

Recap of our November 2021 Program: Indigenous Ecology in the Great Lakes Region

By Lara Jackson

"Relationships and establishing them is the heart of indigenous ecology" was the theme of the November Monthly Meetings presentation, "Indigenous Ecology in the Great Lakes Region." The program was presented by Adam Kessel, who is of Lakota, Italian, and German ancestry and is the Program Coordinator – Conservation and Experimental Programs at the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) for the Southern Cook County Region.

Kessel began the presentation discussing the FPCC's Land Acknowledgment Statement, which can be viewed [here](#).

"This Land Acknowledgment recognizes the tribes that call Chicago home and continue to do work in Cook County. It also maintains a relationship with the community to acknowledge and serves as a foundation," Kessel explained.

The Acknowledgment also amplifies the indigenous community, builds partnerships to have conversations and serves as reciprocity – how we are servicing a certain community.

Kessel explained that Land Acknowledgments "...must be fluid and ready to change based on feedback from the communities you seek to acknowledge and serve."

As such, the FPCC updated its Acknowledgment in October 2021 due to a suggestion from a member of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma.

A focus of indigenous ecology is interpretation and education and our relationship with nature and the interpretation of the land which create these connections. According to Kessel, "Restoration based environmental education programs and stewardship can have mixed messaging to people new to the field."

Examples of these relationships include the Activation Site, Stewardship Days with ceremonies, and the creation of Serpent Twin Mounds at Schiller Woods and the American Indian Center partnership education grant at the Des Plaines River.

The community also needs to reevaluate its viewpoint of invasive species, such as Buckthorn. We need to rethink these lost relationships that past immigrant communities had with these plants. For example, immigrants used the Buckthorn berries to promote heart health and low blood pressure. Buckthorn was also used as a sort of corral to keep cows and other farm animals contained.

Indigenous ecology recognizes that all plants are special to native people and all are sacred and convey different stories and have a use.