

Wildlife stewardship with Indigenous values

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, societies are faced with the reality of climatic changes affecting the very way in which we view the environment. Newly acquired ethics, which require the imposition of poorly founded principles of conservation on a people who depend on the consumptive use of wildlife as a means of livelihood has managed to stop the sealing industry and threaten the fur industry. This ethnocentricity has dominated cultures subjected to colonialism for centuries. Developing countries are affected by the attitudes & activities of nations.

JURISDICTION WITHIN CANADA

The *Constitution Act*, 1867 divides the powers needed to govern Canada between a central authority (the federal government) and several regional authorities (the provincial legislatures). In this regime, management and responsibility for wildlife in Canada belong to those having the proprietary interest. The ten provincial governments and the three territorial governments (delegated by the federal government) regulate wildlife activities within their respective jurisdictions, except for migratory birds, marine mammals, and wildlife resident on federal lands. The latter are the responsibility of the federal government. Similarly, under the Constitution, all lands and resulting revenues within provincial boundaries are provincial responsibilities, except for federal lands that include national parks, lands under the jurisdiction of a federal department such as Environment Canada (protected areas), international airports, and lands reserved for Indians.

On a provincial level wildlife management is practiced on public lands and, with the cooperation of those having a proprietary interest, on provincial private lands. Here, wildlife managers and biologists use specific parameters to determine the health of animal populations at the species level. These include population size including immigration and emigration, age structure, gender balance, reproductive capability, habitat requirements, and food availability. Hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses are also regionally managed; "seasons" are increased, decreased or eliminated based on the health and numbers of the species in question. Like-

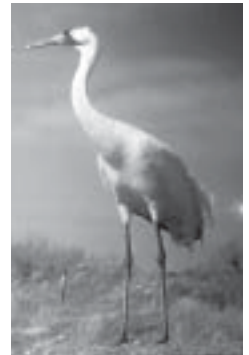
wise, federally, wildlife managers monitor health of populations and they, too, establish seasons and bag limits for "game" species.

Although species of federal interest, such as Canada Geese and other migratory birds, are managed in cooperation with the provinces and territories, gaps can exist. For example, the federal landlord on federal lands within a province or territory does not have to report on the presence or absence of a species or population numbers to provincial managers. Similarly, a province or territory may not inform the federal government of the risks affecting populations of non-migratory species until too late. Thus wildlife biologists at all levels are often dealing with incomplete information. In an attempt to ensure that threatened and endangered species within Canada are afforded the best possible opportunity of survival, the federal government has been working on new legislation over the last few years (Species at Risk Act).

RESPONSIBILITY EXERCISED BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA

Many Indigenous hunting societies in Canada have been recognized as using valid and productive management systems in a communal situation.

A core hunting group usually consists of a minimum of two nuclear families that may be "united by blood or marriage, having the right to hunt, trap or fish in a certain inherited district bounded by some rivers, lakes or natural landmarks." Only one individual is responsible for the territory, and his rights and responsibilities may be inherited by another. This transfer may occur prior to death, and although it usually applies to a member of the person's family, it may be transferred to a person other than a relative, but one who is within the same hunting group and has acquired a knowledge of the territory and its resident animal populations. Essential to the transfer of these rights and responsibilities is the security of the territory, the respect for its inhabitants, and the maintenance of the people making up the hunting group. Not all areas are hunted every year. Some areas may be left for a few years, and the members of the hunting groups may split up and join other groups on other areas. In these cases, the leader from the group becomes a follower in another group and adheres to the directions of the new territory's "owner."



Background image:
A herd of Moskox,
Ovibos moschatos.
Below:
Timber Wolf,
Canis lupus.
Far side:
Whooping Crane,
Grus americana.
Photos courtesy of
Canadian Wildlife
Service (CWS)





Indigenous hunters who have come from an oral tradition learn to observe and recall the events or trends on a larger scale than just one season. Their management schemes indicate a multi-dimensional system in which different species are harvested, not according to ease by which they may be taken, but rather by the numbers that must be harvested in order to maintain a balance among the animal species of the area.

Sage Grouse,
Centrocercus urophasianus.
Photos courtesy of
CWS.

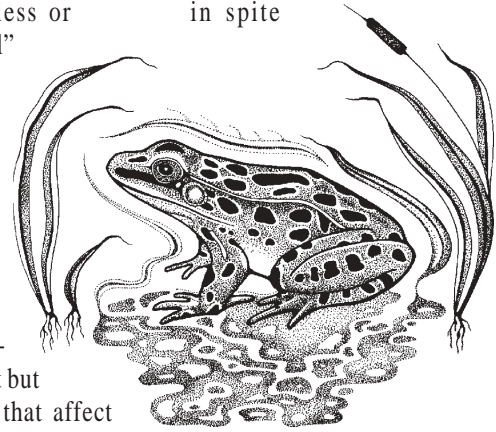
A hunting area is a unit of management. The plans made by groups from different territories may be affected by other groups in adjacent territories and, therefore, essential that the leaders from vast regions know what the other is planning. The same applies to activities within each group. To prevent overlap of activities between groups, boundaries are discussed over the summer. Boundaries of a specific territory may change over time as the leaders decide upon the size of their hunting group and the accessibility for the members of that group. In addition, markers are used to indicate that traps have been set, such as when a hunter traps in an area peripheral to that of his neighbor. These markers are placed in case a hunter should pass by to warn him that others have already trapped the area.

Various strategies are used in the management of wildlife resources by Indigenous managers. An Elder or leader usually oversees the hunting territory. In some communities this person is responsible for putting together hunting groups that live on the territory for the greater part of the winter. Residence on the territory is dictated by the animal activity and the need for social contact by the people. From year to year, hunters constantly evaluate the state of the animal populations in the land they hunt. The prediction of whether or not the animal populations upon which they rely are able to provide the necessary sustenance is used to adjust the management strategy. In the fragile environment of the Sub-arctic, where events such as climatic conditions may affect the size of the population, the hunter depends upon his own skills of observation and constant monitoring, knowledge of species behavior, predator-prey interaction, habitat needs, and interpretation of the signs to decide a management regime.

CONCLUSION

The Brundtland report (1987) suggested that the world had overlooked an important source of knowledge from Indigenous Peoples who had managed to develop and maintain their social structures despite the many economic and political pressures inflicted upon them. Of real concern is the loss of the ability to adopt and adapt to environmental practices and measures in order to maintain a sustainable environment.

Maintaining a sustainable environment requires assessment, monitoring, analysis, planning, and restraint—regardless or in spite of “jurisdictional” boundaries. Indigenous People possess a keen knowledge of their surroundings that encompasses not only the species being sought but also the factors that affect those species, such as the food availability, shelter and water needs, and any species that provides or affects those needs. Signs of weather conditions that indicate 10-year or 100-year cycles have been handed down from generation to generation in anticipation of repetition. Sure in their minds that the generations to follow them would need to sustain the land that they occupied, Indigenous Peoples made and recorded in their fashion—frequently in stories and songs—the significant activities affecting their



Leopard Frog.
(Art by Christi Belcourt)



Bison,
Bison bison,
in Athabasca Delta -
Canada.
Photo courtesy of CWS.