

West Carleton EMC: Algonquins help bring back the American eel

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The Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) are using the traditional Aboriginal knowledge to help in the efforts to stop the decline in eel populations in the Ottawa and other regional rivers.

While to some the eel is an unimportant inhabitant of the river, to the Algonquins they are a sacred and inspirational creature.

In a news release last week, the Algonquins announced the release of two important reports that they say will serve to bridge the gap between scientific and Aboriginal knowledge of Pimisi, the American eel.

The traditional knowledge reports build upon the AOO's landmark report 'Returning Kichissippi Pimisi, the American Eel, to the Ottawa River Basin', released in December 2012. Pimisi means "eel" in the language of the Algonquin people, explains the AOO release.

"Since time immemorial, Algonquins have held a deep connection to Pimisi as a sacred creature and provider of nourishment, medicine and spiritual inspiration. The Algonquins consider the eel to be a model of strength and adaptability, living in harmony with its surroundings."

Although once abundant throughout Algonquin Traditional Territory, Pimisi has suffered "dramatic population declines in recent history and is disappearing from our waters," says the Algonquins. Today, there are only a remnant population left in Ontario.

Deeply concerned about Pimisi's sharp decline, the AOO are working with governments, private proponents and conservation organizations to build upon existing knowledge and to enhance protection and recovery efforts for the American eel.

They say the initiatives demonstrate the value of adopting a collaborative, partner-based approach to tackle complex issues, such as the restoration of Pimisi to its traditional habitat.

The first Traditional Knowledge report released last week focuses on returning the American Eel to the Ottawa River Basin. In 2012, the AOO entered into a partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF) to participate in the Ottawa River American Eel Project.

In the first year of the partnership, the AOO and the CWF engaged a research assistant to participate in the ongoing study of Pimisi in the vicinity of Lac des Chats. In addition to the scientific research conducted in the field, the research assistant also worked to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and cultural heritage through the collection of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) of Pimisi.

The collection of ATK speaks to the significant decline of the American eel while also serving to strengthen the connection between the Algonquin

people and their traditions and ancestors.

The second report explores Algonquin and Aboriginal relationships with the American eel and focuses on the South Nation area. The

report will support, assist and complement science-based eel recovery strategies.

For more information, visit www.tanakiwin.com.