

Indigenous Led Evaluations of Ecosystem Services Through Nbish Ehkinomahgi: The Teachings of Water That Bring Us Back to Our Relationship With Land

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The traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) possessed by Indigenous peoples around the globe is at risk of being lost. Simultaneously, our world faces irreversible depletion of the lands resources upon which this knowledge is based. A response to these challenges may be Indigenous-led strategies of conservation economics that make use of TEK to evaluate the services of ecosystems, primarily to benefit the context of the community. This paper examines the concepts in Indigenous worldviews under which would lie the valuation for ecosystem services (ES) by synthesizing preliminary fieldwork completed in a First Nation community. The common ground between Western Science and Indigenous worldviews, upon which the creation of future mechanisms towards this aim can be laid, is established through the creation of a story using techniques of traditional Anishnabe storytelling. The principles for the valuation of benefits for all *relations* through observations of ES are outlined and discussed. Presented as teachings for both academia and Indigenous Anishnabe peoples, this story creates opportunities for future development through work strategies that respect the evolved economic and cultural needs of indigenous cultures. This paper relays baseline perspectives of the notion of ecosystem services, or gifts of the land, as it is currently held by elders whose cultures have nurtured the evolution of these gifts over thousands of years through the traditional teachings of the indigenous people of Ontario. These teachings are layered by contemporary paradigms of Western science to demonstrate the complex nature in the landscapes that could guide the incorporation of these gifts into a growing ES industry. Commonalities, differences, and unique characteristics to guide the growth of this industry can be found within the following categories: importance of identity, connection to land and knowledge, transfer of knowledge, bravery, and collaborations. These categories use the Seven Grandfather teachings in order to link traditional with contemporary scientific knowledge. Following the teachings of an Elder and the land itself, the author invites the reader to accompany her on a journey towards the common ground upon which the value of gifts from the land can be understood.