



INTRODUCTION TO THE TRIBAL WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT TOOLBOX

This Toolbox resource has been developed with five primary goals in mind and they are:

- 1) To provide managers with some essential “keys” to understanding American Indian cultures.
- 2) To convey information on the role of designated wilderness in traditional and contemporary American Indian cultures.
- 3) To provide managers an overview of some of the wilderness management issues that face American Indian Tribal Groups.
- 4) To present examples of how wilderness, Primitive Areas and Federal lands returned to Tribes are managed by Tribal Groups, or co-managed between Federal Land Management Agencies and American Indian Tribes.
- 5) To provide managers with resources and contacts for finding out more about Tribally managed wilderness and/or Primitive Areas.

Preface:

It must be noted that the information dispensed in this Toolbox is in no way intended to represent or speak for American Indian People. American Indian People speak for themselves, whether it is via individuals, Bands, Tribes or Sovereign Nations. This document is an attempt to provide managers with basic information and resources for finding out more about Tribally managed wilderness- and nothing more!

Terms Defined:

Before delving into the particulars of where the modern concept of “wilderness” fits into American Indian cultures, both past and present, it is important to define a few integral terms that will be utilized throughout this Toolbox.

Although “Native American” is currently the politically correct terminology for referring to the original People’s of North America (excluding Alaska and Canada) it is not always the terminology that American Native People’s prefer. Most Indigenous People actually wish to be referred to by their Tribal affiliation whenever possible. This is why in the past few decades many Tribes have gone through the legal process of reverting back to the traditional names of their forefathers, rather than use names given them by other Tribes or by non-Indian explorers or settlers.

For example, the word Sioux is actually a French generalization of Seven Bands who are indeed linguistically and culturally connected, but who in fact recognize each individual Band as a separate entity, using individual Band names such as Lakota or Dakota rather than generalized catch-all descriptors like Sioux.

Therefore, Tribal names will be used throughout this resource document whenever possible. In all actuality- anybody who was born in America- is a Native American. So when speaking in more-general terms “American Indian” will be utilized. Although the focus of this Toolbox is on American Indian Tribal Groups, references to Tribes from the Alaska area will be made using the terms “Alaskan Natives” and any mention of Tribes from Canada will use the terms “First Nations”- as these are the generalized terms that these People prefer.

Understanding American Indian Cultures:

It is important to provide a basic foundation of understanding pertaining to American Indian cultures and how their philosophies on wilderness may differ in many instances from that of other cultures. By no means does this document claim to provide information that encompasses all aspects, of all Tribes, throughout North America. On the contrary, each Band, Tribe and Sovereign Nation is culturally unique. However, over time, the six principles provided below have been recognized as being consistently present within most American Indian Tribal Groups, thereupon making them helpful to non-Indian managers in grasping some of the basic cultural characteristics that foster where the modern concept of wilderness fits into American Indian systematic views.

The first **“Key is Values.”** If someone wants to get to know more about a group of people, or a specific culture, they must first understand what is important to those people, or, what are their values. For example, most traditional- or Old Style- American Indian People have very different materialistic values than that of other cultures. To a traditional person, it’s not important to have the biggest fanciest house or car, or to have a television set and DVD player in each and every room of one’s home. What’s important- is that they have food and clothes for their children and their family, that they are free to live in a traditional manner, and that they are allowed to practice their own religion without intrusion or fear of being persecuted for their religious beliefs and/or ceremonial expression. In other words traditional Indian People are not as driven by materialistic influences as many other cultures, which can to a large extent influence decisions and/or actions pertaining to Tribal natural resource management in general, and, to Tribal wilderness management more specifically.

The next **“Key is Language.”** Everyone can understand that language is literally the hub of any culture, and American Indian cultures are no different. In fact, to American Indian, Native Alaskan, and First Nation cultures language is even more important than other cultures as they rely so heavily upon an oral tradition.

Tribal histories that include stories of their creation or accounts of their great leaders and important Tribal events, or information on songs, religious practices and ceremonies are all passed down through the generations by word-of-mouth. Unfortunately, many languages were lost in the Assimilation and Americanization eras of the late 1800’s to mid 1900’s. Still today, some traditional languages are becoming a thing of the past. But many Tribes have made a concerted effort to revive and/or maintain their traditional languages because language does indeed play such an integral role in all aspects of

culture. This certainly includes how Indian People deal with the natural world, and their various takes on managing wild places within their lands, so the prominence of language should be identified and considered when trying to understand American Indian People, and their cultural perspectives in relation to wilderness.

“Family is another “Key” to understanding American Indian cultures. To Indian People, family is the most important structure within the Tribal organization. In fact many Tribes are made up of groups of relatives, or Clans, who in the past traveled and lived together as Bands and who still today many times live in clusters of homes on a Reservation or Rancheria (smaller than a Reservation- most common in California). Understanding the significance of family is essential in comprehending how American Indians interact with people from other ethnic groups, as well as with the natural environment as kinship has such a strong influence over all aspects of every day Indian life. An example of this influence is traditionally- many Nations did not live all together in one large group but were divided into smaller family Bands or Clans. Continually camping together would quickly deplete the natural resources that they depended upon for survival, like game and clean water. These same family influences can be translated into the management of today’s Tribal natural resources, and, to the management of Tribal wilderness and/or Primitive Areas.

“Poverty is yet another Key” to understanding Indian People. Please do not misunderstand and think that this text in any way insinuates that all Indian People are poor, because just as all Anglo or Hispanic people are not poor, neither are all American Indians poor. However, the reality is that some of the most impoverished places in America are on Indian Reservations and/or Rancherias and therefore the subject must be discussed. The reason that this issue is helpful in understanding any culture plagued by poverty is that poverty, in many instances, make’s people do things they would not ordinarily do. Say for instance that a Tribe has the opportunity to sell a portion of their mineral resources, possibly located inside an area that they have “considered” for primitive or wilderness designation, to an outside corporation. The decision to open such lands to commercial enterprise, instead of managing them in a natural condition, may come down to mere survival because that commercial profit will help to develop important Tribal Programs such as health, education or housing improvement, all of which are high priorities for the Tribe.

So while the philosophy of protecting and managing wild areas within Reservations is understood and considered by many Tribal Councils, it’s not always the most realistic alternative from a big-picture standpoint.

“The role of Humor as a Key” is meaningful when attempting to better understand American Indian People. They-say “the more one is liked- the more that person gets teased.” Indian People fully comprehend the fact that life is hard and that humor is a means of reducing stress and breaking up the solemn realities of the World around them. For this reason many Tribes have individuals who’s Divine calling it is to serve as clowns, and who play instrumental roles in certain social and ceremonial gatherings. Although humor may not have any direct relevance when it comes to the management of

Tribal wilderness, it certainly must be understood when dealing with Indian People in situations such as co-managing a wilderness unit or developing any type of partnership with an Indian Community.

The last **“Key is Connection to the Land.”** Many of the books written about American Indian cultures convey the strong connection that Indian People have with the environment. In the old days, the People were totally dependent upon the land for food, lodging and clothing. Mother Earth was their church and the birds, animals, and all things were their relatives. Today, for traditional people especially, this same connection is present but it is this very adoration for the Earth that can also create a difficult balancing act in regards to managing natural resources. For example, when a Tribe is offered money to cut timber on a Reservation, many of the traditionalists are against the proposal as they feel this would literally be like cutting the arm or leg of their revered Mother Earth.

This is one of the reasons why many Tribes have a difficult time managing natural resources, including wilderness, in the way that Federal land management agencies are accustomed to. Indian People truly were the original-land managers and not only comprehend how to manage the physical and biological components of the land, but the Spiritual integrity of wild places as well. Thus, understanding the all-encompassing connection that Indian People have with the Earth is vital when trying to get a sense of how Indian Communities look at the modern concept of wilderness.

These keys should be helpful in better understanding Indian People and their diverse cultures, but of course, are just a few of the many exceptional traits that make our Nation’s Indigenous cultures so exquisitely successful and complex. The sections below will examine in more detail how wilderness fits into both traditional as well as contemporary Tribal life.

Summary

Comparable to their Native counterparts around the World, the Indigenous People’s of the Americas were the foremost wilderness stewards. They not only understood how to protect and preserve the natural resources around them, but were intuitively aware of the Spiritual virtues of wild places as well. Understanding the all-encompassing connection that American Indian People had, and still have, with the land is crucial when attempting to gain a sense of how Indian People view the theories behind “modern wilderness.”

The basic concept of designated wilderness being a place one visits to escape the pressures of society, is quite contrary to most traditional American Indian beliefs of natural places simply being interpreted as- home!

But despite such varying perspectives, an effort has been made by some Tribal Groups to transcend these differing cultural barriers in a manner that fosters both traditional and progressive Tribal People to agree upon setting aside “wild places” under their administration. No matter what designation- wilderness, primitive or recreation area-

Tribes throughout the United States have found ways to combine their ageless traditions with the contemporary management of wildlands.

The Salish and Kootenai Peoples probably host the purest model- in regards to how Federally designated wilderness is managed today. A different approach is taken when we look at how the Taos Pueblo co-manages their Sacred Blue Lake and surrounding ancestral lands, once U.S. Forest Service wilderness, with two separate federal agencies. And the Yakamas at the extreme other end of the spectrum, practicing their well-deserved Tribal Sovereignty, by managing natural sectors of land within the boundaries of their Reservation...but not actually calling it “wilderness.”

It is difficult to predict what direction Tribal wilderness protection and management will take in the future, but one thing is certain, Indian People will always have an unwavering relationship with the natural environment. Chief Luther Standing Bear- of the great Oglala Nation- maybe said it best when he stated:

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and the winding streams with tangled growth as “wild.” Only to the non-Indian was nature a “wilderness” and only to him was the land infested with “wild animals.” To us it was tame. The Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery.

It is within these words that one can begin to embrace the relatively conflictive ideologies that exist between American Indian cultures, and other cultures, in relation to the protection and management of modern-wilderness. So yet ironic, but as well heroic, are the efforts of the Tribes referenced in this document and of those Tribes who ponder taking on the challenges of managing wildlands. Seeking to find the delicate balance between distinctively different cultures is a life-long endeavor- and it is most certainly a plight for finding ways to care for our remaining wild places- so that “all people” Indian and non-Indian alike can enjoy them for Seven Generations...and beyond!