

# *Learning from the James Bay Cree*



## **Paul K. Barten, Ph.D.**

Professor of Forest Resources, University of Massachusetts Amherst  
Executive Director, Great Mountain Forest

**Saturday, June 12, 2010, 4:00 pm at the Norfolk Library**

The Cree people have been part of the boreal forest in what is now northern Quebec for at least 3,000 years, 150 generations. They refer to their homeland as a “garden” ...not the forbidding wilderness so often described by Europeans and their descendents. These divergent world views hint at how much we might learn from these self-reliant and resourceful people. Our two worlds met when Henry Hudson arrived in James Bay in 1610. The Hudson’s Bay Company, the North West Company and other fur traders introduced European goods, technologies, and vices throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mining companies, forest products firms, and Hydro-Quebec rolled north in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Each episode of what Boyce Richardson has called “force-fed acculturation” has compelled the Cree to adapt and change in order to maintain their cultural identity and time-tested way of life (...in a landscape where most of us would be hard-pressed to survive for a week). So what? Who cares? Well, as the ecological limits of this fragile Earth, our island home (*BCP* 1979:370), and the cumulative effect of 310,000,000 Americans come more clearly into view, it seems prudent for us to *willingly* acculturate at least some of the key principles, practices, and values that have sustained the Cree people for millennia. To a large extent, I think this is what Thoreau, Marsh, Burroughs, Muir, Leopold, Carson, Maathai, and others have been trying to tell us for years.



Co-sponsored by the Great Mountain Forest, Aton Forest,  
Norfolk Conservation Commission, Norfolk Land Trust,  
and Norfolk Library.

**Free Admission — Open to the Public**