

GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

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• MEMBER TRIBES •

MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community
Keweenaw Bay Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band

WISCONSIN

Bad River Band
Lac Courte Oreilles Band
Lac du Flambeau Band

Red Cliff Band
St. Croix Chippewa
Sokaogon Chippewa

MINNESOTA

Fond du Lac Band
Mille Lacs Band

Guidelines for Conducting Traditional Ecological Knowledge Interviews

I. Introduction

The Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) is an intertribal agency that assists its eleven member tribes with the co-management of their off-reservation treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather in the ceded territories. Healthy resources in abundant number are necessary to continue Anishinaabe bimaadiziwin (lifeways) and to meet spiritual, cultural, medicinal, subsistence, and economic needs. Since its formation in 1984, GLIFWC has sought to infuse Anishinaabe culture and values in all aspects of its mission, and has done so by incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into various natural resource management plans, and rules and regulations.

GLIFWC recognizes that TEK is a source for understanding what constitutes proper respect of a particular resource, and continues to incorporate TEK into treaty resource management plans to effectively serve its member tribes. For the Anishinaabe, natural resource management often has a different approach than that of state or federal management due to the desire to ensure that a certain resource is widely available for all tribal members' physical and spiritual needs in the present and for seven generations into the future. The idea of resources being needed for spiritual health is also reciprocal in that a resource needs respect and love from the Anishinaabe in order for Anishinaabe to receive the benefits from it.

There are multiple definitions of TEK and what information is categorized as such. For GLIFWC, TEK is typically recognized as a subset of the wealth of Anishinaabe gikendaasowin or traditional knowledge. TEK is the process of gathering the knowledge that has been gained from generations of indigenous people's connection and interactions with the environment and that is willingly shared. This knowledge system is based upon direct environmental observations and is typically transmitted orally through aadizookaanan (sacred stories), dibaajimowinan (oral histories), nagamonan (songs), and ceremonies over generations.

The information gathered often includes harvesting techniques, best management practices, species habitat and distribution, and explanations of consequences and effects of certain actions. Such information can be applied to and compared among the harvests for various years. If the harvest was successful, then the validity of such knowledge was reinforced. For unsuccessful harvests, different factors were compared to previous harvests and analyzed, until an explanation was eventually found and then subsequently incorporated into future use. There is no Ojibwe word or phrase analogous to TEK and, as such, tribal elders and harvesters do not make a distinction

between their ecological knowledge and knowledge of other aspects of Anishinaabe bimaadiziwin; it is all viewed as information gained as a result of living.

TEK holders are people who have learned from years of experience. This experience may come from years of first-hand resource harvesting, observations of family or community members working with a resource and/or listening to elders' teachings about a resource. Typical TEK holders are elders and harvesters, although different communities may also consider other tribal members to be TEK holders, such as tribal historians who may not be an elder or harvester. It should also be noted that different communities also have disparate criteria for elder status. For some, a person is considered an elder once s/he has gray hair while others may have set ages, or whenever a person becomes a grandparent. TEK holders may also be referred to as "traditional knowledge holders" or as "Anishinaabe resource providers" since, as mentioned above, the holistic Ojibwe way of thinking often does not make a distinction between ecological knowledge and other aspects of Anishinaabe cultural knowledge.

II. How to Ask Anishinaabe Resource Providers to Participate in a TEK Interview

a. The Cultural Importance of Asemaa (Tobacco)

Asemaa is one of the four most common nookwezigan, or sacred herbs, characterized by their fragrant smoke and slowing-burning properties, along with bashkodejiibik (sage), wiingashk (sweetgrass) and giizhikaandagoons (cedar leaves). These herbs are used for smudging, healing, cleansing, and other ceremonial purposes. Asemaa in particular is used when offering prayers and asking for help or favors because it acts as a spiritual signifier that an exchange is occurring. An Anishinaabe resource provider sharing their knowledge is a gift. Since knowledge is intangible, that person is sharing a part of his or her spiritual energy and, through the act of explaining his or her experiences, he or she is providing years' worth of data that someone else would have to experience to gain the same level of knowledge.

Offering asemaa demonstrates humility by acknowledging one's ignorance and need for help and honoring the wisdom and knowledge that will be shared. The proper use of asemaa indicates to both the TEK holder and the spirits that may be associated with the topics that will be discussed that the knowledge will be respected by those seeking it. Asemaa is the minimum requirement for such a request of information. It is often important to offer additional gifts, such as a stipend for the Anishinaabe resource provider's time, milage, per diem, etc., and a cloth item or food to reinforce the Anishinaabe cultural view that knowledge is highly respected and valued.

b. Approaching Anishinaabe Resource Providers

GLIFWC staff are typically aware of certain TEK holders because of previous projects. However, with GLIFWC's 11 member tribes, it is unlikely that GLIFWC staff are aware of every Anishinaabe resource provider that has knowledge about natural resources of the ceded territories. As such, GLIFWC staff should reach out to GLIFWC's Board of Commissioners and the Voigt Task Force Representatives as a first step to identify potential TEK holders for each project; they are valuable resources for identifying TEK holders in the communities of GLIFWC member tribes. As another resource, the GLIFWC Advisory and Guidance Input Group of Elders (GAAGIGE) has several members who are

harvesters and more often than not eager to participate in TEK projects. However, this group only meets twice a year, so projects with short timelines may not be able to be presented during the TEK gathering process. Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) are a resource for historical accounts containing sources of TEK and typically are aware of families who continue to harvest in their community. Once TEK holders have been identified, they may reference other harvesters or elders during the interview. After the interview, it is useful to follow up and ask if that person would be open to participating the project and his or her contact information.

Asemaa needs to be offered to an Anishinaabe resource provider when asking whether an interview can be conducted, and again before the interview is conducted. It is very effective to offer asemaa first in the manner of asking a TEK holder for a favor of just listening to a basic overview of the project. Each community and even individual TEK holders have different preferences for the proper manner of offering asemaa. However, the most widely accepted method of asking an Anishinaabe to help you is to offer a pinch of loose pipe tobacco with one's left hand. Some elders may even prefer a pack of their favorite brand of cigarettes while others would prefer kinnikinnick. It is useful to carry a small piece of cloth and string in case if a TEK holder does not plan on using the asemaa right away to prevent it from staining hands or being lost during transport.

Once she or he agrees, explain the project details: what type of information the project will be documenting, why that information is useful to GLIFWC, and the manner in which the information will be used during the project, how the information will be stored, and whether or not the information is intended to be used after the project. At this point, the Anishinaabe resource provider is able to agree to be interviewed or can politely decline if uncomfortable with sharing that type of information. If the interview will occur at a later time, one should offer asemaa again before the interview, this time signifying that respect for the knowledge that is going to be shared. If the interview occurs shortly after the asemaa is given the first time, such as later that same day, then an additional asemaa offering for participating in the interview is usually not necessary unless the TEK holder requests it.

c. Information Anishinaabe Resource Providers Need to Know Before Interviewing

An Anishinaabe Resource Provider should be aware of the scope of the project, what information or input the project requires, and the manner in which the interview transcript and information obtained from the interview will be used for the project as well as any future projects. At this time, it is important to emphasize that any information shared for a project is owned by the Anishinaabe resource provider, not the Commission or GLIFWC staff member(s). GLIFWC will only use the information as authorized to do so. Compensation for the interview, if any, needs to be explained, i.e., a social security number is required for tax purposes, before recording necessary interviewee information for payment.

Any additional questions or concerns that a TEK holder has should be addressed before the interview occurs. The transparent nature of how the information will be used and emphasizing his or her ownership and control of the information provided will foster good will towards the project and GLIFWC. This is especially useful when helping to create community buy-in for greater participation and reception.

III. Suggestions for Effective TEK Interviews

Interview questions should be broad to allow for self-editing answers. For some Anishinaabe, some topics are considered off-limits to record, such as aadizookaanan (sacred stories) or even references to the sacred stories. Others may prefer to keep other knowledge “off the record,” such as the location of a resource that may only have enough output for one person’s harvest. The manner and detail in which one can respond to a broad question helps ensure that an interviewee will share only what they believe is appropriate to be shared. Having broad questions will also allow for the interviewee to feel comfortable with informal questions and counters the sentiment “I don’t know anything” that many TEK holders respond with when asked to provide information about a resource. This response is especially common when asked a complex or technical question.

Broad questions also help reduce the total number of questions to be included in the interview which in turn helps to add to the casual nature of the interview. By having 3-5 broad questions, the interviewer should not need a physical list of questions to conduct the interview, which may be intimidating for some elders or harvesters. Follow-up questions can be asked for additional clarification, but working without a list results in more organic conversation and information. A list can also be perceived as being too impersonal for some elders. Another way to reinforce the casual nature is to refer to the interview appointment or interview itself as a “visit” or a “chance to sit and talk.”

The length of each interview will be determined by the TEK holder and by the amount of information she or he chooses to share with you. It is not unusual to have to schedule additional interviews with the same individual for a number of reasons. It may be that an elder is tired of talking for the day but wants to share more information, or for last minute community obligations, such as running a funeral, may arise. An additional follow up meeting should be offered to the Anishinaabe resource provider when she or he is sent the interview transcript in case of transcripts edits that need to be made or additional information to be included if the interview was recorded.

It is important to remember that there is a history of tribal knowledge being abused by early anthropologists and ethnographers, as well as the knowledge holders. Such scholars used traditional knowledge with little to no acknowledgement to the tribal members, often times passing off such knowledge as their own. Recorded knowledge may have also been presented in a culturally insensitive way that reinforced the notion that tribal culture was “primitive”, “savage”, or “dying”. Taboo subjects were sometimes published without consent from the information provider. As such, it is important to respect what information is shared during the interview as well as what information is not shared. The interviewee should at no point feel like she or he is being pressured or bullied into answering a given question.

IV. Guidelines for Conducting TEK Interviews

Once an Anishinaabe resource provider has agreed to participate in a TEK interview, reiterate what information the project is attempting to document, how the information from the interview will be used within the scope of the project and any future uses if applicable. If the interview is being recorded, double check that recording is acceptable and do not record until given approval to begin. It is helpful to have drinks on hand during the interview in case of coughing or dry mouth. It is more than likely for some small talk to occur before the interview begins while drinks are being poured and the interviewee and interviewer get comfortable. Bringing beverages and light snacks

can go a long way to ease any tension. It also reinforces the reciprocal way of Anishinaabe culture; the TEK holder is feeding one with knowledge so one should feed them with food or drinks.

If the interview is being recorded, try to ensure that there is limited background noise that the microphone can pick up. Try to avoid areas near windows as recording equipment may record ambient road noise during the interview. Be sure that the microphone is pointed toward the speaker, and, if recording a group, have the recording equipment in the best available position for the group setup. If the background noise of a location is particularly audible, record 10 to 15 seconds of the room without anyone speaking to identify the background noise later during the audio editing process.

Once finished with the interview questions, ask the interviewee if there is anything she or he would like to add. When the interview is over, once again reiterate how the information and transcript if applicable from the interview will be used in the project and any other future uses. It is often more useful to ask if there are uses the Anishinaabe resource provider does not want his or her TEK used instead of a long list of potential scenarios on the spot. If the interview was recorded, explain how the recording will be stored at GLIFWC, who will have access to it, and what will happen to the recording once the project is completed. Asking if the Anishinaabe resource provider would like a copy of the recording, or if the recording should be kept after the project is completed also reinforces the fact that she or he is the owner of the TEK that was shared in the interview.

The interviewees have the right to determine what happens with the transcripts and any recordings of their interviews as well as the TEK shared during the interview. Ask the interviewee what the preferred method of the transcript review would be. Although some TEK holders may decline reviewing the transcript of their interview, each recorded interview needs to be transcribed in order to ensure accuracy of the information shared and as an accessible reference for later use when creating project deliverables. Often, when reviewing an interview transcript, there may be information that needs clarification or additional information would be useful in project deliverables. If such information is needed, the TEK holder can provide it, if she or he deems it as appropriate to share. The transcript review also provides another opportunity to ensure that the TEK holder approves what information was shared and if there is any information that she or he wants deleted, edited, or added to, then she or he can do so as the owner of such information.

The transcript review is an opportunity for the interviewee to determine what information is shared and used. Any information edited or removed from the transcript by the interviewee after review, must not be used in any way for the project or future use. Finally, if any information from the interview is intended to be used for another purpose besides the project under which the interview took place, contact the Anishinaabe resource provider and ask for her or his permission to do so.