

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mike Robinson

Glenbow Museum Calgary, Canada

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Summary

Canadian indigenous people and their First Nations communities have played an important role in the development of unique co-management regimes that promote regional natural resource sustainability. Co-Management regimes are now a common component of comprehensive land claims settlements. They enable tribal experts and scientists to confer together on decisions regarding the allocation of natural resources, and the review of resource development projects. Further assistance to the co-management process is provided by traditional land use and occupancy studies (TLUOS), which provide graphic, map-based data for a variety of educational and review purposes. Recently the community use of geographic information system (GIS) and global positioning system (GPS) technology has further enhanced the utility of TLUOS.

1. Introduction

Canada played an important role in the creation of "Our Common Future," the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Its member on the

Commission, Maurice Strong, and the Commission's ex officio Secretary General, Jim MacNeill, were both well aware of the situation of Canada's indigenous peoples, and the problems they face as the land-based economy is increasingly encroached upon by concrete industrial development, and the often virtual post-industrial forces of globalization. The first chapter of "Our Common Future," "From Our Earth to Our World," lays out the dilemmas well (1987:12):

Tribal and indigenous peoples will need special attention as the forces of economic development disrupt their traditional life-styles -- life-styles that can offer modern societies many lessons in the management of resources in complex forest, mountain and dry land ecosystems. Some are threatened with virtual extinction by insensitive development over which they have no control. Their traditional rights should be recognized and they should be given a decisive voice in formulating policies about resource development in their areas.

Clearly the objective of sustainability has much to gain from the wisdom of indigenous people, and the traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) they possess. The challenge is to create systems of knowledge-sharing at many levels to enable wisdom and TEK to be applied to resource planning, development and stewardship decisions. It is in the development of co-management regimes in the context of negotiated comprehensive land claims settlements that Canada has made its strongest institutional contribution to strengthening the role of indigenous people and their communities in the context of sustainable development. Before we can discuss these new institutions, it is necessary briefly to review the geography of Canada and the historical record which has contributed to their creation.

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Biographical Sketch

Mike Robinson has 20 years of career experience as an applied anthropologist, non-governmental organization (NGO) leader, and mediator, drawing on his studies in anthropology and law at the University of British Columbia and University College, Oxford. A Rhodes scholar, Mr. Robinson has worked for the Canadian Northern Pipeline Agency, Petro-Canada, Polar Gas and The Arctic Institute of North America of the University of Calgary. At present Mr. Robinson serves as the chairman of the Canadian Polar Commission, the federal representative for exploratory discussions on Treaty 7, adjunct professor in the Faculty of Environmental Design, and executive director of The Arctic Institute of North America of the University of Calgary. His most recent publications involve the socio-legal aspects of consultation with First Nations, cultural land use and occupancy mapping in Canada, and the introduction of the co-management concept to Russia. His new book (co-authored with Karim-Aly Kassam) is entitled *Sami Potatoes: Living with Reindeer and Perestroika*, and was published in November 1998.

Mr. Robinson is married to Lynn Webster, Partner, Cohos Evamy and Associates Architects, and is father to Lancelot and Caitlin. The Robinson/Webster family enjoys wilderness camping vacations, cross-country skiing in the Canadian Rockies, and a broad range of community volunteer commitments.