

# Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge and shaping a new approach to sustainability

---

**Ellen Simmons**

There continues to be a great need for the inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge in natural resource management. This was addressed by the conference titled *Indigenous Earth: Praxis and Transformation*, held in Penticton, B.C., last year. Over the course of 4 days (March 9–12, 2010), more than 30 scholars (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) from around the world shared their theories and methods for applying Indigenous Knowledge to complex environmental and social realities. This diverse group of academics and practitioners presented their research work and experiences on the possible applications of Indigenous Knowledge to our environment and society.

Significant messages were delivered at the conference. Presentations contained powerful messages concerning conservation biology, sustainable forestry, hydrology, cultural heritage, water and land rights, Indigenous environmental ethics, biocolonialism, and traditional laws and Indigenous governance issues.

The intent of this conference was to present academic papers, practices, and current research to both academics and interested participants in an effort to revitalize Indigenous Knowledge theory and practice. The conference goals were:

- To share information on research practices that have led to meaningful progress in the understanding of Indigenous Knowledge and its application to complex environmental and social realities
- To launch a series of research publications proposing solutions to address current environmental concerns
- To build stronger connections between Indigenous Knowledge and Western scientific approaches

- To bring together individuals and organizations to share their Indigenous Knowledge experiences and expertise and improve international dialogue
- To stimulate discussions among disciplines and groups about the successes and challenges of their research and experience

The conference was hosted and funded by FORREX and the En'owkin Centre (Penticton, B.C.). FORREX and the En'owkin Centre gratefully acknowledged the funding support provided by the Forest Investment Account–Forest Science Program and support from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which helped to make a conference of this stature and vitality possible.

## Prominent speakers from around the world

Presenters came from Peru, Bolivia, the Philippines, Norway, and across the United States and Canada. **Richard Armstrong** of Penticton, B.C., conducted the prayer and opening ceremonies. **Grand Chief Stewart Phillip**, president of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, provided a welcome message.

The following keynote speakers were featured.

- **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz**, chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz is a member of the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization, chairperson of the UN Voluntary Fund for the Indigenous Populations, commissioner of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, and chair of the World Summit on Sustainable Development Indigenous Peoples Caucus.

- **Debra Harry**, PhD, global leader and scholar in the movement to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples to their genetic resource, Indigenous Knowledge, and cultural and humans rights. Dr. Harry advocates for the rights of Indigenous peoples internationally, including in the Convention on Biological Diversity; the World Intellectual Property Organization Inter-Governmental Committee on Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore; and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.
  - **Dennis Martinez**, chair, Indigenous Peoples' Restoration Network of the Society for Ecological Restoration. Mr. Martinez lives in a remote part of the Klamath Mountains of northwest California. He has 40 years of experience in ecological and eco-cultural restoration in temperate and tropical restoration and ecosystem-based climate change adaptation. He has received a number of awards in restoration and social justice, including an Eco-trust Indigenous Leadership Award for northwest North America.
- Other conference speakers were as follows, listed here with their affiliation and their presentation title (in no particular order).
- **Peggy Smith**, PhD, Lakehead University – *The 4 C's: Control, Crisis, Capacity, and Culture. A Critical Review and Analysis of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge Research to Improve Provincial Mechanisms for Its Incorporation in Forest Management*
  - **Ronald Ignace**, PhD, and **Marianne Ignace**, PhD, Simon Fraser University – *Yiri7 reStsq'ey's-kucw: Secwepemc Ancient Stories and Our Traditional Laws*
  - **Carol Kalafatic**, Cornell University – *Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainability: Closing the Global-Local Gaps through a Restorative Economy of Respect*
  - **Arzu Sardarli**, PhD, First Nations University – *Use of Indigenous Knowledge in Mathematical Modelling of Water Quality Dynamics*
  - **Beverly Jacobs**, University of Calgary – *Restoring Health, Restoring Land*
  - **Darlene Sanderson**, PhD – *Indigenous World Forum on Water and Peace*
  - **Marlowe Sam**, University of British Columbia Okanagan – *Indigenous Water Rights: From the Local to the Global Reality*
  - **Jelena Porsanger**, Sami University College – *Indigenous Knowledge Challenges the Established Research Paradigm*
  - **Sima Mostofi Javid**, Trent University – *Community Perspectives on Water Resources in the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council*
  - **Zenon Porfidio Gomel Apaza**, development, and official representative of the Association Savia Andean Pukara – *Andean Indigenous World Views and Indigenous Knowledge: Reviving Traditional Andean Culture*
  - **Jeannette Armstrong**, PhD, En'owkin Centre and University of British Columbia Okanagan – *Environmental Ethics from a Syilx Perspective: Oral Literature as Knowledge Documentation*
  - **Don Gayton** and **Henry Michel**, FORREX co-hosts of 2002 conference – *The Challenges of Linking Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Western Science in Natural Resources Management: A Dual Perspective*
  - **Tirso Gonzales**, PhD, University of British Columbia Okanagan – *Making the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Work*
  - **Teresa Ryan**, University of British Columbia – *Consideration of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge: Comparison of Governance Models*
  - **Deborah McGregor**, PhD, University of Toronto – *Indigenous Knowledge and Environmental Ethics: From Guidelines to Governance*
  - **Dawn Morrison**, Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty – *Indigenous Food Systems Network Website Project*
  - **Melanie Karjala** and **Sue Grainger**, University of Northern British Columbia – *Coming Full Circle: A Case Study in Forest Co-management and the Planning Cycle*
  - **Brian Liam Kennelly**, Vermont law School – *Ethnobotanicals and the Law: Powerful Plants*
  - **Larry Joseph**, FORREX – *Documentary film Modern-Day Implications of the Purchase and Removal of a Wetsuweten Totem Pole to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, France*

- **Ruth Olgivie**, University of Victoria – *Regenerating Haa-huu-pah as a Foundation for Nuu-chah-nulth Governance*
- **Barb and Mathilda Frazer**, University of Saskatchewan – *Actualizing Land-Based Knowledge: An Exchange between a Mother and a Daughter*
- **Zoe Dalton**, University of Toronto – *Walpole Island Heritage Centre*
- **Michele Johnson**, University of British Columbia Okanagan – *Complementary Disciplines of En'owkinwixw*
- **Suzanne von der Porten**, University of Waterloo – *Traditional Ecological Knowledge Water Governance of Water Quality Dynamics*
- **Jim Munroe, Nicola Farrer, and Melinda Morben**, Maiyoo Keyoh Society – *Pieces of a Puzzle: From Land Use and Occupancy to Forest Development Plan*
- **Dallas Goodwater**, Okanagan Nation Alliance – *Land Use and Occupancy*
- **Greg Younging**, PhD, University of British Columbia–Okanagan – *Protection of Aboriginal Title*

A conference proceedings containing the above-mentioned presentations is currently being compiled and will be made available soon. Additionally, a summary of each presentation will be made available in a project report format.

### Positive feedback from conference attendees

The feedback from participants and presenters was astounding. Anonymously contributed comments include the following.

*Thank you!*

*Everything was really good/great job!*

*Really enjoyed the wide range of topics from Canada and the world.*

*Learned more about local First Nations and their land views.*

*Learned about the commonality between First Nations views and my own.*

*More outreach to schools, government ministries; women's centre, Green Party, etc. to get more people to attend so the information goes farther.*

*I came for inspiration. I got that and more.*

*Overall organization was very dominant in focus. The integration of Indigenous Knowledge empowers.*

### Indigenous peoples and sustainability

As the United Nations chairperson of Indigenous Issues, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, stated at the conference, “The wisdom and knowledge of Indigenous peoples can help move humanity forward.” Here are quotes from some of the conference presenters on this same theme.

*Indigenous peoples have something to offer humanity for the greater good.* (Deborah McGregor, PhD)

*Nature is stronger than development. Grass will always find a way to grow out of the cracks in your driveway.* (Beverly Jacobs)

*The people of the Andes are a very old culture (10 000–15 000 years). The people use 117 signs in nature to predict climate and can name the 5000 varieties of potatoes that grow in the Andes.* (Zenon Porfidio Gomel Apaza)

*Biocolonism is very personal because it affects everything the First Nation people have relationships with. Many times Indigenous people have been viewed as an impediment to development. We are nations of “givers” dealing with groups of “takers.” The driver of this is greed.* (Debra Harry, PhD)

*Indigenous Knowledge challenges the established research paradigm.* (Jelena Porsanger, PhD)

*Our environmental ethic in the past has been 100% regeneration of the resources, which is proof of sustainability.* (Jeannette Armstrong, PhD)

*Earth's resources are finite and yet developed countries continue to exploit these resources. So how do we incorporate our knowledge to live sustainably in today's world? One thing we need to do is stop the erosion of ecosystem diversity.* (Victoria Tauli-Corpuz)

*The language is a construct of our relationship with the land.* (Jeannette Armstrong, PhD)

The feedback and support at this conference from the participants and presenters was overwhelmingly positive on the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in

natural resource management. There is a clear need for integrating Indigenous Knowledge into natural resource management, to help shape decisions that will ultimately offer meaningful contributions and shape new approaches to global sustainability.

**Acknowledgements**

FORREX and the En'owkin Centre gratefully acknowledge the support from the Forest Investment Account–Forest Science Program.

**Citation –**

Simmons, E. 2011. *LINK News*: Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge and shaping a new approach to sustainability. *BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management* 12(2):x–xiii. <http://jem.forrex.org/index.php/jem/article/view/120/78>

**Contact Information**

*Ellen Simmons* is a FORREX Aboriginal Forestry and Indigenous Knowledge Extension Specialist, based at the En'owkin Centre, RR#2, Site 50, Comp 8, Penticton, BC V2A 6J7.

Email: [Ellen.Simmons@forrex.org](mailto:Ellen.Simmons@forrex.org)