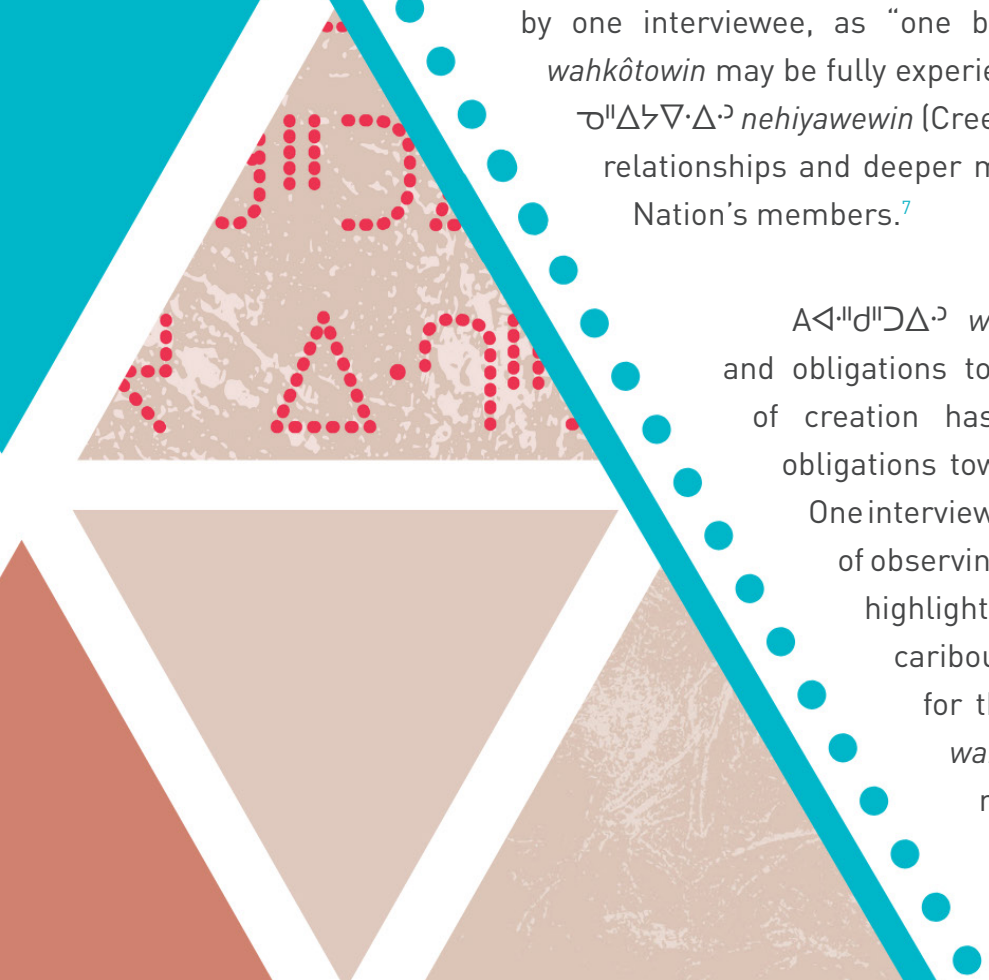
ᐊᐧᐦᑯᐦᑐᐃᐧᑦ wahkôtowin

"(...) everybody works together, everybody supports each other, everybody lives properly. (...) Everybody is working as a family unit."

Elder Jane McDonald, July 11, 2018[1]

ᐊᐧᐦᑯᐦᑐᐃᐧᑦ *wahkôtowin* may be described as the principle and related laws that govern relationships and guide conduct (Cardinal, 2007).[2] Within this concept is the recognition that all beings are related in the world and it encourages all peoples (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to show respect for one another and for all other relations, including plants, animals, the land or the spiritual beings (Campbell, 2005).[3] Some interviewees interpret this principle through their special connection to the land, whether it is their Nation's territory or the earth as a whole.[4] One Elder describes how she experiences ᐊᐧᐦᑯᐦᑐᐃᐧᑦ *wahkôhtowin* in the metaphysical realm in which it is possible to forego chronological time and connect to spirit beings.[5] Most interviewees connect this principle to the interrelatedness of the Aseniwuche Winewak, highlighting their Nation's tight family network, kinship or family roles and community relationships, or, as described by one interviewee, as "one big family".[6] For some, ᐊᐧᐦᑯᐦᑐᐃᐧᑦ *wahkôtowin* may be fully experienced by practicing the principle of ᓂᐦᐃᔭᐁᐧᐃᐧᑦ *nehiyawewin* (Cree language), which allows for closer relationships and deeper mutual understanding between the Nation's members.[7]



Aᐊᐧᐦᑯᐦᑐᐃᐧᑦ *wahkôtowin* entails responsibilities and obligations to all of creation and, in turn, all of creation has responsibilities and reciprocal obligations toward human beings (Jobin, 2014).[8] One interviewee comments on the positive effects of observing these reciprocal obligations as he highlights the importance of protecting the caribou's habitat on the Nation's territory for the Nation's well being.[9] ᐊᐧᐦᑯᐦᑐᐃᐧᑦ *wahkôtowin* may also explain the roles, responsibilities and obligations

guiding Cree people's conduct. They describe what a person is required to know and where he or she fits; the surrounding relationships then determine expectations in regard to fulfilling respective responsibilities and obligations within the Nation (Cardinal, 2000).[10] In applying this principle to her family and to the Nation, one Elder highlights how ᐊᐧᐦᑯᐦᑐᐃᐧᐣ *wahkôtowin* sets out behaviour expectations that are to be maintained for respectful and happy relations.[11]

Endnotes

1 From interview with Elder Jane McDonald, July 11, 2018.

2 Cardinal H. (2007), Nation-Building: Reflection of Nihiyow (Cree). In P. De Pasquale (Ed.), *Natives & settlers, now & then: Historical issues and current perspectives on treaties and land claims in Canada* (1st ed.). University of Alberta Press.

3 Campbell M. (2005, November 1). Reflections: We need to return to the principles of Wahkotowin. *Eagle Feather News*.

4 From interviews with Elder Adelaide McDonald, April 24, 2018 and Tom McDonald, July 23, 2018.

5 From interview with Elder Adelaide McDonald, April 24, 2018.

6 From interviews with Elder Mary Delorme, August 24, 2018; Elder Jane McDonald, July 11, 2018; Tom McDonald, July 23, 2018; Elder Philomene Moberly & Carol Wanyandie, April 26, 2018; Mabel Wanyandie, April 24, 2018 and Russell Wanyandie, April 25, 2018.

7 From interviews with Elder Philomene Moberly & Carol Wanyandie, April 26, 2018 and Elder Mary Delorme, August 24, 2018.

8 Jobin, S. (2014). *Cree economic relationships, governance, and critical Indigenous political economy in resistance to settler-colonial logics* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta].

9 From interview with Tom McDonald, July 23, 2018.

10 Cardinal, H. (2000), *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*. University of Calgary Press.

11 From interview with Elder Jane McDonald, July 11, 2018.

THIS GUIDE WAS PREPARED BY JOHANNE JOHNSON, Wahkohtowin Lodge Researcher, AS PART OF HER Master of Arts in Native Studies.

WAHKOHTOWIN

LAW & GOVERNANCE LODGE

ASENIWUCHE WINEWAK NATION