



# Shoulder to Shoulder at the First Nations' Water Ceremony

By WAASEKOM (PHOTOS BY FRED CATTROLL)

On April 14, Indigenous people from all over Canada and the United States gathered at Site 41, atop what has been documented as the world's purest water, to support the growing effort to once again protect the Alliston Aquifer.

The Friends of the Waverley Uplands cohosted the All Nations Water Ceremony to draw inspiration and strength from the success of Site 41. The proposed expansion of the Teedon Pit and renewal of the permit to take up to 6.8 million litres of water a day for 10 years is the newest call to action to protect the world's purest water.

Local residents Pete and Jenny Anderson, affected by the aggregate mining on the Waverley Uplands, provided a statement on behalf of their group. "The Friends of the Waverley Uplands are committed to the protection of the Alliston Aquifer. We remind the people of Simcoe County that they are blessed with the purest water on the planet. We along with Indigenous people are the stewards of this precious life-source and we must stand shoulder to shoulder once again as we have in the past, Aquifer over aggregate."

Co-founder of the Site 41 movement Elizabeth Brass Elson welcomed area visitors, along with Anne Nahuis Ritchie, local residents who have been supporting the Friends of Waverley Uplands group.

"Protecting the water is one of the most sacred responsibilities we have as women. Being back on the land we fought so hard to save in the Dumpsite 41 peaceful protest was an emotional experience with all those memories of unity and connection with our brothers and sisters coming together again, stepping, praying, drumming, singing, and blessing the water on this sacred aquifer once again," said Elizabeth Brass Elson.

The gathering was also supported by local First Nations representative Terra Sandy Roy, Chief of the Beausoleil First Nation Youth Council who attended the event on behalf her community, "to be with people of all kinds in ceremony, all with the same goal; to protect the water, some of the purest water known to Mother Earth. The busy day began with a beautiful sunrise ceremony, it was conducted by the grandmothers. To sit in unison with everyone was incredible... Although a storm was well in the making and on its way, it didn't stop us."

She continued, "Water is a gift, it's a right, and it's our job as people of all kinds to protect the water in



Ceremonial Jiggle Dance

order to ensure that life of all kinds is able to continue for the next generations to come. It is also our job as people to keep Mother Earth as healthy as can be."

The All Nations Water Ceremony celebrated the leadership that Indigenous women have taken up to ensure the protection of water. It was an opportunity built on the fellowship and mutual concern that is reflective of the Township of Tiny and local area.

Also speaking at the ceremony was Autumn Peltier, a 13-year-old from Manitoulin Island who earlier this year addressed the UN General Assembly on World Water Day. "When I said 'Warrior-Up' at the United Nations, I wanted all people to take a stand for our water and for our planet. We all need to work together, to help each other to save what we can... I'm sad because I'm starting out on my journey and I see what is happening in the world and what is happening to the water. If it's this bad now when I'm only 13, what will things look like when I'm 53?"

"It was not a protest or political rally," says organizer Edward George, "but rather a way-making for future collaboration between indigenous and non indigenous people to navigate an issue that affects everyone. Ceremony binds us to the land and water, it gives us the encouragement and inspiration we need to continue advocating for the single most unifying cause there is, water. As the changes in climate are becoming more and more pronounced, there is reason to be more and more discerning when it comes to decisions that will irreversibly impact the futurity of this land and these waterways we belong to, especially when that threatens life-source water. It was an opportunity to learn more about just how precious water really is."

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