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OPEN RIVERS :  
RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

# RELATIONALITY

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from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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University of Minnesota

Administrative Editor:  
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Media and Production Manager:  
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University of Minnesota

## Contact Us

*Open Rivers*  
Institute for Advanced Study  
University of Minnesota  
Northrop  
84 Church Street SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Telephone: (612) 626-5054  
Fax: (612) 625-8583  
E-mail: [openrvrs@umn.edu](mailto:openrvrs@umn.edu)  
Web Site: <http://openrivers.umn.edu>

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## INTRODUCTION

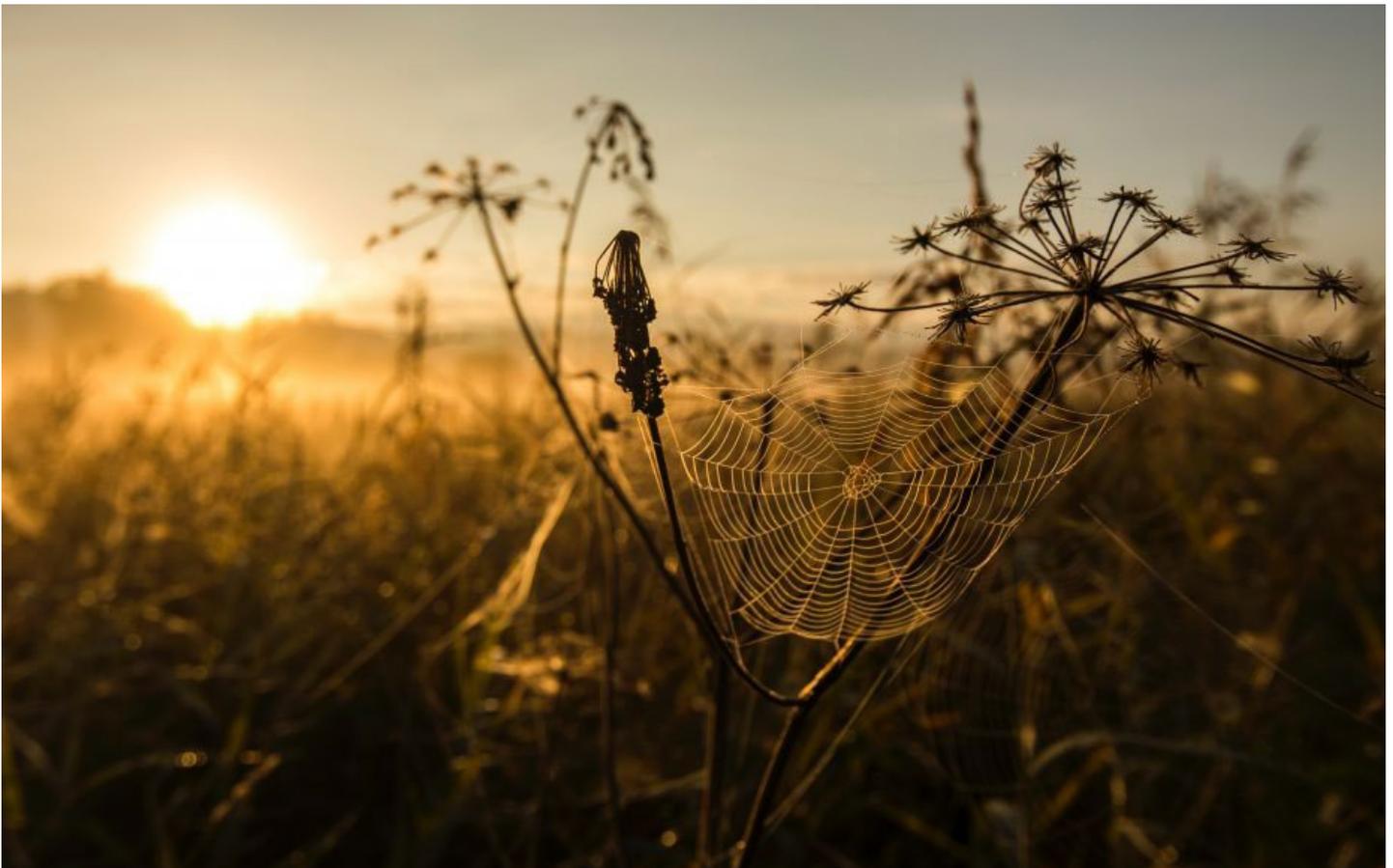
# INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE SEVENTEEN

By Laurie Moberg, Managing Editor

In recent years, the practice of land acknowledgements—making statements to acknowledge that white settlers to Turtle Island (what we now know as North America) are all on lands unethically, unconscionably taken from Indigenous peoples who lived and thrived here long before settlers—has become common. While these kinds of statements mark an important step for many settler institutions, this practice—acknowledgement—is not nearly enough to remedy, recalibrate, compensate, or take responsibility for the displacement, violence, theft, and injustices perpetrated. This issue of *Open Rivers* is an effort

to take another step, to move beyond a simple acknowledgement toward complex learning.

In 2019, the University of Minnesota was awarded a grant focused on drawing the University's attention and work toward learning from Indigenous ways of knowing, methodologies, and relations with other-than-humans in order to effect change in modes of education and the University as a whole. Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the humanities-led Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative began this work by building



*Prairie and spiderweb. Image courtesy of Jan Huber.*

a cohort of participants across three campuses—the University of Minnesota Duluth, Morris, and Twin Cities. As part of the first year of this work, Christine Taitano DeLisle worked with *Open Rivers* staff to help us imagine, coordinate, and create work that could be a resource both for people engaged in the Initiative work moving forward and a broader audience interested in Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies.

In particular, the work in this issue—and the work of the Initiative more generally—focuses on the interrelatedness of Indigenous ways of knowing and what we call the “environment” in Western modes of thinking. We titled this issue “Relationality” to highlight this connectedness. Many of the pieces in this issue offer an implicit challenge: how might our ways of engaging environmental challenges change if we considered ourselves as related, if we considered the “natural world” as other-than-human relatives? How might this interconnectedness impact our relationships with the world around us and with each other?

In “Indigenizing Environmental Thinking,” a group of scholars and thinkers both within and beyond academia respond more directly to this question. In response to a prompt on how Indigenous ways of knowing might reconfigure higher education as well as responses to environmental change, a dozen people share their reflections based on their own teaching, research, and lived experiences.

Other articles demonstrate relationality. In “Rattlesnake Effigy Mound Ancestors Still Teaching” and “Sky Watchers, Earth Watchers, and Guardians of the Former and Future Garden,” Jim Rock introduces Indigenous STEM, histories, and the interconnectedness of places on Turtle Island and the cosmos. These two articles illustrate core principles of Indigenous science in practice and provoke readers to see the world differently. Čhaptémaza (Neil McKay) and Monica Siems McKay explain relationships

between settler institutions, like the University of Minnesota, and the dispossession of Indigenous lands. They argue that acknowledging that the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus is built on Dakhóta land is not enough, pressing readers to recognize that “how we have benefitted and continue to benefit from the theft of Dakhóta lands should obligate us to take reparative action.” There is also place-based research happening at the University of Minnesota grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, as exhibited through the two U of M Grand Challenge Research Grant projects highlighted in “Navigating Indigenous Futures with the Mississippi River.” Both of the projects featured in this article prioritize building good relationships with Minnesota’s Indigenous communities and focus on Indigenous relationalities, “the web of interconnected relations of kinship and ethical regard among Indigenous people, land, water, and sky scapes.” The article focuses on a particular event at the Mississippi River in the fall of 2019 and includes an accompanying gallery of photos from the day.

Several of the pieces also offer insights and resources for exploring Indigenous relationalities and ways of knowing. Becca Gercken and Kevin Whalen reflect on their experiences teaching *The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became US Property* by Martin Case. They argue that this book about white treaty-makers helped students understand the legacy and ongoing impacts of Indigenous land dispossession into the present. Republished from an earlier issue of *Open Rivers*, Mahin Hamilton’s review of *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer invites readers to slow down and savor Kimmerer’s weaving of story, Indigenous knowledge, and Western science in her collection of essays. The Primary Sources column for this issue offers more resources in the form of a reading list that invites readers to engage questions of relations to *this* place, decolonization, Indigenous environmental activism and justice, and Indigenous methodologies and theory. We also share an

article republished from *The Conversation* that exposes ongoing water injustices for aboriginal peoples in the Murray-Darling basin in Australia, offering a perspective on Indigenous relations and settler practices in a different place.

Together, this collection of articles and resources foregrounds Indigenous ways of knowing and invites us all to consider how thinking relationally might reshape our collective environmental futures. Enjoy.

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## About the Author

Laurie Moberg is the managing editor for *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community* and the project manager for the Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative at the University of Minnesota. She earned her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Minnesota in 2018. Her doctoral research investigates recurrent episodes of flooding on rivers in Thailand and queries how the ecological, social, and cosmological entanglements between people and the material world are reimagined and reconfigured in the aftermath of disasters. In her work at the University of Minnesota, Laurie brings her ethnographic sensibilities, attention to story, and interest in human-nonhuman relations to questions of water and absented narratives closer to home.