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**Robin W. Kimmerer**  
Plenary Speaker  
Sunday, June, 25th 7:30 pm Location TBA



Robin Wall Kimmerer is Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF). She is the author of numerous scientific articles, and the books *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses* (2003), and *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013). She is an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, and combines her heritage with her scientific and environmental passions.

### Early life and education

Robin Wall Kimmerer was born in 1953 in the open country of upstate New York to Robert and Patricia Wall. She grew up playing in the surrounding countryside. This time outdoors, playing, living, and observing nature rooted a deep appreciation for the natural environment in Kimmerer. Her enthusiasm for the environment was encouraged by her parents and Kimmerer began envisioning a life studying botany.

Kimmerer remained near home for college, attending SUNY-ESF and receiving a bachelor's degree in botany in 1975. She got a job working for Bausch & Lomb as a microbiologist. Two years working in a corporate lab convinced Kimmerer to explore other options and she returned to school. She moved to Wisconsin to attend the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She earned her master's degree in botany there in 1979, followed by her PhD in plant ecology in 1983.

### Career

From Wisconsin, Kimmerer moved to Kentucky, where she found a teaching position at Transylvania University in Lexington. She and her young family moved shortly thereafter to Danville, Kentucky when she took a position teaching biology, botany, and ecology at Centre College. Kimmerer received tenure at Centre College. In 1993, Kimmerer returned home to upstate New York and her alma mater SUNY-ESF where she currently teaches.

Kimmerer teaches in the Environmental and Forest Biology Department at SUNY-ESF. She teaches courses on Land and Culture, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Ethnobotany, Ecology of Mosses, Disturbance Ecology, and General Botany. Director of the newly established Center for Native Peoples and the Environment[3] at SUNY-ESF, which is part of her work to provide greater access for Native peoples to study environmental science.

Kimmerer is a proponent of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) approach, which Kimmerer describes as a “way of knowing.” TEK is a deeply empirical scientific approach and is based on long-term observation. However, it also involves cultural and spiritual considerations, which have left it marginalized by the greater scientific community. Wider use of TEK by scholars has begun to lend credence to it. Kimmerer's efforts are motivated in part by her family history. Her grandfather was a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, and was educated at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The school was part of a government program claiming to civilize Native children.[4] The effect was that much of the Native culture was lost.

Her current work spans traditional ecological knowledge, moss ecology, outreach to tribal communities and creative writing.

### Professional service

Kimmerer has helped sponsor the Undergraduate Mentoring in Environmental Biology (UMEB) project, which pairs students of color with faculty members in the enviro-bio sciences while they work together to research environmental biology. Kimmerer is

also a part of the United States Department of Agriculture's Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program. The program provides students with real-world experiences that involve complex problem-solving. Kimmerer is also involved in the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), and works with the Onondaga Nation's school doing community outreach. Kimmerer also uses traditional knowledge and science collectively for ecological restoration in research. She has served on the advisory board of the Strategies for Ecology Education, Development and Sustainability (SEEDS) program, a program to increase the number of minority ecologists. Kimmerer is also the former chair of the Ecological Society of America Traditional Ecological Knowledge Section.

In April, 2015, Kimmerer was invited to participate as a panelist at a United Nations plenary meeting to discuss how harmony with nature can help to conserve and sustainably use natural resources, titled "Harmony with Nature: Towards achieving sustainable development goals including addressing climate change in the post-2015 Development Agenda." [6][7]

### Honors and awards

Kimmerer received the John Burroughs Medal Award for her book, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*. [8] Her first book, it incorporated her experience as a plant ecologist and her understanding of traditional knowledge about nature. Her second book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, received the 2014 Sigurd F. Olson Nature Writing Award. [9] *Braiding Sweetgrass* is about the interdependence of people and the natural world, primarily the plant world. She won a second Burroughs award for an essay, "Council of the Pecans," that appeared in *Orion* magazine in 2013. [10]

### Books

- *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses* (Oregon State University Press, 2003) ISBN 0-87071-499-6.
- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Milkweed Editions, 2013) ISBN 9781571313355.

### Research Interests

- Ecology of mosses;
- Restoration of culturally significant plants to Native American communities;
- Environmental partnerships with Native American communities;
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge;
- Disturbance ecology;
- Recovery of epiphytic communities after commercial moss harvest in Oregon

### Projects and Programs

- Founding Director, Center for Native Peoples and the Environment
- Director, Native Earth Environmental Youth Camp in collaboration with the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force
- Co-PI: *Helping Forests Walk: Building resilience for climate change adaptation through forest stewardship in Haudenosaunee communities*, in collaboration with the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force
- Co-PI: *Learning from the Land: cross-cultural forest stewardship education for climate change adaptation in the northern forest*, in collaboration with the College of the Menominee Nation
- Director: USDA Multicultural Scholars Program: Indigenous environmental leaders for the future
- Steering Committee, NSF Research Coordination Network FIRST: Facilitating Indigenous Research, Science and Technology <http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/cfirst/first/>
- Project director: Onondaga Lake Restoration: Growing Plants, Growing Knowledge with indigenous youth in the Onondaga Lake watershed
- Curriculum Development: Development of Traditional Ecological Knowledge curriculum for General Ecology classes
- past Chair, Traditional Ecological Knowledge Section, Ecological Society of America [www.esa.org/tek](http://www.esa.org/tek)

### Information from:

- <http://www.esf.edu/faculty/kimmerer/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin\\_Wall\\_Kimmerer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_Wall_Kimmerer)