

“From here and of the land”: Exploring Métis older adults’ perceptions of the influence of the land on their health and wellbeing

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Aging in Canada

- Canada's aging population is increasing at a fast rate
- There are more seniors (65+yrs) than there are children aged 14yrs and below (Statistics Canada, 2017).
- A 50% increase in the senior population is anticipated by 2036 (from 5.9 million in 2016 to about 10.4 million in 2036) (Statistics Canada, 2017)
- The Indigenous population in Canada is on average young, but is aging faster than their Canadian counterparts (Wilson et al., 2011)
- Aging well is a priority for Indigenous people as health disparities increase with age
- Little is known about consequences of Indigenous aging, especially the Métis



The land and sense of place for Métis

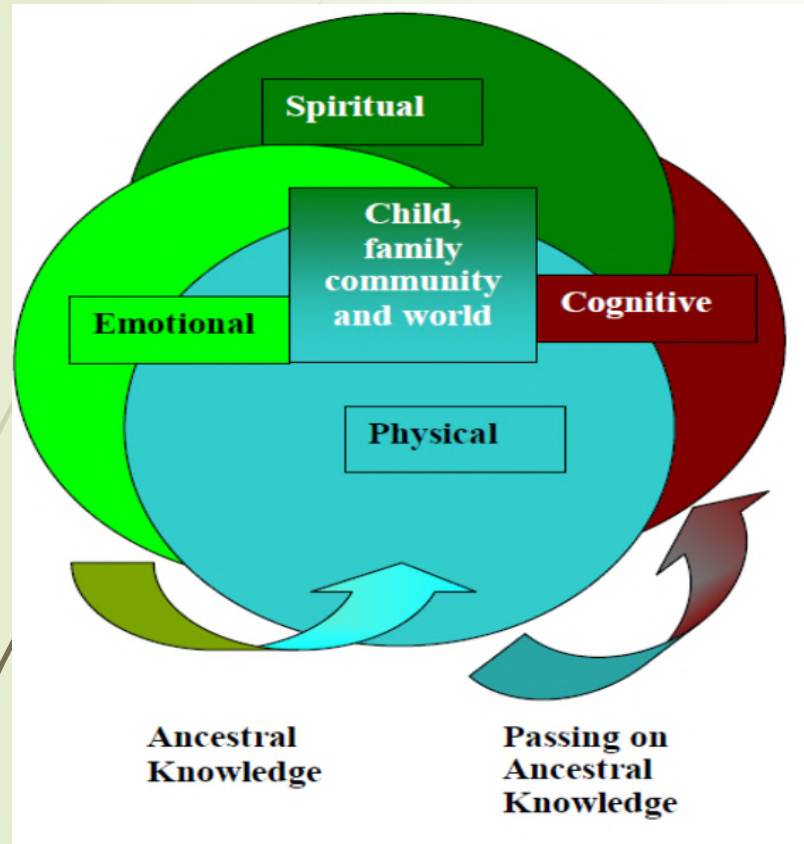
- Métis people have a history of living off of the land
- It shapes their identity, sense of community and informs their health and wellbeing.
- The land serves as a symbol of reclaiming aspects of their lives that have been diminished over time (Windsor & McVey, 2005).
- The land is crucial for the health and wellbeing of Metis people
 - However, the extent and magnitude of the impact of the land on aging well are unknown.
 - There is minimal evidence linking space, place and aging well for Métis older adults



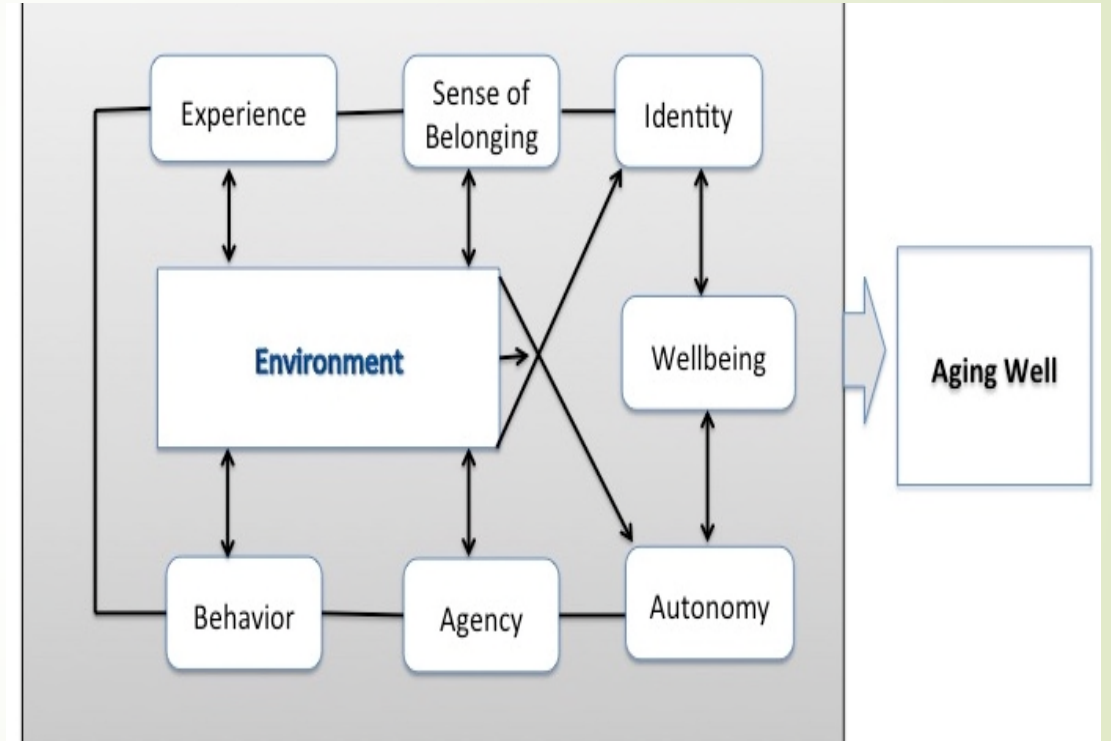
Research purpose and questions

- **The main purpose of this project is to investigate Métis older adults' relationship with their land, exploring their perceptions of the influence of space and place in aging well.**
- How do Métis older adults perceive the land as part of their overall sense of place and wellbeing?
- How has the land changed overtime, and how do these changes impact on the ability of Métis older adults to age well?
- What strategies have Métis older adults used in order to age well in their current landscape, and how might these strategies differ from the past?

Person-environment interchange and Breath of Life Theory based on an ecological framework



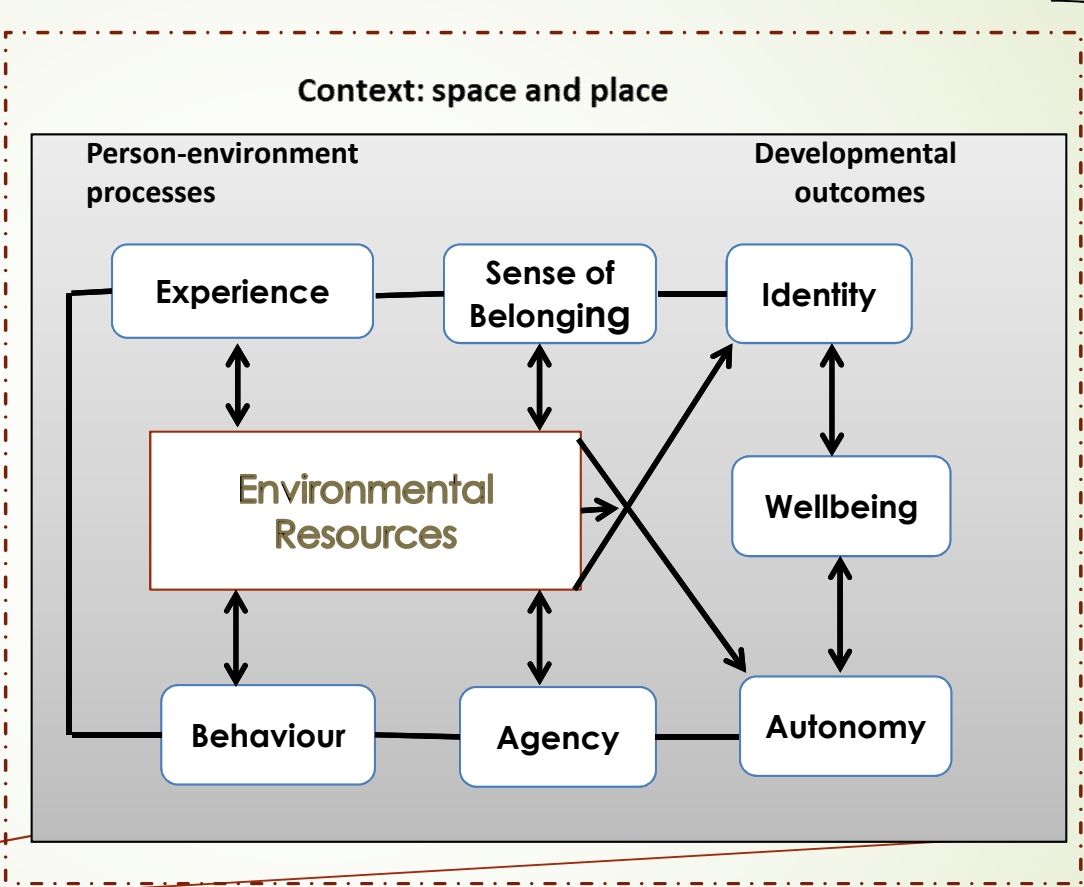
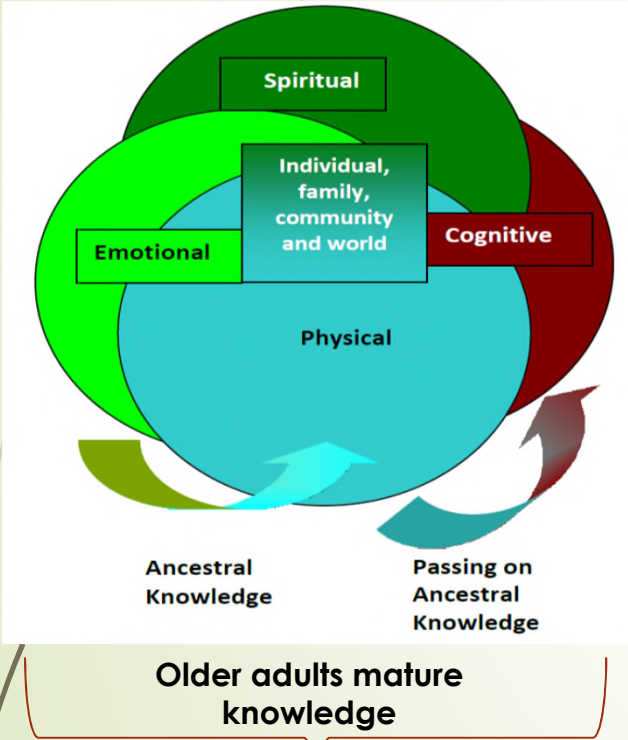
Breath of Life Theory (Blackstock, 2007)



Person-environment interchange (Wahl et al. 2012)

Blackstock's (2007) BOL – Based ecological framework with Wahl & Oswald's (2010) person-environment interchange integrative framework)

Ecological Approach Centered on Aboriginal Epistemology



Aging well in place

While there is responsibility placed on the individual to impart and transfer knowledge, we have less understanding of how individual level characteristics (behaviour and agency) influence this process.

Methods

- **The Community of Île-à-la-Crosse**
- Second oldest settlement in Saskatchewan
- Built in 1776 as post for fur trade.
- Population of 1,296
 - 0-19 years = 465
 - 20-54 years = 585
 - 55 or older = 250
(Statistics Canada, 2017)
- Over two centuries of interactions between people, wildlife and water (lake) as their economic, social, and cultural lives are tied to their land.



Methods

- **Community-based participatory research**
- **Research approach**
 - Two-eyed seeing approach
- **Participants**
 - 25 Métis older adults (age 55 years or older) were recruited
- **Sampling strategy:** Snow-ball sampling strategy
- **Interviews:** Semi-structured and spatial
 - 5 semi structured and walking spatial interviews
 - 20 semi-structured and sitting spatial interviews
- **Observation:** Participant observation
- **Geographic Information System:**
 - Geographically locate places of attachment
 - Land use classification



Data analysis

- Thematic analysis using NVivo 12
 - Inductive and deductive open coding
- Community members informed the data analysis
- Spatial analysis using ArcGIS 10.6
 - Mapping places of attachment
 - Merging places of attachment and qualitative data
 - Land use mapping

Summary of results

- Themes from the qualitative data analysis
 - 1. “*Wuskiywiy-tan!* Let’s Move!”: Staying busy, Staying active
 - 2. “The land connects and enriches us”
 - 3. “Tensions in our relationship with the land”
 - 4. “Changes occurring on the land impact our health and wellbeing”
 - 5. “We are Métis, We are the land, We are resilient”
- Spatial mapping
 - Places of attachment
 - Spatial patterning
 - Changes in land use over time

Results

- **1. “*Wuskiywiy-tan!* Let’s Move!”: Staying busy, Staying active**
 - Traditional land-based practices and physical activities
 - Where and when to stay busy and active
- **2. “The land connects and enriches us”**
 - “The as a spiritual setting”
 - “The land enriches the soul”
 - “The land connects us to generations and other creatures”
- **3. “Tensions in our relationship with the land”**
 - Natural and human disturbances occurring to the land
 - Places, spaces and colonization
 - “Observed changes occurring to our land”

- “[Being on the land] seems like a kind of meditation and it involves doing some physical movement of muscles, walking, but it rests you and calms the mind and spirit.”
- “Oh, it’s so peaceful and rejuvenating out there. It’s like all your worries just go away.”
- “...there are some problems you can’t solve by just sitting in your house. You must go to the land. It’s peaceful. ...you can think clearly with no disturbance.”
- “...previously, you could tell when the snow will come in and when the lake will freeze up. ...not anymore because the weather keeps changing.”
- “...with all these government rules and regulations. You need a license to do almost everything on the land. ...like hunting and fishing. It’s so irritating and restrictive.”

Results

➤ 4. “Changes occurring on the land impact our health and wellbeing”

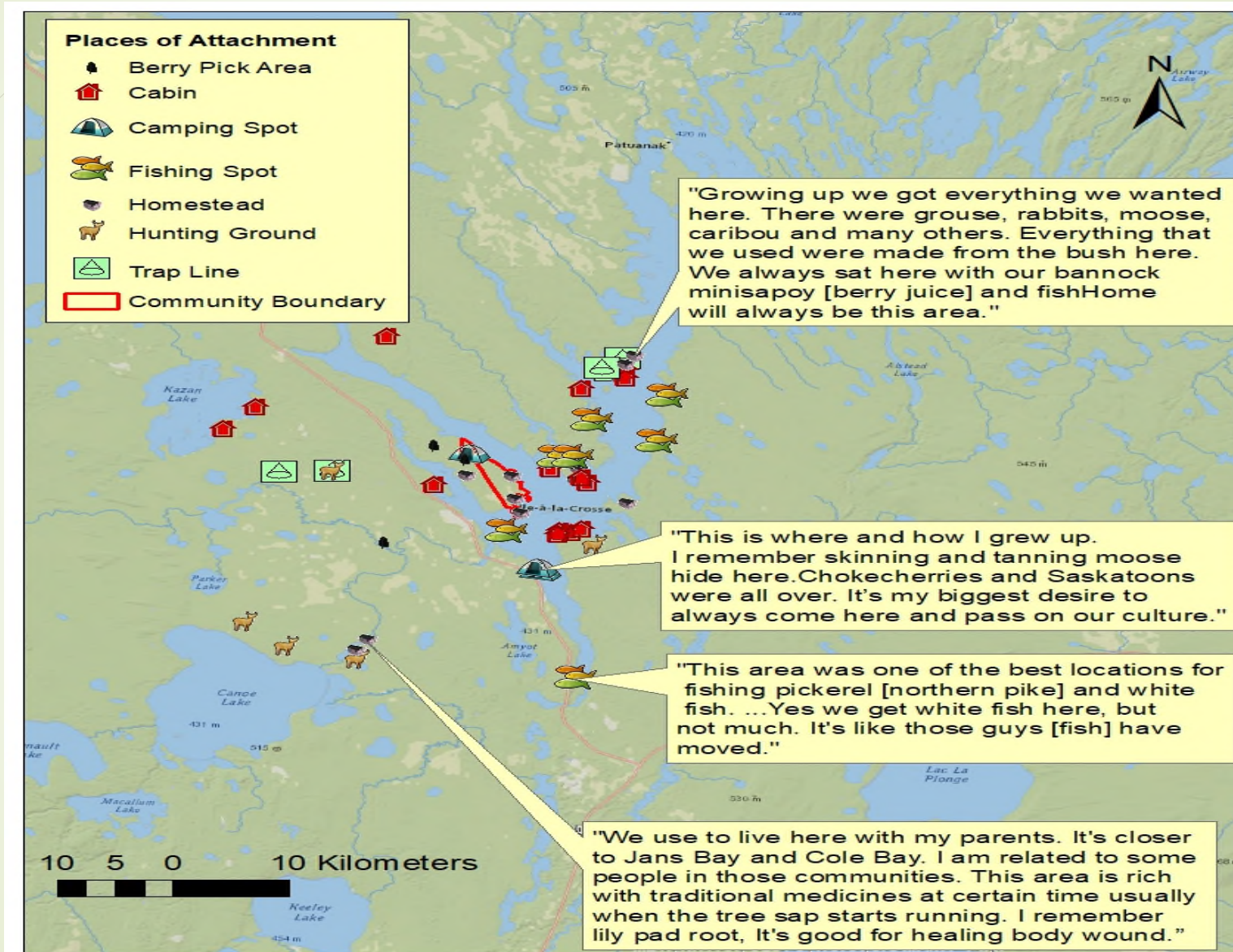
- “Changing mobility and physical activity patterns”
- “Changes in food consumption patterns”
- “A sense of losing who we are”

➤ 5. “We are Métis, We are the land, We are resilient”

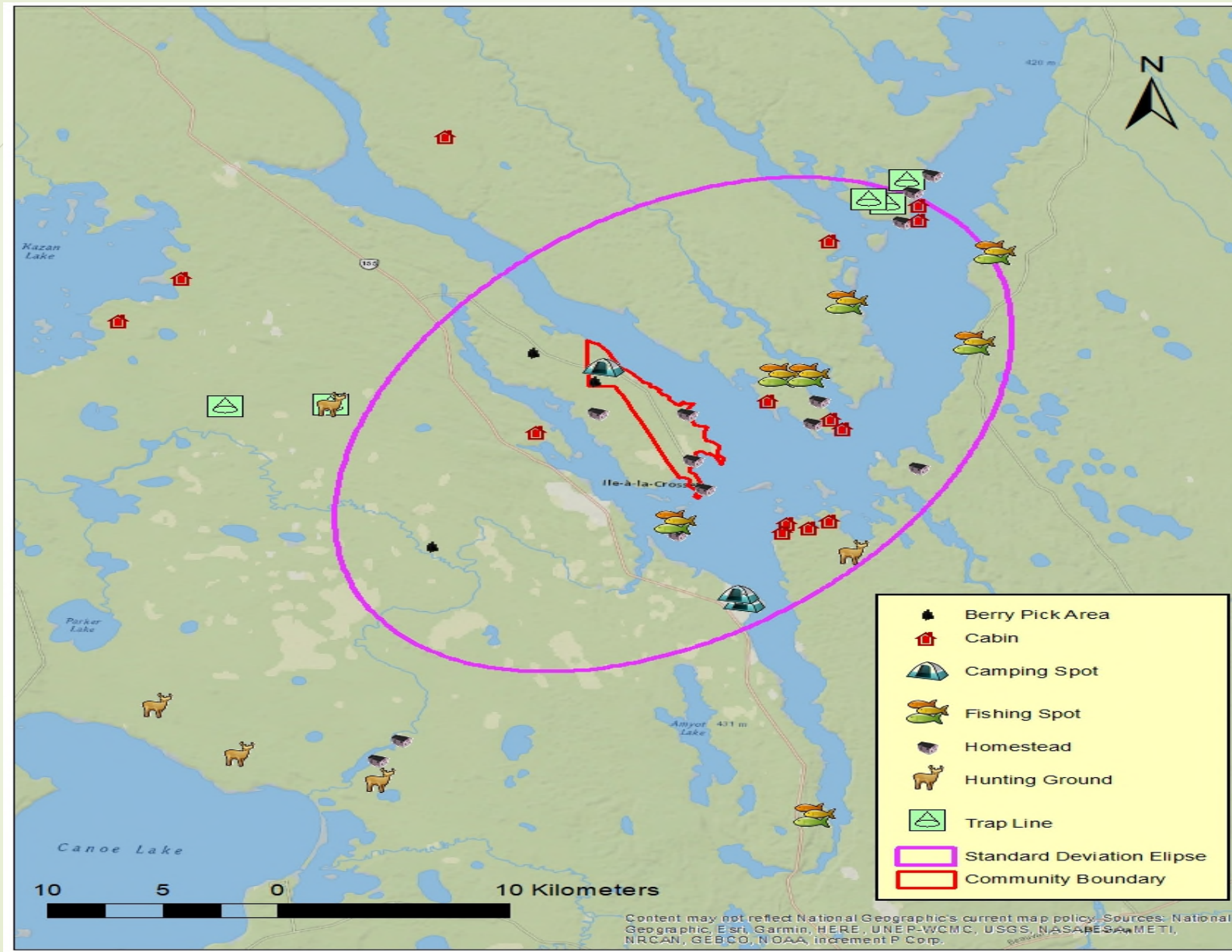
- Maintaining cultural continuity
- “Community garden ensures that we are health”
- “Walking and biking around the community keeps us active”

- “It is becoming increasingly risky to travel on the lake. The ice melts early now, ...very early”.
- “It seems we have many people in town with obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure. I think we can trace the cause to the food we eat these days. ...the store-bought [food].”
- “I grew up hunting, trapping and fishing. Our ancestors were doing it. It’s who we are in this community. Sometimes I feel that with all the changes occurring, we are going to lose all these practices.”
- “...teaching survival skill is important for me as an Elder. It is important for ensuring cultural continuity. ...the kids will also teach their children someday.”
- “I pick my berries from the farm [Sakitawak community garden] when they open it to the community. It’s always nice to pick those berries and the connection with nature.”

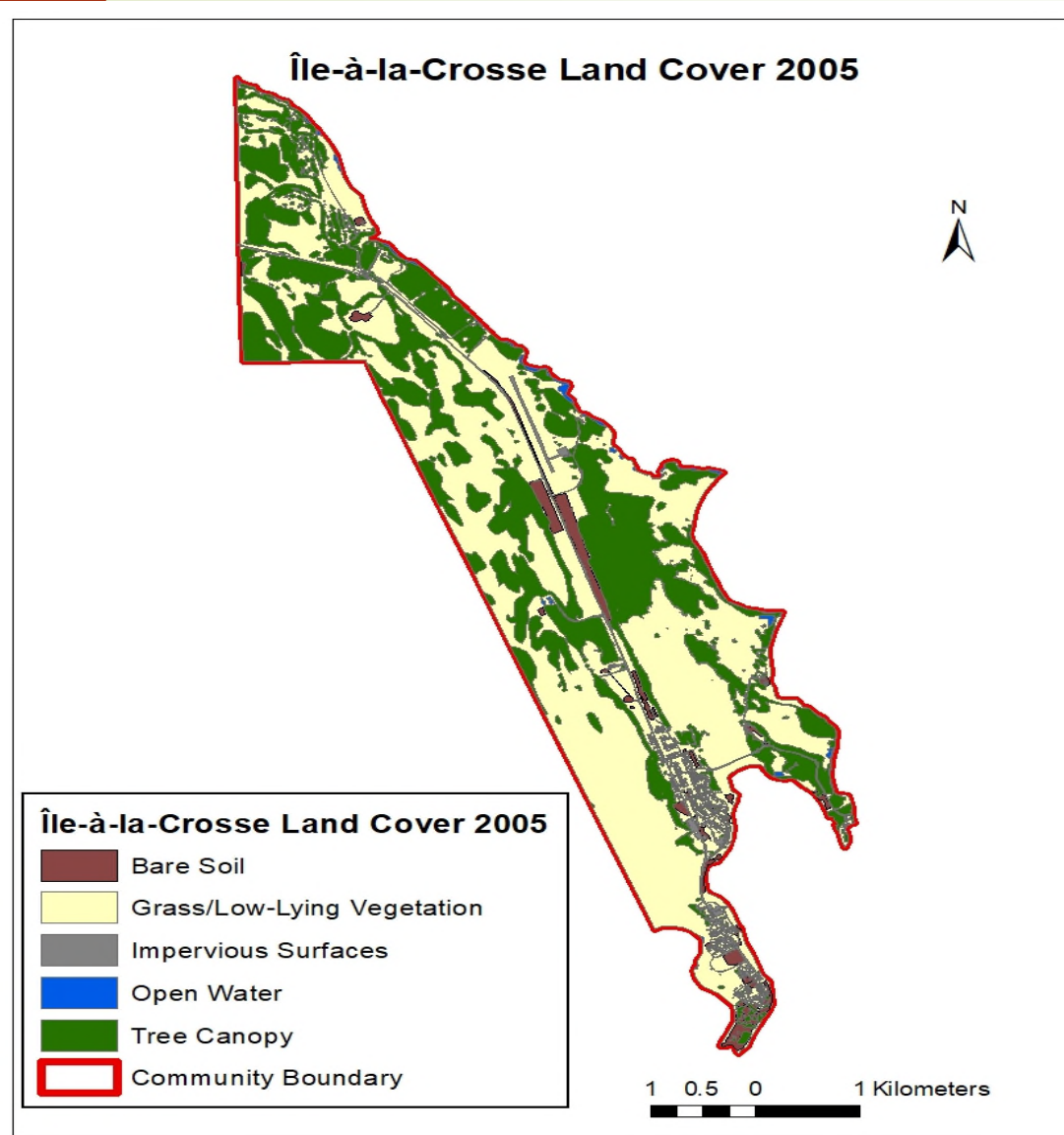
Spatial mapping of locations of places of attachment



Spatial patterning of places of attachment



Land use change 2005 and 2017



Land use change 2005 and 2017

Land cover/land use classes	2005		2017	
	Area (km/sq)	%	Area (km/sq)	%
Bare soil	2	8	1	4
Grass/Low-lying vegetation	9	38	10	42
Impervious surfaces	2	8	3	13
Open water	1	4	2	8
Tree canopy	10	42	8	33

Conclusions

- Métis older adults are deeply connected to the land, which informs their general health and wellbeing and aging well.
- Indigenous older adults have observed place and space related stressors, which impact on their health and wellbeing
- Older Métis adults are active agents with the strength and flexibility address some of the challenges to aging well
- These findings increase our understanding of space and place-related dimensions of aging well.
- These findings inform possibilities culturally-based interventions designed to support aging well among older Métis adults as well as First Nations and Inuit older adults who desire to age well and in place.
 - As our health system explores ways to support aging well among Métis older adults, decision-makers must consider providing culture-based and relevant interventions, services, and resources that can prolong the length of time Métis older adults can remain in their community.

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