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Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wild Salmonid Biological Diversity in Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula

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Kamchatka Indigenous Peoples' Salmon Biodiversity and River Ecosystems Ecological Knowledge Maintenance and Conservation Program

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Introduction

It comes as no surprise that Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) closely interacts with the knowledge of ecological system and therefore, is greatly important for ecosystem research. Studying of indigenous folklore can contribute significantly to the development of ecological education and become an integrant for the educational system. Traditional myths, through which local peoples perceive their environment and according to which the world is understood as alive, form the basis of traditional nature use.

The Northern indigenous peoples of Kamchatka have begun to reclaim their customs and traditions in which traditional music, dances and ceremonies are involved and that reflect their relationship with the Nature. Knowledge contained in these artistic forms should be used to deepen the understanding of biodiversity value. Oral stories, legends, fairy tails and narratives of hunting, fishing and harvesting comprise invaluable records of indigenous peoples' ecological knowledge, of their practices and findings relevant to biodiversity and samonid conservation.

Throughout the history of Kamchatka Indigenous Peoples of the North have been involved in salmon fisheries as well as in other forms of natural resource use, and have been directly dependant on the return of salmon for food. Annually Pacific salmon migrated from the ocean back to spawning rivers. Spawning seasons were usually accompanied by phenological phenomena tied to climatic and other factors. Salmon, the main source of sustenance for the Indigenous peoples of Kamchatka played an absolutely important role in various aspects of their ethnological being. Studies of these aspects should be built on available databases and findings resulted from new sessions with the holders of traditional knowledge.

The importance of indigenous knowledge studies for biodiversity conservation is being underestimated, which is a barrier on the path to the development of indigenous knowledge conservation and restoration strategies. The role of traditional knowledge that has been involved in a daily struggle of local communities for survival and that has been enabling them to survive is also neglected.

Salmon biodiversity conservation might not have been regarded by indigenous peoples as a challenge, but they have always known of an important role that salmon played in their lives. They treated salmon with respect and protected it naturally by applying traditional alleviating techniques to the fishing process. Fishing traditions that local people established tell us about fishing tools and techniques; methods of fish processing, and about the intensity of salmon consumption. Undoubtedly, local peoples have developed their specific approaches to protect and use effectively natural resources, including salmon. This is why, it is necessarily important to analyse not only salmon fishery-related records, but records containing the knowledge about protection of all elements of salmon ecosystem. Analyzing of folk superstitions about natural phenomena and lean seasons can also answer many questions.

Learning of indigenous customs and traditions will produce exciting results and create a valuable knowledge basis that incites local and newly arrived population to think ecologically. The aim to made ecological knowledge available and popular with local populations serves as a guideline for this project.

Studying of archaic beliefs and their contemporary interpretations should encourage the descendents of Kamchatka indigenous peoples to recollect the system of cultural wealth produced by their ancestors. Therefore, systematic filling of TEK data collected by experts from indigenous peoples will allow us to develop biodiversity conservation and biodiversity-oriented managerial strategies and then to demonstrate how to apply these strategies in the process of biodiversity conservation. This will also allow us to popularize TEK among local population and interested individuals who can correct it or use for their own research. TEK also needs to be studied from the perspective of law issues based on local customs and traditions.

In the present context of an implicit danger that TEK may become extinct it is becoming extremely important to record the knowledge with the application of new techniques and to adopt it for use by public of all social groups.

The purpose of this program is the strengthening of integrate conservation of Kamchatka's biodiversity, cultural heritage of the Northern Indigenous Peoples and their role in biodiversity conservation by compiling and recording TEK.

Activities under this program will be conducted in consultations with the specialists on Philology, Ethnology, Biology, Linguistics (indigenous languages of the Northern Peoples of Kamchatka) and Economics of Nature Recourses from Kamchatka Pedagogical University, Palana Advanced Teachers Training Institute and in cooperation with regional experts in TEK, including native informants.

Specialists from Association Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East, regional associations and tribal communities, Kovran Ecological Center in the Tigilsky Region, the Ethno-ecological Informational Center "Luch", the Administration of the Kamchatka Oblast and Koryak Autonomous Okrug are also expected to participate in the work.

Purpose: By compiling TEK, strengthen the integrate conservation of Kamchatka's biodiversity, also the cultural wealth of the Indigenous Peoples of the North and their impact upon the biodiversity conservation process. Study TEK to develop effective methodologies and strategies for biodiversity friendly management and to prepare materials for educational purposes and for use in mass media.

Tasks

There are a number of tasks to be implemented:

1. Compile existing data from all possible sources on TEK to produce a digital database that can be included in educational programs on TEK.

2. Collect information on TEK and about territories of traditional nature use, tribal communities (in retrospect). Modern methods of data collection will involve: interviews, data collection in the project sites; cartography, and archive data processing work. Conduct corporative field sessions with the participation of the elderly – holders of traditional knowledge and of the youth who will be passing this knowledge on to further generations.

3. Compile, analyse and summarize data on TEK. Evaluate the state of cultural and biodiversity resources in the project sites. File collected data in the format corresponding to a TEK database and appropriate for use in diversity friendly management.

4. Prepare principles and recommendations on that how to conserve and hand down TEK as well as how to apply this knowledge to the process of biodiversity conservation and natural resource co-management.

5. Collect and record TEK with the help and support of local population inhabiting project sites.