this way people can learn how manoomin





## BLACK DUCK WILD RICE

comes from the bottom of the lake to their plate, and how to participate in this process and do it themselves. According to James “it’s liberating... engaging with your traditional food systems, which brings health to the whole ecosystem, including the two-legged, gives you a sense of satisfaction and pride for being able to be self-sustaining again while upholding our responsibilities to all our relations – especially in light of the impacts of colonialism.”

However, according to James the revitalization of his community’s relationship with manoomin is particularly significant as the “manoomin itself is culture” and embodies the knowledge of how to revitalize Anishinaabeg identity, culture and community.

*The wild rice speaks, it speaks softly, yet it wants to be heard. It will speak and you will become aware. The more the seeds grow together, they love community, a large community and their strength is in their voices and as they grow in numbers they are more audible to mainstream society. It has a lot to teach us about culture and about society... as it is a society and it is a diverse society. There are many strains of wild rice, there are many levels of creation living in the rice, all with different needs and wants and so to me wild rice is a reflection of us as a people. And many of the things that has happened to wild rice have happened to us, and when I say us I don’t just mean Nishnaabe. I mean all people on the land, it has happened to us all, we’ve forgotten, we have become weak and scattered in our need and want for community.*

James would like to see people being able to advance their sense of well-being through improving their physical health, as well as strengthening their sense of Anishinaabeg identity by participating in wild rice and connecting to one of the Anishinaabeg’s greatest teachers—the manoomin itself. And so he has been teaching. James doesn’t just gather wild rice. He also teaches people about wild rice because their knowledge and experience of it has dwindled over the years, because they have not had access to it and that knowledge just slips away if it’s not being used and engaged with.

## Addressing Social Inequalities

### A site for Active Reconciliation

Much of Black Duck’s work addresses the inequitable relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples. Black Duck tries to bring it to the forefront, in many ways making the inequalities which have been systematized and hidden through the colonial process more visible through acts of resistance and resurgence. The Anishinaabeg have not disappeared. The manoomin has not disappeared. Black Duck is able to do this partly because they engage settler communities in a variety of ways and on a variety of scales and levels. There is weight in those seeds, in each package of those seeds. There is



social, cultural and economic weight that people take into their bodies, making the issues more visible, more real. The issues in the Kawartha Lakes region regarding the revitalization of manoomin make this a site of reconciliation, an opportunity to re-envision our relationships – as Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and as people with the earth and this particular place.



...the answer needs to be more active. Reconciliation needs to be a process. Nishnaabe people have shared, to the point that they are doing without the basic necessities, such as healthy traditional foods and the means to access them within their own traditional territories. So there has to be a re-sharing, sharing right from the top to the bottom. This is the process of reconciliation.

However, reconciliation through *apologies only* is not the answer, as sometimes apologies are not accepted. According to James, “the answer needs to be more active. Reconciliation needs to be a process. Nishnaabe people have shared, to the point that they are doing without the basic necessities, such as healthy traditional foods and the means to access them within their own traditional territories. So there has to be a re-sharing, sharing right from the top to the bottom. This is the process of reconciliation.” This process is going to take an enormous amount of education and is part of the reason why Black Duck does education geared towards both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It is a way to re-build relationships, facilitating understanding and developing ways to take collaborative and collective action.

## Increasing Social Capital

### Cultivating Relationships

Over the years, James’ family and friends have been very supportive and most of their work has been voluntary. Although James would still be doing what he is doing irrespective of all the help he has received, it would be on a much smaller scale and may have taken a different path. People volunteering their ideas, time, energy, skills, solidarity and resources have enhanced and expanded what Black Duck has been able to do as Black Duck scaled up its activities over the past ten years.



In many ways, Black Duck has emerged out of the relationships James cultivated first with individuals and then with the circles of community connections they brought with them.

*Over the years I have had many conversations with co-author Paula Anderson. Those conversations were instrumental to how I decided to develop Black Duck. Without these conversations I may have gone down a more strictly capitalistic path as that is what I knew and that was what was being propagated in my community, and it was and still is often what is used to evaluate your success by. But we shared and exchanged knowledge and ideas and we looked at potential alternative approaches, which encouraged me to re-evaluate my responsibilities and to prioritize the needs of my people along the way. Through this relationship many community connections were cultivated on behalf of Black Duck and linked me to the local and sustainable food movement, the university, the college and many wider settler-community groups and organizations that were aligned with clean water, healthy food systems and the reconciliation process.*



There are philanthropists in the community who have supported me, through their time, resources and/or connections for various reasons, maybe number one – guilt – to what has happened to us – Nishnaabe people. And people trying to remediate that personally, not waiting for their government to do it but to just remediate personally. And so I appreciate those that have done it for these reasons...but really I don't know why people do it, but I sure do appreciate when people help support with more than their words. I don't think it is me, I think people help because of a bigger reason ...

In a similar way Black Duck has cultivated a wide variety of community connections, often facilitated first through the development of individual relationships, which has then led to increased community connections and organizational support. These relationships have often been grounded in friendship and mutual interest in good food, in particular the revitalization of culturally appropriate food and the restoration of ecosystems. These relationships are the foundation on which Black Duck has cultivated its networks of support. For example through Black Duck's relationship with Trent University, the Indigenous Studies department kindly publicizes their Community Wild Rice Workshops, which Black Duck could only offer because of the kind donation of use of canoes by Camp Kawartha for the weekend. This wider publication of the workshop reached Nijkiwendida Ansihinabekwewag Services, who encouraged a group of urban

Indigenous youth to attend. These youth were so inspired by their experience with manoomin they wanted to reciprocate, and located funding to support Black Duck in

purchasing their own set of canoes and equipment, so that they could expand their educational opportunities.

In the same way, Trent University Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, who have the opportunity to volunteer with Black Duck as part of their class work, bring what they have learned back to their communities. They become the ambassadors for manoomin, and through them Black Duck has re-connected with many Anishinaabeg communities, adding to an ever-expanding network across the territory working on the revitalization of manoomin within their own communities. At the same time, the non-Indigenous students are bringing a different perspective of land and food back to their families, communities and workplaces.



Wild rice harvesting workshop with Trent University students

This format has been replicated in a myriad of ways over the years. Through the cultivation of real relationships between people, who then nurture additional relationships on their behalf, Black Duck is able to do the wide range of activities that they do.



## Challenges to the Wild Rice Revitalization Process

### Ignorance



*...within the wider settler community, it is like they can't remember anything past their grandfathers, most people in the region can't even remember their great grandfathers. All of that knowledge that comes with the Elders, or the lack of Elders, has disappeared locally, regionally. When the settlers first began to arrive they didn't just come in one at a time, they were brought in by the ship load, not just one ship load but ship loads – colonists coming in and plunked down on the land all within a few years. The impact of that coupled with their lack of knowledge of the people already living on the land for thousands of years – negated what we as Nishnaabe people knew. Our farming practices, our hunting practices, the way we treated the environment was of no consequence or importance. And that is the way it has been for 150 years. And we have to deal with that ignorance now! Before we as a Nishnaabe people have been wiped out by their genocide practices, it requires education at a local level, it requires the honouring and the recognition of the treaties and the treaty process. People got to know how they got possession of the land. The truth and reconciliation through action.*

### Systematic Inequalities & Institutional Jurisdictions



*...the colonial program of genocide has been institutionalized and the practices are going to continue until (those institutions) are changed. However, it is difficult to affect institutions, the gears grind so slow... [and] they are made to propagate themselves. So there is federal jurisdiction, there is provincial, there is municipal and there is First Nation. All these institutions are greedy, in the sense that they do not want to relinquish the power that they hold... because of this people can't come to a solution. Some may think this is a disadvantage, but for myself I have turned it around to think of it as an advantage, because of those peoples' greed they end up not doing anything. So I am an irritant... in that I use the space created through their unwillingness to share...*

*Case in point 30 years ago, the Curve Lake Chief, my dad (Elder Murray Whetung) and several counsellors and myself went to Parks Canada to see about enhancing, promoting and protecting wild rice. They said they would get back to us, 20 years later I got a letter from them, during that 20 years I planted a lot of wild rice and feed a lot of people, enough to the point where two seasons ago, the issue came to a big head between the levels of government and their jurisdictions, I was not disappointed to see that, it almost gave me hope ... but through my experience these governments are not going to change quickly, it is going to keep on like this and in the meantime I am going to keep on doing what I am doing.*



## Maintaining and Building Relationships

One of the big challenges involved with any work within the social economy or community realm is the cultivation and maintenance of relationships that are grounded in good communication, reciprocity, respect and trust. It requires a lot of personal time, reflection, skills and resources to do this well. Black Duck finds itself often under-resourced, limited in time, at odds with the digital age and embedded in a set of community relationships in the process of healing and revitalizing from the multigenerational impacts of colonization. It is a lot of responsibility and quite exhausting to trust in, maintain and expand relationships in a good way, while engaging the community and communicating goals and aspirations. Even with the people that have come on board to support Black Duck, James still feels very much on his own. He often says that he is only one guy and can only do so much and he doesn't want to be the leader, as he feels that his true skills and talents lie in taking care of the manoomin itself.

## Resources Needed to Sustain the Project

### Funding

Black Duck generates a modest amount of income, which is not enough to pay a living wage for those involved, while also covering operational expenses and the many costs associated with scaling up the capacity of Black Duck to provide good, healthy and safe food for the community, restore the wild rice beds, and deliver needed outreach and education. To sustain and grow the work of Black Duck into the future requires funds to support the community aspects of this project as well as the capacity building needed to do this work well. This would allow the income presently generated within the project to support those involved in a fair way as well as cover yearly operational expenses.

In particular, Black Duck sees three main areas where long-term funding is needed to support their work.

1. Research and Development - to support the development of culturally appropriate sustainable technologies to support the manoomin restoration, harvesting and processing process.
2. Education - within both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community that supports the revitalization of manoomin across the territory. This needs to start with education about the treaties and the reconciliation process and the responsibility to take action. It also needs to include funding to support on-the-land programs to revitalize and transmit traditional knowledge of manoomin and to build cross-cultural understanding as well as ecosystem and food system education.



3. Development and maintenance of a ‘living manoomin seed bank’ which is the foundation for the restoration of a regional manoomin-based food system.

## Protection

James also stressed the importance of Indigenous-led systems to be put in place to protect and enhance the manoomin beds within the territory and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples to manage and/or co-manage these systems, as well as restore the ecological integrity of their territory through manoomin revitalization. This protection is essential so that the work that has been done in reclaiming and restoring a manoomin-based food system in this territory to date does not get lost in both the short and long term. This would allow Black Duck to ‘plan’ rather than continually have to react to the highly vulnerable situation the manoomin is in and volatile conflict over manoomin resurgence within the territory. However, James realizes that at this point protection systems are caught up in the longer process of nation-to-nation negotiation. He also recognizes that these protection policies need to be developed in an inclusive manner, which takes time. However, as these long term Indigenous-led monitoring,



I think our government(s) should be providing financial support to people who are interested and want to increase and restore the wild rice in our area. Not just financial but also legal and enforcement because as it is we—and it—have no protection. We need the legal [rights] and the enforcement to protect that wild rice; otherwise all the work that has been done will be wasted.

protection and enforcement mechanisms are developed, shorter term mechanism need to be put in place to protect manoomin and Indigenous peoples’ rights to actively engage within their food system and to prevent its destruction. This would be consistent with upholding treaty obligations as well as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to which Canada is a signatory.

As short-term actions are taking place, important steps for implementing long-term monitoring, protection and enforcement systems and developing an Indigenous led management system needs to get started. This would include an inclusive system to be developed within and between regional First Nation communities through a community process, that honours the diversity of approaches and people contributing to the restoration and revitalization process. It will require a sharing of knowledge and resources between groups within these communities. As well, this process should include an educational component, to increase understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities of concepts such as ‘protection and enhancement’, ‘rights’, ‘responsibilities’, ‘protocols’ and ‘treaty’ as well as the cultural, ecological and inherent value of manoomin itself.

## Succession and Future Plans

As James gets older, there have been an increasing number of conversations around how he sees the future of Black Duck, and who will continue the work that he has started. First of all, although James may often feel isolated in the work he is undertaking on behalf of manoomin, James sees a future where Black Duck does not need to do all the work. He sees the revitalization of manoomin as a collective and community process, and so a decentralized and diverse approach in the future is important. Education and building strong alliances will need to be an important part of this.

James sees himself as gradually transferring the knowledge and skills he has developed to immediate family members, specifically his daughter Daemin Whetung. Black Duck will become her 'social enterprise' if she so chooses. He has articulated the desire to move more into a Knowledge holder role, providing guidance and mentoring rather than doing all of the work himself. This transfer of skills and knowledge has already begun and is a big undertaking. As James has found out, this will not only require a vast set of technical skills, innovative thinking and knowledge related to manoomin, it will also require social enterprise, finance and organizational skills. It will require the skills to develop and maintain good relationships and communication that Black Duck has relied upon so heavily. However, James does not place unnecessary stress on Daemin to continue in the same way that Black Duck has been developed to date. Things change, and as Daemin brings in her own skills and talents it will evolve and take new form.

As for James, it has been a long and often difficult journey. Yet he still carries a big dream, and that is to see the restoration of manoomin in Rice Lake. He sees Black Duck as one of many contributors to this revitalization work. He recognizes that it will require a multi-dimensional and multi-community approach and a huge educational commitment. It is not something that can be accomplished in isolation.

However, James feels that Black Duck has contributed to laying some of the groundwork within the region for this to come to fruition. Black Duck has talked to, developed relationships with, and shared the pieces of knowledge they hold with a lot of people and will continue to do this. But the time has come for all those people to pick up this work and contribute their time, energy and unique skills to this transformative endeavour. The future plan is to put it back into the hands and hearts of the community, as it will be the whole community who will ultimately benefit from re-kindling their relationship with manoomin.







James Whetung and daughter Daemin Whetung with new Wild Rice Roasting Equipment

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