

# What is Traditional Ecological Knowledge?

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Aboriginal traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) has been and continues to be accumulated through time spent living on the land. It encompasses all aspects of the environment—biophysical, economic, social, cultural and spiritual—and sees humans as an intimate part of it, rather than as external observers or controllers. TEK is part of the collective memory of a community, and is passed on orally through songs and stories, as well as through actions and observation.

This holistic view of the environment is based on underlying values that support sustainability. They include taking only what is needed and leaving the rest undisturbed, and providing for the well-being of the community without jeopardizing the integrity of the environment. The belief that all living creatures deserve respect has enabled Aboriginal peoples to hunt, trap and fish, while at the same time conserving wildlife populations for future generations.

While TEK was often dismissed in the past due to its anecdotal nature, it is an important piece of the puzzle. It has helped scientists recognize and evaluate species and spaces at risk by providing information on broad trends in species distribution, abundance and seasonal behaviour patterns, and saved time and money by guiding field work.

## Best Practices for Traditional Ecological Knowledge

- Respect the ownership, source and origins of the knowledge and the needs and sensitivities of its holders, and obtain their approval and involvement.
- Take the time needed to establish a strong, trusting relationship based on honesty, openness and sharing.
- Work on projects of common interest and benefit.
- Continuously foster communication between partners.
- Provide value-added knowledge back to the community in the form of useful products (such as reports) and services, and share equitably with the holders any benefits arising from the use of TEK.

