Solstalgia

Solstalgia is an effort to better understand the emotional and cultural distress that results from the loss of place value or community identity caused by environmental change specifically in the Western Lake Superior region.

What does solstalgia mean?

Solstalgia is the emotional and cultural distress of a loss of place value or community identity caused by environmental change.

What’s the problem this solstalgia group is addressing?

We are witnessing a tremendous increase in the health risks associated with climate change across the entire planet. For example, in North America we are experiencing climate change related human health impacts of heat stress, vector borne illnesses, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, allergens, as well as trauma from severe and violent storms (Crimmins, et al., 2016; EPA, 2017).

There is also mounting evidence to support the concern for growing emotional health risks associated with a changing climate (Trombley, et al. 2017). The emotional health risks include anxiety, stress, depression, and increases in violence and aggression. The emotional and cultural distress of a loss of place value or community identity caused by environmental change has recently been called solstalgia (Albrecht, et al., 2007), though similar concepts of collective historical loss and trauma are deeply rooted in indigenous communities and scholarship (Walls & Whitbeck, 2011).

What is the solstalgia group planning to do?

The proposed effort outlined in this proposal represents the first steps in a plan to attempt to better understand this emotional and cultural distress in a regional context, specifically, Western Lake Superior. We hope to explore how a changing climate may be having an impact on the psychological well-being of residents and the subsequent resilience of communities in this unique region with attention to differential impacts for Indigenous communities given legacies of land dispossession.

In addition, the transformational character of emotion regarding climate change will be explored in the context of place attachment (Ryan, 2016). How might our emotional and

Solstalgia retreat

Several broad objectives were identified for the retreat:

• Professional relationship building—understanding the diversity of work and professional perspective within the group.
• Personal relationship building—building trust, warmth, and caring within the group.
• Developing a deeper understanding of previous literature and study of solstalgia—study, review, and discussion of work in the field to develop a firm foundation to apply to our work in Western Lake Superior.
• Design of a plan for moving forward—initial grant planning, program development, research planning, etc.

The retreat was a rich sharing experience and the objectives met. The group will meet again in December, 2018 to report on initial efforts and to further clarify direction and action.
cultural distress over the changes we experience in the landscapes we call home have the power to generate hope, responsibility, and action? What information is needed to better understand the concerns and opportunities that may emerge from a place-based understanding of the problem?

What information is guiding Solastalgia?

We will be guided by a rich literature and empirical base from North American Indigenous research (American Indian, Alaska Native, First Nations). This body of work illustrates the harmful impacts of cultural loss (including loss of land; Whitbeck, et al., 2004), the utility of connectedness to nature and community for health promotion (e.g. Mohatt, et al., 2011), and the centrality of land and place in many Indigenous wellness orientations (e.g., Walters, et al., 2011).

In what geographic areas is the solastalgia group working?

The area encompasses two nations (two states and a province), sovereign tribal nations—including federally recognized tribal reservations (U.S.) and reserves (Canada), urban and rural communities, expansive forested landscapes, and a significant portion of the world’s largest lake; the region is an area linked together physically, culturally, and ecologically.