

Center for Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM)

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba

CBRM Database

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Case Study Name:	Revamping community-based conservation through participatory research		
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Region:	North America		
Country:	Canada		
Ecosystem Type:	Northern coniferous forest (boreal)		
Social Characteristics:	Indigenous community		
Scale of Study:	Community/ protected areas		
Resource Type:	Protected area		
Type of Initiative:	Community initiative		
Community Based Work:	Resource management/conservation		
Keywords:	Community-based conservation; protected areas; Cree Nation of Wemindji; collaborative research; knowledge		

	exchange; capacity building
Summary:	<p>Community-based conservation is experiencing a crisis of identity and purpose as a result of a disappointing track record and unresolved deficiencies. The latter include over-simplified assumptions and misconceptions of “community,” the imposition of externally designed and driven projects at the community level, a focus on conservation outcomes at the expense of community empowerment and social justice, and limited attention to participatory processes. New approaches are urgently needed to address these weaknesses and to counter a rising trend towards environmental protectionism and a preference for conservation approaches at an eco-regional scale that threaten the interests of local and Indigenous communities. We propose that three core principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR)—(1) community-defined research agenda; (2) collaborative research process; and (3) meaningful research outcomes—hold much promise. Drawing on the experience of a research partnership involving the James Bay Cree community of Wemindji, northern Quebec, and academic researchers from four Canadian universities, we document the process of applying these principles to a community-based conservation project that uses protected areas as a political strategy to redefine relations with governments in terms of a shared responsibility to care for land and sea. We suggest that basic assumptions of CBPR, including collaborative, equitable partnerships in all phases of the research, promotion of co-learning and capacity building among all partners, emphasis on local relevance, and commitment to long-term engagement, can provide the basis for a revamped phase of community-based conservation that supports environmental protection while strengthening local institutions, building capacity, and contributing to cultural survival.</p>