

Non-Timber Forest Resources – What Is in This Term?

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When we speak of non-timber forest resources (NTFR) or non-timber forest products (NTFP), what exactly does this mean? These all-encompassing terms “refer to natural resources collected from forests apart from sawn timber” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2001:5). Are the resources or products harvested purely for sustenance or for capital gain? What exactly is considered a natural resource? These questions are only a few of many others that accompany this topic.

When there is confusion around a defining a term, it can lead to obstacles in truly understanding how to manage our forests in an ethical and sustainable way.

From an Indigenous (or First Nations) perspective, we do not hear people speak of using the term “non-timber forest products.” There is much ambiguity in the use of this term. It can mean many different things to different people. FORREX was fortunate to host a webinar series around NTFR/NTFP in December 2011. Keith Hunter of First Nations Wildcrafters BC spoke specifically to the confusion around the use of this term:

As a result of this, we have ended up with a definition that was created, but yet does not fit a construct of everyone’s mindset. Part of the challenge that has been created is always a push to find where [something] fits rather than working with what we already have, outward. This is challenging for First Nations, as we are striving for integration of equitable knowledge systems. First Nations in British Columbia have had little or no involvement in defining these terms and as a result, these terms don’t reflect the integrity of cultures, practices, or traditions. This is very important as we move forward, that we need to be very careful when we use it and how we develop it, because we ultimately want to be inclusive. We need to develop a broader vocabulary that is inclusive of these knowledge systems. (Keith Hunter, December 2011)

The Coquilles Indian Tribe (southern Oregon coast) has gained recognition nationally as the tribe that works to find an equilibrium between sustainable forest practices and forest ecology. The tribe has been touted as attempting a different kind of forestry. According to Chief Ken Tanner,



RJ Edwards harvesting ghost berries. Photo credit: Ellen Simmons



We don't own the forests; it's a part of our organic being, which we share with all the other creatures and creations" (Wells 2011:para. 7). Chief Tanner goes on to say, "We get many things from the forest – canoes, baskets, clothes, shelter, fir, cedar, spruce, beargrass, camas – and we use all of these things. But they also have a spiritual value which we honor as we honor our ancestors. What we take, we try to give back. What we don't need, we try not to take. (Wells 2011:para. 20)

First Nations, for thousands of years, have always had a close connection, respect, and understanding of the land. It is both promising and encouraging to know there are endeavours occurring to reintegrate a way of living, while combining the best of both practices (Western methodologies and TEK). It is vital that this work continues to be fostered. Indigenous Peoples have an unprecedented comprehension of the land and its resources that is not always acknowledged or included at the planning level in many of the initiatives around sustainable harvesting (both NTFR and timber).

FORREX will host another guest speaker on NTFR in the Spring of 2012. Evelyn Hamilton will provide a summary of the current status of management for NTFR. She will provide an overview of these resources, discuss their economic and cultural importance and associated rights and regulations, and outline trends related to NTFR. She will suggest opportunities to improve the socio-economic and cultural benefits associated with these valuable forest products.

At the end of the discussion lead by Keith Hunter at the FORREX webinar in December 2011, he proposed a number of forward-thinking solutions (or "presumptions," as he called them), which call for

- Decision-making support tools that result in better decision making. It is one thing to make decisions and another thing to develop decision support tools that are reactions to making better decisions on the land base.
- Solutions that are practical and cost effective (inventory of the entire province is not practical or cost effective).
- Inclusion of First Nations full prior and informed consent. This consent must meet the international standards that Canada signed onto in order to have legitimacy in the global marketplace.
- Incorporate compatible and equitable knowledge systems by including Western science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

The connections First Nations have with nature remains today. It is heartening to know that aspirations and ingenuity exists with respect to reintegrating TEK in a way that is complementary to Western scientific approaches, ultimately bringing forth innovative methodologies that respect and sustain the land.

References

- Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. 2001. Sustainable management of non-timber forest resources. <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-06.pdf> (Accessed March, 2012).
- Wells, G. 2011. Native American forestry combines traditional wisdom with modern science. <http://www.energybulletin.net/stories/2011-11-23/native-american-forestry-combines-traditional-wisdom-modern-science> (Accessed March, 2012).

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