

Renfrew Mercury: Bridging the gap between scientific and Aboriginal traditional knowledge of Pimisi - the American eel

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The Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) announce the release of two reports which serve to bridge the gap between scientific and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) of Pimisi, the American eel.

These 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.

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.

Today, we are left with only a remnant population 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.

These 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 throughout Algonquin Traditional Territory.

REPORT: VOLUME 1 The first Traditional Knowledge report is entitled Returning Kichissippi Pimisi, the American Eel, to the Ottawa River Basin: Bridging the Gap between Scientific and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge. 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 this 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 on the Ottawa River.

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 of Pimisi.

This collection of ATK speaks to the significant decline of the American eel while also serving to strengthen the connection between the Algonquin people, our traditions and our ancestors.

REPORT: VOLUME 2 The second Traditional Knowledge report is entitled Bridging the Gap between Scientific and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge: Exploring Algonquin and Aboriginal relationships with the American eel.

Under Canada's 2013-2014 Aboriginal Funds for Species at Risk, the AOO partnered with South Nation Conservation Area (SNC) on the SNC's American Eel Project. As a component of the American Eel Project, the AOO collected ATK of Pimisi and also compiled existing information from various sources in order to

report on the Algonquin and other Aboriginal peoples' cultural connections with the American eel within and beyond the political boundaries of Ontario. The collection of ATK is vital to eel recovery science.

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

RETURNING PIMISI TO TRADITIONAL HABITAT IN ALGONQUIN TRADITIONAL TERRITORY The importance of the American eel to the Algonquin people cannot be overstated and as such, returning Pimisi to its home in Algonquin Traditional Territory must involve the Algonquins of Ontario.

It is vital to the AOO that viable populations of the

American Eel be restored to its historical range in Ontario and specifically to traditional waters throughout the Ottawa River Basin, including the traditional waters of the Mississippi, Bonnechere, Petawawa, Mattawa, Madawaska and South Nation Rivers and other tributaries.

Pimisi was there for the Algonquin people and their ancestors in the Ottawa Valley for centuries, and more recently, was there for European settlers, providing economic, material sustenance and medicines.

The AOO are determined to be the voice of the eel in mankind's efforts to ensure the survival of the species.

Electronic versions of both reports are available at www.tanakiwin.com/kichisippipimisi.