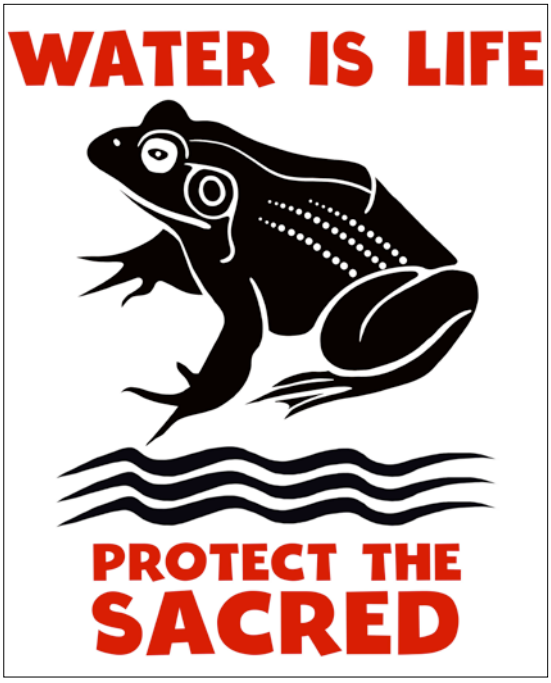
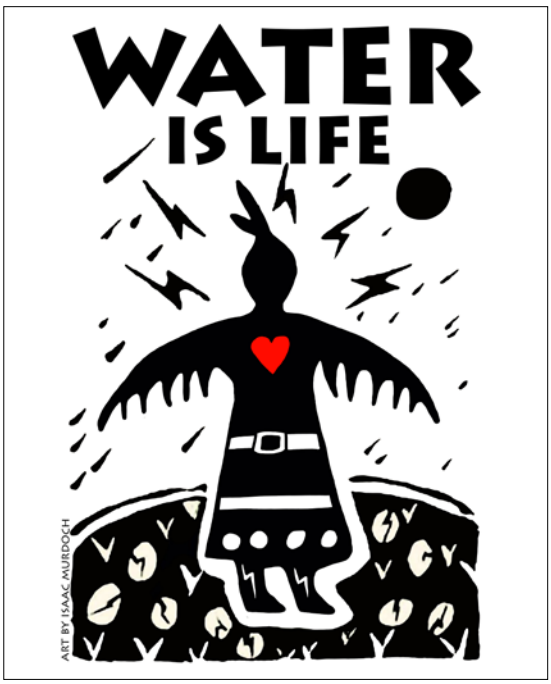
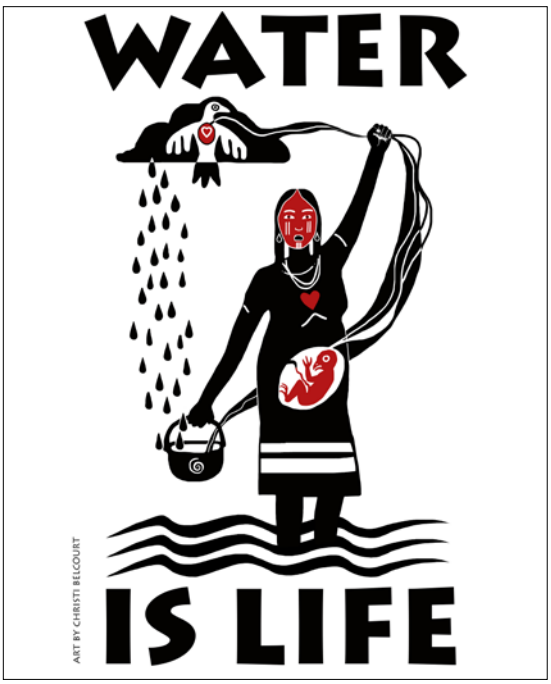
Water protection banners

Examples of water protection banners by Isaac Murdoch and Christie Belcourt.









[Image source: https://onamancollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/pregnantwomanbanner150dpi30in.jpg]
[Image source: https://onamancollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ThunderbirdwomanWIL2.jpg]
[Image source: https://onamancollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FrogWaterisLifeColour30in200dpi.jpg]
[Image source: https://onamancollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ProtectOurWater.jpg]

Indigenous water protectors profile



Organization name: _____

Where are they located? _____

Is their work connected to a particular body of water? _____

If so, which one? _____

How do they describe their reasons for protecting water?

_____

Are they partnering with other organizations or communities? _____

If so, list any partner organizations:

_____

_____

What actions are they taking to promote/protect water?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What can we learn from them about promoting/protecting water?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Pathways to action case studies



1. Science and research: The Experimental Lakes Area

Where: northwestern Ontario, near Kenora

The problem: In the 1960s, lakes across North America were turning bright green with harmful algae. Thick blooms killed fish, closed beaches and made water undrinkable. Nobody could agree on what was causing it. The detergent industry said it was carbon. Other scientists suspected phosphates, the ingredient in laundry soap and sewage that acts like fertilizer.

What they did: In 1968, a set of small lakes in northwestern Ontario was set aside so scientists could experiment on whole, real lakes. In 1973, researchers stretched a plastic curtain across Lake 226, dividing it in two. They added carbon and nitrogen to both halves. To one half only, they added phosphorus.

What happened: Within weeks the phosphorus half turned thick and green. The other half stayed clear. The photograph taken from the air of one lake, one green half and one clear half, ended the argument.

What changed: Phosphorus was limited in laundry detergent and other soaps. Sewage treatment plants were redesigned to remove phosphorus. Phosphorus targets were written into the 1972 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between Canada and the United States. Lake Erie, which people had called dead, largely recovered.

Think about it: This experiment took years and did not clean up a single lake by itself. Why was it still one of the most important things anyone did for freshwater in Canada?

Pathways to action case studies



2. Government: The Canada Water Agency

Where: headquarters in Winnipeg, Man., with five regional offices. Find Winnipeg and Lake Winnipeg on the map.

The problem: Canada holds about one fifth of the world's freshwater, but responsibility for it is split among federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments. For decades there was no single federal body whose job was to protect and restore freshwater. Problems that crossed borders, like a lake shared by two provinces and a river crossing into another country, were handled by a variety of governing bodies.

What they did: The Canada Water Agency became a standalone federal agency on Oct. 16, 2024. Its headquarters was placed in Winnipeg, close to Lake Winnipeg, one of the most stressed large lakes in the country.

What it does: Brings federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous partners together to make decisions; develops national freshwater policy; builds a national freshwater data strategy; and delivers the Freshwater Action Plan. They have a budget of $650 million to spend over ten years for eight priority waterbodies: the Great Lakes, Lake Winnipeg, Lake of the Woods, Lake Simcoe, the St. Lawrence River, the Mackenzie River, the Fraser River and the Wolastoq/ Saint John River.

Think about it: Find as many of the eight priority waterbodies as you can on the map. Why might these eight have been chosen? Which waterway near you is not on the list, and who is responsible for it?

Pathways to action case studies



3. Organizations: Water First education and training

Where: across Canada, working in partnership with Indigenous communities.

The problem: Many First Nations communities have lived under drinking water advisories for years. Building a treatment plant is not enough on its own. A plant needs certified operators to run it, and communities have often had no opportunities for community members to earn that certification. Relying on trained operators from away is expensive and when problems occur it takes a long time to fix them.

What they did: Water First, a Canadian charity, created the Drinking Water Internship: a fifteen-month paid program in which Indigenous young adults combine classroom learning with about 1,800 hours of hands-on training in their own community's water treatment plant, working toward provincial operator certification.

What changed: Across its first eight rounds, 65 interns graduated from the internship from 40 Indigenous communities, with more than 161,000 hours logged in local water plants. What stays behind is not a product but people — certified, employed, knowledgeable and running their own community's water system.

Think about it: Water First did not invent a new technology. It trained people. Why might that be more useful than a new machine? What does this tell you about what a problem really is?

Pathways to action case studies



4. Grassroots and community action: The Water Walkers

Where: the shores of the Great Lakes, and now waterways across Turtle Island (trace Lake Superior's shoreline on the map)

The problem: People were harming water without noticing they were doing it. There was no rule to break, no committee to petition and no research finding that would make people care.

What she did: In 2003, Anishinaabe Grandmother Josephine Mandamin (Biidaasige-ba) began walking the entire shoreline of Lake Superior, carrying a copper pail of water and an eagle staff. She walked the shores of all five Great Lakes and, in her lifetime, more than 25,000 kilometres.

What changed: Nibi Walks and Water Walks are now held across Turtle Island by people who never met her. Her great-niece Autumn Peltier carried the message to the United Nations as a teenager. Communities have written water declarations that governments and organizations now quote. Josephine Mandamin died in 2019. The walks continue.

Think about it: This pathway is the only one of the four you could begin tomorrow, with nothing but a decision. What would you want people to notice about the water where you live?

My water protection pathway



An individual or group protecting water who inspires me is....

One action that they have taken that inspires me is...

One way I can protect water in my community or region is...

I can work with other people to protect water by...

Another action I can take on behalf of water is...

The pathway to action that most interests me is... because...

One thing I could do through that pathway this year is...

One other pathway I would need help from is...
