

Partnerships

CHAPTER ONE:



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People & Partnerships Are the Foundation

Humans play a critical role in habitat sustainability. We are embedded within landscapes and are dependent on healthy ecosystem elements—air, soil, water, plants, and animals—and the functions they provide. We cannot separate humans from the environment, yet we often try. Local and traditional knowledge, science, planning, communications, relationships, and passion for the work the IWJV does must all be applied through a lens of relevance to people: human interactions intertwined with the landscape.

The IWJV's existence is based on recognizing the importance of people and partnerships. The people who comprise our partnership have grown into a vast network across the western landscape and the broader United States. Our partners approach landscape health differently depending on their roles and motivations on the landscape, but the end goals are similar: a healthy system that provides for all.

The IWJV prioritizes an approach that integrates people and landscape. A challenge that can traditionally affect habitat efforts is that lines are drawn across cultural, disciplinary, and institutional divisions. Efforts are siloed for numerous reasons, such as agency and program structures, thus creating arbitrary and inconsistent methods of tracking progress and marking successes. These metrics often lack the nuance to capture ecological, socioeconomic, and institutional complexities and, thus, the true impacts on habitat within a system¹.

Our understanding of landscape and ecological, socioeconomic, and institutional systems in which our work is placed continues to evolve. Our thinking and approach to habitat conservation explores the complex nature of these systems. Our collaborative, integrative, place-based approach allows us to sustain habitat for multiple purposes and benefit ecosystems and their human and non-human inhabitants.



¹ [Who gets harmed as the Colorado River changes?](#)



Many Forms of Knowledge

IWJV supports empowering partners in place-based decision-making that is informed by a suite of knowledge types (Box 1) to inform conservation. Many types of knowledge generated through different processes are valid and robust, including Indigenous Knowledge, local knowledge, and western science. One way of knowing is not inherently better than another, and there are temporal, spatial, and topical strengths and gaps in all forms of knowing. We believe that using a wide variety of sources of knowledge and expertise can improve conservation efforts and facilitate participation and ownership from many different people and perspectives.

Broadening knowledge sources expands the scope of information and values that can inform actions on the ground². Indigenous Knowledge provides information related to species, places, and processes important to Tribes and relevant to the function of ecological systems^{3,4}. In many fields, the temporal scale of Indigenous Knowledge greatly exceeds that of western science, which is generally limited to the last century. Additionally, Indigenous Knowledge provides a framework for incorporating human values into ecological problem-solving, as ecological knowledge is inseparable from culture, language, and survival⁵. In addition to Indigenous Knowledge, local knowledge and expertise held by people such as farmers, ranchers, natural resource specialists, and hunters, who have long histories of living in, working on, or using the lands, can provide place-based knowledge.

It is imperative to acknowledge that appropriate engagement with Indigenous Knowledge differs from engagement with western science. Indigenous Knowledge must be used with permission in relationship with Indigenous Peoples through a process that is participatory and inclusive, not extractive and appropriative. Mutually beneficial partnerships that are centered in place, respect Tribal and Indigenous sovereignty and land rights, protect Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous People, and acknowledge historical context and injustice are one model for integrating Indigenous Knowledge with decision-making⁶.

Engaging with Indigenous Knowledge has the potential to bring new voices and perspectives to conservation and address past inequities, but this work must be intentional to prevent harm to Indigenous People and loss of Indigenous Knowledge⁷.

To be successful, we must understand and integrate the many forms of knowledge and the role of people in establishing our habitat priorities. This requires a holistic approach that lends itself to sustainable outcomes for those who are part of the landscape: past, present, and future.



² [Wall-Kimmerer 2002](#)

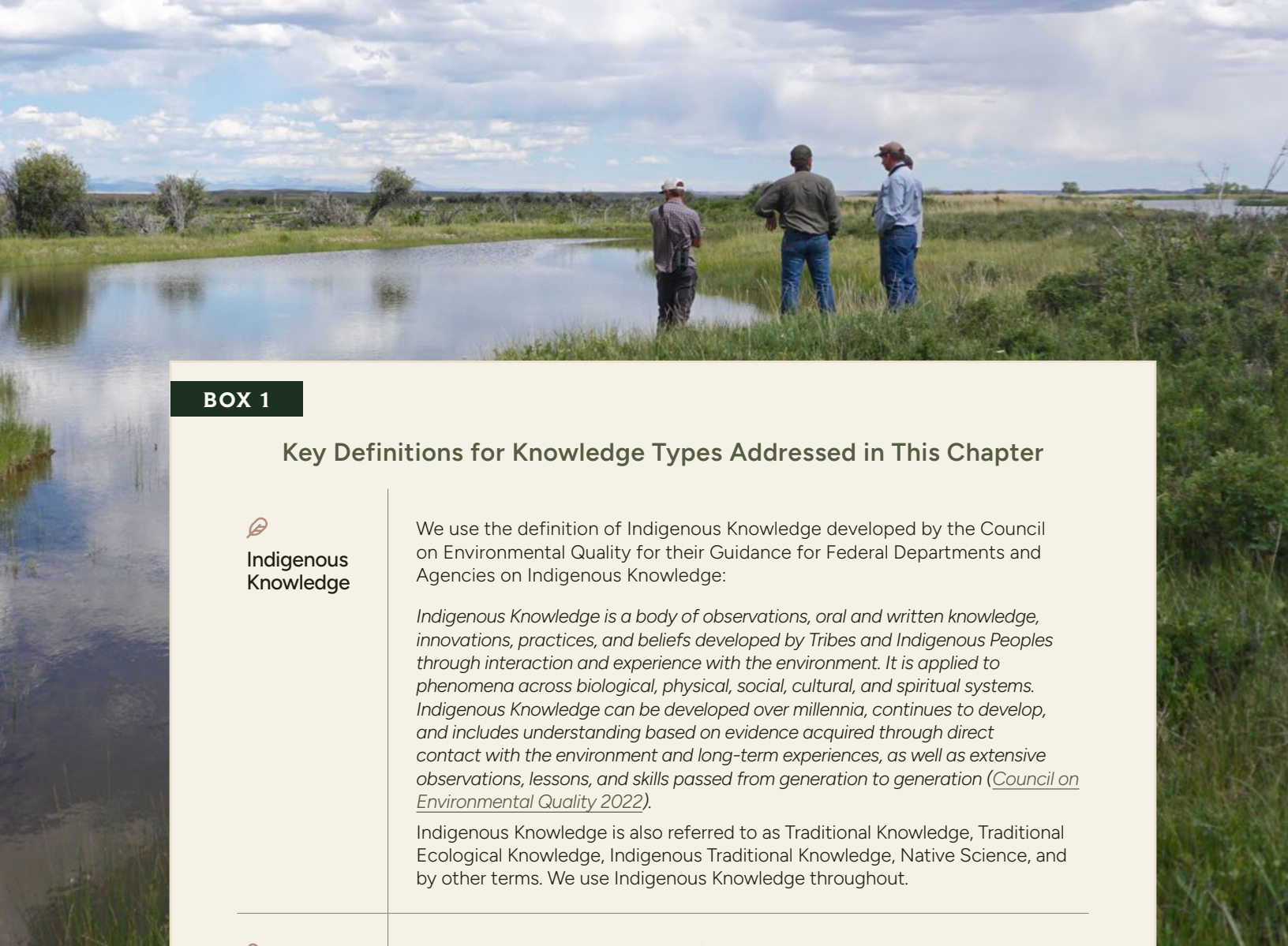
³ [Wall-Kimmerer 2002](#), [Lake et al. 2017](#), [Long et al. 2023](#)

⁴ [Hessami et al. 2021](#)

⁵ [Wall-Kimmerer 2002](#)

⁶ [Kūlana Noi'i Working Group 2021](#), [Council on Environmental Quality 2022](#)

⁷ [First Archivist Circle 2007](#), [Council on Environmental Quality 2022](#)



BOX 1

Key Definitions for Knowledge Types Addressed in This Chapter



Indigenous Knowledge

We use the definition of Indigenous Knowledge developed by the Council on Environmental Quality for their Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge:

Indigenous Knowledge is a body of observations, oral and written knowledge, innovations, practices, and beliefs developed by Tribes and Indigenous Peoples through interaction and experience with the environment. It is applied to phenomena across biological, physical, social, cultural, and spiritual systems. Indigenous Knowledge can be developed over millennia, continues to develop, and includes understanding based on evidence acquired through direct contact with the environment and long-term experiences, as well as extensive observations, lessons, and skills passed from generation to generation ([Council on Environmental Quality 2022](#)).

Indigenous Knowledge is also referred to as Traditional Knowledge, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, Native Science, and by other terms. We use Indigenous Knowledge throughout.



Local Knowledge

People who have long histories of living on, using, or working in a landscape and interacting with the natural world. We use the Food and Agricultural Organization's definition of local knowledge:

Local knowledge is the knowledge that people in a given community have developed over time, and continue to develop. It is: Based on experience, often tested over centuries of use, adapted to the local culture and environment, embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals, held by individuals or communities, dynamic and changing



Western Science

We use the definition of western science from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services:

Western science is... knowledge typically generated in universities, research institutions and private firms following paradigms and methods typically associated with the "scientific method" consolidated in Post-Renaissance Europe on the basis of wider and more ancient roots. It is typically transmitted through scientific journals and scholarly books. Some of its central tenets are observer independence, replicable findings, systematic skepticism, and transparent research methodologies with standard units and categories ([IPBES](#)).



Foundational Partnership Structures

The foundation of the IWJV is a strong and diverse network of people. Our partnership process supports collaborating to balance diverse human interests, functional habitat, and the conservation and management of wildlife. We strive to be relevant by creating forums to bring people together and building a shared vision for conservation by:

- **Supporting partnership-driven conservation** through collaboratives that bring different perspectives together to achieve informed, landscape-scale conservation.
- **Investing in capacity building** through partnerships with established trust and credibility.
- **Engaging agricultural producers** as foundational implementers in conserving valuable working lands that support climate resilience, provide habitat for fish and wildlife, deliver an array of ecosystem services, and support rural economies.
- **Focusing on solutions with multiple benefits** through a broad set of conservation tools.
- **Strengthening voluntary, partnership-driven conservation programs** via the increased capacity to deliver funding, matching significant interest from other agencies and partners in working lands conservation.
- **Ensuring federal funding reaches local communities** and allows local people to develop innovative solutions for voluntary, proactive conservation at scale.
- **Building partnerships with research and management communities** to bridge the gap between science and implementation.
- **Working with programs and initiatives to help partners apply science, amplify communications, and leverage funding** to achieve what none of us could do alone.
- **Working to expand into new partnerships** that bring additional knowledge to inform decision-making.



Looking Ahead

Our work is based on viewing people as part of the landscape and recognizing that we mean all people on the landscape. Inspiring people to care about the rural landscapes of the West is one of the biggest challenges to the future of conservation. If enough people lose connection and interest, the conservation community will lose the resources and support needed to conserve the landscapes we work in. Thus, our work must be relevant to a broader suite of the American public than wildlife and other natural resource professionals. We must partner with and hire from a wide network, expanding beyond the voices and faces traditionally included in Western wildlife habitat conservation. We will bring different perspectives, cultures, and life experiences together to learn from each other. Our work must speak to the people who may never see an antelope run through the sagebrush sea, watch hundreds of migrating birds land on a flood-irrigated field, or rest beneath the shade of an ancient ponderosa pine. As a conservation community, we must ensure that people from across the United States value sustaining ecosystems, species, and long-held ways of life into the future.

As we move forward, we will:

- **Acknowledge** the interconnectedness of systems and people within the landscape. We will evaluate how partnership efforts can lead to beneficial long-term outcomes and identify meaningful ways to share our impacts. This will include identifying new partners and sources for collaborative work.
- **Lead** outreach efforts that invite and reflect different voices both internally and public-facing. This type of communication work is everyone's responsibility and requires developing relationships that intentionally include perspectives – indigenous people, multi-generational ranch families – not traditionally given a large platform in the business of wildlife conservation.
- **Engage** with people outside the habitats we work in who greatly influence decisions that impact these lands (e.g., urban populations, legislators, policymakers, etc.). Work with these folks to develop strategies to share the importance of habitats of significance and why these should matter to people who don't live or recreate in them. Incorporate new values these groups have for the landscapes into our work.
- **Sustain** and grow a diverse and impactful IWJV Management Board by continually challenging ourselves to identify and seek out individuals who share our core values while bringing different perspectives and potentially representing new entities on the board, helping us look to the future.