

Reconnecting to the Forest: An Indigenous Perspective on Regenerative Practices in the Natural Products Industry



Nathan Wright

*Founder
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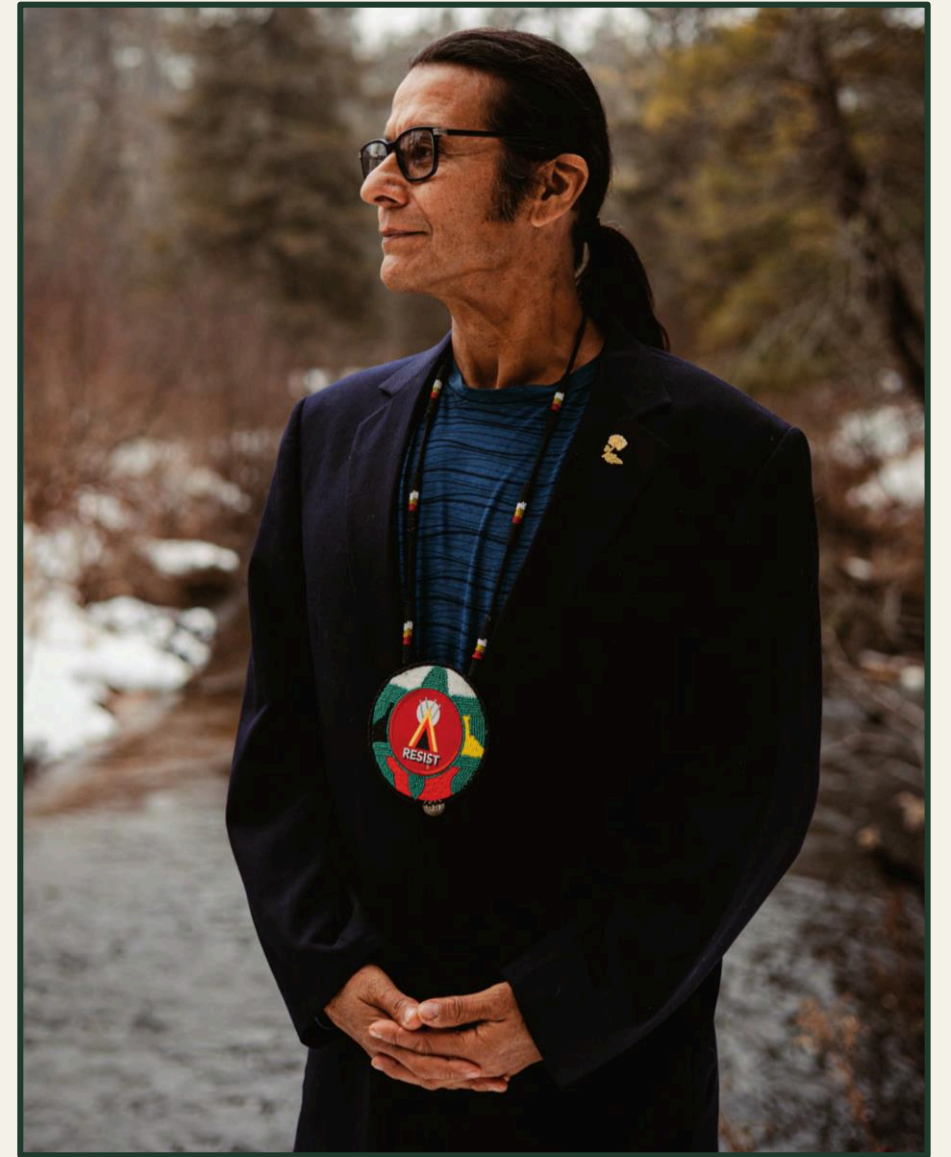
Reconnecting to the Forest: An Indigenous Perspective on Regenerative Practices in the Natural Products Industry

Nathan Wright
Herbal Lodge
Natural Products Expo

Who I Am

Nathan Wright
Getege'nini — “Man of Olden Times”

- Citizen, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
- Founder, Herbal Lodge (15+ years)
- Indigenous ecological knowledge speaker
- Sustainable wild harvesting & regenerative systems
- Based in Petoskey, Michigan



Ojibwe (Anishinaabe)

Great Lakes Nation
Plant-Centered Culture

Contributions:

- Wild rice stewardship
- Forest-based food systems
- Maple sugaring
- Medicinal plant knowledge
- Climate-adapted seasonal systems



Plant-Centered Worldview

- Midewiwin – plant-centered spiritual tradition
- Medicines as relationships, not just chemistry
- Protocols: harvest timing, offerings, intention
- Knowledge passed through generations



Purpose of the Session

- Indigenous ecological knowledge & sustainability
 - Reciprocity and responsibility to the land
 - Applying traditional insight to modern supply chains
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The Great Flood

The animals gathered in a canoe.

One by one they dove beneath the water searching for earth.

The smallest one returned.

Muskrat brought soil from the depths.

From that sacrifice, the land began again.



Where Did We Go Wrong?

Most cultures once lived in close relationship with the land.

Over time, many societies became disconnected from the ecosystems that sustain them.

When that relationship breaks, extraction replaces reciprocity.

The Scarcity Model vs. Regenerative Reality

Extractive Model

Extract → Scale → Deplete

- Growth = success
- Short-term optimization
- Price determines value
- Externalize ecological cost

Regenerative Model



- Regeneration over extraction
- Long-term ecosystem health
- Biological limits respected
- Community responsibility

The dominant economic model was designed to allocate scarcity — not to ensure abundance.

Indigenous Roots of Regenerative Agriculture

- Land stewardship developed over thousands of years
 - Agriculture based on reciprocity with nature
 - Biodiverse systems such as polyculture and agroforestry
 - Knowledge built through observation of ecosystems
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Manoomin (Wild Rice)

A regenerative harvest system
designed to renew itself

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Birchbark (Wiigwaas)

A renewable material that can be harvested without harming the tree.

Used by the Anishinaabe for canoes, homes, containers, and art.



Tobacco (Asemaa)

A sacred plant used by many Indigenous nations

- Offered before harvesting from the land
- Used to give thanks and show respect
- Represents a relationship with the natural world



Reciprocity

A core principle of many Indigenous cultures

- Humans are part of nature
 - When we take, we also give back
 - Gratitude maintains balance
 - A relationship with the land
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Practical Examples of Reciprocity

- Harvesting with respect
 - Taking only what is needed
 - Ensuring regeneration
 - Giving thanks and acknowledgment
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From Traditional Knowledge to Modern Supply Chains

From Traditional Knowledge to Modern Supply Chains

- Indigenous stewardship systems
 - Regenerative agriculture's Indigenous roots
 - Learning from traditional land management
 - Building regenerative sourcing systems
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Resilience of Nature and Ecosystems

- Biodiversity strengthens ecosystems
 - Indigenous land stewardship protects biodiversity
 - Healthy ecosystems regenerate naturally
 - Long-term observation of natural systems
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Lessons for Business

- Think in generations, not quarters
 - Build reciprocal supply relationships
 - Protect biodiversity and ecosystems
 - Respect Indigenous knowledge and communities
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Product Development and Materials

- Ingredients come from living ecosystems
 - Ethical sourcing begins with respect for the land
 - Indigenous knowledge guides sustainable harvesting
 - Quality products begin with healthy ecosystems
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Cedar (Giizhik)

- One of the four sacred medicines
- Used for protection and purification
- Plants as teachers and medicine
- Respect for the medicines of the forest



Ethics in Ingredient Sourcing

- Respect for plants and ecosystems
 - Sustainable harvesting practices
 - Protecting biodiversity
 - Respecting Indigenous knowledge
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Story of Mandaamin (Corn)

- Gift received through vision and sacrifice
- Agriculture taught through spirit guidance
- Food grown through care for the land
- Foundation of Indigenous agriculture



Indigenous Agricultural Systems

- Polyculture farming systems
- The Three Sisters: corn, beans, squash
- Biodiversity strengthens soil and ecosystems
- Agriculture based on relationship with the land



Ma'iingan (Wolf)

- Wolves and humans created as brothers
- Walking the same path in the world
- Lessons about balance and ecosystem health
- What happens to the wolf happens to us



Biodiversity and Ecosystems

- Healthy ecosystems depend on biodiversity
- Every species plays a role in balance
- Keystone species influence entire ecosystems
- Human well-being depends on ecosystem health



Connection to the Land

- Indigenous knowledge comes from relationship with place
- Observation of nature over generations
- The land teaches those who listen
- Respect and humility guide this relationship



Collaboration with Indigenous Communities

- Indigenous knowledge guides sustainable practices
 - Ethical partnerships strengthen ecosystems and communities
 - Respect for cultural knowledge and protocols
 - Shared responsibility for protecting the land
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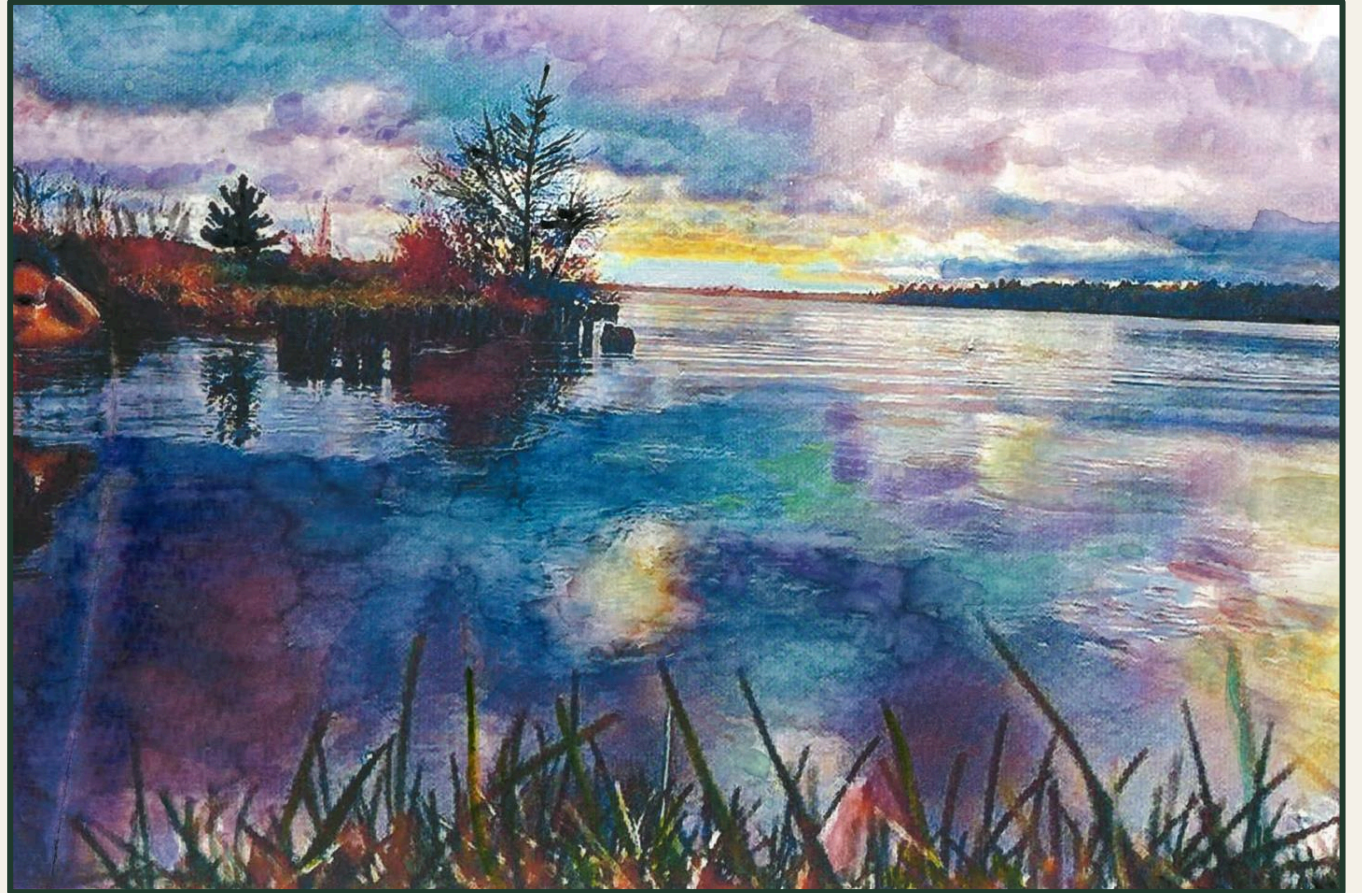
Universal Connection

- Humans are part of nature, not separate from it
- Experiences on the land become teachings
- Fear and respect both shape our relationship with nature
- Moving forward despite uncertainty



Resilience

- Training the body
- Training the mind
- Living in balance with nature







Key Takeaways

- Regeneration must guide extraction
 - Reciprocity builds resilient ecosystems and businesses
 - Indigenous ecological knowledge offers proven stewardship systems
 - Healthy ecosystems create healthy products and industries
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Acknowledgment


- With respect, we recognize the traditional lands of the Tongva, Acjachemen, Luiseño, and Payómkawichum peoples.
 - We thank them for allowing us to gather and share knowledge here today.
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Who I Am (Revisited)

Nathan John Wright
Getege'nini — “Man of Olden Times”

- Founder, Herbal Lodge
- 15+ years sustainable wild harvesting
- Indigenous ecological knowledge & regenerative systems
- Ethical supply chains & cultural stewardship

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Miigwech. Thank you.



45 YEARS Natural Products EXPO WEST®

The logo features a large '45' in a dark red color, with 'YEARS' written in a smaller font inside the '5'. To the right of the '45' is the word 'Natural' in a dark grey font, followed by 'Products' in a larger, bold dark grey font. Below 'Products' is 'EXPO WEST' in a dark red font, with a registered trademark symbol (®) to its right. A decorative circular graphic composed of small colored dots is positioned above the word 'Natural'.



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