

CommuniTea: Land Acknowledgements and Indigenous Science

8 November 2022, Clark 507 and Zoom

~30 people attended in person

WCC co-chairs, Sheri White and Konrad Huguen, led the CommuniTea.

Notes collected by: Hannah Mark, Dina Pandya, Christine Charrette, and Logan Tegler.

Pre-CommuniTea References & Information posted here:

<https://web.who.edu/wcc/events-activities/communithea-indigenous-science-land-acknowledgements/>

Land Acknowledgments

- What do you know about the indigenous people who live in the places you have lived and worked?
 - Lots of people expressed not feeling we know all that much about the local native tribes, here or in other places we have lived.
 - Some have attended the summer Wampanoag Powwow.
 - Some have indigenous family members, though those connections have not always been strong or maintained through generations (sometimes because of things like the residential schools).
 - Some feel like the ways in which they have learned about indigenous people have made it feel like tribes are ancient history, removed from the present, when that's not necessarily true. People are still here.
 - The last residential schools in Canada closed in the 1990s.
 - Discussed how in places like Puerto Rico there is an implicit understanding that if you were born there, you are likely part Indigenous, African and European.

- How can land acknowledgements be helpful? How are they not helpful?
 - Land acknowledgements can help folks consider the cultures that came before their own wherever they are.
 - We can also incorporate more educational resources into land acknowledgements – tell people about places they can go to learn more.
 - Land acknowledgements bring to the fore histories of a place, which can help inform the present/efforts to tackle current problems.
 - Land acknowledgements can feel performative if there is no further learning/engagement with local tribes.
 - A land acknowledgement PowerPoint slide doesn't fix anything caused by colonialism. Especially for big institutions or people in power, just saying "we acknowledge" and not doing anything concrete (no reparative efforts, no financial commitments) is sort of meaningless.
 - If we all get used to seeing a land acknowledgement PowerPoint slide at the beginning of a talk, we can eventually start to tune them out.
 - Different people at different levels of power have different abilities to actually do things.

- Question was brought up as to whether native peoples are wanting us/scientists/people to be doing land acknowledgements.
- There are a lot of problems with land acknowledgements as a concept, in that indigenous people don't think about land "ownership" the same way that we do in a western framework – they are more likely to think of themselves as land stewards. Land acknowledgements are more for those of us who are not indigenous – indigenous people don't need it, we are the ones who need the knowledge.
- How can we acknowledge the past and present inhabitants of the places where we conduct research?
 - Engage with opportunities to learn more about their culture/history.
 - It would be helpful for WHOI to organize a wide variety of events in collaboration with local tribes.
 - It can be a challenge to sustaining efforts – cannot just talk a bit, but have to keep working on this in the long term.
- How are Land Acknowledgements relevant (or not) for work in the open ocean, for other non-research work at WHOI (e.g., Finance, Facilities)?
 - Land acknowledgement statements in ocean going work can at times feel performative.
 - If meaningful activities are happening in addition to the land acknowledgements, helps them to feel less performative.
 - Important to ask the local community what they would like the Institution to do in addition to integrating land acknowledgements into our work. Just doing land acknowledgements falls short unless we are directly asking local tribes what we can do for them.
 - But, it is also important to not put the burden of educating us/mapping out actions for us to take on indigenous communities.
 - Working on the water doesn't get us oceanographers off the hook. We bring our data back here and work on it here.
- What can we as ocean scientists do to acknowledge and/or support indigenous peoples in areas where we work (at WHOI or in remote locations)?
 - The next step after acknowledgements is reparations. How can WHOI facilitate work with indigenous communities? That's what needs to be done.
 - Need for more resources and guidance on how to engage with indigenous communities. Colonial legacy is of *taking* – how do you engage with indigenous communities and extract samples/information/knowledge from their land without continuing that extractive mindset? WHOI could provide more guidance on that as an institution.
 - Educational opportunities come to mind, e.g. high school helpers in labs – this could be an opportunity for local people, give them a chance to try out science. Also, they already have housing and are already here.

- Beyond just being ocean researchers, how might we contribute as people just living in the area?
 - Programs that contribute some allocation of funds from the sale of a house to the local tribes
 - Beach clean-ups and other ways to show respect for the land
 - Lab visits to local schools
- For research being done in other places, there are sometimes opportunities to collaborate with/involve local indigenous groups.
 - These groups may not want to work with outsider scientists, sometimes because they have had bad experiences in the past (see: colonialism) or because our research is just not that interesting to them and we aren't offering anything worthwhile to them.
 - Maybe the ideal is not us scientists coming in from outside and collaborating with local groups, but capacity building so that in the future the people from the land are the ones doing science on the land.
- The information we extract is a resource, even if it's not directly of interest to the people in a particular place. There should be some form of remuneration. Local knowledge should be credited, valued, compensated, acknowledged; particularly when people have long-term research studies in a particular location.
 - In many places (e.g., the Arctic) indigenous knowledge is important for tracking long-term changes in ecosystems. There are certain fields where western science absolutely needs indigenous knowledge that goes back for generations. And in those places, in those fields, it's important to think about how you're going to acknowledge or compensate communities **before** you start work.
- It can be hard to know what to do as an individual in these contexts, especially when we aren't the people in charge of the money. The things that are more meaningful require money.
- Funding agencies could mandate (or generally incentivize) people to work more collaboratively with local communities.
 - *Note: Natalie sent a link to a letter later that suggests this is not always done well: <https://www.arctictoday.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-03-19-NNA-Letter-Final-1.pdf>*
- Instead of thinking about what we can get from indigenous knowledge, think about what we can give back.
- There is a desire for more transparency as to how WHOI is working with/helping/supporting the local community
 - *Note: There should be more public information on that soon, as relationships are being built.*

Indigenous Science

- Do you think of Traditional or Indigenous Knowledge as “Science” or “Religion”? Why?
- Do you think indigenous knowledge can contribute to Western Science? How?
- How can western science learn from and incorporate indigenous science?
 - Braiding Sweetgrass (book) was brought up as a good resource on this topic
 - There are fundamental conflicts between “western” and “traditional” frameworks - who owns knowledge? Who owns data?

Some other points discussed

- AGU Thriving Earth Exchange is one model for working with communities on science that the *communities* want to have done (and matching them to scientists who can help them out). This is a type of thing that WHOI could do.
- Working on land acknowledgments is the kind of thing that might make more sense as a group (the Woods Hole science community) effort rather than having MBL, Woodwell, etc. each doing things on their own. Also, it might be less of a burden on tribes if they could work with the science community as a larger unit.
- Braiding Sweetgrass (book) is highly recommended.
- This Land is Their Land (book) is a good resource for learning specifically about the Wampanoag and tribes in this local area.
- The podcast All My Relations was also recommended
 - <https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/>
 - All My Relations is hosted by Matika Wilbur (Swinomish and Tulalip) and Adrienne Keene (Cherokee Nation) to explore our relationships— relationships to land, to our creatural relatives, and to one another.