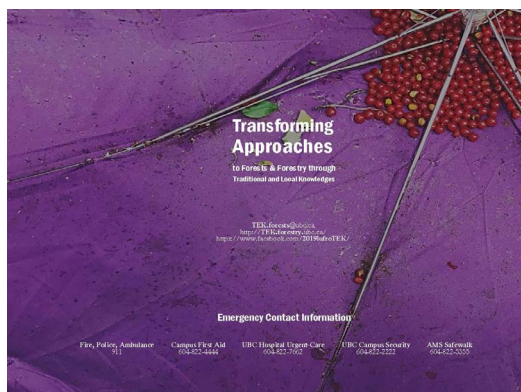


## Transforming Approaches to Forests and Forestry through Traditional and Local Knowledges

Report by Janette Bulkan, Deputy Coordinator of IUFRO Working Party 9.03.04  
*Traditional forest knowledge in temperate and boreal regions*

A conference on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), 'Transforming approaches to forests and forestry through Traditional and Local Knowledges: Reciprocity and relationship-building in forest ecosystems' was held at the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Forestry on the unceded territory of the Musqueam (x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm) Indigenous Nation, during 21-23 August 2019). There were 98 registered participants, including Indigenous and Local Community members, undergraduate and graduate students and academics and government officials.



**Some shared findings that threaded through the conference events were:**

- In the epoch of the Anthropocene, human societies and their leaders would do well to collaborate with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), drawing on their time-tested traditional and local knowledges in order to respond strategically to the challenges posed by global heating and biodiversity loss and degradation.
- Traditional and local knowledges are based on long-standing observations and practices in specific territories and should

be accorded equal legitimacy as Western knowledges.

- Traditional and local knowledges are generally not separable from specific territories. At best these forms of knowledge are relational, bound up with respect and reverence for all forest values and the web of life that sustains humans and non-human societies. The interrelationships among flora and fauna that are the bedrock of Indigenous Knowledges are increasingly recognized in Western scientific investigations. Forestry cannot be reduced to a sole focus on tree species of commercial value.
- The human rights of Indigenous Peoples are violated when they are hindered from accessing their traditional territories and acting on and reviving their traditional knowledge of resource management by the claims of property rights holders, including the Nation-State. In such scenarios, the loss of their traditional and local knowledges represents a loss not only to the Indigenous Peoples themselves but to the global treasury of knowledge.
- Forests and natural landscapes more generally are also sites for farms, gathered foods and medicines. Human societies need to recognize, value and legally protect more of these landscapes and recover the associated fast-disappearing knowledges of foods and medicines.
- Transformative approaches begin with self-transformations, grounded in human relationships.
- Indigenous and Local place-based knowledges need to be safeguarded through legal protections and/or collaborative management of the associated landscapes. Actions must be scaled up through insistent advocacy, writings and representation in every possible policy making forum.

The next steps include producing two longer-term outputs: a Green Paper aimed at policy makers at all levels and in all countries; and a joint volume of Conference Proceedings, consisting of written articles from the Vancouver meeting added to those to be presented at the TEK sessions organized by Professor Stephen Wyatt at IUFRO's World Congress that will take place in Curitiba, Brazil, from 29 September to 5 October 2019.

The three-day conference was organized by Janette Bulkan (Associate Professor of Indigenous Forestry and Deputy Coordinator of the IUFRO 9.03.04) and twelve graduate students of the University of British Columbia (UBC) on behalf of two IUFRO Working Parties:

9.03.04 – *Traditional forest knowledge in temperate and boreal regions* <https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-9/90000/90300/90304/>

9.03.05 – *Traditional forest knowledge in tropical and sub-tropical regions* <https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-9/90000/90300/90305/>

Professor Youn Yeo-Chang, Coordinator of IUFRO 9.03.05 participated in the Conference and presented a well-received paper on village groves in Namwon, Korea. Professor Cecil Konijnendijk, UBC professor of urban forestry and incoming Coordinator of IUFRO's Division 6 on the social aspects of forestry, delivered introductory remarks on the mission of IUFRO and the relevance of this conference to that work.

A major objective of the meeting was to give all participants some practice in building sincere and equitable relationships, in which the traditional knowledge, perspectives, and authority of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) are as valued as scientific data gathering and interpretation techniques. This was achieved through an initial day of relationship building among all participants and on the following two days interactive workshops, panel presentations and discussions, excursions to UBC's Museum of Anthropology and xwcicəsəm Garden (Indigenous health research and education garden) and an informative walk around the fruiting berry bushes and plants adjoining UBC's Faculty of Forestry.

Two common threads in the presentations and discussions during the course of the conference were: the equal validity of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems, and the urgent need to collaborate with the holders of traditional ecological knowledge to safeguard the planet's remaining biocultural diversity.