

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

This book examines the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and how it can provide models for a time-tested form of sustainability needed in the world today. The essays, written by a team of scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, explore TEK through compelling cases of environmental sustainability from multiple tribal and geographic locations in North America and beyond. Addressing the philosophical issues concerning Indigenous and ecological knowledge production and maintenance, the authors focus on how environmental values and ethics are applied to the uses of land. Grounded in an understanding of the profound relationship between biological and cultural diversity, this book defines, interrogates, and problematizes the many definitions of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and sustainability. It includes a holistic and broad disciplinary approach to sustainability, including language, art, and ceremony, as critical ways to maintain healthy human–environment relations.

Melissa K. Nelson is an ecologist and indigenous scholar-activist. She is a professor of American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University. Since 1993, she has also served as the president of the Cultural Conservancy. She is the editor of *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future* (2008) and is an active media maker, having produced several documentary short films and audio recordings.

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Preface

In our own ways, we have both been studying, teaching, and working to foster an appreciation of the cultural dimensions of humankind's relationship to the natural world. Melissa teaches American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University, has directed the Cultural Conservancy for more than two decades, and she has been a long-time contributor to Bioneers and the Indigenous food movement. All these roles offer opportunities to explore the human–nature accord through Indigenous points of view. As executive director of the Arizona Humanities Council, Dan developed noteworthy state and regional public projects that examined the historical, artistic, and ethical dimensions of the West's majestic landscapes, threatened waters, and land-based economies.

So when anthropologist Norman Yoffee suggested that we collaborate on a research and publication project on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), a topic that touches on most of our interests, we leapt at the chance to bring this volume to conclusion.

We thank Norm for starting the dialogue, and Christopher Boone at Arizona State University's Global Institute of Sustainability (GIOS) for underwriting and nurturing the research that led to this publication. The seeds were planted during a three-day seminar at the Amerind Museum in Dragoon, Arizona (Figure 1), where, thanks to GIOS's support and Amerind's generosity, we were able to bring together most of the authors presented here for deep, extended, and engaging conversations about Traditional Ecological Knowledge and its role today in education, land management, conservation programs, public policy, and sustainability studies.

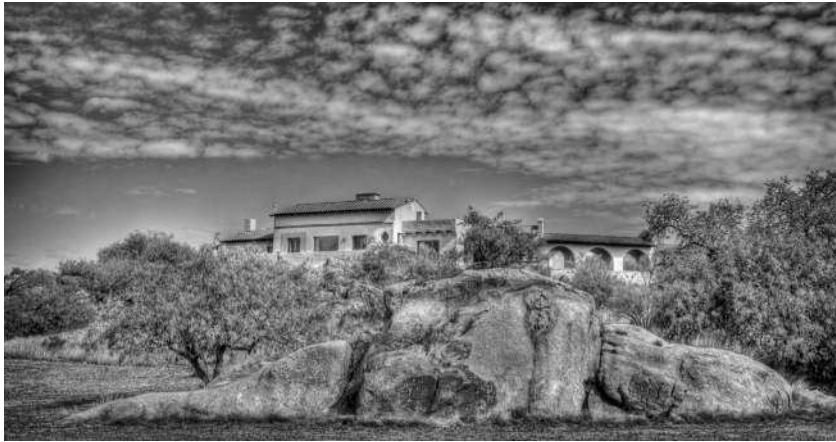


FIGURE 1 Amerind Museum and Research Center, Dragoon, Arizona, where the authors met for a seminar in 2013. (Photo used with permission of Amerind Museum.)

Other books and monographs survey the terrain covered in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental Sustainability*, although this collection is significant in that it includes the voices of leading *Indigenous* scholars and activists, who discuss this mixture of Native knowledge and western science in the classroom and the field, and who also contribute to community programs that incorporate the principles outlined here. All are teachers in their own way, introducing life-affirming ways to an engaged generation of educators, land managers, park rangers, tribal officials, researchers, government employees, farmers, ranchers, tourism directors, and other culture- and nature-based economies.

Given the number of tribal nations in North America alone, not to mention the many bands and clans *within* tribal nations, we realize a full survey of Indigenous attitudes toward the land, even on this one continent, is not possible. A broad hemispheric study would be even more challenging at this point. So while this volume does touch on the Māori and other world cultures, North America is the focus. Admittedly, it is a regional approach, but the path these authors have started down will certainly widen, inviting more voices and more perspectives, as TEK's influence continues to grow.