**First Nations’ Perspective on Drinking Water**

**Water is alive. It is a being with its own spirit.**

Water must be respected as a living being. Water bodies are believed to have various personalities and responsibilities that require different demonstrations of respect. Water is understood to have feelings and to be capable of being sad and/or angry if not respected or treated properly. Water must be free to fulfill its responsibilities and it is inappropriate for people to interfere with its life-giving duties.

**Water is sacred.**

Water is regarded as sacred and is often used in ceremonies. It is a powerful medicine and must be respected as such. It has life-giving properties. We require water in order to live. “Water is life” is a common sentiment expressed among Elders and traditional teachings.

**Water is a relative.**

Water is alive and infused with spirit and it is a relative. One speaks to water as one would a relative, with caring and compassion. Water is not a commodity to be bought and sold. It is to be revered and treated with respect and dignity.

**Water is part of a holistic system, a part of Creation.**

Water is not a single, separate aspect of the environment. It is part of a greater, interconnected whole. When one thinks about water, one must consider all that to which water is connected and related. When one considers water, therefore, one must consider all that water supports and all that supports water. One must consider, for example, the plants that water nourishes, the fish that live in water, the medicines that grow in or around water, and the animals that drink water.

**Water is key to survival.**

Water is critical for the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual life of Aboriginal people. Water fulfills many functions for continued life on Earth. The role of water in life must be recognized. Therefore, it is inappropriate to deprive others (including fish, plants, and land animals) of water by hoarding water for oneself.

**Appropriate water use is about proper relationships.**

From a First Nations’ perspective, one does not really use water. Instead, one speaks to, and seeks permission from, water to utilize its life-giving properties. One does not seek to treat water as a commodity, but should find an appropriate relationship with water based on respect and the recognition that water is a living spiritual force. Water is regarded as a gift. In traditional teachings and values, there are protocols to ensure that proper relationships with water are maintained so that water, in turn, is able to fulfill its responsibilities.

**Water must be treated with an ethic of thanksgiving.**

Water is critical to the survival of all life on Earth, and First Nations people are most thankful for water’s existence. There are protocols and ceremonies for giving thanks to water and for establishing and maintaining a spiritual connection to water. In First Nations cultures, water is not taken for granted and its life-giving qualities are regularly recognized and honoured.

**People have specific responsibilities to protect water.**

People are taught that they have an obligation, a responsibility, to care for water. This responsibility has been proclaimed in international declarations involving water. Women, in particular, are considered to have specific responsibilities in relation to water. This means that consideration must be given to the gender of decision-makers, especially with respect to Aboriginal women, who have the responsibility of speaking for water in Aboriginal communities.

**Planning for water governance must take a long-term approach.**

Decision-makers must plan at least seven generations ahead. Any decisions about water should be based on recognition of the impact such decisions will have on subsequent generations.

**Knowledge regarding water must be shared.**

First Nations peoples’ unique views and values in relation to water must be shared with people who are not of First Nations ancestry. Traditional teachings about water would benefit the general population, so people who are not of First Nations ancestry can also learn to develop proper relationships with water.

**Women have a central role.**

Women carry the responsibility to talk for the water. The recognition of women’s role in creating life along with water means that women and water have a special bond.

**Renaming the waters with their proper names.**

Renaming the waters with their proper names, rather than the newcomers’ names, is important in helping the waters heal.