

RAD Story Lodge | Episode 1

What is RAD? Part 1

Randi Russell: Oki and hello. Welcome to the RAD Story Lodge, a place where you will hear stories from the land and learn from indigenous communities who are advancing regenerative economies and reshaping the way we think about conservation. We aim to demystify topics like nature-based solutions and shine the light on pathways to a sustainable future. I'm Randi Russell, a member of The Blood Tribe and part of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

As the Network Operations Director here at RAD, my role is to grow the network in a way that is in line with indigenous values and worldviews. I'm so incredibly honored to get to introduce the RAD Leadership Circle.

Samantha Whiteeye: nidashinzi, khwe shopakal, my name is Sam Whiteeye.

Dani Warren: My name is Dani Warren.

Terry Dorward: My name is Terry Doward.

David Flood: Ndizhinikaaz Zonzei Maiingun. My name is David Flood, my spirit name is Strong Wolf.

Gwen Bridge: Tansi, my name is Gwen Bridge.

Steven Nitah: My name is Steven Nitah.

Randi Russell: We are governed by this amazing [00:01:00] group of six indigenous leaders and have designed the RAD Network with guidance from elders across Turtle Island. Together we are committed to staying rooted in love and abundance as we carry out the work guided by our core values, which are focused on advancing indigenous rights, knowledge sharing, and growing equitable pathways to funding.

In this episode, we will hear from David Flood, Sam Whiteeye, and Steven Nitah, who will provide some of the context of why the RAD Network exists.

David Flood: Zonzei Maiingun ndizhinikaaz, Metatchewan First Nation ndoonjibaa. I come from Metatchewan First Nation. I come from Treaty nine, territory. I come from a community by the name of Metatchewan First Nation, an Ojibwe community. My given name at birth is David Flood, and I am a practitioner, supporting indigenous, advocacy work for the last, I would argue, 30 years of my life since graduating university.

Samantha Whiteye: Nidashinzi, khwe shopakal, ni nonjiae, lapaui lakaui, ni nangwa mawak takwa, ni injilinapaui. So, hello everyone. My name is Sam Whiteye. I [00:02:00] come from Eelūnapéewi Lahkéewiit, or Delaware Nation at Moraviantown. I'm Turtle Clan and I am the Indigenous Leadership Director with Carolinian Canada.

Steven Nitah: My name is Steven Nitah. I am a First Nations person from the Łutséł K'é Dene First Nations in the Northwest Territories. I'm a former chief, former MLA. I was the lead negotiator in the, uh, establishment negotiations with Canada and the government of Northwest Territories that created the Thaidene Nënë indigenous protected and conserved area.

David Flood: I've been chasing carbon and climate change, since COP 10, way back in, uh, 2007, I think it was with COP 10 in Montreal for the Kyoto Protocol.

So this space of the need for indigenous participation and, the most recent document internationally, the Paris Agreement. But my name, uh, over that period of time has been shared in many circles. And my understanding was, it came up, uh, through the Indigenous Leadership Initiative through Val Courtois, and I happened to sit as a senior advisor to that [00:03:00] group.

There was an organizing group, as a result of the CRP out of Guelph, the Conservation through Reconciliation partnership, that was meant to launch stream seven of the CRP.

And I think there was a few other leaders in the group that already had conceptually started a toy with a name. We actually went there branded with some touques and I mean, RAD was born. We hit the ground running and, and we started doing advocacy on the basis of the spirit, intent of restore, assert, defend, for indigenous people in the Canadian context.

There was some great success there and, and some early interest, to get behind the idea of RAD and forming some form of national network to raise the

understanding and interest with First Nations in this ability to create these financial relationships around land and carbon and nature-based solutions.

Randi Russell: The RAD Network started in 2023 with a vision gathering to establish direction for the network. Prior to this, however, there were many people in projects working [00:04:00] to build solutions in both conservation and reconciliation. Steven has been immersed in this work for most of his life. Here he talks about some of the critical steps on his journey.

Steven Nitah: I was a member of the Indigenous Circle of Experts, as part of Canada's Pathways to Target One, where we're mandated to ask Indigenous peoples from coast to coast to coast about what type of relationships they would like to have with Crown governments to use some of their territories to help Canada meet its international commitment of 30%. And then we, we took what we heard and finalized the report that we released to Canada and to Canadians in March of 2018. The report is called We Rise Together, and it has 48 recommendations, all very much implementable.

As that process was winding down, discussion started to look at creating a research type of a project. [00:05:00] The research project we created, we named Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership. The main goal of the Conservation through Reconciliation was to develop tools that can be used by Indigenous nations, their allies, the NGO communities and governments to support indigenous leadership in conservation.

RAD is a group of dedicated individuals that are helping build those tools that ensures that Indigenous rights, responsibilities, value systems are centered in creating nature based solution financing projects that support IPCAs.

Randi Russell: Building the right tools is one piece. It is also critical to have a pathway to share knowledge across nations and grow reciprocal relationships within this ecosystem so we can permanently break down silos and sustain an effective network.

Here, Sam reflects on why this work matters [00:06:00] to her and how she got involved with RAD.

Samantha Whiteye: I think what brought me to RAD was really, the fact that, they were indigenous-led,

and they were able to build a strong network and collaboration really quickly because of their connections. And I think that's really important because when

we talk about indigenous nations, nationhood and sovereignty and jurisdiction and rights and all the things, you need to have strong nations leading the way that that came to the table, as well as experts and important allies. And so they kind of sit at the intersection of all three.

Samantha Whiteye: One of the things I really appreciate about the RAD network and you know why I feel so strongly tied to it as a leadership member is that it works to support and give that power back to First Nations as a collective. There's something really strong, I think, about having a bunch of nations sitting at the table in a collective saying we don't agree to this, this, and this. And [00:07:00] RAD Network can really support critical conversations around rights, jurisdiction, sovereignty, any kind of issues in, in certain territories on a larger scale. They, they're collaborators in that sense.

David Flood: The beautiful part about the idea of a network or the purpose of a network is to accelerate and respond solutions. And I think that's, that's the subscription we're looking for. And it's not RAD to provide all the solutions. This is, this is to get the best of, you know, where needed, RAD is a convener where RAD is a leader, that's fine, based on the internal capacities of the people that are employed through the RAD network.

But at the end of the day, it's fundamentally the continued coming together.

We've now more recently captured resources to operate for the next four or five years as an indigenous knowledge hub at the National Network, talking to more and more of the practitioners, gaining more momentum and interest. And now we've come this spring, 2025, it's the full [00:08:00] launch of the Indigenous Knowledge Hub for RAD hosted through Wahkohtowin Development, not-for-profit.

You can Google "climate change solutions". You can Google "carbon sequestration projects". You can Google "nature-based solutions". You can get lost in all kinds of research and reports. What we're trying to do here is create the most relevant repository of transparent information as a clearing house so that communities can come shopping.

And they can come and participate and they can come and learn and grab whatever's on the shelf as a template and have some confidence. These are good, usable tools.

Steven Nitah: Nature is the one third solution to climate change, and many of our peoples have the raw materials within their territories in Canada to support

the other two thirds solutions to climate change. So, indigenous leadership and not only conservation, but land relationships, whether it's economic [00:09:00] development, conservation, or others is essential. We're proven to be the best caretakers of nature. The world needs that. And in Canada, we have constitutional rights that are becoming clearer and clearer. So, the opportunity to work and build relationship between Indigenous nations, the provincial governments, territorial governments, and federal government is right in front of us.

Randi Russell: The RAD Network really emerged to respond to a need that was identified around financing. A big part of our work has to do with trying to understand and remove barriers that nations face in accessing sustainable funding.

Sam talks here about how philanthropic and government funders can do better when it comes to funding in Indigenous-led conservation.

Samantha Whiteye: I think funders really need to open up their perspectives on what [00:10:00] it means to support First Nations and Indigenous leadership in the ways that they need and not putting us in such colonial boxes.

Samantha Whiteye: The ways that First Nations want to do it, it's usually more, well, like more holistic. It's more of a holistic worldview. And if you even say that word to funders, oh my gosh, they don't know what to do with it because they're still stuck in a colonial systemic way of getting these funds to First Nations or organizations that they don't understand holistically that when you support one thing in a holistic way, it supports everything.

I think there's obviously a huge space, like I said, for innovation. You know, a lot of the initiatives coming out around nature based solutions, the conservation impact bond is one other kind of blended finance mechanism, or IPCAs, are a big conversation right now, and I just refer to all of these kind of mechanisms as tools in the toolbox, right.

What is going to fit best for the nations, that need it the most right now and are ready [00:11:00] to go forward with that, moving forward on the feasibility, who should be around the table, building that collaboration in the network, getting the funding in, and then going out and doing the work and building capacity while they're doing it.

Randi Russell: So we have the tools, we are building up understanding and human capacity. What else is missing from the equation at this stage? How are

we going to ensure that the work we are doing now is not only impactful, but also sustainable in the future? These are the questions David speaks to here.

David Flood: They always say the power is in the people, and if in our communities, 50% of the people are under 30 years of age, there is a lot of power. And that demographic is not gonna change. We are gonna continue to be one of the fastest leading, population growth demographic in the Canadian context.

If we are truly at this time of reconciliation, [00:12:00] then there should be no platform, door that needs to open or pathway for economic participation, that is closed to us because you'll become more efficient by allowing us to create our own solutions than trying to impose them.

Time and time again Canada has come to that realization. Indigenous-led solutions. How else is it gonna happen in the natural environment if it's not indigenous led solutions for nature-based solutions? Go to the knowledge keepers, go to the land users, go to the people that are gonna implement the practices and who are gonna benefit most from deploying the projects and providing the monitoring and telling the world, they're cared for, they're loved.

Randi Russell: The groundwork has been laid. The research backs up traditional knowledge and stewards of the [00:13:00] lands and waters are already making progress, caring for Mother Earth the way we have for thousands of years.

And along with that, we are out on the land innovating and exploring creative solutions to integrate technology and establish new blended models.

Steven Nitah: Climate change is real. It's happening. It's, you know, it's, we're seeing extremes in weather patterns. It's going to hit our communities and our territories, and we have to have the capacity to be able to adapt, and mitigate as much as we can. Indigenous people are connected to nature, and nature is one third of the solution, and I think we could be real leaders there.

David Flood: currently the Indian Act still prevails and governs our nations across all that space. So we have to basically go and beg, to the federal government to get funding to do what we want to do. We're not sharing in the big pie of what Canada has to offer both domestically and internationally.

And I think that's where we're going with this journey with RAD is [00:14:00] to stand up as the Paris Agreement said, there is no solution in Canada unless the First Nations are part of it. And that's where we need to be.

Samantha Whiteye: And I again, just want to remind our allies that, if you don't know how to do it in a really good way, maybe take the time to like really listen to what the nations need and support them in that way.

And it often requires you as an ally to change your processes. But that's what you should be doing. Because that's reconciliation in practice.

Randi Russell: [00:15:00] Thank you for joining us in the RAD Story Lodge. We hope you enjoyed today's episode. To learn more, visit radnetwork.ca, follow us on Instagram and LinkedIn, and be sure to subscribe to the podcast to stay connected and reach out if you have a story to share.

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Join us for part two and meet the rest of the amazing RAD Leadership Circle.