

Assembly of First Nations

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SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
December 2-3-4, 2025, Ottawa, ON

Resolution no. 42/2025

TITLE: The Health of All Our Relations – First Nations Animals and Food Systems Health

SUBJECT: Environment, Health

MOVED BY: Byron Louis, Proxy, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, BC

SECONDED BY: Chief Robert Charlie-Tetlichi, Inuvik Native Band, NT

DECISION: Carried by consensus

WHEREAS:

A. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) states:

- i. Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.
- ii. Article 19: States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.
- iii. Article 20(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
- iv. Article 24(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

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- v. Article 24(2): Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.
- vi. Article 29(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for Indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.
- vii. Article 31(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.
- viii. Article 32(2): States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the Indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

B. Zoonoses, animal diseases, and other diseases that are transferred to and amongst animals, alongside associated federal, provincial/territorial responses, disproportionately affect First Nations health, cultural and ceremonial practice and continuity, food sovereignty and safety, economic stability and security, and directly impact our Inherent and Treaty rights and rights protected by Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. These impacts are compounded by barriers to data access and culturally appropriate monitoring systems.

C. The links between animal health and human health, as well as the impacts of zoonoses and animal diseases on First Nations, have been recognized and affirmed by United Nations organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization on Animal Health (WOAH) through the Quadripartite Secretariat for One Health.

D. Numerous circumstances increase animal vulnerability to diseases such as climate change, chemical contamination, infrastructure development and sewage release, habitat and biodiversity loss and degradation due to forestry, invasive species, mining, lagoons, and industrial agriculture and agri-food, which are pathways for disease spread and lead to stress and weakened immune systems in animals.

E. First Nations have, since time immemorial, relied on the animals, plants, and fungi we gather and consume for sustenance and ceremonial purposes. These wildlife resources given to First Nations by the Creator have important purposes in our ceremonies, songs, prayer, and traditional ways handed down from generation to generation.

F. First Nations are connected to all living things, we have upheld balance and sustainably managed our actions within our environments, lands, waters, and the biodiversity within since time immemorial, through

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exercising our Inherent rights and responsibilities, associated knowledge systems, processes involving Elders and youth, and traditional laws. This relational understanding forms the foundation of First Nations-led conservation and health frameworks.

- G.** First Nations have not been fully involved in the development of regulations and policies surrounding animal and plant health and diseases. To secure, maintain, and protect First Nations rights and interests, full, informed, equitable and meaningful participation in all policy and regulatory processes regarding animal, plant and fungi health and diseases with all levels of government is vital.
- H.** First Nations-in-Assembly have previously adopted Resolution 70/ 2010, *First Nations-Controlled Awareness, Training and Surveillance Programs for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)*, Resolution 13/2017, *Chronic Wasting Disease*, and Resolution 58/2018, *First Nations Responses to Chronic Wasting Disease*.
- I.** The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has actioned these resolutions by coordinating with federal departments and agencies, calling for the closure of all game farms, and developing First Nations-specific communications tools.
- J.** There is a need to review and strengthen national responses to animal, plant and fungi health and diseases and for full partnership and the equitable and meaningful participation of First Nations with all levels of government in their efforts on biodiversity health and diseases that reflect First Nations priorities and knowledge.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the First Nations-in-Assembly:

- 1. Call on the Government of Canada to recognize the multi-dimensional, interconnected, and interrelated nature of these critical issues and work in partnership with First Nations to develop comprehensive approaches to address each issue, in coordination with Ministers responsible for climate change, environmental protection, stewardship, conservation, animal health, and food sovereignty.
- 2. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to work collaboratively with First Nations, regional representative bodies, non-government organizations, industry, and all orders of government to:
 - a. Call on the relevant federal Ministers and departments to provide adequate, long-term, and equitable funding to support First Nations, regions, and provincial and territorial organizations to develop, maintain, and strengthen their own surveillance, and wildlife, human, and food systems health programs as well as emergency response capacity for zoonotic outbreaks, Chronic Wasting Disease, and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease across our lands and waters;
 - b. Promote ongoing research to better understand the risks associated with animal, plant and fungi health and their links with food safety, sovereignty, and security, including climate-related and cross-border disease transmission, drawing on First Nations and Western sciences and ensuring research ethics uphold Indigenous data governance standards and respect First Nations data sovereignty, including through the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, Possession (OCAP®); and
 - c. Develop and advocate for First Nations-specific communication tools and workshops to raise awareness about animal, plant, and food-systems health, ensuring that information is culturally

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relevant and accessible through sharing circles and story-telling, for example, to reach harvesters, Elders, and youth.

3. Direct the AFN to continue to deepen engagement with the appropriate Ministers and departments, such as the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Rural Economic Development, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the Minister of Health, to work in full partnership and with the meaningful inclusion of First Nations to address animal health, advance food sovereignty, and support First Nations' full participation in all related dialogues.
4. Direct the AFN to report to the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment as well as the First Nations-in-Assembly on progress achieved under this resolution, including funding opportunities, remaining gaps, and recommendations.

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