Traditional Knowledge:

Much More Than Science

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What is Traditional Knowledge?

- Traditional Knowledge, as defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8 (j): refers to the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world.
- Traditional Knowledge is developed through experience gained by doing. I like to call this experiencial learning.
- Traditional Knowledge is most commonly transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Each successive generation applying and utilizing this knowledge, adding to it, fine tuning it, perfecting it, then passing it down to the next generation.
- Traditional Knowledge then represents accumulated knowledge.
- Traditional Knowledge is therefore understood as communal knowledge, belonging to the community, collectively owned, and therefore not subject to alienation from the community.

What does it look like?
What does it sound like?

- Traditional Knowledge comes in many forms including, but not limited to, stories about people and events that occurred in times past, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, language adaptation and evolution in response to specific environment conditions, specific management practices involving the use of fire, pruning and coppicing practices, including the intentional development of plant species and animal breeds. Traditional Knowledge is typically very practical by nature, particularly in such fields as agriculture, fisheries, health, horticulture, and forestry.

- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is perhaps the most common or relevant to our work here. So what is it specifically? It is the knowledge, practice, and belief concerning the relationship of living beings to one another and to the physical environment, which is held by peoples in traditional (place-based) societies with a direct dependence upon local resources.

Traditional Knowledge: Some Guiding Principles

- Traditional knowledge systems and institutions include people, places, processes, and cultural treasures.
- Traditional knowledge systems and institutions not only produce, transmit, and perpetuate knowledge; they also integrate such knowledge into the values, customary practices, and identity of a people or group.
- As both a derivative from and a manifestation of the unique identity, autonomy, and places of indigenous peoples, traditional knowledge systems and institutions represent the essential elements of nationhood.

“If it was a snake it would have bitten you”

- In the previous slide I used the term nationhood and am reminded that while Karuk People are identified as the earliest inhabitants of the mid-Klamath River region, the Karuk Tribe was not federally recognized until 1979.
- The Karuk Constitution under which our contemporary tribal government was established was not adopted until 1985.
- Karuk contemporary government and institutions are only 31 years old.
- Traditional Knowledge systems are dynamic, accumulated, evolving and adapting.
- In those 31 years we have learned a great deal about interacting with federal, state, local governments and NGO’s through experience. Some good but mostly not so good. We have accumulated knowledge and added that knowledge to the previous knowledge accumulated by our people between about 1850 and 1983.
- In 2015 the Karuk Tribe adopted a universal consultation policy to guide our consultations and interactions with all federal, state, local governments and agencies, as well as NGO’s. This consultation policy is Traditional Knowledge (TK).

Traditional Knowledge: Some *(more)* Guiding Principles

- I use the phrase "traditional knowledge's" deliberately in plural form to emphasize that there are diverse forms of traditional knowledge and knowledge systems that must be recognized as unique to each tribe and knowledge holder because knowledge's are emergent from the symbiotic relationship of indigenous peoples and places—a nature-culture nexus.
- As with all societies, indigenous peoples rely on complex knowledge systems to support the continuance of the ways of life that matter to their communities. These systems often involve interconnected webs of environmental, moral, social, political, and spiritual knowledge's. These webs express bonds among humans of different generations who play different roles in their communities, plants and animals, non-human entities (such as spirits), and collectives (such as forest landscapes).
- Because many indigenous peoples continue to live their lives closely connected to the earth, TKs are derived from the relationships indigenous peoples have with landscapes, waterscapes, plants, animals, and ecological processes. Indigenous peoples have used TKs to adapt and utilize resources derived from ecosystems of which they are also a part.

Traditional Knowledge: Some *(more)* Guiding Principles

- Don’t assume you know everything about Indians, because you have some Indian friends.
- What you think you know is likely wrong.
- Wide spread misunderstandings and misconceptions permeate every aspect of our daily lives.
- "Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society (largely invisible to the dominant society) and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.

Traditional Knowledge: Some *(more)* Guiding Principles

- How do I know if I'm talking to a "Real Indian?" "They don't look like an Indian to me."

- On an individual basis, an indigenous person is one who belongs to an indigenous group or tribe through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by the group or tribe as one of its members (acceptance by the group). This preserves for the group or tribe the sovereign right and power to decide who belongs to them, without external interference.

- Given the cross-boundary scale and inter-connectedness of watersheds and ecosystems, indigenous and non-indigenous people, governments, and organizations have much to gain by collaborating with one another.

- Sharing across knowledge systems, between TKs and western climate science, for example, is becoming more common place as recognition of our shared destiny becomes increasingly obvious.

Conclusion

- I joined the North Coast Resource Partnership because I recognized the good work being done.
- I wanted to bring that good work into my community and help others do the same.
- We are on a journey together, we are learning from each other, we are sharing with each other because we desire a better future for each other and for our respective communities.
- When we succeed, we succeed together and when we fail, we fail together.