



AFN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

RESPECTING AND PROTECTING MOTHER EARTH

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

Although there is no universally accepted definition of “traditional knowledge”, the term is commonly understood to refer to collective knowledge of traditions used by Indigenous groups to sustain and adapt themselves to their environment over time. This information is passed on from one generation to the next within the Indigenous group. Such Traditional Knowledge is unique to Indigenous communities and is rooted in the rich culture of its peoples. The knowledge may be passed down in many ways, including:

- Storytelling
- Ceremonies
- Dances
- Traditions
- Arts and Crafts
- Ideologies
- Hunting, trapping
- Food Gathering
- Food Preparation and Storage
- Spirituality
- Beliefs
- Teachings
- Innovations
- Medicines

Traditional Knowledge is usually shared among Elders, healers, or hunters and gatherers, and is passed on to the next generation through ceremonies, stories or teachings.

Challenges and Considerations

In 1948 the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was adopted. Article 27 states:

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancements and its benefits;

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Indigenous peoples around the world have become concerned about the unlicensed use by non-indigenous groups of traditional knowledge. The principles of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP), give First Nations a means to control the collection of data, including traditional knowledge, thereby protecting access to and use of such information.

The Species at Risk Act (SARA) is the first piece of Canadian legislation to recognize Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge, and states in the preamble that *“the traditional knowledge of aboriginal peoples of Canada should be considered in the assessment of which species may be at risk and in developing and implementing recovery measures”*. The Act also establishes the National Aboriginal Council on Species At Risk (NACOSAR) to advise the Minister and the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council on the administration of the Act. NACOSAR consists of six aboriginal members, selected by the Minister based upon recommendations from aboriginal organizations. The Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) is also established under SARA to advise COSEWIC.

For More Information

For more information, please consult the following organizations or websites:

The Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Sub Committee of COSEWIC:

http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct6/index_e.cfm

Traditional ecological knowledge prior art database:

<http://ip.aaas.org/tekindex.nsf/TEKPAD?OpenFrameSet>

World Intellectual Property Organization:

http://www.wipo.int/freepublications/en/tk/920/wipo_pub_920.pdf

National Aboriginal Health Organization guide on OCAP:

http://www.naho.ca/firstnations/english/documents/FNC-OCAP_001.pdf