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Cultural importance of white pine (*Pinus strobus* L.) to the Kitcisakik Algonquin community of western Quebec, Canada

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Abstract: Trees and forests have always played a significant role in the cultural and spiritual lives of societies. Understanding the cultural importance of tree species is necessary to develop socially acceptable forest management and restoration strategies. White pine (*Pinus strobus* L.) used to be abundant in northeastern North America, including on the ancestral territory of the Kitcisakik Algonquin community (western Quebec, Canada). The community is calling for restoration and sustainable management of white pine on their ancestral territory. As a first step towards this goal, key informant interviews were used to document the cultural importance of white pine to the Kitcisakik community. White pine was perceived as an important component of traditional life, providing several goods and services. White pine is featured in legends, is used as a medicine, provides habitat for flagship wildlife species, and is a prominent part of cultural landscapes. White pine is a cultural keystone species for the Kitcisakik Algonquin community. Local people point to extensive logging as the reason behind white pine decline on the ancestral territory. They suggest that mixed plantations should be used in a culturally adapted restoration strategy.

Résumé : Les arbres et les forêts ont toujours joué un rôle important dans la culture et la spiritualité des sociétés. La compréhension de l'importance culturelle des espèces arborescentes est nécessaire pour développer des stratégies de restauration et d'aménagement socialement acceptables. Le pin blanc (*Pinus strobus* L.) était autrefois plus abondant dans les forêts du nord-est de l'Amérique du Nord, notamment sur le territoire ancestral de la communauté algonquine de Kitcisakik (Québec, Canada). La communauté revendique la restauration et l'aménagement durable du pin blanc sur son territoire ancestral. Un premier pas vers cet objectif a été franchi en réalisant des entrevues avec des informateurs clés de la communauté afin de documenter l'importance culturelle de l'espèce. Le pin blanc était perçu comme une composante importante de la vie traditionnelle, fournissant de nombreux biens et services. L'espèce figure dans des légendes, est utilisée comme plante médicinale, procure de l'habitat à des espèces fauniques d'intérêt, et est une constituante importante des paysages culturels. Le pin blanc est une espèce culturelle clé de la communauté algonquine de Kitcisakik. Les gens de la communauté ont identifié la surexploitation des forêts de pin blanc comme raison principale du déclin de l'espèce sur leur territoire ancestral. Ils ont suggéré que des plantations mixtes pourraient être utilisées dans une stratégie de restauration culturellement adaptée.

Introduction

Trees and forests have considerable cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance for people around the world (Dudley et al. 2005; Trigger and Mulcock 2005). They provide goods and services that benefit society in various ways. It is sometimes forests, as part of cultural landscapes, or often specific tree species that are deeply ingrained in the cultures and beliefs of societies. However, the ways in which societies benefit from trees differ widely, as patterns of resource use are shaped by the values, priorities, perceptions, and expectations of each cultural group. For example, aboriginal communities living in or close to forested areas view their surrounding landscape as a cultural entity (Berkes and Davidson-Hunt 2006; Ramakrishnan 2007). Forests are sacred for them and considered an integral part of their collective identity and culture (Young 1999). Many native trees have long held special significance to society — partly valued as economic resources, but also as sources of inspiration, symbols of place, and metaphors for life (Trigger and Mulcock 2005; Turner et al. 2009). The banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis* L.) in Nepal, the baobab (*Adansonia* spp.) in Madagascar, and the monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana* (Molina) K. Koch) in Chile are examples of such culturally important tree species (Dudley et al. 2005).

Garibaldi and Turner (2004) were among the first to coin the term “cultural keystone species” while referring to the importance of western red-cedar (*Thuja plicata* Donn ex D. Don) to Northwest Coast cultures. Species that have fundamental roles in diet, production of material goods, medicine, and (or) spiritual practices and beliefs can be designated as cultural keystone species (Garibaldi and Turner 2004). According to Platten and Henfrey (2009), cultural keystone species are essential to maintaining the complexity of social-ecological systems. The cultural keystone species concept provides a framework for assessing the impacts of environmental change on a particular group of people and their way of life (Garibaldi and Turner 2004). As such, it is a useful tool for ecological conservation and restoration.

Forest managers understand the economic and environmental importance of trees, but they seldom grasp their cultural and symbolic significance and the traditions that surround them (Schroeder 1992; McDonough 2003). However, in recent years, evolving forest management policies have moved to incorporate social and aboriginal values (UN 2007; Trostler and Parrotta 2012). There is indeed a pervasive public support for new approaches of sustainable forest management that significantly involve public input and meaningfully manage forests for multiple values (Robinson and Hawley 1997). In this context, managing forests

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