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00:00:07,010 --> 00:00:13,930

Good day and welcome to this episode of Capital Stories, as we explore the NCC and its history.

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00:00:13,930 --> 00:00:19,010

This year, our 125th anniversary of the NCC and its predecessors.

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00:00:19,530 --> 00:00:32,410

And I'm very happy to be joined today by three guests: starting on my left, Anita Tenasco, who is the Director of Algonquin Initiatives at Algonquin College, or Indigenous Initiatives, I guess is the right title.

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00:00:33,160 --> 00:00:38,280

So Anita, welcome. To my right, Cristina Wood, who is a Ph.D. candidate at York University.

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00:00:38,920 --> 00:00:45,000

And to her right, Gary Meus, who's a senior landscape architect and one of my colleagues at the NCC.

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00:00:45,000 --> 00:00:46,240

So, welcome to all of you.

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00:00:47,560 --> 00:01:05,960

So, the NCC is celebrating 125 years, and the waterways are so important in terms of how Ottawa came to be, why Ottawa was chosen to be the capital of Canada, and has been really central to how the Capital has evolved.

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00:01:06,320 --> 00:01:17,400

And so, while I do want to spend a good amount of time talking about the NCC and its relationship to the water, the waterways existed before the NCC was formed in 1899,

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00:01:17,720 --> 00:01:39,560

and I thought it was important to really start our conversation today with a little bit of an understanding of the waterways and how they were used for thousands of years by the Algonquin people, who, of course, were stewards of this land and still are, and have a rich history and a rich understanding of the importance of those waterways.

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00:01:39,560 --> 00:01:47,160

So, Anita, I want to start with you, and maybe you can help situate us a little bit in terms of understanding the role of our waterways.

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00:01:47,360 --> 00:01:51,480

Obviously, we're sitting at the junction of the Gatineau River and the Rideau River and the Ottawa River.

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00:01:52,040 --> 00:01:59,240

Can you tell us a little bit about the history of the waterways for the Algonquin people, how they were used and their importance?

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00:01:59,880 --> 00:02:06,720

Kwey, good morning and thank you for allowing me to share about the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation, my nation.

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00:02:07,000 --> 00:02:19,600

I'm from Kitigan Zibi and so our nation is the host nation for the Ottawa area, and the waterways in Ottawa and surrounding Ottawa are our home.

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00:02:20,040 --> 00:02:22,200

We have been here since time immemorial.

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00:02:22,520 --> 00:02:26,960

We're a nation of over 11,000 people and we've never left this area.

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00:02:27,200 --> 00:02:29,480

We've always occupied this area.

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00:02:29,880 --> 00:02:33,320

We have a large community here in Gatineau and in Ottawa.

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00:02:33,720 --> 00:02:35,280

We love the waterways.

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00:02:35,320 --> 00:02:37,440

We love the Kichi Z?b?.

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00:02:37,480 --> 00:02:43,600

The Kichi Z?b?, or what is now known in English as the Ottawa River, is so very important to us.

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00:02:44,200 --> 00:02:53,120

This is the river that has sheltered us, that has fed us, that has clothed us, that has allowed for us to celebrate and have ceremony.

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00:02:53,440 --> 00:02:55,040

This is where we traded.

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00:02:55,520 --> 00:03:00,360

The word Ottawa comes from "adawe" in our language, which means to trade.

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00:03:00,640 --> 00:03:07,360

So this area and its waterways have always been a part of our history and will continue to be so.

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00:03:08,600 --> 00:03:08,960

Great.

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00:03:09,000 --> 00:03:16,760

And so we know that this important junction of three rivers was the basis of this notion of "to trade."

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00:03:17,520 --> 00:03:24,440

Can you give us a little bit of a sense of how your understanding... of how your ancestors were using the water?

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00:03:25,480 --> 00:03:27,480

Were there temporary settlements here?

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00:03:27,480 --> 00:03:31,800

Were there certain times of year where people would come to this area?

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00:03:32,080 --> 00:03:36,520

Tell us how it would look if we were to, you know, move back a thousand years.

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00:03:36,520 --> 00:03:37,640

What would we be seeing?

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00:03:38,440 --> 00:03:38,840

Right.

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00:03:38,840 --> 00:03:43,280

So our traditional unceded territory is vast.

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00:03:44,080 --> 00:03:47,960

It makes up a huge part of Ontario and western Quebec.

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00:03:48,560 --> 00:03:55,320

And so historically our people would paddle the waters along the Kichi Z?b?.

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00:03:55,560 --> 00:03:58,720

And we would meet here in what is now Ottawa.

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00:03:58,720 --> 00:04:01,040

We would have huge gatherings here.

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00:04:01,200 --> 00:04:18,960

We would have governance meetings, we would have trading opportunities, we would celebrate births, we would honour deaths, we would have marriages, we would have huge feasts, we would fish, we would hunt, we would gather in this important area.

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00:04:19,440 --> 00:04:22,000

And so we would always return to this area.

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00:04:22,720 --> 00:04:31,960

So when settlement started to happen and non-Indigenous peoples... settlers started to arrive, this caused some turmoil in our nation, right?

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00:04:31,960 --> 00:04:38,880

We said, you know, this is an important place for us and now we're here sharing it with non-Indigenous peoples.

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00:04:39,200 --> 00:04:41,600

And there was a huge struggle in our nation.

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00:04:42,960 --> 00:04:55,640

So many of our people then started to retreat to less occupied areas of our traditional territory and we knew that development was happening and we weren't consulted about this development.

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00:04:55,640 --> 00:05:00,640

We never gave permission for this development and yet it was happening.

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00:05:02,040 --> 00:05:06,720

So there were very challenging times and we had to work through those times.

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00:05:06,720 --> 00:05:10,800

We had to stay strong as an Anishinabe Algonquin people.

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00:05:10,800 --> 00:05:12,680

We had to keep our culture alive.

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00:05:12,960 --> 00:05:14,400

We had to feed our people.

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00:05:14,560 --> 00:05:17,560

We had to educate our children in our ways.

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00:05:18,000 --> 00:05:28,520

We had to continue occupying the lands as much as possible, as our ancestors have always done since time immemorial.

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00:05:28,920 --> 00:05:29,200

Great.

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00:05:29,200 --> 00:05:29,520

Thank you.

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00:05:29,520 --> 00:05:34,560

That's important to situate sort of the early history of the Ottawa River.

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00:05:34,840 --> 00:05:43,000

And then we fast forward to the early 1600s, and the first French explorers start to paddle in.

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00:05:43,000 --> 00:05:46,560

They're thinking, of course, about fur.

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00:05:46,560 --> 00:05:51,880

They're thinking about ways in which they can commodify the area around the Ottawa River.

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00:05:52,560 --> 00:05:58,880

And at that time, Cristina, would the river have looked pretty similarly 400 years ago

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00:05:58,880 --> 00:06:05,440

when we have Champlain and others paddling from Montreal?

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00:06:05,440 --> 00:06:08,320

Or do you think it would have looked different from how it looks now?

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00:06:11,200 --> 00:06:35,000

The waterscape and the landscape has been changed in the last 100 years in some ways that, you know, Samuel de Champlain would notice. For example, with major dam projects, reservoir projects up and downstream from where we are.

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00:06:36,160 --> 00:06:47,000

The topography of islands has changed, which affected Indigenous foodways throughout what is now Canada.

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00:06:48,720 --> 00:06:52,560

And so those are elements that are different.

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00:06:52,560 --> 00:06:53,160

Of course,

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00:06:53,800 --> 00:07:02,720

now, Samuel de Champlain couldn't navigate upstream as easily because of those interruptions, particularly downstream.

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00:07:03,520 --> 00:07:08,800

But in some ways, there are a lot of similarities.

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00:07:08,800 --> 00:07:24,280

The Rideau Falls which, you know, gave this place such significance to the French settlers, remain, you know, staggering and beautiful and different.

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00:07:25,520 --> 00:07:30,240

So yeah, there's some similarities and some differences for sure.

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00:07:30,400 --> 00:07:30,680

Right.

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00:07:31,120 --> 00:07:39,320

So we fast forward and because we want to get at some point to the NCC and its role in interacting with the Capital waterways.

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00:07:39,600 --> 00:07:43,240

But before that, we have a period of industrialization.

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00:07:43,240 --> 00:07:58,720

We have a period where the river and the waterways are very much used as a junkyard by those who came, who saw it either as a place to send lumber down downstream or to use it for an industrial wasteland.

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00:07:59,560 --> 00:08:13,800

So if we move into the 1800s and we imagine again casting an eye on what the capital looks like, Gary, what would we see and what would surprise us about what the capital looks like, say, 150 years ago?

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00:08:15,000 --> 00:08:18,600

It's an interesting question, because there are so many stratas.

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00:08:18,600 --> 00:08:37,440

Even now, when you take a walk on one of the pathways and you actually go, for example, to Victoria Island, the stratas of development that have occurred showcase how the river has truly transformed, not just on its own.

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00:08:37,520 --> 00:08:41,600

It's basically because of how we've treated it.

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00:08:42,440 --> 00:08:57,440

We've taken the chance to see opportunities and to see how development can actually really occur in a manner that is succinct with the ways of how people were living at the time.

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00:08:58,400 --> 00:09:05,840

But as you look at it now, there are remnants of how the river really still battled through.

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00:09:07,040 --> 00:09:11,680

Still, with the amount of different levels of development that have occurred.

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00:09:12,200 --> 00:09:22,880

The river has stayed strong and it has been the source for so many people to just be able to take advantage of on any type of level.

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00:09:23,280 --> 00:09:37,120

And so there are remnants, but the river now speaks highly of itself as promoting itself as much as it can, and I think that's how we all now become stewards of it.

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00:09:37,920 --> 00:09:49,480

One of the areas that has an association, a darker association with the NCC, due to the expropriation of residents in the 1960s, is LeBreton Flats.

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00:09:50,040 --> 00:09:59,480

But if we go back to, let's say the late 1800s, Cristina, it was a bustling area, industry train yards.

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00:09:59,720 --> 00:10:07,960

What would we see and characterize for us a little bit the relationship between LeBreton Flats and the river adjacent?

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00:10:09,240 --> 00:10:31,480

Yeah, as you say, bustling, which is really different from how I've grown up knowing that area in the aftermath of that dark history that you mentioned, or that dark chapter that you mentioned, of expropriation and clearing of that place, which is again part of that sacred territory where the rivers meet that lowland.

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00:10:33,120 --> 00:10:35,000

And so what would we see?

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00:10:35,000 --> 00:10:42,000

We would see piled-high lumber ready to ship to market.

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00:10:42,760 --> 00:10:52,360

Earlier, that market was overseas and in the mid-19th century that changes.

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00:10:52,360 --> 00:10:55,920

We're shipping that lumber to the United States.

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00:10:57,320 --> 00:11:03,760

We would see businesses, we would see sort of outfitters for that industry.



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00:11:03,760 --> 00:11:13,440

That's where a lot of settlers came to make their way to outfit the people who were going to participate in this industrial activity.

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00:11:14,200 --> 00:11:22,400

And then people beginning to settle families and beginning to intensify the development there.

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00:11:23,280 --> 00:11:29,120

Another thing that I like to remind people of and thinking about the past,

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00:11:29,440 --> 00:11:30,160

what would we see,

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00:11:30,160 --> 00:11:31,160

what would we smell?

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00:11:32,560 --> 00:11:44,960

What would we hear, particularly around that area and downstream from the Chaudières Falls as pollution intensifies with the industrial activity?

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00:11:45,360 --> 00:11:48,400

This is a huge thing that we find in the historical sources.

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00:11:48,400 --> 00:12:03,120

People report the stench of the pollution and that affects the way people interact with the water as a place of recreation and enjoyment.

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00:12:03,120 --> 00:12:19,760

You know, the idea being to settle here... we have the beautiful vista, the Parliament buildings, and you know, MPs begin to debate pollution, in part because they can smell it in the 1870s and 1880s.

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00:12:19,760 --> 00:12:25,440

So if I were to read the Hansards from the 1870s, I would hear a discussion of smells from LeBreton flats.

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00:12:26,480 --> 00:12:34,160

Yeah, sorry, I shifted a bit away from LeBreton flats there, but because it's a bit upstream, because I really wanted to talk about smell.

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00:12:34,160 --> 00:12:45,320

But yeah, that's the first discussion in Canada about pollution... has to do with the smell from the river being used as a wasteland.

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00:12:46,000 --> 00:12:56,760

But yes, at LeBreton Flats, you know, we'd smell horse manure, we'd smell an urban centre without the plumbing, the kind of plumbing that we're used to now.

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00:12:57,840 --> 00:13:01,320

And we'd hear a really, really, busy, bustling place.

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00:13:02,840 --> 00:13:03,200

Yeah.

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00:13:03,560 --> 00:13:09,440

So despite the impact of colonialism, the Algonquin Anishinabe people were still here.

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00:13:09,440 --> 00:13:11,240

As you said, they didn't go anywhere.

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00:13:11,600 --> 00:13:19,960

And Anita, we hear a lot about the importance of Victoria Island, which I understand continued to be a place of ceremony and importance.

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00:13:20,760 --> 00:13:35,880

And so do you want to speak a little bit about that and other ways in which Cristina's reference to the sacredness of the falls, that boiling falls, that Chaudières, can you talk a little bit about the importance of that area to the Algonquin people?

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00:13:36,200 --> 00:13:37,280

Yes, I can.

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00:13:37,280 --> 00:13:51,720

I was going to share that even in the late 1880s, our people were still coming to the area, trying to connect with our sacred sites and trying to connect with the waterways, trying to connect with the land.

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00:13:52,360 --> 00:14:09,960

We were aware that development was happening and it was not good for the land and the territory, but we were very concerned about the falls and

where we would make our offerings and where our people would gather for ceremony since time immemorial.

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00:14:10,760 --> 00:14:23,520

So our people never left, and as difficult as it was to leave the reserves that were created by that time, including Kitigan Zibi, that was created in the early 1850s,

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00:14:24,360 --> 00:14:28,600

our people made the journey, and they made it here to the Ottawa area.

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00:14:28,640 --> 00:14:30,960

We never left and we're still here.

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00:14:30,960 --> 00:14:33,040

And our people are proud of that fact.

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00:14:33,760 --> 00:14:35,680

They wanted to reconnect with the falls.

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00:14:35,680 --> 00:14:38,240

They wanted to see what is now LeBreton Flats.

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00:14:38,440 --> 00:14:45,800

They wanted to see where the Parliament is now located, the cliffs, you know, the water, the trees.

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00:14:46,160 --> 00:14:49,680

This is all in our memories and they remain in our memory.

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00:14:50,240 --> 00:14:50,520

Thank you.

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00:14:51,400 --> 00:14:59,880

So we're going to fast forward a little bit because I want to get to this issue of what has the water meant to the NCC and its history?

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00:15:00,120 --> 00:15:05,520

How has the NCC's position on the waters changed over the last 125 years?

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00:15:06,040 --> 00:15:10,840

And I guess without spending too much time on the planning history – we did that in another episode –

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00:15:11,200 --> 00:15:20,800

by the 1950s and with the Gréber Report, we start to see a recognition that the waterways do have important significance.

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00:15:20,800 --> 00:15:39,360

We get these parkways that are built on the east and west side of Ottawa and building on some of the earlier plans, the Todd plan and the Bennett plan, we see an evolution of this idea that actually the rivers in the waterways can be an attraction, can be a place that we need to take advantage of.

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00:15:39,680 --> 00:15:41,960

So, Cristina, maybe I'll start with you.

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00:15:42,960 --> 00:15:50,920

We start to see that in the 1950s... and at the same time the beginning of a de-industrialization of the Ottawa River.

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00:15:50,920 --> 00:15:53,160

Is that a fair parallel?

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00:15:55,480 --> 00:15:56,400

Yes, yeah.

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00:15:56,400 --> 00:16:13,320

Because with that plan, the part of the vision is to move the railways to the outskirts of town where previously the development of the city had the railways as integral and central.

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00:16:14,200 --> 00:16:41,280

So we see that movement and in terms of the kind of industry that is happening on the river, there's been a major shift by then, in part due to the ravenous environmental exploitation of timber upstream, that literally means the supply has been reduced for this industry.

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00:16:41,600 --> 00:17:04,560

You see a shift from enormous old growths on lumber, beautiful ancient forests being exploited through the 19th century into the 20th century that transitions into, first, sawn lumber, which is sort of for construction, and then into pulp and paper.

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00:17:04,920 --> 00:17:09,600

And that industry continues, sort of up until the 1950s.

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00:17:10,200 --> 00:17:13,160

It continues to this day up and downstream.

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00:17:14,560 --> 00:17:49,040

But yes, because of this vision for the Capital and the prescribed importance of a capital that is globally recognized, you know, significant, worthy of standing alongside Washington, D.C. and Paris, and that is worthy of a planner so eminent, we do see, you know, yeah, there is the partnership between that de-industrialization and this new vision of this place.

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00:17:50,040 --> 00:18:03,920

Gary, one of the things, as a landscape architect, I'd be interested to hear you talk about, is the fact that our waterways really are a central feature in situating the capital physically and topographically.

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00:18:05,000 --> 00:18:14,480

And I think planners over the course of the last 125 years have really used that as a way of understanding how the Capital can represent Canada.

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00:18:14,480 --> 00:18:25,720

Can you talk a little bit about the topography, about the importance of the water and some of the features that you think are particularly important in terms of understanding the geography of the capital?

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00:18:26,960 --> 00:18:34,640

So the interesting portion really reverts back to how the industrialization period

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00:18:35,000 --> 00:18:48,520

came into, like, into a rapid stance of being very prompt about the development. "City beautiful" movement came in with, okay, let's revert back.

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00:18:48,960 --> 00:19:00,680

Like we've industrialized, we've developed, we've formed all of these different shapes within cities, but now people also need places of repose.

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00:19:01,120 --> 00:19:21,800

And so what occurred with those types of movements and where we are today, is the fact of finding those places that actually make people take

advantage of being outdoors and being in a place that actually means more than just being a nice park or a retreat.

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00:19:22,200 --> 00:19:25,520

It actually has a sense to what those places are.

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00:19:26,560 --> 00:19:44,240

And so, when we speak of the variety of different landscapes that are being designed and developed, we tend to really focus the attention on what the significance of those landscapes truly mean.

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00:19:44,800 --> 00:19:54,440

And I think that that's where the change actually is occurring from the industrialization of how cities have grown to where they are today.

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00:19:55,600 --> 00:20:08,280

When we talk about topography, for example, we talk about topography because cities are always... have a backbone, and those backbones are the river, and being able to,

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00:20:09,200 --> 00:20:17,360

being able to have that type of relationship is crucial to how people enjoy the fact of being in the cities.

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00:20:18,000 --> 00:20:23,520

And so, now it's not just a visual type of aspect.

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00:20:24,040 --> 00:20:37,040

We want a tactile type of situation, how it was used before, and it's coming back in the sense where people will take advantage of waterways in a variety of different ways.

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00:20:37,160 --> 00:20:38,960

It does not have to be physical.

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00:20:39,320 --> 00:20:41,560

It can also just be visual.

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00:20:41,720 --> 00:20:50,720

It can also be in an audio form. Like, it's a variety of different ways that people will take advantage of things.

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00:20:51,120 --> 00:21:02,120

And I think that that's what makes cities now actually really revert back to getting to their backbone again and focusing their attention on how to take advantage of these.

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00:21:02,800 --> 00:21:15,640

Yeah, I like your sense, your description of the different ways in which waterways and rivers are considered. Before we move to sort of the 21st century and some of the things the NCC is doing now,

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00:21:16,640 --> 00:21:22,200

I want to talk about one physical manifestation of human use of the river, which is recreation.

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00:21:23,400 --> 00:21:32,480

And I know I have a cursory understanding of the ways in which recreation manifested, but I know others may know more.

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00:21:32,480 --> 00:21:37,880

Cristina, you've done, and I think in your Ph.D. research, you've got a pretty good understanding of some of those.

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00:21:37,880 --> 00:21:46,920

Do you want to speak to ways in which there was a recognition that the river could be not just a place of repose but of activity?

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00:21:47,800 --> 00:21:48,920

Yeah, absolutely.

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00:21:48,920 --> 00:22:02,760

And, and I think just to build on what Gary is saying, that the reverting back to that is, I think what you're saying, is sort of on the official level of planning.

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00:22:02,760 --> 00:22:26,680

Because something I found in my research is that for certain people, and that's often people who have the luxury of being able to think about where to vacation, or to have some free time, recreation and sort of an orientation or relationship with the waterways has been sort of a through line.

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00:22:26,680 --> 00:22:33,720

But that hasn't been part of the official vision of the city, which is what I think is so great and what we'll get to.

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00:22:34,840 --> 00:23:07,080

But yes, through its history, even through the history of, sort of, the shameful chapter of the pollution, settlers are using the river and relating to the river in a way, in a way of recreation, in a way of, sort of, a holiday-scape, a holiday landscape.

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00:23:08,000 --> 00:23:24,320

There's steamships that are a major part of patterns of colonialism and that continues with, sort of, the occupation of this land and water as a space for recreation.

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00:23:24,320 --> 00:23:43,840

So, in the city itself and in the landscape that we now know is the National Capital Region, through the 19th and 20th century, there are these things called end-of-the-line attractions that are being developed, either by the railways or by steam steamship companies.

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00:23:43,840 --> 00:23:53,240

And these are sort of entrepreneurial spirits who are thinking, okay, how can I make money from the ticket prices of my railway?

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00:23:53,760 --> 00:23:55,520

I'll build an end-of-the-line attraction.

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00:23:55,520 --> 00:24:01,800

So in Aylmer, and now it's sort of the Aylmer Marina area... that was called Queen's Park.

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00:24:01,800 --> 00:24:18,560

And there was an enormous waterslide there, and you'd go all along the northern shore of the river to shoot the shoot and to picnic with your family on Kettle Island.

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00:24:18,600 --> 00:24:33,520

There was in 1910 through to 1920 or so, an amusement park there, with a merry-go-round, with a moving picture show, with a restaurant.

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00:24:33,520 --> 00:24:36,280

And that was an end-of-the-line attraction for a steamship company.

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00:24:36,280 --> 00:24:50,960

So these are places that you, again, if you're a certain type of person who can think about this, would be able to access as a pastime in the summer. And, in the wintertime,



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00:24:51,280 --> 00:24:54,320

the recreation is a... it's a big part of people's lives as well.

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00:24:54,320 --> 00:24:59,360

And, I think there, in my experience, that can be a little bit more informal.

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00:24:59,360 --> 00:25:04,040

It's hard to capture, you know, where people are swimming in the summer, in the sources.

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00:25:04,040 --> 00:25:36,280

You know, there's little bits and bobs here. But certainly in the winter time, there are snowshoe associations, there are sleigh races on the ice in the urban centre of Ottawa now, and canoe associations, yachting associations, that are... that demonstrate this connection of the water and the city as a space for recreation.

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00:25:37,800 --> 00:25:53,400

And as the city becomes more intensified, more intensely developed, even Kettle Island is removed from the dusty, unhealthy, polluted city.

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00:25:53,400 --> 00:26:15,320

And you can go for a healthy fresh summer air to Kettle Island or downstream to Hiawatha Park, which is just sort of before Petrie Island, Besser's Grove area at Green's Creek - another point of confluence, which just demonstrates the ways that the waterways' points of confluence are so significant.

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00:26:15,600 --> 00:26:16,960

And that's really a through line.

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00:26:17,520 --> 00:26:34,720

But yeah, for certain types of people, there's holiday landscape and then in more informal ways, people are swimming, people are skating in the wintertime, and that can be a bit more accessible for all kinds of people.

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00:26:35,520 --> 00:26:41,520

Skating is a good segue-way to think a little bit about some of the other waterways, including the Rideau Canal.

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00:26:41,520 --> 00:26:50,280

And you did mention it earlier as a place that had been adjacent to railway lines that were started to be removed in the 1940s and 50s.

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00:26:51,360 --> 00:27:04,760

But one thing that I want to move to is... so obviously when the Rideau Canal Skateway started in the early 1970s, you can see that as being sort of the early formalization of recreation.

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00:27:04,760 --> 00:27:14,320

You get beaches, you get other activities, but I want to fast forward to the 21st century and talk a little bit about what's happening now.

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00:27:14,400 --> 00:27:26,200

And in my mind, there are three important factors that are setting the stage for how certainly the NCC's consideration of the capital waterways are changing.

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00:27:26,760 --> 00:27:30,720

And in my mind those three are one, reconciliation.

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00:27:31,000 --> 00:27:34,480

And I want to talk about some specific examples of that in a minute.

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00:27:34,480 --> 00:27:35,960

Anita, I'm going to ask you about that.

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00:27:36,560 --> 00:27:54,240

The second is maybe a greater awareness of the ecological importance of waterways and a recognition that in order for us to be able to appreciate and use them properly, we have to make sure that they are as pristine and clean as possible.

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00:27:54,920 --> 00:27:59,360

And the third is this understanding, and it's a little bit back to the future.

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00:27:59,360 --> 00:28:06,200

And I loved your references, Cristina, to what was happening in Aylmer and what was happening on Kettle Island.

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00:28:06,440 --> 00:28:19,360

And I feel like for the NCC, there's a rediscovery of thinking about the waterways, not only in a passive way, but again, as an active way, as a place where people can enjoy nature in sustainable ways.

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00:28:19,560 --> 00:28:33,320

So those three elements, reconciliation, ecological importance and recreation, I think are forming the basis of a new relationship and a real stimulus for different ways in which NCC projects are advancing.

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00:28:33,920 --> 00:28:39,080

One of those projects is the revitalization of the former Nepean Point.

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00:28:39,960 --> 00:28:50,240

I'm going to let Gary and Anita talk a little bit about how that project touches, I think on all three of those areas, but particularly on the reconciliation part.

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00:28:50,600 --> 00:29:01,480

So Gary, can you set the stage a little bit for how Kiweki Point, sorry, I just gave away the name... sort of gets established as a project.

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00:29:01,480 --> 00:29:10,600

And then Anita, I'm going to ask you to speak a little bit about your involvement and how you think the Algonquin involvement in that project was important.

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00:29:10,600 --> 00:29:12,280

So Gary set the stage for us.

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00:29:13,040 --> 00:29:35,000

So back in 2017, the NCC actually put forward an international design competition and that competition regrouped firms from everywhere that had very bodacious-like designs, that to revitalize the area [that] at that time was known as Nepean Point.

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00:29:36,080 --> 00:29:50,960

The firm that was chosen was Janet Rosenberg Studios as a very 21st century, avant-garde type of design that kind of related back to the relationship of the area with the river.

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00:29:51,320 --> 00:30:19,160

And that was really key into how the design progressed and how everyone really gravitated toward how the big river landscape was now viewed as an important and significant piece of how this would be a rebirth of an area that can now host so many different people to not just learn about the river, but experience it.

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00:30:20,560 --> 00:30:37,640

And so you know, we broke ground with demolition in 2020, construction started in 2022, and we are fastly approaching how the opening is going to come very, very soon.

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00:30:39,000 --> 00:30:44,720

The design itself really is poised as an experience.

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00:30:45,480 --> 00:30:57,720

It's not just a beautiful landscape, it's actually taking the time to focus on the visitor experience way of going and walking through a site.

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00:30:58,240 --> 00:31:08,640

And this is done by the design elements that are included, by the vegetation, the landscape, the forms of the site itself.

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00:31:09,280 --> 00:31:25,360

There are also elements of architecture that basically act as a backdrop to the river and different heights within the park to have similar experiences, but all with which to focus on the river itself.

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00:31:26,120 --> 00:31:40,600

And so the way that the site is designed, the pathways themselves, they always have this inclination of the river's movements, of how people moved along the river.

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00:31:41,040 --> 00:31:59,040

So from the perimeter pathway that goes around the site to the ridge pathway that basically links the pedestrian bridge that now is actually making its life back from the 1954 bridge that was removed because of the Alexandra Bridge.

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00:31:59,200 --> 00:32:01,600

It crosses Saint Patrick between Major's Hill Park.

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00:32:01,600 --> 00:32:02,360

Exactly.

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00:32:02,680 --> 00:32:03,400

Exactly.

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00:32:03,400 --> 00:32:17,440

And so having that pedestrian bridge link itself to the north-south pathway of the park is an inclination of further pedestrianizing how the area can take advantage of the river even more.

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00:32:17,920 --> 00:32:35,160

And the meandering pathways and the step pathways that are within the internal structure of the park mirror again how the river has all of these different kinks that basically make it this energy piece that kind of flows within the area.

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00:32:35,800 --> 00:33:01,920

But along all of these different pieces and along how the landscape speaks to the variety of different design ideas that actually are being promoted, we also have the interpretive layer that comes in, that basically capitalizes on, not just the design portion, but how it relates back to the river and the people.

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00:33:02,720 --> 00:33:22,320

The design itself was focused on being able to be an aspect of Canadianism, meaning being able to relate and regroup all Canadians together in order to be able to take advantage of the river.

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00:33:23,080 --> 00:33:27,520

And an important part of that also was the relationship with the Algonquin people.

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00:33:28,000 --> 00:33:35,120

And I know that there were early discussions and conversations and involvement through a working group.

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00:33:35,720 --> 00:33:38,080

Anita, you were a part of that process.

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00:33:38,360 --> 00:33:53,280

Can you speak to us a little bit about the interpretation Gary mentioned and how the park will reflect and respond to the important Algonquin history and role as stewards of these lands?

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00:33:54,040 --> 00:33:57,680

Right, so Anishinabe Algonquin voices need to be heard.

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00:33:57,960 --> 00:34:04,880

And I want to say, migwech, thank you to the NCC for hearing us and working with us in this particular project.

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00:34:05,320 --> 00:34:27,800

Through the Kitigan Zibi Cultural Centre, elders and knowledge keepers were engaged to learn about the project, to contribute to the project, to offer history and language within the project, to engage with Anishinabe Algonquin artists within the project, and we were really on site and present in the project.

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00:34:28,320 --> 00:34:41,160

Through the work of Rene Tenasco at the NCC, through Joan Commanda Tenasco's work in contributing language, in engaging with Pikwàkanagàn as well.

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00:34:42,040 --> 00:34:45,040

Kirby Whiteduck was always with us in this work.

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00:34:45,280 --> 00:35:08,280

It was a great way for two communities within the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation to come together to talk about our collective history, to talk about our connection to the land, to really have our people represented in this park so that Canadians from across the land and visitors to Canada who will visit the park will learn about our nation as the host nation of the Ottawa area.

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00:35:08,560 --> 00:35:09,720

That is so important.

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00:35:10,000 --> 00:35:12,120

That is a part of reconciliation.

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00:35:12,360 --> 00:35:19,920

That is making concrete change on the landscape in the city, in the capital of Canada – so important.

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00:35:19,920 --> 00:35:20,560

Yeah, no.

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00:35:20,720 --> 00:35:21,240

Well said.

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00:35:21,600 --> 00:35:31,560

So that's one very big and important example of this evolution that I spoke of, of really thinking about how we're interacting and viewing the river differently.

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00:35:31,920 --> 00:35:33,560

There are a couple of other projects.

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00:35:33,560 --> 00:35:39,920

The NCC River House opened last year, which is an opportunity for people both to enjoy the landscape.

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00:35:39,920 --> 00:35:47,800

There was a lot of attention on changing the shoreline so that it was people-friendly, so that people could sit and enjoy.

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00:35:48,560 --> 00:35:50,440

There are swim docks which have been a real hit.

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00:35:50,800 --> 00:35:58,160

And it's been really interesting for me to watch because you've seen... and Cristina, you alluded to sometimes there are barriers to recreation.

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00:35:58,520 --> 00:36:00,160

NCC River House is free.

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00:36:00,440 --> 00:36:15,160

And what that means is people who may not have a cottage or who may not be able to pay for waterfront access in other circumstances are really becoming the beneficiaries and great users and appreciating this free access.

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00:36:16,080 --> 00:36:24,280

And, so what I'm curious about... we've got that project, Westboro Beach is probably nine months or so away from opening.

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00:36:24,280 --> 00:36:28,000

So that will be another important riverfront project.

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00:36:29,280 --> 00:36:38,200

Ottawa and the National Capital Region is not alone in rethinking its relationship to waterways.

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00:36:38,560 --> 00:36:41,240

Gary, I know you've worked in other cities.

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00:36:42,240 --> 00:36:43,360

What do you think is happening?

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00:36:43,800 --> 00:36:47,920

Is it coincidence that cities worldwide are rethinking this?

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00:36:47,920 --> 00:37:03,880

Are there connections and similarities between the ways that cities are turning to face their waters and what do you think are some good examples of successful regeneration projects worldwide?

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00:37:04,560 --> 00:37:15,240

Oh, there are a lot, but I think that you just point... you just touched on a very important point... is that cities are wanting to face the river.

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00:37:15,600 --> 00:37:28,960

And I think that that's something that, in more of a historical sense, cities have turned their backs to the river because it was more of a transportation channel than anything about enjoyment.

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00:37:29,400 --> 00:37:42,240

And so what occurred was now to be able to actually feel and really experience the river is now being part of what is important to people.

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00:37:42,760 --> 00:37:50,400

And so not just people, but cities worldwide are actually really focusing their attention on being able to take advantage of these.

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00:37:52,000 --> 00:38:18,280

One perfect example is in Washington, D.C., for example, in Georgetown, there is... they've done an amazing job of being able to revert the C&O canal trailway leading into Georgetown to be able to actually have a boating-kayaking type of situation where now you bleed into K Street,

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00:38:18,640 --> 00:38:26,840

and then all of a sudden you have this opening of a gateway park that really lends itself to the views of the Potomac River.

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00:38:27,160 --> 00:38:33,960

I mean, those are examples that cities are taking now, that they are really focusing their attentions on.

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00:38:34,360 --> 00:38:52,000

And I mean, it's in the... I guess you might say the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland, the Potomac River has now viewed itself as being like



the significant piece of attraction for a variety of different developments of many, many kinds.

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00:38:52,000 --> 00:39:02,200

And so seeing what we're doing here, now, with the Kichi Z?b?, is right there with those types of visions.

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00:39:02,440 --> 00:39:04,480

But we're doing it in our way.

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00:39:04,600 --> 00:39:09,920

It's not... a mimicking what other cities have been done.

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00:39:10,520 --> 00:39:17,640

The Kichi Z?b? is actually getting itself to be recognized as its own entity.

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00:39:18,120 --> 00:39:24,120

And also speaking, like we were talking about interpretation for Kìwekì Point.

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00:39:24,600 --> 00:39:34,200

Now the river is the one narrating the experience that people are going to take on a site, which is a completely different way of actually experiencing things.

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00:39:34,600 --> 00:39:43,080

And so I think that each of these cities are taking their own way of having that type of experience being felt.

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00:39:43,280 --> 00:39:44,200

And that's what excites.

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00:39:44,200 --> 00:39:45,160

That's what's exciting.

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00:39:45,480 --> 00:39:55,360

Yeah. Another way in which certainly the NCC is trying to face the river, as you say, is also offering opportunities for people to sit and enjoy.

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00:39:55,680 --> 00:40:01,520

I talked about recreation, but some people like to enjoy things passively, myself included from time to time.

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00:40:02,200 --> 00:40:09,880

A cold glass of beer or something to eat is a wonderful thing to do on the shoreline of many of the Capital's rivers.

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00:40:10,200 --> 00:40:27,000

And that's another way in which I think certainly the NCC's relationship with the water has evolved, from understanding it as a place that people either bike along or walk along or drive along, to a place where people can stop and, you know, really enjoy it.

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00:40:27,000 --> 00:40:29,160

And facing the river is an important part of that.

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00:40:29,920 --> 00:40:41,680

Cristina, from your perspective and from the research you've done, are there other components of the evolution of the river and the waterways that you would want to remark on?

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00:40:41,680 --> 00:40:45,280

Is there anything that we're missing in this storyline?

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00:40:47,840 --> 00:40:51,120

Well, I'll move us out of the 21st century for a second.

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00:40:51,440 --> 00:40:51,760

Sure.

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00:40:51,880 --> 00:40:52,000

Yeah.

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00:40:53,160 --> 00:40:55,600

But not too far. I think

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00:40:55,600 --> 00:41:19,040

one thing we have to remember and maybe, well, it definitely builds on what Gary is just saying, is the environmental movement in the 1960s and the 1970s and the way that that changes a global conversation about relationship with the environment.

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00:41:19,320 --> 00:41:23,600

Indigenous leaders are huge in driving that conversation.

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00:41:24,680 --> 00:41:40,760

And there are, sort of, these major – I love water puns – watershed moments, in that time that changed conversations of, you know, globally, for people, for cities, about the river.

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00:41:40,760 --> 00:42:03,280

And there's sort of... there's one anecdote that I think is important to share, which is a funeral for the river, which occurred... the group of student activists at Carleton University who had a conference and basically a funeral for the river.

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00:42:03,280 --> 00:42:07,200

And this was sort of a student activist movement.

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00:42:07,880 --> 00:42:17,320

There was a film created, as well as sort of environmental advocacy in that period,

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00:42:17,600 --> 00:42:35,440

which changed the way, then, we all, and the city and the NCC as well, understood, you know, people's understanding of the river and people's relationship with the river, and that continues to this day.

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00:42:35,720 --> 00:42:43,360

I know with the NCC and, as sort of as a layperson, a resident of the region, to talk about swimming in the river.

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00:42:43,720 --> 00:42:49,240

Sometimes people can be scandalized – as in really, is that – are you okay to swim in the river?

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00:42:50,080 --> 00:42:56,840

Because we have these memories, not very distant memories, of the waterways feeding into the river.

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00:42:57,920 --> 00:43:07,560

Brewery Creek, on the Gatineau side, on the Quebec side, on the North Shore, that was extremely polluted not too long ago.

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00:43:07,560 --> 00:43:19,080

And that we have all been working, sort of at various government levels at the federal, at the municipal, at the provincial levels, to rehabilitate.

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00:43:19,080 --> 00:43:39,480

So I think those things... and just to talk of connections to other rivers, this funeral movement that happened on the Don River in Toronto as well, as a big display to gain attention, sort of a publicity stunt to gain attention to the environmental cause.

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00:43:40,480 --> 00:44:10,040

So I think that's an important thing to remember and it's [an] important thing to be... you know, grateful for those, those forebearers who in the environmental movement, who shifted our collective awareness and reoriented our relationship as one of gratitude and of relationship of interdependence with waterways, which has always existed on Turtle Island.

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00:44:10,040 --> 00:44:14,760

And how... you know, and then now is part of what you describe as the NCC vision.

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00:44:15,200 --> 00:44:15,480

Yeah.

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00:44:15,480 --> 00:44:16,360

I think that's so important.

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00:44:16,360 --> 00:44:22,520

And I realize one thing that we hadn't mentioned up until now is the fact that life literally comes from the river.

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00:44:22,520 --> 00:44:26,520

Our drinking water is sourced in the National Capital Region from the Ottawa River.

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00:44:26,520 --> 00:44:30,560

So, also a very important, as you say, interdependence and function.

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00:44:31,280 --> 00:44:35,680

And I'm really glad, Cristina, that you mentioned the environmental movement and its roots.

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00:44:35,960 --> 00:44:48,320

And we should say that even now, the Ottawa Riverkeeper, which is an organization that's very active in terms of monitoring and advocating for the health of the Ottawa River, is also a tenant of the NCC.

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00:44:48,320 --> 00:44:49,120

They exist.

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00:44:49,120 --> 00:44:51,360

Their offices are at the NCC River House.

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00:44:51,640 --> 00:44:54,320

So we very much appreciate the work that they've done.

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00:44:55,080 --> 00:44:57,080

So, yeah, a very, very important point.

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00:44:57,080 --> 00:45:09,960

And I think the relationship between reconciliation and understanding the role of the Algonquin people, the environmental movement, this sort of landscape architecture and planning tendency to want to face the rivers.

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00:45:10,240 --> 00:45:11,600

They've all sort of happened.

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00:45:11,600 --> 00:45:25,640

They're all happening at the same time, and I think represent a huge opportunity for the NCC and other levels of government, really, to do the right thing from an environmental point of view, from a reconciliation point of view.

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00:45:25,920 --> 00:45:50,160

And also, you know, from the purpose of improving life in the Capital, both for residents and for visitors to create a more inviting environment, which, by the way, also in an era of a climate crisis where we're experiencing these, you know, much more frequent extreme weather events.

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00:45:50,640 --> 00:46:02,720

You know, to think about that, to think about mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, to think about adaptation, to think about ways in which the river will continue to play a role for us in the capital is also important.

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00:46:03,320 --> 00:46:06,480

So, despite the challenges, I remain hopeful.

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00:46:06,480 --> 00:46:10,280

I think there is an opportunity for us to do even more in those areas.

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00:46:11,000 --> 00:46:32,920

And so I think if we look at the first 125 years, which is mixed in terms of some real missteps, some real abusing of the waterways functions, I think I'm more optimistic about the next 125 years in terms of our ability to establish more of a symbiosis with our water.

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00:46:33,720 --> 00:46:35,560

And I'm hopeful that that happens.

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00:46:36,520 --> 00:46:44,200

So thank you to the three of you for helping us understand a little bit about the history to situate the different parts of it.

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00:46:44,480 --> 00:46:49,200

So Anita, Cristina, Gary – really enjoyed this conversation today.

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00:46:49,200 --> 00:46:58,560

Thank you for, yeah, again, helping us interpret the NCC's waterways and the NCC's role in addressing them.

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00:46:58,720 --> 00:47:00,200

So thank you for joining me.

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00:47:00,440 --> 00:47:01,600

Thank you, migwech.

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00:47:03,640 --> 00:47:06,680

And that wraps up this episode of Capital Stories.

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00:47:06,840 --> 00:47:15,120

Join us next time as we continue to celebrate the triumphs, reflect on the challenges, and peer into the future of the National Capital Region.

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00:47:15,320 --> 00:47:16,120

Thanks for joining us.