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# Review of *Traditional forest-related knowledge* by John A. Parrotta and Ronald L. Trosper

Sheil, Douglas

Sheil, Douglas. Review of *Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge Sustaining Communities, Ecosystems and Biocultural Diversity* by John A. Parrotta and Ronald L. Trosper (eds.). *Conservation & Society* 15, no. 1 (2017): 123-4. https://doi.org/10.4103/cs.cs_17_19 .

Parrotta, J.A., and Ronald L. Trosper, eds. *Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge: Sustaining Communities, Ecosystems and Biocultural Diversity*. New York: Springer, 2012.

Reviewing the world's traditional knowledge (TK) relating to forest use and management ("traditional forest-related knowledge" or "TFK") is a vast undertaking. This book, edited by John Parrotta and Ronald Trosper and drawing on the expertise of 76 authors world-wide, makes an important contribution to pulling this neglected topic out of the shadows. At present the information, practices and value systems labelled TFK, seem to play, at best, a minor role in mainstream forestry and environmental sciences. The extent to which this matters and how it might be improved, are neither obvious nor widely agreed. There are challenges to reaching any wellfounded conclusions or even to deciding how such conclusions might be sought. Obstacles include disciplinary differences, debates about validation, and the ethics and the politics of information ownership (e.g. Sheil and Lawrence 2004). The greatest challenge may be the unwieldy breadth of the topic itself. TK is a body of diverse information. It is hard to define but can be argued to span a range of disparate topics including history, folklore, uses, practices, traditions, institutions, governance principles, cosmologies and the sacred. Without accepted principles to systematize it, TK appears to be a jumble of beliefs, narratives and practices. What matters then is how we assess, sift and use it. We, as scientists, need specific questions where we can apply scientific methods to the relevant TK claims and potentials. We, as practitioners, need ways to recognise how TK can inform practices and improve outcomes. (Excerpt from the book review)

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