

Mi'kmaw Decision-Making

Encroachment and Deforestation

Scenario

It is the spring of 1758. You are living with your large extended family some distance from the coast in a winter camping area. It is time for the plamu (salmon) and alanj (herring) to return to Mi'kma'ki.

You, and all of your sukwiskw (aunties) and klamuksiskw (uncles) and many nikma'j (cousins) are returning to the lower part of the river to fish. This is the area where each year your village welcomes the spring in Siwkewiku's (maple sugar time).



Artwork: G Gloade

The treaty relationship is not as strong as it once was, and you have heard your Elders and family talking of fighting and violence between the Mi'kmaq and the British. Across Mi'kma'ki, the Mi'kmaq are concerned, having seen the deportation of the Acadians.

When your village arrives at the bend in the river of your spring village site, you find that a group of English-speaking people have recently cut a large area of trees and plants to build their homes. The medicines, wood, and food of the area have been removed. They have planned their houses on top of the wikuoml locations your community has used for generations.

Group Resolution

Within your groups, you must decide how you are going to respond to these newcomers.

Use Mi'kmaw values as you make decisions: work together to reach a decision, honour humility, respect each other and include everyone. Remember that in Mi'kmaw worldview, decisions consider all living beings and the land, not just people.



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Historical Notes

This scenario is built on real historical experiences of the disruption of Mi'kmaw seasonal mobility after the arrival of the British as well as other newcomers. English-speaking populations were encouraged throughout Mi'kma'ki as an intentional colonial policy to use population growth as a means of land confiscation and disruption.



Artwork: © Gloade

How did the Mi'kmaq respond?

The experience of land loss and mobility disruption is one of the most consequential of European contact and colonialism. Different families and communities responded differently.

- Some families avoided newcomers and used their deep knowledge of Mi'kma'ki to keep families and communities together without significant violence. Among other dangers, newcomers brought illness, and avoidance was one way of keeping communities safer. One proposal called Belcher's Proclamation set aside a territory within Mi'kma'ki that was only for indigenous people. This "Indian Territory" was never realized, but it was response to encroachment.
- In a number of instances, Mi'kmaw warriors confronted people who disrupted Mi'kmaw lives with violence. The clearing of land damaged the plants, animals and land of Mi'kma'ki from Mi'kmaw perspectives and taking resources out of Mi'kma'ki without sharing other resources freely was seen as an act of aggression. Sharing freely without expectation of anything in return is central to Mi'kmaw culture.
- Lastly, within a couple of years of this story the treaty relationship was renewed through the Treaty of 1761, which was ratified until 1763 by a large number of Mi'kmaw Saqmaq. This Treaty did reduce conflict across Mi'kma'ki, although the British soon "forgot" the treaty relationship. The Treaty of 1761 has been affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada numerous times and is foundational to the treaty relationship.

