

Take Action: Eqpahak Island

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Step 1: Identify your concern:

Our Take Action project was to discuss and persuade NB Power to give the Eqpahak island back to the First Nations people, this island has very special meaning to a lot of people, it is not only their island but also a land which held council meetings and has many artifacts as well as a burial site. With ownership rightfully given back to the St. Mary's people the island could become very educational, not only for the First Nations but also for other students in Public High Schools.

Step 2: Research Your Concern

Prior to contact, Maliseet people had no concept of land ownership but they were quick to learn the new ways of the new people. In 1768, two Maliseet Chiefs from Eqpahak travelled to Halifax to try to acquire ownership of the island for their people. A meeting was held between British officials and Maliseet Chiefs Pierre Thomas and Ambroise St. Aubon. The Chiefs were requesting that a priest would remain with them, that two Acadian families be removed from their lands for reasons of hunting and encroaching on their territories, that a bell be returned to them that was taken from them and brought to Quebec. They also requested for some utensils and tools so that they could farm, to remain neutral if war broke out between European powers, and finally, they wanted land, 4 acres at St. Anne's in Fredericton and 500 acres of wood land adjacent to Ekoupaque island and the island. The British agreed to most of the requests, they promised the removal of the Acadians, the return of their bell, tools for farming, and a priest would be supplied to them. As far as the land was concerned, there were no promises made at this time. It is unclear if any of the above mentioned promises made by the British were ever fulfilled. Ten years later war starts between the British and the Americans and the Maliseet people declared war on the British. This declaration of war on the British from the Maliseet people would help them in their request concerning Eqpahak.

In the following year on August 2nd, 1779, the Maliseet people got their land they had asked for in 1768. Michael Thomas at the time was the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the province of New Brunswick. The track of the land that had been granted was five hundred acres in the Springhill area, the island opposite of Springhill, Eqpahak, which consisted of two hundred acres. Also included was four acres at St. Anne's Point in Fredericton. This would belong to the Maliseet people until 1794, when the five hundred acres and also Eqpahak were sold to the loyalist. The circumstances leading to the sale are questionable, why would the Chiefs sell their land that they had worked so hard to get?

The sale of the island would cause a split of the Maliseet people with many moving to different locations within New Brunswick and Maine.

The Maliseet people never got over the theft of Eqpahak, in 1887, Andrew Paul believed to be from St. Mary's and Peter Tomer wrote a letter to New Brunswick's M.P. John Costigan to try to get the land back with no success. In the mid 1990's St. Mary's First Nation tried once again to acquire Eqpahak from the province through a land transaction deal. This also was unsuccessful and Eqpahak island is currently in possession of NB Power.

It has been over two hundred years since the Maliseet people have had ownership of Eqpahak, ownership according to Canadian Laws that is. The loss of Eqpahak should be corrected once and for all and NB Power has an opportunity to do so. The island has no real value to NB Power but to the Maliseet people, Eqpahak has and always will be an important place to them, their stories connect them to the land.

Step 3: Find Out Who Supports You

Our first task was to get the Chief of St. Mary's, Candice Paul in Fredericton on board, after meeting with her she was happily in support of our Take Action, in fact, almost a year before, the First Nations had tried to regain ownership of the island with no luck so she was glad to see us trying once again.

Step 4: Create a Plan

We wanted more people on board so we met with the MLA on the North Side of Fredericton, Pam Lynch, upon meeting with her she brought along the executive assistant of NB Power Jacob Baisley. During this meeting they suggested we should not try to own the island but rather a partnership with NB Power over the Island, meaning that if people wanted to access the island to let NB Power know ahead of time so they could decide whether or not the island was a safe place to visit during certain seasons.

Step 5: Take Action

We decided this just did not cut it so another meeting was set up with Pat Francois who is an Aboriginal secretariat and he arranged a meeting with NB Power for March 16, 2012. Soon after, NB Power agreed to give the land back to its rightful owners and Eqpahak island is now property of the St. Mary's people.

Step 6: Evaluate the Plan

Overall, we feel as if we did an effective job in getting the island back to its rightful owners. We went through the proper steps and got influential people on our side such as Chief Candice Paul. It was also helpful that even before this Take Action previous attempts had been made by Percy and Chief Candice Paul and their persistence to not give up was very beneficial to us.

Step 7: Apply your Learning

We have learned from taking part in this Take Action that without support you cannot get very far and that if you want something bad enough to never let anything get in your way. Percy Sacobie along with Chief Candice Paul has been trying to get the ownership back to its rightful owners twice now and if they had given up the island would still belong to NB Power. Persistence is key and if you believe in something never give up and always stick to your guns.

Link to NB Curriculum

To link this Take Action project to the Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum we looked at how the curriculum focuses on promoting students growth as individuals and as citizens of Canada. The curriculum also focuses on the opportunities for students to explore multiple approaches that may be used to analyze and interpret their own world as well as the world of others. The island could be used for educational purposes such as learning about the burial site as well as the history of council meetings and the artifacts that are located there. Students would be able to explore the world of the First Nations dating back hundreds of years ago and how their world has changed and what it means to be a Canadian citizen to certain people here in Canada.