

DRAFT: 7 May 2025

How We* Work

on organizing to transform non-native conservation culture

*Who's the "we"? This document was drafted by members of the organizing collective, with input from Catalysts. But you might find yourself in the "we", too.

We aspire to...	What that looks like...
...support Indigenous leadership and capacity for collective voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">We work in deep collaboration with the Wabanaki Commission as the best way to remain accountable to sovereign Nations. This entity coordinates between Wabanaki Nations and offers leadership to conservation culture.We build Wabanaki partners' capacities to meet with us, asking what's needed and working to provide it.In the non-native community, we work to be ready to respond to requests from Wabanaki partners when they emerge.
...build from the different strengths present across the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">We work with land trusts, advocacy orgs, philanthropies, educators, timber companies, government agencies...many organizations have a role to play.We don't share all the same beliefs, but we do share core commitments to action and working together. These are expressed in Community Letters that outline an organization's motivations and commitment to the work.Every organization has different contributions, based on their particular people, capacity, and context.
...organize and participate in new structures for gathering and coordination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In addition to the Wabanaki Commission, we rely on the Conservation Community Delegation (a circle of partners from across peer organizations), Catalysts (individuals who hold particular responsibilities in advancing the work), and Working Groups. These circles meet monthly to share information and respond to what's coming up in the work.We host online and in-person community-wide gatherings so folks can build relationships and learn together. Gatherings are flexible and non-rigid to meet emergent needs.
...continually support ongoing learning and peer relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Learning Journey is a year-long commitment where conservation organization staff and board members gather repeatedly to deepen their learning.We support organizations through self-guided curriculum and resources, and encourage them to create dedicated Learning Teams that carry the work into their organization.In ongoing learning, we create opportunities to connect as full humans and express motivation for change. For example, "This I Believe" statements are a practice of witnessing the current moment and calling peers into action.
...build relationships of respect and listening across worlds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">We create spaces for non-native partners to hear directly from Wabanaki leaders.We reduce barriers for Wabanaki partners to show up in our spaces – or meet on their ground instead of asking them to always enter our spaces.When invited to gatherings with Wabanaki partners, we do our best to show up.When needed, we create caucus spaces to prep or debrief around cross-cultural spaces.
...carry individual, organizational, and community-wide scales of thinking and action in mind.	<p>Some examples...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Individuals: Pause, breathe. Understand the particular abilities you have to offer to the collective work. Brainstorm a list of who you can call when you're in a tough place.Organizations: Commit staff and board time to relearning. Dedicate your budget to Wabanaki projects. See many more ideas expressed as "stepping stones" in Welcome to the First Light Community.Community: Call on one another for guidance and support. Fundraise together, or share funds to support a project. Convene annually to build relationships and share the work.
...reveal and shift the power structures in place that may be blocking the work of return.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">We bring analyses on power into learning journeys and other shared spaces.We include funders as members of, not separate from, the ongoing learning and action.In response to community, we created a board-specific Learning Journey.
...keep holding connection and accountability for this work across the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">First Light staff is a flexible, dynamic organizing collective that holds a commitment to sustain relationships and accountability across peer organizations in the conservation community.

Foundations

these ideas underlie our practices

- We can do much more together than any of us can alone.
- Returning land to Wabanaki communities is an act of solidarity, not charity. There's reciprocal benefit to this work.
- Community change needs both bold ideas and incremental steps, and an acceptance of the tension between the two.
- This work is emergent and always shifting; the ways we work are formed to encourage change.
- Every culture has the responsibility to shift itself.

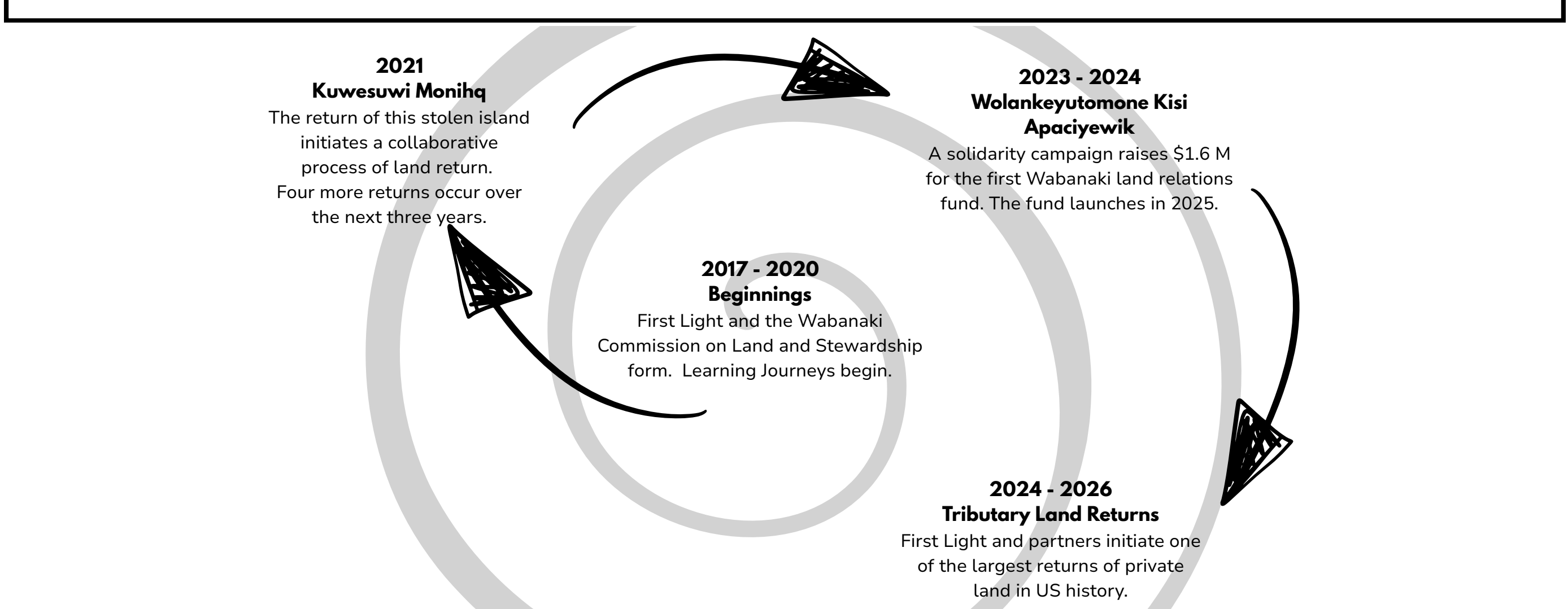
Other Learnings

think of these as other maps we use to navigate this work

- [Organizational model visual](#)
- [Welcome to the First Light Community](#)
- [What is a First Light project?](#)
- [Principles around Signage](#)
- [Curiosity, Humility, and Self-Critique](#)

Where We've Been

some of the steps along the way



How to Learn More

visit dawnlandreturn.org and please reach out!