Learnings from “Changing the Narrative” Training

First Light – April 2022
Contributions to this work: The learning shared here is built around “The Five Rs”, a concept shared from Nolan Altwater with Lokotah Sanborn and Dawn Neptune Adams, who in turn shared it with participants in the “Changing the Narrative” training. Participants Adilson Morales, Colleen Truskey, Holden Turner, Jocelyn Hubbell, Louise Jensen, and Stefan Jackson created this document on behalf of the First Light conservation community.
**Introduction:** We’d like to start by sharing the word cloud generated by Adilson created based on the small group discussion notes – these words are the ones that came up most frequently for you. We discussed these notes and realized that much of what was discussed as needs (and strengths!) of our organizations aligned with the five “R’s” we received from Lokotah and Dawn—respect, responsibility, relationality, reciprocity, and reverence. For each of these “R’s”, we talked through what they might look like in practice within our organizations. These are the principles that will help us “change the narrative.”

- **Respect:** Each moment of every relationship and project needs our respect. It is a letting go, a getting outside of one’s own head. It is a tuning in to the moment to:
  - **Meet people where they are.** Listen with an open heart and mind. Center the concerns and voices of others, not yourself.
  - **Give people all the time they need.** Time is precious. Don’t fill the silences in discussions too soon. Make time for thought, service, reflection, and relationship. Take time for yourself to be prepared for this work, to give your best. Move at the speed of trust - in all relationships: internal and external.
  - **Commit to take the time to build relationships with Wabanaki partners.** Relationships are on-going and take time and care. Show up, be ready to serve and center Wabanaki projects and voices. Projects may come and go over time but the relationship should be on-going and endure.
  - **Be clear and honest about your intentions.** To both yourself and others about what you can and cannot do both individually and organizationally. This may change over time so check-ins are an ongoing part of the process and the relationship.
  - **Recognize that your understanding might be completely upended through discussion.** Be open to change, to relearn, to recenter, and to start again. It is an opportunity to strengthen relationships, build anew in a more inclusive way.

- **Responsibility:** We are responsible for:
  - **committing to continued unlearning and relearning,** and to the centering of voices of the indigenous communities in our communications and relationships and sharing that learning within the organization and outside of it where appropriate
  - our actions and are committed to **owning up to past mistakes** - personally, organizationally, and culturally and to working toward ways that are not harmful
  - **being trustworthy;** that our word can be believed; that we consult with the indigenous communities first before taking any action but without placing the burden on those communities
  - **working toward a healthy coexistence** with the lands and waters and indigenous peoples that includes indigenous wisdom

- **Relationality:** Relationships are the story. That’s why we must:
  - **Acknowledge the structural challenges** to forming relationships that catalyze change (time/rules/process/etc). **We are not entitled to a relationship.**
  - **Be accountable** for the process and the product of forming a relationship
  - **Create community-oriented relationships,** so that the relationship doesn’t rest on one person. And, be ready to pass the baton and help others create similar relationships.
  - **Ground relationships on shared values:** trust, honesty, care. Honor time, expectations, and promises.
- **Reverence** for relationships.

- **Reciprocity**: A settler logic excludes our neighbors from social space and the exchanges therein, instead claiming an exclusive right to decide the narrative. **Reciprocity instead requires re-including neighbors (humans and nonhumans alike) in the social space of narrative.** In practice, reciprocity attunes us to refrain from extraction of Wabanaki stories, instead building any narrative out of relationships where stories are co-written. At the very least, we compensate the authors and respectfully invite them to provide feedback on the media at hand. Moving in this way is rooted in the logic of the guest: always displaced, trying to humbly familiarize ourselves with the relationships of care already going on around us. Reciprocity is bringing gifts when visiting Wabanaki allies, then working together to get something done.

- **Reverence**: Whereas *respect* describes the mechanics of considerate and attentive conduct, *reverence* refers to the heart of what inspires said conduct in the first place. To use a metaphor shared by Adilson, *respect* is akin to using your manners at the dinner table, whereas *reverence* is appreciating where your dinner came from and the folks who prepared it for you—*if reverence* comes first, then all the rest will surely follow. **Reverence is embodied by an all-encompassing perspective of the landscapes we live within, the time we pass through, and the neighbors, near and far, we live alongside.** As a principle in practice, reverence requires us to relinquish authority and entitlement, to restrain our inclination towards urgency and demand, and to foster patience and humility in their stead. As we learned during the First Light Learning Journey, “forty miles in, forty miles out” – it took centuries to get where we are today, and it will take centuries to find our way out again, but the opportunity to be a part of that story – however small a part – is an honor.