

----- CONFERENCE BRIEF -----

“Sharing the Knowledge: A First Nations Perspective”

February 9-11, 2000, Fort St. John, BC

Hosted by the Treaty 8 Tribal Association Traditional Use Study
(T8TA TUS)

Summary

A conference entitled “Sharing the Knowledge: A First Nations Perspective” was held earlier this month in Fort St. John, BC. The conference provided a First Nation’s forum to discuss applied strategies for putting information collected through the traditional use study (TUS) process to use in empowering First Nation communities in land use decisions, and in supporting continued transmission of cultural knowledge within First Nations communities. Despite a snow storm on the first day, over 150 people from across BC and Canada attended each of the three days of the conference. 16 First Nations presenters from BC and elsewhere shared their insights and experiences with the Treaty 8 communities and Chiefs, and with the many other participants.

Conference Goals

To provide a First Nations driven forum to share knowledge and discuss successes and challenges in:

- gathering, managing and using traditional knowledge information;
- developing and implementing First Nation policies and legislation to protect cultural resources;
- developing information sharing protocols that maintain the authority and integrity of the First Nation communities and First Nation intellectual property rights;
- going beyond the Traditional Use Study (TUS) process to the application and transmission of traditional use data in the community and on the land.

Conference Format

The conference was organized according to three primary themes:

- *Application of Traditional Knowledge in Non-native and Non-traditional Systems:*
How do we effectively use traditional knowledge gathered from sources, such as Traditional Use Studies or related programs, to enforce First Nation rights in land and resource management?
- *Developing Information Sharing Protocols:*
As First Nations, how do we share traditional knowledge with external agencies, while still maintaining the authority and integrity of our intellectual properties? Have we shared too much?
- *Utilizing Traditional Knowledge Within The Community*
How can we use information collected through traditional use studies to facilitate or support continued transmission of cultural knowledge, and continued development within our communities?

The first day of the conference was open only to First Nations and their representatives. The second and third days were open to all interested parties. Presentations were 20-30 minutes long. A 30 minute question and discussion period followed each presentation. A strategy panel consisting of all the presenters was held on the first and third days. The strategy panels summarized critical issues and suggested strategies for First Nations looking to implement traditional use knowledge for the benefit of their communities. Evening activities included a traditional tea dance, hand games, and a dry dance.

Conference Abstracts

A complete version of conference abstracts and presentations will be available from the T8TA TUS in May 2000. If interested, please email us at t8tamap@awink.com, or contact Connie Bigfoot at (250) 785-0612. The conference presenters and their topics were as follows:

- PRESENTER: Heather Harris, Metis. Professor of Indigenous Studies at UNBC.
TOPIC: *Applying information gathered from traditional knowledge-based studies to enhance language and revive spiritual activities.*
- PRESENTER: Russell Collier, Gitksan Nation. Lands and Resource Planner, Strategic Watershed Team.
TOPIC: *The application of traditional knowledge in non-native and non-traditional systems.*
- PRESENTER: Pat Brady, Halfway River First Nation. Elder. (presentation read by Leon Sadownick).
TOPIC: *Challenges to trapping and traditional livelihood in the Cypress Creek valley, NE BC.*
- PRESENTER: Chief Ron Ignace, Skeetchestn Indian Band.
TOPIC: *Existing federal and provincial laws that protect First Nations cultural resources and First Nations developed policies and permits for managing cultural resources.*
- PRESENTER: Nola Markey, Saulneau First Nations. Anthropologist, Simon Fraser University.
TOPIC: *Is it appropriate to copyright and sell traditional knowledge in today's information economy? How do First Nations protect traditional knowledge from being misused?*
- PRESENTER: T8TA Traditional Use Study Panel
TOPIC: *Overview of the T8TA's traditional use study and community researcher's experiences with it.*
- PRESENTERS: Laurie Montour, Mohawk Nation of Kahnawake. Land Use Planner for Gwa'Sala-'Nakwaxda'Xw Edmund Gus, Little Black River First Nation. Manager for the Centre for Traditional Knowledge, Ottawa.
TOPIC: *A look at First Nations developed policies and mitigative strategies for managing resources, especially using traditional knowledge in land referral and environmental assessment processes.*
- PRESENTER: Gwen Point, Sto:lo Nation. Northeast/Northwest Regional Coordinator for the Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Branch.
TOPIC: *First Nation curriculum development: transferring Aboriginal values, knowledge and expertise to youth through education.*
- PRESENTER: Gary Oker, Doig River First Nations. Artist and Programs Director.
TOPIC: *First Nations product development in the 21st century: technology, training and developing First Nations industry.*
- PRESENTER: Eldon Yellowhorn, Peigan First Nation. Archaeologist, Simon Fraser University.
TOPIC: *New technology and its implication for the transmission of knowledge within the First Nation community.*
- PRESENTER: Doris Ronnenberg, Saulneau First Nations. President of the First Nation Council of
TOPIC: *Using traditional knowledge as a tool for healing and enhancing the health of First Nations.*
- PRESENTERS: Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC, Okanagan Indian Band.
Leigh Ogsten, UBCIC– Research Director.
TOPIC: *The UBCIC resource centre and outreach programs it has developed to facilitate the education of our communities and the protection of our lands.*
- PRESENTER: Dianne Hinkley, Cowichan Tribes. TARR researcher.
TOPIC: *Gathering oral history and its ethical application within First Nation communities.*

Commentary

The conference expressed a wide range of perspectives regarding TUS's in BC. While they hold a great deal of potential benefit for First Nations, communities must be very careful to ensure that they remain in control of the information and resources developed through them. Where a TUS is a First Nations driven process, it is a powerful tool for community building, empowerment, and education. In order to ensure that this is the case, First Nations must come together to protect their rights and their communities. It is hoped that this conference and the relationships built through it will contribute to this process. Many thanks from the T8TA TUS to all who participated.