

RAVEN Research Hub

Rural Action and Voices for the Environment

Statement of Principles and Actions (Updated August 31, 2018)

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Overview

RAVEN is supporting rural action and voices for the environment. We are building capacity for alternative digital media production and distribution by rural champions. Based at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, RAVEN will be formally launched on September 13, 2018. RAVEN is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation until 2022.



Rébeka Frazer-Chiasson (pictured here) and her father, Jean-Eudes, own and operate Terre Partagé Farm in Rogersville. Rébeka is also the president of the National Farmer's Union of New Brunswick. Both Rébeka and her father have been long-time champions for the family farm in New Brunswick. Rébeka grows organic strawberries and manages the farm's fruit and vegetable production. Rogersville, famous for its brussels sprouts, used to be one of Canada's largest vegetable producing regions.

Research has found that many forms of digital media are similar to mainstream media, particularly in their production processes. Alternative media, however, are distinct. While more commercially-oriented than in the past, alternative media have motives beyond profit -- they produce critical content and promote social change. RAVEN partner, the New Brunswick Media Co-op (NBMC) was formed in 2009 as a not-for-profit co-operative. Free from the constraints of the profit motive, advertisers and state funding, the NBMC is able to tell stories on the side of people without fear of censorship.

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Over the years, the NBMC has helped cultivate community journalists to tell the stories of their own lives through words, photographs, audio and video.

Across Canada the voices and desires of rural residents are largely marginalized in urban, corporate media. Rural perspectives about community sustainability need to be heard and understood to challenge the environmental degradation of rural lands and waters by corporate interests. The RAVEN research hub is supporting the voices of rural champions seeking rural social, environmental and economic justice. Operating on unceded Wabanaki territory, our hub aims to promote healthy economies and relationships that are guided by the Indigenous principle of protecting lives and land for seven generations.



Wolastoq Grand Council Chiefs, past (Harry LaPorte) and present (Ron Tremblay), and youth gather for a ceremony for the protection of the land and water from fracking. Photo by Liane Thibodeau.

A RAVEN project collaborator is the **Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre (MWC)**, located on traditional territory of Wolastoqiyik at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. MWC provides a learning environment for all Indigenous students to develop a strong cultural foundation as well as academic and professional skills, and offers opportunities for all UNB students and faculty to become familiar with Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey histories, cultures, contributions and treaty rights through principles of respect, sharing, harmony, acceptance and unity in diversity.

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Henry Harris, a resident of Grand Manan and fisherman, stacks lobster traps on the back of the boat. Photo by Robert van Waarden.

RAVEN's focus is: land, water and air protection; clean and renewable energy; regenerative farming; sustainable forestry and fishing; and alternative media.

Our work is supporting rural champions to share their stories and visions for community sustainability. Engagement in the RAVEN project will also enhance employment prospects in cultural industries for rural project participants.

We are now developing a wider network of collaborators and will be applying for additional funding to expand the project. We want to build a RAVEN research hub, a critical mass of researchers and rural collaborators and partners. Working together, RAVEN can support university researchers and students, rural communities, Indigenous land and water protectors, allies and activists to increase skills and digital content for sustainable rural communities in New Brunswick.

We invite researchers, rural champions, and land and water protectors to consider becoming partners in the RAVEN initiative.

RAVEN Participants

Currently, eight faculty members from the **University of New Brunswick** are engaged in the project:

- Casey Burkholder, UNB Faculty of Education
- Daniel Tubb, UNB Arts, Anthropology
- David Perley, Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre, UNB Faculty of Education
- David Hofmann, UNB Arts, Sociology
- Matt Rogers, UNB Faculty of Education
- Rick Wightman, UNB Faculty of Computer Science
- Susan O'Donnell, UNB Arts, Sociology
- Tracy Glynn, UNB Interdisciplinary Studies

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Our partners are the **NB Media Co-op**, represented by Sophie Lavoie, and the **Joint Economic Development Initiative** (JEDI), represented by Tyler Foley.

Interviews to date with **potential partners** have identified strong interest by the Wolastoq Grand Council, many rural advocacy groups, such as the NB Federation of Woodlot Owners, environmental organizations as well as rural and media researchers with other universities in New Brunswick, including St. Thomas University, Mount Allison University and Université de Moncton.

RAVEN Objectives

- Create a multi-disciplinary team with expertise in digital communications and media and sustainable rural communities.
- Develop strong relationships between university researchers and students, rural communities, and Indigenous land and water protectors, allies, and activists.
- Work with and train rural community activists and advocates in digital media skills -- including video and film-making, photography, animated shorts, graphics, memes, blogs and other creative digital media.
- Co-produce digital media content that highlights, in their own voices, their visions for sustainable futures.
- Share and promote the digital media productions widely online; co-organize exhibitions and screenings.
- Identify gaps in broadband access and poor connectivity in rural New Brunswick and solutions to improve Internet access for rural communities.
- Analyze the extent to which digital media content produced by rural community activists and advocates supports solidarity and action toward rural sustainability.
- Identify and implement strategies and tools for the effective use of the internet and online tools to produce and distribute digital media by rural communities in New Brunswick.
- Produce publications and share them widely on social media. Give graduate students and community members opportunities to lead or co-author all publications.

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RAVEN's Definition of Rural Community

New Brunswick is one of the most rural provinces in Canada and the only province to experience a decline in population between the 2011 and 2016 census. In addition, there is a growing movement of residents away from rural areas and into urban areas. The RAVEN project takes an inclusive approach to defining rural communities in New Brunswick.

In keeping with Statistics Canada definitions and considering common understandings of rural in New Brunswick, RAVEN is including the following rural communities within the scope of the project:

- All 15 First Nation communities in New Brunswick and the Schoodic Band of the Passamaquoddy Nation. We recognize the links that exist between the New Brunswick First Nations and the other Wabanaki nations outside the colonial borders of New Brunswick that are also parties to the Peace and Friendship Treaties. First Nations are self-governing, autonomous communities.
- Towns, villages and rural areas in NB with fewer than 1,500 people in the 2016 census.
- Any other community in the province that wants to be a part of the project and can make the case that its rural attributes and environmental situation is aligned with the RAVEN perspective and objectives. Rural land-uses of interest to the RAVEN project include: farming, forestry, fishing, energy generation and preservation of lands and waters for future generations.

RAVEN Principles and Actions

The team is committed to research that supports support social justice. We align ourselves with a tradition of critical activist researchers that are committed, theoretically principled, and both sourced in and furthered by research. This position requires critical reflection of ourselves as researchers and activists that will happen during our research hub meetings. The members and partners of the project and research hub share the following principles and perspectives that will govern our activities together:

- We recognize that the lands of our research project are the traditional unceded territories of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and Passamaquoddy peoples. We respectfully acknowledge that the territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship," which were signed between the indigenous peoples and the British Crown between 1725 and 1776. We are guided in our actions by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- We believe that the people and communities of rural New Brunswick are intimately connected with their lands and waters. The lands and waters provide significant social, cultural and economic benefits for them, the province, Canada and the world.

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- We believe that rural communities have the right to, and are responsible for, their sustainable futures. As researchers, allies and practitioners, we will support their efforts toward rural community sustainability by co-producing their stories of success, challenge and struggle. We will share these stories in ways that honour and respect the people and communities they come from.
- Our publications and productions will highlight the desires of rural community members for sustainable futures.
- All media productions, publications and activities associated with this research project and hub will include a co-author or co-producer living in rural New Brunswick. The co-author / co-producer will be supported to make a meaningful contribution to the media production / publication.
- All media productions or publications involving a specific named community will include a co-author or co-producer who is a member of and resident in the community.
- In our publications and productions, we will highlight the efforts of rural communities to maintain public ownership and shared decision-making for all Crown forested lands and to direct the resources of the forests, lands and waters for the economic benefit and social development of the people of the region.
- We support and will highlight in our publications and productions efforts of rural communities to co-operate and organize regionally to promote healthy lands, waters and communities.
- We will support and highlight in our productions and publications the efforts of community, provincial and federal governments to promote diversified local and regional economies, especially value-added production, based on a variety of local businesses and activities.
- We support public (government) investments directed towards community-based land and water management.
- We advocate for fair trade policies that ensure communities receive full value for their resources and labour.
- We will partner and work with existing local and regional businesses and organizations as well as support new social enterprises sharing common values and expertise, whenever possible.
- As members of this research hub, we will regularly evaluate the effectiveness of our practice, measuring performance, where possible, and consulting with the rural people we work with.