ACR Aboriginal Programs Project Program Template

Program Area: 5.0 Resource Stewardship

Sub Program: 5.1 Strengthening the Knowledge Base

Template: 5.1.2 Best Practices Handbook for Traditional Use Studies

Sponsor(s): Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Alberta

Energy, Western Economic Diversification Canada

1. Objective

To provide a best practices handbook that can guide companies and other parties interested in undertaking traditional use studies in Alberta.

2. Description

The rapid expansion of resource development activities across Alberta and the associated land disturbance creates potential conflicts with traditional use by Aboriginal communities. This led to the development of a best practices handbook that is intended to provide useful information to anyone who wants to learn about conducting traditional use studies. The best practices identified in this handbook are based on interviews with people, communities and organizations in Alberta that have been involved in traditional use studies.

The handbook uses the term "traditional use study" to mean a project that is designed to capture and record patterns of traditional use by Aboriginal communities. Three main types of data collection characterize a traditional use study:

- Interviews and discussions with elders and custodians of knowledge
- ➤ Historical and other types of research
- Mapping and recording of traditional uses, including sites and activities

Although traditional use studies are community-specific, they share some similar components. The type of traditional use study described in this handbook typically has three phases. Each phase has several steps or activities – from the start-up stage, where the need for a study is identified, through to completing the study. The phases are:

Phase 1 - Plan the traditional use study

- Identify the need for a traditional use study
- > Determine who will be responsible for the study
- Inform the community and develop community support for the study
- Decide how the traditional use study will be managed
- > Develop a budget, identify project supporters and obtain funding

Phase 2 - Conduct the traditional use study

- > Select and train interviewers, researchers and mapping technicians
- Inform elders and custodians of knowledge about the study
- > Conduct the interviews and undertake research
- Map the information obtained through the interviews
- Utilize databases

Phase 3 - Use the traditional use study

- > Establish the value of the study
- Share information with appropriate stakeholders
- > Apply results to activities of interest to the community
- Create a living document that can be frequently updated

Traditional use studies have evolved to reflect community control of the study and have emphasized training Aboriginal people to undertake all aspects of the study. Additionally, some communities are undertaking a series of smaller individual studies conducted over a longer period of time. In this way, a community can do a phased traditional use study and focus on areas of immediate interest.

3. Implementation

Some of the key elements for implementation and management of this program are:

- Once the need for a traditional use study has been determined, the Aboriginal community should decide who will have overall responsibility for the project. The support and guidance of community leadership is key for access to elders and custodians of knowledge and will help to maintain momentum over the extended time period typical of a traditional use study.
- A trend with recent studies is the intent to use the results of the study to create sustainable long-term benefits. For example: initiating a plan for using the information to ensure balanced and sustainable economic development; using the data as part of an industry referral process; and monitoring change and measuring the capacity of the land to sustain traditional use.
- > Traditional use study information can be put into a geographic information system (GIS) program, in layers, to be easily accessed and used in the resource development and referrals process.
- Aboriginal communities are often reluctant to share traditional use information within the community and with external groups. As a result, it is important that information-sharing be guided by an agreed-upon protocol that is explicit about intellectual property, ownership and control.
- Aboriginal communities often identify a difference between information that can be made publicly available and other information that needs to be kept confidential because it is protected by elders and custodians of knowledge. This could include medicinal plant

sites, and productive berry and hunting areas. Confidentiality can be managed by strategies such as using buffer zones around sensitive sites, having protocols on information-sharing, using access control procedures, and mapping landscape capacity or habitats rather than specific activities or sites.

The traditional use study should be fully funded to meet expectations. In most cases, partnerships have been developed to help with the costs. If the community leads the study, funding a portion of the project can help attract other funding sources and demonstrate the community's commitment to the project. Where studies are industry-initiated, communities often feel they should not be expected to contribute money as the knowledge they have is a valuable asset and should be considered a valuable contribution.

4. Timeframe for Results

The handbook presents what have been found to be the best practices at this time (2003). The process for doing a traditional use study continues to evolve as knowledge and experience are gained.

5. Measurable Criteria

Resource developers in Alberta may voluntarily undertake, or be required to undertake, traditional use studies in connection with projects and activities on Crown land. Such studies can provide a useful planning tool for industry in avoiding or mitigating impacts on traditional use sites and activities, and helping build positive relationships with Aboriginal communities.

For Aboriginal communities, traditional use studies provide a mechanism for providing input into managing natural resources, educating industry about Aboriginal dependence on the land and resources, and serving as a community development tool by giving the community an understanding of its unique history.

6. Budget

Costs of a traditional use study are dependent on the area of land, the number of people and communities involved, and the amount of time and effort required to collect the data. The costs for studies conducted in Alberta have generally ranged from \$100,000 to \$160,000.

7. Partners and Sponsors

The handbook was developed through a project sponsored and funded by Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Alberta Energy and Western Economic Diversification Canada under the Western Economic Partnership Agreement. Aboriginal communities in Alberta with experience in traditional use studies were invited to participate in developing this handbook.

8. Experience with the Program

The handbook was published in 2003. It appears that the first traditional use study undertaken in Alberta was completed in 1982, with several more studies initiated in the early 1990s. To date, approximately 39 Aboriginal communities in Alberta have undertaken some type of traditional use study.

9. General Applicability

This handbook is applicable to all industries active on Crown or reserve lands in Alberta where the need for a traditional use study has been determined.

10. Additional Information or Support

This publication is available at no charge from:

Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 19th Floor, Commerce Place, 10155 - 102nd Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4G8

An electronic version is available at www.aand.gov.ab.ca

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