



Integrating aboriginal knowledge and traditions into management strategies for species of concern

The Elders message? It is important to respect the lands, water, plants, and animals, and to connect with them.

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Perhaps nothing captured the spirit of a two-day workshop on integrating aboriginal knowledge and traditions into managing species at risk more than a special Elders panel that was dedicated to hearing their concerns.

During the “Transforming our Traditions into Management Plans” workshop held in Merritt this past February, the Elders spoke not about years of formal research, or of trials, data collection, and study plots, but of their own observations. They showed great concern about all the plants and animals that they used to see and hunt, but are now having a hard time finding: the rabbit and the porcupine, the whistler, the grouse, the squirrel and the chipmunk, the owl and the beaver, the wasp and the bee, the coyote and the wolf, and the many fish species that are missing from rivers.

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They also talked about their concerns with the fragmentation of lands and ecosystems, and how this constrains animals from moving across the landscape. The Panel encouraged everyone to be proactive in addressing the needs of Mother Earth and to change the way we live and reconnect to the land. They also stressed the importance of adapting the way First Nations communicate and pass on their values to the new generations since, just like some species, the traditional knowledge and values of those that have walked the trails of the past are also endangered.

Many other powerful and thoughtful messages were heard at the workshop, which was organized and hosted by Esh-Km-Am Cultural Resources Management Services, and co-funded by the Government of Canada Aboriginal Funds for Species at Risk, BC Hydro, BC Ministry of Environment, Golder Associates, Kinder Morgan, Madrone Environmental Services Ltd., Highland Valley Copper, Stuwix Resources Joint Venture, Ardeu Wood Products Ltd., Esh-kn-am Cultural

Resources Management Services, Coldwater Indian Band, Cook’s Ferry Indian Band, Siska Indian Band, FORREX, and Van Houtte Café.

The event showcased successful experiences with integrating aboriginal knowledge and traditions into management strategies for land, natural resources and, more particularly, species, both those at risk and those that are less common and that hold significant value in terms of aboriginal sustainability and survival. The 109 participants ranged from First Nations, government, consultants, and industry to members of the public, which provided a great opportunity for sharing knowledge and discussing the challenging topic of managing for species at risk.

Day One

Following a traditional opening prayer, **Chief Harold Aljam** (Coldwater Band) welcomed the numerous participants, setting the stage for the first keynote speaker, **Chief Fred Sampson** (Siska Band). Chief Sampson stressed the importance of streams and rivers as a source of vitality and integration among communities, and non-timber forest resources (NTFRs) as an alternative to the current timber industry. “We citizens and First Nations people have a huge responsibility in taking care of Mother Earth and must lead a necessary change,” he said.

Chief Sampson is working with the Siska Band on web and audiovisual tools to educate their next generation about NTFRs and to encourage balanced and sustainable use of resources found on their traditional territory. Chief Sampson also talked on behalf of the Siska Traditions Society about how to advance indigenous sustainable harvesting techniques, stressing the relevance of NTFRs and traditional ecological knowledge. He showcased several successful initiatives: sustainable harvesting of rose, berries, sage, mint, and Arnica flowers and integration of knowledge from indigenous knowledge keepers into sustainable harvesting practices; business and marketing plans for their products, particularly jams, soaps, and herbal teas; and a traditional food guide that encourages a healthier

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Manage resources from a holistic



Pedro Lara Almuedo photo

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The Elders' Panel provided traditional views on species of concern. Photo is printed with permission of Bernice Garcia (Esh-Kn-Am Cultural Resources Management Services).

traditional diet and links traditional recipes with product gathering. Finally, Chief Sampson encouraged the collaboration and exchange of traditional knowledge among First Nations (www.siskatraditions.org).

Bernice Garcia (Senior Researcher, Esh-Km-Am Cultural Resources Management Services) spoke about species of concern for Elders (e.g., sugar tree, fisher, deer, rabbit, and porcupine) and the strong cultural links these species have with their traditions. She introduced a project in which a series of videos captured the Elders' oral history. Following her presentation, Garcia's Elder aunt shared her views about some of the plants and animals that she used to see, gather, and hunt, and which can hardly be found anymore. She also shared some legends and stories that are an important part of the oral history of her people.

Ron Ignace (Skeetchestn Band) and **Marianne Ignace** (Academic Co-ordinator, SFU Kamloops Program) provided an interesting presentation on traditional knowledge and language, and, using information from ancient stories, offered a geological, ecological, archaeological, and linguistic history of the current landscape in BC's Central Interior. **Tony Hamilton** (Large Carnivore Specialist, BC Ministry of Environment) and **Susan Senger** (Research Ecologist, Landscape Consulting Corp.) provided an overview of grizzly bear ecology, management, and population recovery efforts, and stressed that habitat loss and fragmentation are the main threats to bear populations. They also gave an update on the grizzly bear recovery success they have achieved so far through long-term management for ecosystem stability. **Fred Holmes** (Land and Resource Co-ordinator,

Coldwater Indian Band) showed the prospects of taking care of Mother Earth's needs from a planning point of view, focusing on ecosystems, human society, and institutions' perspectives and remarking on the need for co-ordinated resource-use planning that includes all peoples.

Mary Sandy (Staff Archaeologist/Anthropologist, Esh-Km-Am Cultural Resources Management Services) shared her insights on integrating traditional knowledge and world view into land-management projects. She showcased the successful experience of establishing old-growth areas within a particular timber supply area by integrating First Nations' views and values into the selection criteria. **Nola Markey** (Golder Associates Ltd.) presented on the Secwepemc Species at Risk project, which identified key resource knowledge holders among several First Nations communities and conducted personal interviews to gather relevant traditional information about species at risk—including badger, Burrowing Owl, gopher snake, Great Basin spadefoot toad, Western Screech Owl, and mountain caribou—using a custom designed species rating system. **Stuart Aird** (Nesoo Watchie Resource Management) introduced the audience to CoNect, a web-based application to assist in bridging the gap between indigenous and western world views in land- and resource-use planning. Aird stressed the need for facilitating ecosystem-based management and addressing the cumulative effects of natural resource development through proper planning, while bridging the gap between the stewardship, governance, and management realms.

Deanne Eustache and **Crystal Swayze** (GIS Technicians, Esh-Km-Am Cultural Resources Management Services) ended the first day of



point of view

presentations and dialogue by sharing their experience in applying GIS technology and mapping techniques to capture and use traditional and cultural data about different species.

Day Two

The second day of the event was opened by keynote speaker **Chief David Walkem** (Cook's Ferry Band) with a presentation on the key changes and needs that are required to incorporate First Nations' values into forest management planning. Chief Walkem also shared the lessons learned from the Innovative Forest Practices Agreement Pilot Project implemented in the Merritt Timber Supply Area.

Kate Leatherbarrow (BC Ministry of Forests and Range) followed with an overview of the Forest and Range Evaluation Program, focusing on how this program is addressing cultural heritage resources and values.

Tania Tripp and **Margaret Rogers** (Madrone Environmental Services) shared their experience on a project developed for the Siska Traditions Society that carried out successful terrestrial ecosystem mapping for 17 particular non-timber forest products. **Mike Burwash** (Senior Ecosystem Biologist, BC Ministry of Environment) presented on successful ungulate winter range management partnerships with First Nations in the Cariboo, Thompson, and Nicola districts: a mountain caribou management project in the Kootenays, a moose winter range project in the Kamloops Timber Supply Area, and two mule deer winter range projects in Merritt and Lillooet.

Francis Iredale (Wildlife Biologist, BC Ministry of Environment) shared his experiences on several successful initiatives for species recovery (e.g., Lewis' Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Western Screech Owl, Flammulated Owl, rattlesnake, and spadefoot toad) through developing local partnerships with First Nations based on shared values. **Sarma Liepins** (Ecosystem Biologist, BC Ministry of Environment) gave an enthusiastic presentation about the value of restoring wetlands and its importance for local communities based on his experience with a collaborative project with the Kamloops Indian Band in the Barnhartvale area to restore several small wetlands for Great Basin spadefoot. (See previous *LINK* article www.forrex.org/publications/link/ISS44/vol8_no3_art13.pdf) 

Take-home messages from "Transforming our Traditions into Management Plans"

Together with the views provided by the Elders' Panel, some of the key messages coming from both presenters and attendees during this event include the following:

- Management must be understood and implemented from a holistic viewpoint, acknowledging interrelationships between all species at the biome or ecosystem level, and avoiding the current species-by-species approach (e.g., to effectively address species conservation and recovery goals, it is critical to address ecosystem/habitat loss and fragmentation issues).
- There is a need for co-ordinated resource-use planning and, particularly, for the integration of traditional knowledge and world view into land and resource management projects.
- Some of the key aspects to be addressed to incorporate First Nations' values into forest management planning include the following: provincial legislation and policy changes; the need for information and inventories of First Nations' knowledge; the need for adequate human and financial resources; the need for a collective First Nations' vision; and the need for strong interrelationships, collaboration, and exchange of traditional knowledge among First Nations and with industry and government partners.
- Web-based products, audiovisual products, and GIS applications have a relevant role to play in both capturing traditional knowledge and bridging the gap within the First Nations' communities (youth connecting to elder) and between indigenous and western world views.
- Individual initiative and action at the local level is important to champion the stewardship of our land and its natural values to move collectively forward in species recovery.
- There is a need to think about and engage in long-term management strategies and ecosystem based management while continuing information sharing and improving the way we communicate with project partners.
- It is extremely important to build meaningful relationships, collaborations, and partnerships on local/community level projects that capture local knowledge and share it with decision makers and the next generations.

For further information about this workshop, please contact Esh-Km-Am Cultural Resources Management Services (<http://eshknam.ca/>).