

### 3) Environmental Justice and Cultural History

*"A condition of environmental justice exists when environmental risks and hazards and investments and benefits are equally distributed without direct or indirect discrimination at all jurisdictional levels and when access to environmental investments, benefits, and natural resources are equally distributed; and when access to information, participation in decision making, and access to justice in environment-related matters are enjoyed by all."*

*--- Central and Eastern European Workshop on Environmental Justice (Budapest, December 2003)*

*A long history of colonialism and social inequity in the Arctic has left northern indigenous peoples highly vulnerable to environmental damage. This form of human rights abuse is one of selective victimization in which Native groups are deprived of critical resources and a healthy environment while others remain free to live in a healthy setting. From <http://arcticcircle.uconn.edu/SEEJ/>*

Environmental education has traditionally focused on natural resources and wildlife and how people manage their behavior to sustain healthy ecosystems. Environmental justice brings into view those conditions, processes and structures that expose some communities to environment-related risks and hazards more than others. The cultural history of a society is the shared ideas, identities, and collective expressions of a cultural group. Environment and culture are closely interconnected and changes to one affect the other.

In this strand, we examine the intersections between environmental education, culture and the right of all peoples to a healthy environment. Environmental decision-making involves economic investments that have long-term impacts on society. Low income communities and communities of color tend to be disproportionately impacted drawing attention to the creation of EJ assistance programs. Communities involved in EJ programs are specially invited to share their stories. In this strand, we want to explore new concepts, alliances, and strategies that can cut through the socioeconomic and political realities that can move us in new directions. We are seeking presentations that address these questions:

What is the connection between environmental justice, poverty and cultural history?

How do we address inequitable risk exposures in waste, air quality, and water quality issues?

How have historical cultivation practices in areas such as tobacco, vegetables, orchard crops, fishing, and crabbing etc. affected the environment and the communities involved as they make their living using natural resources?

How are environmental changes affecting cultures around the world (for example, global climate change and the ability of Inuit to access fishing areas due to the lack of ice)? What consequences do such changes have for cultural groups? Why is this important?

How can we draw inspiration from our ancestral heritages in working for environmental justice?

What programs model effective approaches to working with and educating low income communities and/or communities of color that successfully improve the health of the people and the health of the environment?

What skills and knowledge do environmental educators need to create a better understanding of environmental justice issues so that they are incorporated into EE programs? How can NAAEE and environmental organizations help build these skills and knowledge?

Is environmental justice a fundamental human right?

What strategies are needed to raise the consciousness of and engage the EE community, and all sectors of society that frame our thinking e.g. the media, business, religion, politics, education, family, to become more responsive to environmental justice in the decision-making process and ensure a healthy environment for all people?

What is the role of environmental education in ensuring equal access to environmental investments, benefits, resources, information and power?

Are there present-day cultures where culture and environment fortify each other e.g. in the cultural tourism industry or the sustainability movement, etc, that we can learn from?

To what extent can EJ and EE offer an innovative approach empowering youth of color to achieve academic success?