

Traditional Ecological Knowledge



A Brief Overview
Compiled by Jacqueline Monteith
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Simplicity

In studying TEK, it is tempting to try and learn everything about everything. However, this ultimately distorts the traditional way of learning about our land and all it has to offer. Learning is a lifetime endeavour, and simplicity is ideal. It is not necessary to complicate learning, it is not necessary to learn scientific names or terms, it is only necessary to take the gift of knowledge for what it is. Keep the knowledge simple, and keep it for life.

Book and Hands- on Learning

Ideally, the information presented here would not be learned in this format. Book learning is valuable in many ways, yet is not the traditional way of learning. Rather, hands-on learning, experiencing an activity, and acknowledging all senses is needed. Through experience, an individual can use smell, taste, touch, sight, and sound to learn. This allows for deeper and more personal meanings, as memory also relies on all senses. In addition, teachings are a language lesson at the same time.

Oral History

Stories can tell us about something that is true even if the story is made up. We can tell when a story is true by the way it makes us feel inside. When we hear something that makes us feel happy or sad, or makes us dream of wonderful things, or takes us on a trip in our imagination, or makes us feel real, then that story is true. True stories take us on journeys in our imagination and feelings. They help us know what is possible. After we hear, or read, a true story, we carry that story around inside of us. It becomes part of who we are. And, in a way, we become a part of the story.

For all people, before there was the written word, there was the sound. Oral tradition means that the information, the stories, are told rather than written down. Sometimes, a people have both a written and an oral tradition. Oral traditions have a different way of being alive than written histories. Because people hold the oral tradition in their memory, and sometimes the story changes with the telling, oral histories can be more fluid, more dynamic, more alive, than written histories. This doesn't make them less true, just different than written histories.

The stories told by the drums, the stories told by the dancers, the stories told by the singers, and the writers are all part of our world. We help to keep the story alive when we hear it. We have our place in the story. And in turn we all have our story to tell.

TRADITIONAL STORYTELLING

Charlene Fisher

From the time I was a young girl I have always had memories of my grandmother telling countless fascinating stories of the past. It has not been until recently that I have recognized the importance of this custom of storytelling. My grandmother is a tradition-bearer of many valuable resources but I am only going to concentrate on the significance of storytelling. My grandmother and all other elders like her are fountains of information that is relevant to us all as an aboriginal society which we as a younger generation must soak up and again pass on.

Storytelling in our Native culture is not done to fit the needs of people. It doesn't change and grow with time. Native storytelling is handed down from one person to the next, verbatim. The stories don't change with the fancy of the storyteller like fairy tales do.

Storytelling is unique to many cultures but in the Native culture of Alaska storytelling is done to show values, pass on skills, and in some instances show why and how something is or came to be, for example, the etymological genre of storytelling.

When a story is told etymologically it is a story specifically designed to tell why something is the way it is, for example, why the raven is black, and why pussywillows have twisted tree trunks. They are told to explain something.

Stories that tell of legends are passed down to show human characteristics or again just to show why things are the way they are. In the legends of my people there is a first man, who deals with nature. The stories of this man usually show human types of personalities like shrewdness and the emotional traits of people. Most of the time animals and nature are personified to stress the meaning of the handed-down values. An example of this is that hunters are thought to be great and noble but the little animals are usually more shrewd and quicker with their wits. Hence this type of story hands down values and sets the society's expectations.

The most common type of storytelling is when a skill is handed down from person to person. In the Interior this could be how to kill a moose quickly and efficiently, but in other places it could be how to kill a whale. Basically these stories are told so people know how to live off the land and survive. These are the stories that do not change very much or at all. They are passed down to another as if the teller is reading from a book. There are usually no major additions or falsities put into these stories. This is because the way Native people have been living has been that way for tens of thousands of years and there is no need to change something that works.

All of these types are used to preserve a life-style that has been in existence for thousands of years. Keeping the tradition of storytelling guarantees that the ideas and values and skill stay alive even in a competitive, dominant

White society. Storytelling is an educational source of wisdom for the young people of a Native American society. Native storytelling also preserves an attitude, a certain pride that shows in the faces of those who know and live by the traditional Native values. To this day these stories and legends are still in circulation and will continue to be as long as they are passed down to the next generation.

Consulting Elders

"They say we have been here for 60,000 years, but it is much longer. We have been here since the time before time began. We have come directly out of the Dreamtime of the Creative Ancestors. We have lived and kept the earth as it was on the First Day." - Aboriginal Elder

Elders hold a special place in Aboriginal living. Elders are the keepers and givers of knowledge, elders have lived the past, and elders can help all of us survive in the future. Elders can be consulted on many issues or questions, and the wisdom passed on should always be respected.

** writing from an anonymous Aboriginal adult...

"This is what we think of, not for us, but for all generations of grandchildren even if we the elders are no longer here. But we will still be with them. This is how it is when someone listens to what the elder is teaching. Even if he doesn't see him, he is still with him and remembers what he taught him. That's how it is. The teachings of the elders. If one listens he will be made strong and he will be strong and confident. But if he doesn't listen he won't be able to do anything and will know nothing.

This is how a child can be when he respects the teachings of an elder. In the future, much into the future, he can see this and how good it is for him and believe with his own eyes when he sees this. This is why they say we should respect our elders. They have their teachings and they have their knowledge even though we feel they can not do anything anymore. We should never feel this way about our elders, that they cannot do anything, because they are our teachers and they were our first teachers when they were much stronger."

Seven Generations

The concept of the Seven Generations teachings is that every action we have, every choice we make, has the ability to affect the future, even seven generations ahead of ourselves. This is true in a personal or family sense, and in terms of our Earth. The choices we make today affect the future greatly, more than we can currently imagine, so choose wisely. In addition, Seven Generations acknowledges that we, in this generation, have been affected by the people before us. The choices and actions of our ancestors have guided us to where we are today, both personally and on a world-scale.

Seven Generations teachings are becoming more popular and are even becoming mainstream, as product or company names reflect this. However, it is important to remember that this involves looking back seven generations, looking ahead seven generations, and then applying this new sense of wisdom to our choices today.

Four Directions

CREE (NEHIYAWAK) TEACHING ELDER: MARY LEE

As Cree people, we were given the gift of being named for the four parts of human beings. *Nehiyawak*, we were called. It means being balanced in the four parts that are found in the four directions of the Medicine Wheel. These four parts for human beings are the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental aspects of the self. We need to try and balance these four parts that were given to us, to function as people. The fire is in the centre of the Medicine Wheel. That is where the meaning of the teachings comes from. For me this fire is also the self. When you look at the Medicine Wheel, you start from self. And as you look out, you make your circle. This is how the Medicine Wheel represents the life journey of people. The old people will tell you it is life itself. Look at the four seasons and follow the sun. Spring in the east, summer in the south, fall in the west and winter in the north. It tells the whole story of how all life came into being abundantly bright, rising in the east and then fading away as it moves west and north. All life rises and sets like the sun.

Being spiritual is remembering. It is remembering that the first thing that was gifted to you when you came into being was the spirit. Sadly, we tend to forget that and then we neglect our spirit and take it for granted. So we need to remember where we came from and the gifts that were given to us as human beings.

EAST

The woman spirit comes from the east, where the sun rises, where our warmth and vision starts. And the spirit of women brings that warmth into the home. One of our four sacred medicines, sage, also resides here in the east, because it is women's medicine. It comes from the buffalo plant that was gifted to the women. It is called prairie buffalo sage. There are many sacred teachings about the plants and medicines, and of how they decided to be where they are, but that is another teaching for another time.

SOUTH

Here in the south all life is active. It's the time of summer. Our physical aspect is represented here. In this part of our journey, we become young people. The young are very physical beings, very active, continuously moving, changing themselves, even their moods. We have good energy at this time of our journey. A lot of people today are scared of youth; we don't quite understand or trust them. But there's a reason why: we've kept them apart from that circle of life. We need to respect youth, and accept them into our world. In our Cree language, there's no word for "teenagers." They're young adults. And we need to encourage youth. We don't need to say, "You're bad," because there are no bad people; we only do bad things.

But sometimes youth need to be reminded by the old people. And that's okay. I notice older people saying, "I can't tell my grandchildren that, because they don't believe me, they don't listen; they think I'm wrong." Say it anyway. Like my mother used to say, "You don't hear everything today, but someday you will hear what's been said. When you need it you will hear it." So it's good to take young people to older people, to have them sit there and listen. Because they might be blocking out that day, but their spirit never blocks out; their spirit will take in the information.

And we should take the youth to see different people. My mother used to say, "If you only go to one elder all your life, you will only know what that one elder knows." So expand your wings and learn. Go and listen. You might not agree, but hear how that person is teaching. Hear the teachings from other nations, and remember yours. But don't ever contradict or correct them. Only when you're asked do you share. Young people sometimes disrespect the Elders when they're talking about stories and teachings; they're correcting them. But that Elder can only share with you what they've heard and what they remember. Maybe you heard it different, but that's okay. If you listen, you'll be richer, because now you've heard different sides of the story.

WEST

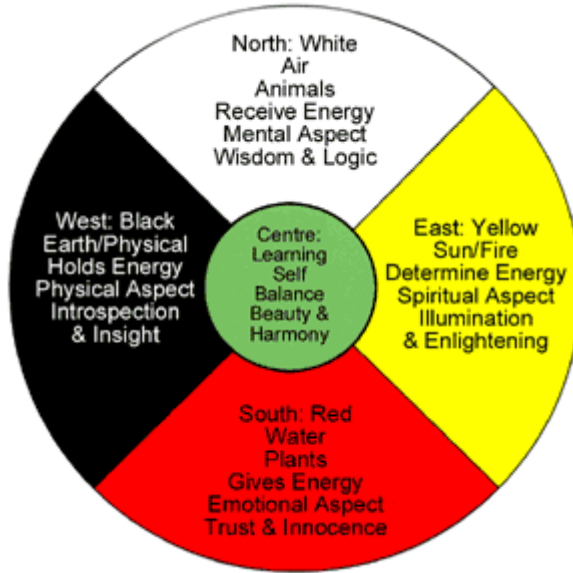
Here in the West is the time of adulthood, of responsibility. You're responsible at that time for other people. It's also the parenting stage of your life journey when you have that bond with the child in the eastern direction. And most often we are so touched by our children that we want them to have a better life than we have as adults.

That's why that gift of emotion is also in the West with the adult. We can do our own thinking and speak out more as adults we're stronger, more capable, if we have grown in a good way. And if we know we need to get healthy, that's usually when we come out and talk about issues that have held us back in our journeys to be good people, to live a good life.

NORTH

We started from the east, we went to the south, and in the emotion part we went to the west in our journey. That's like any ceremony we go to. We start our ceremonies in the east, and then we'll finish in the northern direction, which is our life journey. We finish our journeys as older people in that direction - which is the mental part of our journey.

I think the mental part is there because we're capable then to stop and think, and look at our journeys and foresee the journeys of our people. Because we have the capability to be mentally intact, to know a lot of things that are needed in our communities, in our people. We have time to think; we're not so rushed, not so physical any more. We went through our emotional stage of life. Now we are sort of the thinking part of the community, of the family. We are the ones that make decisions for families. We're supposed to be the brain people; if we've looked after ourselves, we get to that stage in our journey. And in this place we also have that relationship with the youth - who are looking to us from the south.



Creation Stories

Here is a very famous example of how the land is viewed in Aboriginal cultures.

Chief Seattle in 1852 Address to the U.S. Government



Chief Seattle - Letter to the President 1852

The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.

We know the sap that courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth as it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle these are our brothers.

The rocky crests, the juices in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man, all belong to the same family.

The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each ghostly reflection in the clear waters of the lakes tell of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.

The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the rivers the kindness you would give to any brother.

If we sell you our land, remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life. So if we sell you our land, you must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow flowers.

Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth.

This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

One thing we know; our God is your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.

Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men and the ripe hills is blotted by talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone! Where will the eagle be? Gone! And what is it to say good-bye to the swift pony and hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival.

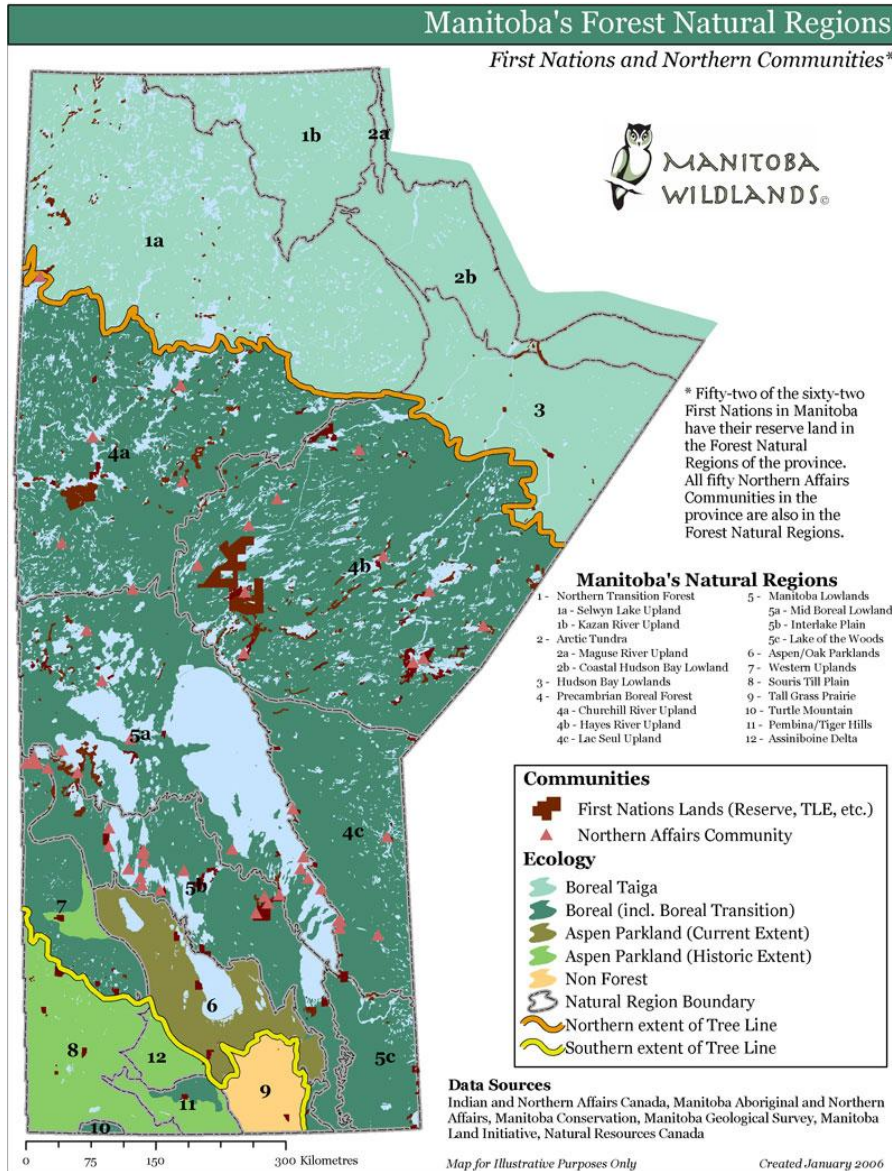
When the last Red Man has vanished with his wilderness and his memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across a prairie, will these shores and forests still be here? Will there be any of the spirit of my people left?

We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. care for it as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children and love it, as God loves us all.

As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land. This earth is precious to us. It is also precious to you. One thing we know: there is only one God. No man, be he Red Man or White Man, can be apart. We are brothers after all.

-- Chief Seattle, in a letter to the President in 1852

Plants



Learning about our plants is a large undertaking. It is advised to take on a little at a time until knowledge becomes intrinsic, and then to move on to learn more. Plants should be learned a little at a time. It is important to gain the wisdom of plant use before moving on to learn more.

Ethnobotany

Ethnobotany (from "*ethnology*" - study of culture^[1] and "*botany*" - study of plants) is the scientific study of the relationships that exist between people and plants.

Ethnobotanists aim to document, describe and explain complex relationships between cultures and (uses of) plants: focusing, primarily, on how plants are used, managed and perceived across human societies (eg. as foods; as medicines; in divination; in cosmetics; in dyeing; as textiles; in construction; as tools; as currency; as clothing; in literature; in rituals; and in social life.)^[1]

In Aboriginal culture, the Plant World generally symbolizes transformation:

- Roots represent the past, and honour Ancestry
- Trunk represents the present and reveals the life force and creative spirit within each of us.
- Branches represent desired future goals.
- Fruit or Flowers represent attainment of goals.

Remember to always offer tobacco when picking. It represents giving back to our Earth and saying thanks to our Mother Earth. In addition, each plant has its own way of being picked, from prayer of thanks, to season, to direction picked. This will be learned when taught by one who is wise in TEK.

There are four main categories of plant use: ceremonial, food, medicine, and materials. The focus here will be on the four main ceremonial plants. Four Sacred plants used for ceremonial and healing purposes are: Tobacco (East), Sage (South), Sweetgrass (West), Cedar (North).

Medicinal Warning

Many people are under the impression that 'natural' means 'safe'. However, many natural ingredients can be harmful and even deadly to the human body. Every medicine is useful if used in a knowing way.

This brief overview of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is not intended to give any reader enough information to collect, prepare, or use natural medicines. To do this, an individual must consult with those who have vast and specific knowledge on TEK, such as a trusted elder.

Ceremonial Plants

1. Sweetgrass



Scientific name: Hierochloa odorata

Habitat: meadows, wet ground

Medicinal Use: braids can be boiled and given to aid in labour

Ritual Use: Sweetgrass is picked, braided, and dried for incense. One end of the braid is lit and allowed to smolder. The smoke is washed over the head, arms, torso, and legs for purification. The smoke purifies the body and air or evil spirits, and carries prayers to the Creator. It is used to bless people and food. A single blade of grass represents an aspect of the living world, when separated it can be broken, but when braided it cannot be broken. When in ceremony, hair is usually braided to signify that we are all one people and that our world vision is one of strong, united, supportive communities. Sweetgrass is a tangible metaphor for a unified world.



2. Sage

Scientific Name: Artemisia frigida

Habitat: open meadows or fields

Medicinal Use: Can be used to stop bleeding, and as a poultice to cleanse wounds. Rub onto skin as insect repellent and to heal burns. Chew leaves to freshen breath.

Ritual Use: Sage is used by the original peoples to make their prayers, to signal the creator of one's need for help. There are many varieties of Sage and all are effective in smudging. Smudging is a way of using the smoke from burning herbs to cleanse the body, an object, or a given area of negative influences. It can also be chewed for good luck, sometimes called 'bingo medicine'.

3. Cedar



Scientific Name: *Thuja occidentalis*

Habitat: moist woods, swamps from Manitoba to Maritimes

Medicinal Use: To treat rheumatism, sore bladder, and effects of a stroke.

Ritual Use: When burned, cedar acts as a purifier, cleansing the area in which it is burned and emitting a pleasant scent. It can be used to bless a house before moving in. Cedar was offered to the fire to smudge the lodge and people. It is also used to waft the smoke to ward away sickness. It works both as a purifier and as a way to attract GOOD energy in your direction. Elders say put some in your shoes and only goodness will come your way. Many traditional women keep some cedar in their left pocket. When you breathe in the smell of cedar you decide that you're going to have courage and stamina and that you're going to survive.



4. Tobacco

Scientific Name: (Bearberry leaves) *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*

Habitat: common in woodlands on sandy hills, exposed rock, eskers

Medicinal Use: Can be used to aid in stomach problems and fever.

Ritual Use: Used to connect the natural and spiritual worlds since its roots run deep into the ground, and the smoke rises high into the sky. It is used in prayers of thankfulness, in the sacred pipe. Some people choose to inhale it, while others do not. It is used in purification, as a way to offer our humbleness to the Creator. It is given or offered to animals and plants when taking gifts such as during hunting or picking. It is offered to people when asking for something such as advice or ceremonies.

Animals

In Native stories frequent references was given to a time when animals were humans, gifted with the power of speech and other human attributes. The People believed that animals had souls which were immortal and they were reborn after death. Animals were considered the equals of humans in general intelligence, and to surpass humans in the particulars for which the animal in question was especially noted.

Animals are regarded by the season. Although all animals are respected and valued in any season, animals are hunted and used according to the seasons. Every part of the bodies are used in daily lives: clothing, shelter, creating more hunting tools, and of course food. Nothing is ever wasted.

Summer: muskrat, beaver

Fall: moose, goose

Winter: rabbit, caribou

Spring: pickerel, chickens

Traditional Laws of the Land and of the Hunt

- Always give thanks for the gift you have been given, whether plant or animal. This usually is in the form of offering tobacco.
- Never take more than what you need or will use. This is wasteful and will negatively affect future hunters.
- Always be kind to plants and animals, as they have given their lives for you. Respect this gift.

Animal Symbolism

Bear: The Bear is known for its great strength and hunting abilities. Bear is a protector. It is a symbol of great strength, power, authority and honour. It can be identified by its short snout, canine teeth and claws.

Eagle: The Eagle is a powerful bird. He is revered for his beauty and majestic or regal nature. He is respected the most of all birds and represents wisdom, power, peace, spirituality and friendship. The Eagle is recognized by its hooked beak.

Frog: The frog is a symbol of medicine, innocence, communication and stability. It is known as a speaker or communicator, cleanser of spirit, bringer of wealth, and family stability.

Hummingbird: The Hummingbird is known for its fortitude and ability to overcome great obstacles. It is a gentle creature and joyful messenger. The coming of a hummingbird symbolizes peace, healing and joy.

Killer Whale: The Killer Whale is the Traveller and Lord or Guardian of the Ocean. The most respected of all the sea creatures. Legends say that great chiefs of the past have been transformed into these powerful creatures. The Killer Whale symbolizes long life and wealth.

Loon: Symbolizes imagination, independence, harmony

Raven: The Raven, also known as the trickster because of his wit and sense of humour. Raven is known to be very tough. He is quick and curious and legend has it that he brought light to the earth. The Raven represents creativity, prestige, knowledge and can be identified by its long straight beak.

Swan: Symbolizes fidelity, love, faithfulness

Thunderbird: The Thunderbird is the most powerful of all mythical animals. The legend is that his wings made thunder and his eyes shot lightning. It is distinguishable by its ears. The Thunderbird symbolizes personal power and a link to the spirit world.

Wolf: The wolf is known for its spiritual powers. It is a symbol of family, unity or togetherness, loyalty and spirituality.

Beaver: The beaver spirit is never defeated. It can live in two worlds – the water and the land. A gentle nature makes the beaver a friend to all creatures within its domain. People who work with the beaver spirit will learn great lessons of life that will bring many blessings of strength, security and trust. However, the beaver is also frowned upon for its incestuous nature.

Bison: The great bison or buffalo of North America is a very powerful symbol to American Indians. The smaller woodlands buffalo and its bigger cousin, the plains buffalo were revered and honored in ceremony and every day life. To the Plains Indian, our Buffalo Brother meant sacred life and the abundance of the Creator's blessing on Mother Earth.

Butterfly: The butterfly is great admired among American Indians and is a bringer of joy and peace.

Coyote: Coyote is subject of many American Indian stories, songs and ceremonies and is often referred to as the Trickster. Coyotes can adapt to almost any environment. Coyote is a survivor.

Dogs: Dogs have one of the best totems or spirit guides because they are well attuned to the nature of humans and understand the best ways to guide them. Throughout history the dog has been known as man's best friend.

Fox: The Fox represents cunning, slyness, stealth, observation, and wisdom.

Moose: Our powerful moose cousin is a symbol of courage and determination. Those who know the moose spirit proudly walk with grace and have universal knowledge. The power of their presence is awesome and inspiring.

Spider: Grandmother spider is a wise old teacher and weaver of many stories. Her unique tapestry of life offers many paths to the center of oneself and creation. Her medicine speaks of connections and unity of spirit.

Ceremonial Symbolism

Moon: The Moon spirit is said to watch over us and has the ability to affect our moods. The moon lightens the darkness of the night. The moon is a protector and guardian.

Sun: Legend says that the sun was released from a box by the Raven. The sun chief inhabited the sky and could be reached by climbing a chain of arrows. He descended by sliding down its long rays. The Sun symbolizes healing energy, abundant life, beauty and peace

Dreamcatcher: If hung over your bed your bad dreams are filtered through the web and dissipate into the Universe; your good dreams remain caught in the web. Thunderbird thinks it is a shame to lose some of those bad dreams because those are the teaching dreams, and they have presented themselves because there are teachings and messages that need to be listened to. There is another school of thought that reverses the process by capturing the bad dreams and allowing the good ones to fly free.

Earth: At the root of all Native teachings, lies in the reverence for the land. As an Elder once said, "We are the environment and the environment is us. We deal with all of nature as equal members of the universal family. We go to the mountain, we go into the mountain, we become the mountain - never trying to overcome it, but always being part of its energy."

Fire: For most Tribes, fire symbolizes the heart of The People. It is present at all ceremonies in one form or another. Fire represents cleansing and renewal, for out of the ashes comes new growth, new thoughts, rebirth of ideas and new ways of being; the plant world regenerates itself in a healthy way from the ashes of the old.

Inukshuk: The Inukshuk has become the main cultural symbol of recognition for the Inuit people and the Canadian North. It had a variety of meanings. (a) It was a directional marker used by the Inuit to help with navigation. (b) It was used as a memorial marker. (c) Warn of impending danger particularly on open water. (d) It marked sacred space. It also means friendship, hope, safety, protection. It is a beacon in the North, a welcome sight of greeting.

Medicine Bundle [http://www.shannonthunderbird.com/Medicine Bundle'.jpg](http://www.shannonthunderbird.com/Medicine%20Bundle'.jpg) The Medicine Bundle is usually associated with the Spirit Doctor or a Healer. It contains the items that the Healer uses in her healing ceremonies. If used by another, without her express permission the energy could be destructive. The items came in visions and dreams and could include any of the following: crystals, roots, animal hides, shakers, arrowheads, horse hair, tobacco, sage, sweetgrass, cedar, animal bones, feathers, drums, stones, pipe, even nail clippings and human hair.



Aboriginal Women And Traditional Healing An Issue Paper

**Prepared for the
National Aboriginal Women's Summit
June 20-22, 2007
in Corner Brook, NL**

“We had our own medicines before the Europeans arrived. My mother and grandmother knew all the medicines.”

- Beatrice, Plains Cree woman in her seventies, quoted in *Sharing Our Stories on Promoting Health and Community Healing*, by Connie Deiter and Linda Ottway, (Winnipeg: Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence, 2001).

Aboriginal Women and Traditional Healing, an Issue Paper
By the Native Women’s Association of Canada, June 2007 p. 1

Aboriginal Women and Traditional Healing

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women know that returning to traditional healing can mean real healing for ourselves, our families and our communities. Some health care providers recognize this and some health programs include traditional healing. (The Alternative Healing Program at Akwesasne is one such program.) The medicine of Aboriginal communities is becoming more and more important; however, much more still needs to be done.

Traditional healing treats your mind, body, and spirit. Thus, it is holistic. This is very different from western medicine which focuses on parts of the body and separates the body from the mind. Traditional healing aims to restore balance. Ceremony and the power of faith and belief are important parts of traditional healing. At its best, traditional healing is a way of living, a way of approaching life.

The ways of traditional healing are as diverse as Aboriginal cultures, but there are many things in common. One is the belief that healing takes time and that it can be intense. Another common belief is that the relationship between the healer and the person is important. Aboriginal people also believe that ceremonies offer guidance and begin healing or help it along. Medicines come from the natural environment or from our Mother, the Earth. Healers are recognized by their communities and have learned not by going to school, but from other healers and Elders.

All these things shape the practices associated with traditional healing. One such practice has to do with rest. In some First Nations, men rested before a hunt. Women rested during menstruation. Another practice is smudging, through which Aboriginal people purify our minds and physical surroundings.

It is difficult to ‘translate’ Aboriginal healing concepts because they are so different from western health concepts. For example, Aboriginal ideas about illness prevention are very different from predominant Canadian ideas.

A Legacy of Outdated Thinking

For many years, health care providers and health researchers considered traditional healing to be outdated and of little use. Policies and programs were — and still are — shaped by this view. Worse, many Aboriginal people themselves came to believe that traditional healing was second rate.

Traditional healing declined because of the colonial process. Before the European invasion, Aboriginal people were healthy. There were as many as 90 to 112 million Aboriginal people in North America then; today only a small fraction of this number

remains.

After the invasion, Aboriginal people were not allowed to practise their culture, including ceremonies and traditional healing. They lost the land where healing plants came from. Aboriginal people were forced to abandon practices that connected them with the laws of nature. They often ended up in poverty, which is recognized as the main cause of poor health. Traditional cures could not work against the new diseases, including smallpox and tuberculosis. Women healers lost respect as Aboriginal people were pressured to live in male-dominated nuclear families.

The decline of traditional medicine has been devastating for Aboriginal people, especially women. Meanwhile, western health care has failed to improve Aboriginal health. Many Aboriginal women feel their communities are not healthy. Aboriginal women say that many health services are not culturally-appropriate; these services were designed without the input of Aboriginal women. The result is that Aboriginal women have lower life expectancies than other Canadians. In addition, health problems, like the diabetes epidemic, make their lives very difficult.

We recognize that traditional healing cannot cure every disease, just as western health care cannot. But centuries of experience have shown that many Aboriginal medicines are safe and effective.

The Use of Traditional Healing Among Aboriginal Women Today

Because of the decline of traditional healing, many Aboriginal people say they do not know as much about traditional healing as they wish. However, the majority use traditional healing in one form or another. And, many feel that returning to traditional healing practices would improve their health. A majority of Métis people would use traditional healing more often if it was available through their local health centre or covered by the health care system.

Despite the obstacles, traditional healing remains important to Aboriginal people. There is not enough research about the role of women in traditional healing. And, most research doesn't divide information by gender. It is clear, however, that there is a deeply felt desire to incorporate more traditional healing into our lives.

As long as traditional healing remains on the margins of western health care, Aboriginal women will not be as healthy as they could be. Because Aboriginal women have not taken part in designing the system, health care is often culturally inappropriate and sometimes ineffective.

What is needed to Support and Promote Traditional Healing?

Researchers and Aboriginal women have identified ideas which will assist Aboriginal women, as well as other health care providers, to use traditional healing and improve our health. Our recommendations include:

1. Recognize the diversity and value of traditional healing;
2. Acknowledge the loss of traditional healing and its results: poor health for Aboriginal people, especially women;
3. Understand the destruction of Aboriginal women's roles, especially in traditional healing;
4. Promote the revitalization of traditional healing;
5. Provide support and recognition to traditional healers, especially women;

6. Through research and learning, develop a deeper understanding of traditional healing, especially female roles and icons;
7. Conduct research that is specific to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women healers and healing;
8. Understand and communicate that it is disrespectful and hurtful when traditional healing is misused, especially by non-Aboriginal people;
9. Respect the intellectual property of traditional healers and their medicines;
10. Research how traditional healing can be effectively combined with other health services;
11. Focus research enquiry on and identify how Aboriginal women may better access traditional healing;
12. Research and publicize programs that work, whether these are traditional healing alone or a combination of traditional healing and western medicine;
13. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal women to help develop traditional healing policies and programs;
14. Encourage meaningful dialogue between Aboriginal healers and non-Aboriginal health care providers;
15. Emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity in health services;
16. Provide stable, sufficient funding for NWAC and its Provincial/Territorial Member Associations (PTMAs) to conduct research on the subject of Aboriginal women and traditional healing;
17. Commit to making immediate, substantial improvements to the social, economic and political conditions within which Aboriginal women and their families live; and,
18. Commit to engaging Aboriginal women in the development and delivery of womenspecific health and traditional healing action plans including that all such plans and resulting policies and programs will include a culturally relevant gender-based analysis.

Ecotrust Canada

**all information taken from Ecotrust.ca

Building the conservation economy

Ecotrust Canada is an enterprising nonprofit whose purpose is to build the conservation economy in coastal BC. We work at the intersection of conservation and community economic development promoting innovation and providing services for communities, First Nations and enterprises to green and grow their local economies.

RUN-OF-RIVER POWER

First Nation Regeneration Fund

The Fund seeks to generate renewable energy in BC and regenerate Aboriginal economies by financing Aboriginal equity stakes in run-of-river projects.

The Fund has been established through a partnership between Ecotrust Canada, the Tale'awtxw Aboriginal Capital Corporation (TACC) and the Tribal Resources Investment Corporation (Tricorp). It is the first fund of its kind in BC.

Independent Power Producers, or IPPs, must meaningfully consult and accommodate First Nations' interest when developing projects in their traditional territories. With limited access to capital, however, many First Nations are unable to become part owners of these power projects. The Regeneration Fund provides financing that enables First Nations to purchase equity positions in projects. With an abundance of rivers and streams in their territories, many First Nations see run-of-river power production as a key competitive advantage in reviving their local economies.

Financing is made available from the Regeneration Fund as debt to the First Nation. The First Nation repays its loan through dividends and royalties from the run-of-river power project and possibly from other sources. Once the loan is repaid, the dividends and royalties become long-term discretionary income that can be used by First Nations for economic or social development.

The Regeneration Fund will focus on run-of-river projects that minimize environmental impacts and maximize socio-economic benefits to local First Nations.

Building the Conservation Economy

British Columbia's competitive advantage rests on social and ecological diversity unparalleled in the world. Our rich rainforests, teeming rivers and bountiful seas, combined with our well-educated workforce and unique blend of Indigenous and global cultures, differentiates us in the world.

We are driven by the triple-bottom-line, where economic opportunity improves rather than degrades social and environmental conditions. Some people call it sustainability - we call it the conservation economy. A conservation economy provides meaningful work and good livelihoods, supports vibrant communities and the recognition of Aboriginal rights and title, and conserves and restores the environment.

Ecotrust Canada builds the **capacity** of communities, institutions and businesses to participate in the conservation economy; raises and brokers **capital** to accelerate the transition to a conservation economy; and **connects** conservation entrepreneurs to each other, and to the marketplace. We champion the conservation economy.

In the conservation economy, returns are about more than the numbers at the bottom of a balance sheet. We gauge business success in terms of the planet, people, and profits—the triple-bottom line. At Ecotrust Canada, we believe that a capital gain needn't be nature's loss.

Mapping Services

Geographic Information Systems or GIS is key to empowering communities and First Nations. Knowledge is power and effective decision-making requires the ability to manage vast amounts of information and data.

Ecotrust Canada has an award-winning GIS team that has provided GIS services to more than two dozen First Nations and communities in BC over the last 14 years. Our experienced staff can provide expertise in strategic GIS assessments for resource management, spatial analysis and cartography. These services are geared toward building sustained local capacity and giving communities the tools required for effective marine-use and land-use decision-making. We also host the Aboriginal Mapping Network.

Mapping services:

- Community GIS needs assessments
- GIS program planning & implementation
- Capacity building & training
- Use & occupancy research & best practices
- Cartography
- Referrals assessments & support
- Terrestrial & marine spatial analysis & modeling
- Online data, spatial analysis & mapping tools
- Aboriginal Mapping Network

Planning Services

Planning is critical to creating a sustainable vision for your community and carrying it out. Integrated planning can reduce resource conflicts and environmental impacts, maximize local community and economic benefits, and ensure Aboriginal title and rights are respected.

Ecotrust Canada has a professional team of community planners, resource managers, and researchers experienced in a variety of planning processes. From community visioning to implementing ecosystem-based management on the ground, Ecotrust Canada can help your community turn its vision into reality.

Planning services:

- Community visioning & facilitation
- Strategic planning, governance & decision-making
- Resource management capacity building
- Land-use and marine-use plans
- Community plans
- Forest management plans
- Ecotourism plans

MORE

Economic Development Services

In developing enterprises and economic strategies, we like to keep three things top of mind: the planet, people and profits. Some people call it the triple-bottom line. We call it the conservation economy.

That's Ecotrust Canada's distinctive approach to community economic development. We have designed, built, financed and managed some of the most environmentally and socially innovative enterprises in BC. Ecoforestry in Clayoquot Sound, a shellfish strategy for the North Coast, a sustainable seafood company owned by local shareholders, a fishermen's licence bank designed to promote conservation, an Aboriginal tourism operation—these are just some of the ventures we've helped to research, launch or manage over the years.

Our skilled, multi-disciplinary staff offers an integrated perspective on marketing, research, corporate governance, finance, management, and human resources. We also specialize in building long-term, multi-faceted partnerships with First Nations to help build their capacity to own and operate successful enterprises that offer good jobs and livelihoods to their members.

Our approach is to transform progressive ideas into profitable enterprises. We are both thinkers and doers, working at the intersection of conservation and community economic development.

Economic Development services:

- Strategic planning
- Sector & regional development strategies
- Corporate governance
- Market research and analysis

- Business planning & feasibility studies
- Management & training
- Product development

Can cooperatives help revive struggling Aboriginal communities?

Posted on August 14th, 2009 by admin

That's the question that Ecotrust Canada put to a group of First Nations leaders in Clayoquot Sound.

This spring Ecotrust Canada partnered with BC Hydro and Vancity in a project to better understand the context and opportunities for using the cooperative model as a tool for kick-starting the economies of BC's struggling First Nations.

On July 27, 2009, Aboriginal leaders in Clayoquot Sound gathered to discuss the concept of a cooperative economy. During the meeting, held at the Temperate Rainforest Field Study Centre in Hesquiat Harbour, natural points of cooperation emerged and opportunities to use the co-op model were identified.

The concept of shared service co-ops amongst the First Nations in Clayoquot Sound resonated as a way to reduce costs, increase ownership of ventures and better meet the needs of community members in the remote region. The gathering explored how the cooperative approach could be used for shared barging and shipping, waste removal, telecommunications and transportation services.

The gathering resulted in participants having a better understanding of the co-op model and identification of some concrete opportunities. Participants concluded that there is great potential, even need, to grow the cooperative economy in Clayoquot Sound.

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