

How do the Métis see their rights?

Audrey Poitras was first elected president of the Métis Nation of Alberta in 1996. The Métis Nation of Alberta has more than 35 000 members. Its mandate is to represent the Métis in government decision-making processes and to provide services to Métis people, such as housing and funds for education.



In 2007, as elected president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Audrey Poitras represented her organization's members in negotiations and debates on issues of concern to Canadians.

One of the fundamental aspects of Métis rights is our ability to define ourselves. It's not up to the government, or non-Métis people, to define who is Métis. Only the Métis Nation itself can make those kinds of distinctions.

The recognition of Métis rights goes hand in hand with the sense of identity for many people. The recognition gives them the courage to reconnect with their heritage, and to once again be proud of who they are.

It's been a constant battle to have our rights recognized. But one thing we do know: our rights are enshrined in Canada's constitution at a national level.

The interpretation of Métis rights falls to the different provinces, and many provinces have a very narrow interpretation of our rights. Although we have come a long way, there's a long way to go.

Gerald Cunningham is a member of the East Prairie Métis Settlement and was elected president of the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) in 2007. The MSGC is the governing body of the eight Métis Settlements in Alberta, with approximately 9000 members.



In 2007, as elected president of the Métis Settlements General Council, Gerald Cunningham represented the Métis of Alberta's Métis Settlements.

The most important part for me is that the Métis are now recognized in the Canadian constitution as one of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Métis people are now proud of who they are. A lot of people did not identify themselves as Métis before, but you can see from the 2006 census of Canada that more people are coming forward as Métis. Over the past decade, the Métis population was the fastest growing Aboriginal group, up 72 percent in Alberta and more than 90 percent in Canada.

At the present time, the box labelled "Métis rights in Canada" only contains harvesting rights. Métis across the country have to work together to fill that box up and further define our Métis rights.



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE Why might the Métis organizations described on this page have different perspectives on Métis collective rights?



Why are the collective rights of the Métis important to Audrey Poitras and Gerald Cunningham?