

Introductory Remarks from the National Aboriginal Forestry Association

Harry M. Bombay¹

On behalf of the National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA), I have appreciated the opportunity to be part of the planning committee for this conference. As an invited speaker, I'd like to pay particular respect to the Anishinabeg people of the Treaty #3 area as it is in their traditional territory where we have chosen to discuss the matter of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Considering the importance of the topic, the presence of Elder Clifford Skead is acknowledged and appreciated. As I am a member of the Rainy River First Nation, located about 150 km south of Kenora, this conference and the trip here provide me with an opportunity to visit with my home community and to renew some old friendships.

Although I grew up eating wild rice, bannock, berries, fish, rabbit, and other wild game from the forests of this region, my current lifestyle is not a good example of how to preserve the traditions of my people. I work in Ottawa. As Executive Director of NAFA, my diet consists of meetings, national forest policy processes, multi-stakeholder fora, and travel to workshops and conferences—lots of them.

The objective of NAFA is to promote and support increased Aboriginal involvement in forest management and related commercial opportunities. In pursuit of this goal, NAFA is committed to multiple use forestry that, from the Aboriginal perspective, implies a different weighting of values; that is, a stronger leaning towards non-timber values. Tribal Chief Sandy last night spoke of the need for sustainability not only in general, but also within the forest industry in Ontario, which has continually neglected the needs of Aboriginal communities. He noted a greater congruence in philosophy

between Aboriginal peoples and those promoting the development of NTFPs.

In the past few years, NAFA has been more active in encouraging Aboriginal communities to develop forest-based businesses with a focus on NTFPs. Recently we were involved in a study of NTFP potential with the North Shore Tribal Council. In our work, we have noted the growth in demand generated by consumer preference for natural products in areas such as alternative health care, specialty foods, and interior decor. Although Indigenous peoples throughout the world are not considered a significant market segment, we have had a preference for these natural products for hundreds of years.

Aboriginal people in Canada, because of the location of our communities and the knowledge our people possess about the properties of numerous plants and herbs, have a unique advantage in establishing commercial businesses based on NTFPs. Notwithstanding the issues that surround intellectual property rights and the lack of appropriate mechanisms to protect traditional ecological knowledge, Aboriginal communities should be assessing NTFP potential in their traditional territories. My rationale for this suggestion is fourfold:

1. If Aboriginal people don't do it, someone else will.
2. Most NTFP development does not require the disclosure of traditional ecological knowledge.
3. NTFP harvesting and production should be viewed as a traditional land use activity and therefore a means by which our Aboriginal and Treaty rights within traditional territories can be further substantiated.
4. Producing NTFPs is a means of retaining traditional knowledge, thereby strengthening our cultures within a contemporary context.

A further benefit is that we contribute to biodiversity preservation, provided there are management practices that ensure sustainability over time.

¹ *Executive Director, National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA), 875 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1S 3W4; Phone: 613-233-5563; Fax: 613-233-4329; e-mail: nafa@web.net; Internet: <http://www.nafaforestry.org>.*



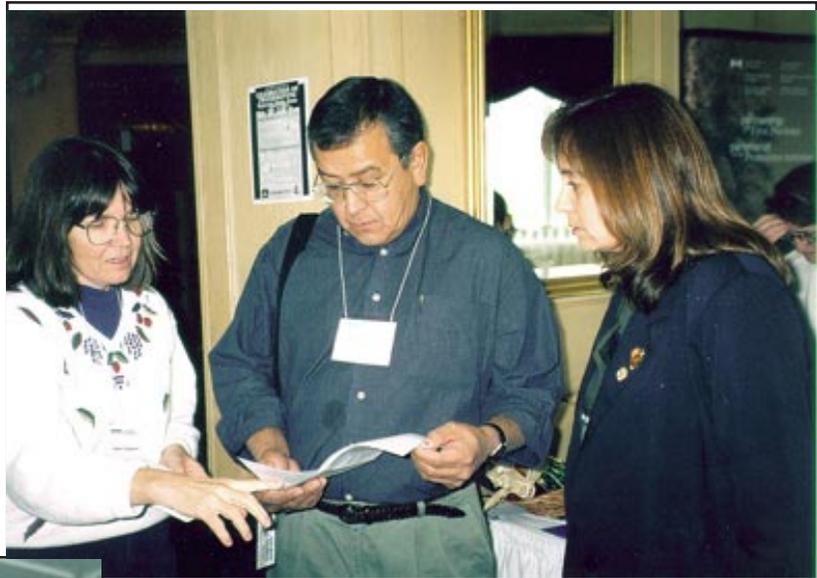
Another matter I would like to discuss is food security, which was raised last night by Paul Vantomme of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). He pointed out that one group of Indigenous people in Africa, the Pygmies, have to compete with logging companies for a fruit from a certain type of tree, which is part of their daily food intake. Other Indigenous peoples have the same problem. In South America, the Mapuche people depend on a pine nut as a basic food staple, although both government and industry have only seen the value of the timber from this particular species of pine. Other resource use conflicts are less direct, such as the inadequate attention given to the effects of timber harvesting on NTFP production, which is presently not adequately provided for within timber management plans.

The point I'd like to make here is one of sustainability. From the perspective of NAFA, development is not sustainable unless it sustains the forest use of Indigenous peoples. Sustainable forest management is directly related to the food security of Indigenous peoples. Foods from the forest are NTFPs. Indigenous peoples should not have to compete for foods that they have used for centuries and that are essential to their survival.

Materials from the forest have been, and will continue to be, extremely important to Aboriginal people. My father was a hunter, a trapper, a guide for tourist operations, and occasionally a logger. However, I don't recall my mother ever asking him, upon his return from the trap line, if he was bringing home any NTFPs. Times are changing. Aboriginal communities need economic opportunities compatible with their values. The production of NTFPs holds considerable promise. The challenge on our part is for us, as Indigenous peoples, to become more market-oriented in what we produce. As well, we have to work collectively to address issues pertaining to intellectual property rights and look at how traditional knowledge can be shared for our mutual benefit. Intellectual property rights regimes that protect traditional knowledge, as well as ensure that Indigenous peoples benefit from its use, are a fundamental element of sustainable forest management.

These are some of the issues that underlie the advancement of non-timber forest products and that are of importance to Aboriginal people in Canada. Thank you for the opportunity to raise them here.

► *Karen Chapeskie (left), Taiga Institute, discusses the conference agenda with Harry Bombay (center), and Janet Pronovost (right), National Aboriginal Forestry Association. (Photo courtesy Bobbie Harrington)*



▼ *A group of conference goers, part of the Sweat Lodge teachings field trip, warm their hands over the fire at Iskatewizaagegan #39 Independent First Nation in Shoal Lake, Ontario. From Left to right Dave Downing, Timberline Forest Consultants; John Lavois, Manitouwadge, Ontario; Trish Flaster, Botanical Liaisons; Pat Rasmussen, Counterpart International; Brian Walmark, Megwekob; Maureen McIlwrick, Canadian Forest Service; Edgar Lavois, Greenstone Economic Development Corporation; and Dale Hutchinson, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (Photo courtesy Bobbie Harrington)*

▲ *Stuart Hill, God's Lake First Nation, talks to the group about traditional ecological knowledge and intellectual property rights. (Photo courtesy Bobbie Harrington)*

