

SPECIAL SERIES



BREAKING GROUND

A Spotlight on Six Women in Canada's Environmental Industry

MARGOT FERGUSON

FOLLOWING OPPORTUNITIES WHERE THEY LEAD

Margot's background in science and sense of adventure have shaped her career.



Margot Ferguson's path into the environmental industry began with a firm grounding in science and a willingness to follow opportunities where they led. Trained first as a geophysicist, she later completed courses in a master's program in environmental science, recognizing early on that the combination of technical and environmental training would shape her future career.

Career Path

In 1993, Margot joined Northern PetroSearch, a geophysical operations firm that required environmental protection plans for seismic programs. What began as technical support quickly evolved into a career deeply rooted in environmental due diligence and community collaboration.

As the industry grew, Boyd Exploration Consultants merged with Northern PetroSearch, forming Boyd PetroSearch. In 1998 EnviroSearch, the environmental department, was launched as a separate entity so the team could provide environmental services for Boyd's competitors and move

beyond supporting seismic and exploration drilling programs. Margot became an owner, and work expanded into front-end assessments and protection plans (collaborating with geoscientists, biologists, and conservation officers) and environmental monitoring/compliance programs. Much of this work took place on Indigenous lands — spanning approximately 40 reserves across Alberta and Saskatchewan — and in the Northwest Territories, where seismic and drilling projects required complex government applications, extensive communication with Land and Water Boards and regulatory agencies, supported by community and elder consultations.

EnviroSearch joined MWH in 2008 - an international environmental and engineering company looking to expand its presence in Canada. Seven years later, with the other three EnviroSearch partners having moved-on, she was given the opportunity to buy back the Alberta portion of the business. She chose to take that leap, along with two key Indigenous partnerships in the Sahtu Region of the NWT - Nehkedi Environmental (Colville Lake) and Northern

EnviroSearch Tulita (with Tulita Water). These partnerships became pivotal turning points for the company.

Margot met Ailsa Le May, her business partner, during their earth science undergrad programs at the University of Saskatchewan where they played intramural soccer together. Following divergent paths, they reconnected many years later at a RemTech conference in Banff. Ailsa, an environmental consultant and geologist, initially supported EnviroSearch on a contract basis, ultimately merging her business with Margot's and the two becoming equal partners.



People, Partnerships, and Persistence

Relationships and meeting new people have been the driving force behind Margot's work. One of the most surprising meetings was an elder consultation with Alex Janvier in Cold Lake, who also happened to be a renowned Order of Canada artist. That encounter, like many others, reinforced her belief that you never know who you're going to meet, what you will learn, or where one connection may lead.

Through the partnerships with Colville Lake and Tulita Water, relationships with companies such as ConocoPhillips, Suncor, Canadian Natural, and Husky evolved into long-term working partnerships. Community involvement proved essential to success. Through a shared focus on youth and elders, the Tulita Water partnership committed to funding elder support, youth programs, and guaranteed annual funding for the preschool and school lunch programs over five years. This initiative reflected Margot's belief that environmental work must also support the people connected to the land.

Today, EnviroSearch employs 10 people and maintains two Indigenous partnerships, with long-standing relationships, working predominantly in Western Canada and NWT.

Federal funding for Indigenous business was also essential to the growth of Ksááhko Environmental, the newer Treaty 7 partnership.

“Environmental work must also
**SUPPORT THE PEOPLE CONNECTED
TO THE LAND.**”

Like any long career, Margot's has included setbacks. Losing a major proposal she believed was a sure win was a memorable disappointment. A misinterpretation of the government's request meant that weeks of work went unconsidered. From that experience, she learned the importance of asking more questions up-front and always requesting a debrief. Her approach to disappointment is to listen, adjust, adapt, and move forward, always keeping lessons learned for the future. She believes sometimes you lose a job only to see it return later in a different form.

Leadership, Adaptability, and Perspective

What Margot enjoys most about her work is the small, client-focused and adaptable nature of EnviroSearch. The company operates with a family-like atmosphere, and she values the engagement side of the work just as much as the technical aspects — especially elder and community consultations and visits to remote communities. Places like Colville Lake, NT – on her first trip in 2000 there was no running water, transportation was limited to snowmobiles and quads, and groceries cost almost five times what she was used to – offer her insight into different ways of life and the realities many communities face.

Running a small business means wearing many hats. Margot manages cash flow, works closely with a bookkeeper and administrator, and remains involved in business development, project management, and field work. With a natural aptitude for math, the financial side of the business came more easily to her. But much of her confidence in building relationships traces back to her childhood. Her family relocated every summer, and attending different schools taught Margot how to adapt quickly, build rapport, form affiliations, and speak up. Those early experiences, she believes, also gave her a lasting sense of adventure.

“**NO SINGLE PATH IS THE ONLY PATH.**
Success comes from not fully knowing what
lies ahead, but moving forward anyway.”

Her own nonlinear journey shapes Margot's advice to women entering the environmental industry. She believes there is no single path to success, and that some of it comes from not fully knowing what lies ahead. She encourages women to say yes to opportunities, trust their transferable skills, and use their connections. She also emphasizes the importance of not downplaying qualifications, seeking mentorship and leadership training, not burning bridges, and bringing your genuine self to every role.

“ Have a general idea of what you want to do but put one foot forward and **DON'T BE AFRAID TO SAY YES TO THINGS** that you are not as comfortable with. ”

Today, Margot enjoys leading her boutique business with minimal hierarchy, where people gain experience by working across multiple roles. She mentors her team, stays

connected to project work, engages in elder and community consultations while visiting remote communities and sites, and builds long-standing relationships across the industry. Her path from geophysics to environmental consulting and community-based projects reflects an esteemed career shaped with intention and a little serendipity. 🌈

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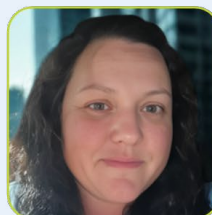
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