

Artwork by Isaac Murdoch and Christi Belcourt

# WATER IS SACRED



ART BY ISAAC MURDOCH



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*This zine was created in commemoration of **Women's Month** and **World Water Day** in 2025, with the aim of connecting water justice and gender equality. The corresponding pieces were created to celebrate the role of women in protecting water systems, and to call for stronger connections between environmental and gender advocacy.*

*Photo Credit: Indigenous Climate Action*

# ERIEL TCHEKWIE DERANGER

*Water Protection Advocacy*

by Shaylyn Pelikys (she/her)



Eriel Tchekwie Deranger is a a Dënesųłiné activist from Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Executive Director and founder of Indigenous Climate Action (ICA). As the Executive Director of ICA, she has played a critical role in advocating for Indigenous communities whose water sources have been threatened by resource extraction activities. (1) Before her birth, Deranger’s family was forcibly removed from their trapline in northern Saskatchewan by armed security, due to the expansion of uranium mining. Deranger spent her childhood living downstream of Alberta’s oil sands (2).

## **OPPOSITION TO THE TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE EXPANSION**

One of Deranger’s points of advocacy efforts has been her involvement in opposition to the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion, a project designed to transport oil from the tar sands to the Pacific coast. The pipeline’s construction posed significant risks to water bodies along its route, including the Fraser River, a critical source of water for many Indigenous communities. Deranger, alongside other Indigenous activists, has worked

tirelessly to halt the expansion, citing concerns over the potential for oil spills, the disruption of traditional lands, and the lack of meaningful consultation with affected Indigenous Nations. As the pipeline would pass through traditional territories near vital water sources, the potential for spills or leaks threatens the water quality and health of the local ecosystems (1) (3).

Indigenous activists, including Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, have also highlighted the disturbing connection between the construction of pipelines like the Trans Mountain Expansion and increased violence against Indigenous women. The establishment of so-called "man camps", temporary housing for workers associated with large-scale infrastructure projects, have been linked to higher rates of sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of abuse in nearby Indigenous communities (4) (5).

## **ADVOCACY FOR LIVELIHOOD AND HEALTH**

Deranger is outspoken about how Indigenous people are one of the first people to notice the impact of climate change. This is due to the livelihoods of many communities having direct cultural ties to the land. Arctic communities are witnessing the melting of permafrost. Rural communities in Alberta have been experiencing flooding. The glacial-river system, Lake Athabasca, has been declining every year due to increasing temperatures causing glacial melting; this impact has been observed by Fort Chipewyan. Another direct impact from this decline has caused droughts in downstream northern communities (6).

Deranger has been a vocal advocate for the ways in which climate change directly affects the health of Indigenous communities. She shares observations from her home, Chipewyan First Nation, where she underscores the compounded impacts of global climate change. These include the depletion of local waterways and the disruption of migratory patterns for various species. Such changes have a profound impact on the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples in the region, especially as many remote communities rely on hunting and fishing for food. When resources become contaminated or

disappear altogether, access to traditional food sources is lost, forcing people to turn to expensive grocery store alternatives. Deranger emphasizes the resulting health consequences, including a rise in chronic conditions such as diabetes, autoimmune diseases, and even cancer, all of which are linked to the loss of traditional, nutrient-rich diets (7).

## CONCLUSION

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger's work in water protection exemplifies the critical role Indigenous activists play in the fight for environmental justice. Through her advocacy and leadership, she has highlighted the urgent need for action to preserve water resources, particularly for Indigenous communities whose cultures and lives depend on them. As climate change and resource extraction continue to threaten water sources globally, Deranger's contributions offer a model for integrating Indigenous leadership into environmental governance and policy development.

## FEMALE VOICES ON ENERGY JUSTICE IN TURTLE ISLAND

The following are podcasts featuring female Indigenous voices on Energy Justice.

- [For The Wild: ERIEL DERANGER on Radicality Amid Expanding Tar Sands /45](#)
- [Warrior Life: Kanahus Manuel Targeted by RCMP & TMX](#)
- [Energy Policy Now: Can Clean Energy Deliver Energy Justice to Canada's First Nations?](#)
- [What On Earth: Meet the Woman Guiding First Nations Away from Fossil Fuels](#)

## SOURCES

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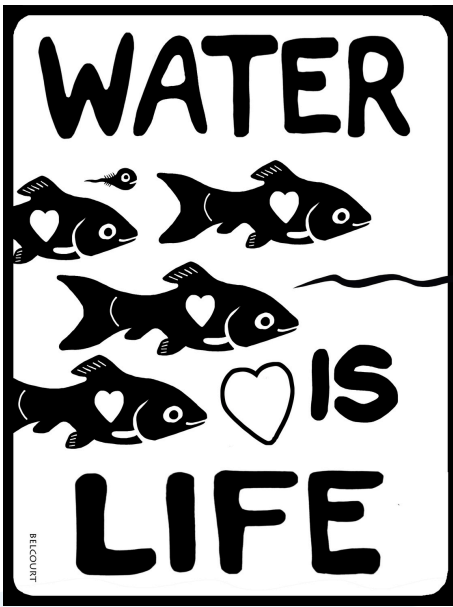
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(7) American Public Health Association. (2017, November 5). Eriel Tchekwie Deranger on Indigenous health and climate change at APHA 2017 [Video].

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## CALL TO ACTION:

*Real-Life Strategies for Water and Environmental Justice this International Women's Day*

by Jennifer Amadi (she/her)

The sun beat down on the arid landscape, reflecting off the parched earth and the hopeful faces of the women gathered. They were mothers, daughters, sisters – united by their shared struggle for water and their unwavering determination to create a better future. In their hands, they held not only empty buckets but also the blueprints for a more equitable world. Today, on International Women's Day, we are reminded that water is not simply a resource; it is a lifeline, a source of sustenance, and a symbol of hope. Yet, for too many women around the world, access to clean water remains a distant dream. The burden of water collection falls disproportionately on their shoulders, limiting their opportunities for education, economic empowerment, and participation in community life.

The time has come to turn this tide. We must move beyond rhetoric and take concrete action to integrate gender perspectives into water and environmental justice. This means engaging women in all aspects of water management, from planning and decision-making to implementation and monitoring. It means recognizing their unique knowledge and expertise and empowering them to be-

come agents of change. The [case studies](#) presented in this document paint a vivid picture of the transformative power of gender mainstreaming in water and the environment (1). In Nicaragua, community engagement and gender-responsive policies led to improved access to clean water and enhanced sanitation practices.

In other parts of the world, similar initiatives have yielded remarkable results, demonstrating that when women are given a voice, entire communities thrive. However, challenges remain. The absence of gender-specific indicators and the lack of methodologies for replicating successful interventions hinder progress. We must address these challenges head-on, developing innovative tools and strategies to measure the impact of gender mainstreaming and ensure its sustainability. The road ahead is not without its obstacles, but the destination is clear: a world where water flows freely for all, regardless of gender. A world where women and girls are not merely beneficiaries of development but active participants in shaping their own destiny. On this International Women's Day, let us renew our commitment to gender equality and water justice. Let us work together to build a future where every woman and every girl has the right to a clean environment, water, and the opportunity to live a life of dignity and empowerment. The time for action is now.

## SOURCES

(1) Flores, O., Jimenez, A., & Perez-Foguet, A. (2013). Monitoring access to water in rural areas based on the human right to water framework: a local level case study in Nicaragua. *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, 29(4), 605-621.





# GENDER, WATER, & JUSTICE

*Centring Indigenous Women  
in Water Stewardship*

by Cameron Armstrong (she/her)

In recent years, there has been an increased shift to recognizing the relationships between social and environmental issues, rather than addressing the world's largest problems in siloes. Some may credit the United Nations and the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals as the catalyst to majorly shifting how we think about the relationships between global issues, however, Indigenous Peoples have long recognized the integral relationship between women and water for generations.

So what does that mean when we think about gender equality and water in the context of so-called Canada?

First, environmental degradation is inherently gendered, disproportionately impacting women, and particularly Indigenous women (1). Though, Indigenous women are often on the frontlines of water protection across Turtle Island (3).

From leaders such as [Judy DaSilva advocating for justice for her home community of Grassy Narrows](#) in Western Ontario, [Grassroots Grandmothers Circle defending waterways](#) from natural gas development in Nova Scotia, to [Ta'kaiya Blaney's song "Shallow Waters"](#) to call out the oil company, Enbridge, Indigenous women and girls are at the forefront of water protection.

But for many, that work is not centred around activism, but rather is about upholding traditional responsibilities and protecting ways of life for current and future generations (3).

Across many Nations, women are often recognized as water-knowledge holders, possessing Traditional Ecological Knowledge central to upholding sacred relationships to water. These responsibilities are rooted in Indigenous governance, legal orders, and creation stories which dictate their roles as water protectors (2).

Despite their critical role and knowledge, Indigenous women have been systematically excluded from Western water governance and environmental management (1). Western water stewardship has not escaped the oppressive systems of colonization and the patriarchy. As we move toward more equitable water management, it is crucial to recognize and uphold Indigenous women's distinct knowledge, governance authority, and responsibility. Shifting toward relationships grounded in justice means centring Indigenous feminist perspectives that address the impacts of colonization and the patriarchy on our water relationships.

Water is the foundation of life - it touches every aspect of our existence. It is tied to healthcare, economic and trade systems, travel and transportation, food and sustenance, spiritual and cultural practices, and the power to birth new life. As we reflect on International Women's Day and World Water Day, and particularly for those of us who are settlers and have benefitted from colonial water infrastructure and access, I encourage you to think about your personal relationship with this life-giving source. Where does your water come from? Who has benefited from our current forms of water access? Who has lost? Who is speaking for the water?

By reflecting on these questions, we can begin to understand the profound interconnectedness of gender, water, and justice and work towards a future that honours the knowledge and responsibility of Indigenous women as water protectors and stewards.





If you would like to engage with and learn more about water protection being led by women across what is currently known as Canada, check out the following resources! I also encourage you to do your own research on local water protectors and Indigenous-led water conservation efforts.

- [IKWE: Honouring Women, Life Givers, and Water Protectors](#)
- There's Something in the Water ([Book](#)) ([Film](#))
- [river woman](#) by Katherena Vermette
- [Shallow Waters](#) by Ta’Kaiya Blaney
- [Indigenous conservation is not a threat](#) by Taylor Galvin
- [Flooding Sustainable Livelihoods of the Lake St Martin First Nation: The Need to Enhance the Role of Gender and Language in Anishinaabe Knowledge Systems](#) by Dr. Myrle Ballard
- [Water Carriers Project](#)

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- (1) Dennis, M. K., & Bell, F. M. (2020). Indigenous women, water protectors, and reciprocal responsibilities. *Social Work*, 65(4), 378–386. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swaa033>
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# CONTRIBUTORS

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**Shaylyn Pelikys** is an undergraduate student in Biological Sciences with a concentration on Ecological and Environmental Biology. She has also completed a Minor in Geological Sciences and Physics & Astronomy. Her research interests include the impact of hydroelectricity, greenwashing, conservation, remote sensing, oceanography, & ecology. She seeks to deepen her understanding of how environmental impacts affect Indigenous, as well the relationship between caused environmental harm and social injustices. Shaylyn is working with CHRR as a research assistant on the Just Waters project.

**Cameron Armstrong (she/her)** comes from a mixed Filipina ancestry and was born and raised in Winnipeg, MB/Treaty 1 Territory. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Environmental Science at the University of Manitoba and is interested in environmental justice, policy work, water protection, and empowering Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) youth in environmental spaces. Recognized as one of 2023's Top 25 Environmentalists Under 25 by the Starfish, Cameron serves as the Senior Program Specialist at Youth Climate Lab.



# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## JUST WATERS

Thinking with Hydro-Social Relations  
for a More Just and Sustainable World



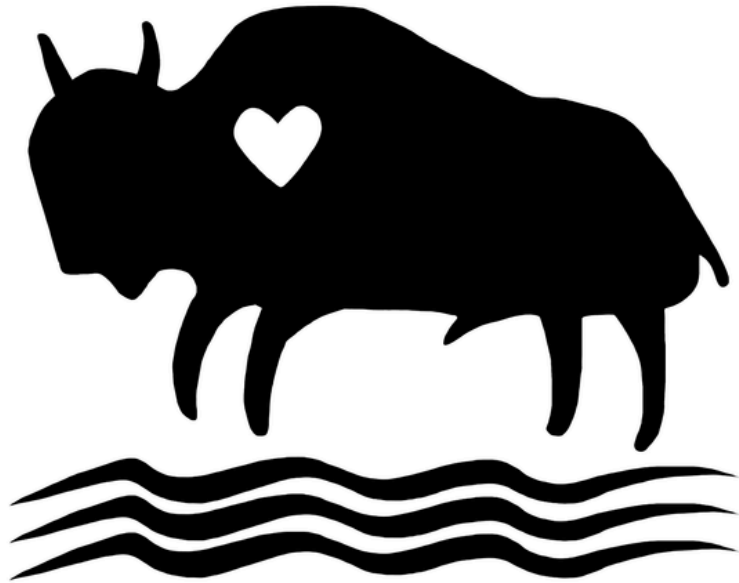
*Just Waters: Thinking with Hydro-Social Relations for a More Just and Sustainable World* is an interdisciplinary research project that is housed at the Centre for Human Rights Research at the University of Manitoba. This three-year project, funded by the [UM IGNITE Program](#), will nurture new and ongoing relationships to mobilize and connect individuals locally and internationally to better address the ongoing issues surrounding water justice. Just Waters applies an interdisciplinary lens to water (in)justice and work to move research to the next steps. By establishing an interdisciplinary approach and centering the hydro-social, the project nurtures new and ongoing relationships to mobilize and connect individuals locally and internationally to better address the ongoing issues surrounding water justice.

LEARN MORE  
ABOUT THE  
PROJECT THROUGH  
SCANNING THE QR  
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CHRR.INFO.



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# WATER IS LIFE



# PROTECT THE SACRED

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