

MAINSTREAMING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

– Integrative Science Elder Albert Marshall at conference at Wingspread, WI.

Institute for Integrative Science & Health: www.integrativescience.ca

• May 2011

Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall was an invited participant in the conference "Mainstreaming Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainability" which was held 9-11 May 2011 at The Johnson Foundation at Wingspread in Racine, Wisconsin (<http://www.johnsonfdn.org/>).



The purpose of the conference was to ascertain Indigenous Knowledge-based approaches to natural resource management and education. Discussion focussed on advancing sustainability by taking a “Red Path toward a Green Society” to reconnect humans with nature through indigenous ways of knowing. Conference participants of primarily tribal elders, educators and natural resource managers shared personal stories and experiences reflecting Seven Generations' perspectives on sustainability, and discussed IK-based sustainability case studies and pre-K-16 education curricula for sustainability. It was envisioned that the results of the conference would consist of two integrated sets of recommendations on policy and practice to mainstream IK lessons learned into natural resource management and environmental science curricula. <http://www.johnsonfdn.org/conference/mainstreaming-indigenous-knowledge-sustainability?r=1>

Read the post-conference commentary “Grandfathers Thunder Blessing at Wingspread” (appended at the end of this document but also available on-line at <http://gemeducationcenter.wordpress.com/2011/06/01/june-2011-commentary-grandfathers-thunder-blessing-at-wingspread/>). **Two-Eyed Seeing was featured prominently in the conference statement that was developed** (the statement is found in the post-conference commentary).



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On May 9, 2011, tribal wisdom keepers gathered at Wingspread. As Oneida Cultural Heritage Officer Robert Brown offered the opening prayer in the Oneida language, thunder echoed ancestral grandfathers’ blessing upon the participants and their deliberations to do the right thing by Mother Earth. The *GEM Mainstreaming Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainability Conference* was thus started, with the purpose of charting a **Red** Path towards an **Evergreen** Society.

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Wisdom keepers from across Indian Country gather at GEM Wingspread Conference in Racine, Wisconsin, May 9-11, 2011.

Sharing personal stories of how indigenous knowledge helped inform and guide their individual calling and journey along life's pathways, participants spoke from the heart. Inspired by respect and responsibility as guardians of Mother Earth, their voices collectively articulated challenges and changes needed to protect and honor all interdependent elements bestowed by the Creator to sustain life. Embracing a deep spiritual connection to Nature, a "Seven Generations" approach of responsibility to future generations of all life forms in perpetuity was a common thread woven through the fabric of discussion on indigenous knowledge-based lifeways for sustainability.

To stimulate thinking and sharing on indigenous knowledge-based natural resource management and environmental protection, an Oneida Sustainability Model Report showcased ongoing efforts and initiatives at the Oneida Reservation in Wisconsin. Rich sharing of actions towards sustainability practiced by other American Indian nations and one First Nation in Canada contributed to a variety of place-based, culturally appropriate, and spiritually mandated actions. Performed with humility, respect, and gratitude to the Creator, these actions stem from "who we are" as indigenous peoples. These steps along Nature's pathway follow indigenous knowledge passed down from ancestors as the "Right thing to do." These insights, spiritual understandings, ecological perspectives, and strong sense of community connecting all elements interactively are the essence of behavior and existence for indigenous peoples. And a guide for the rest of us.

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We are at a crossroads. As readily observed in current media and our daily lives, and as portended by prophesy across many indigenous peoples, the time has come where we must choose which path to follow. We must choose between the business-as-usual path that has resulted in disconnection, degradation and disgrace, and the “Seven Generations” pathway that offers reconnection, restoration, and renewal.

Indigenous peoples have accumulated wisdom that guides life-affirming perspectives and practices that can be infused into educating future generations. Combining the best from Western science and indigenous science, “Two-Eyed Seeing” was featured at Wingspread as a way to help bridge cultures on the natural path and rejecting the artificial path many have blindly followed throughout the Industrial Revolution and into the 21st century. The Seventh Fire has been lit, and the choice must now be made. “Business-as-usual” is no longer acceptable. Urgent educational and curricular reform to infuse indigenous knowledge is needed at all levels. A Pre-Kindergarten-16 Indigenous Knowledge-based Education Report featuring selected examples of excellence across the USA geographically was presented at Wingspread for schools, colleges and universities embracing and teaching IK-based curricula.

Identifying post-conference actions needing immediate and long-term attention, participants focused on specific water issues currently: stopping hydrofracking to recover oil and natural gas in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and elsewhere; ending coal slurry draw-down of groundwater in New Mexico and Arizona for power plants; and preventing unnecessary and environmentally damaging extractive oil mining on the north slopes of Alaska. Other urgent actions included replacing “No Child Left Behind” education with “Two-Eyed Seeing” curricula for all schools, as well as establishing an Indigenous Nations University and network of place-based regional IK-based colleges to develop a cadre of indigenous experts (e.g., engineers, biologists, watershed managers, etc.) needed by indigenous nations with funding for pilot educational projects and the Indigenous Nations University system targeted from gaming proceeds across Indian Country. Affirming decisions addressing these important issues for action, swirling mists enveloped Wingspread during the final deliberations. Awesome.

Looking beyond the horizon, a draft conference statement of long-term change in behavior for life on Earth was developed:

We, the GEM Wingspread conferees, individually and collectively, recognize and respect the sovereignty of the Indigenous Nations of North America. In order to honor and promote the sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples we are committed to creating institutions based on the rich wisdom of these First Peoples of North America. To accomplish this goal, we will establish relationships and alliances with friends and allies who recognize the critical importance of advancing and communicating rich community- (ecology-) based indigenous knowledges through education practices that emphasize the practical life-enhancing character of these knowledges. We affirm the beauty that resides in the wisdom of Peoples who understand themselves as but one small – but important – part of the complexity of life. The Wingspread conferees recognize the Indigenous knowledges suppressed during the last 500 years of colonial history are desperately needed to guide the critical choices we must make to address the ecological well-being of the home we all share – the beautiful blue-green planet our allies call planet Earth and we call Mother earth. To this end we will work to promote “Two-Eye(d) Seeing” and Seven Generations planning to realize an EverGreen future.


The GEM Wingspread gathering helped bring indigenous and non-indigenous voices together on common ground in common cause: To do the right thing in choosing Nature’s pathway following Seven Generations perspective and bridged by Two-Eyed Seeing to a sustainable future. There is yet much to be done. Together the journey continues.

On Nature’s pathway,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Victor D. Phillip". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

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