

Yearend Summary Activity Report

Submitted to NWT Environment and Natural Resources

Compiled by Deborah Simmons

SENES Consultants Ltd.

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Introduction

Two years ago, the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board (SRRB) launched a traditional knowledge (TK) research program in partnership with University of Manitoba to understand Dene and Métis perspectives on caribou monitoring and stewardship. This has been a response to community concerns that the two caribou herds that migrate through the region, the Bluenose West and Bluenose East herds, are in decline. Community-led studies have taken place and are ongoing in the communities of Déline, Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake. Over the past year a study was initiated in Tulita. A fifth study is planned for Norman Wells in 2009-2010.

Over the past year, we succeeded in expanding the scope of the program through a series of partnerships:

- Following direction from the elders, we continued to provide opportunities for youth participation in the program.
- We expanded the on-the-land aspect of the research process, taking the lead on a harvesting trip to Drum Lake.
- We provided a forum for Renewable Resources Councils to discuss key messages from the caribou traditional knowledge study to date, and to develop an understanding of their role in caribou stewardship.
- We facilitated formation of a Caribou-Communities research network in the Sahtu Region as a forum for dialogue and coordination among academics and community researchers engaged in various complementary research projects.

The **goals** of the program are as follows:

- Strengthen understanding about the role of traditional knowledge in understanding ecological change and making resource management decisions about barren-ground caribou.

- Identify traditional Dene and Métis best practices for barren-ground caribou stewardship.
- Enhance knowledge exchange among Renewable Resources Councils and elders in order to strengthen their role in barren-ground caribou management.

Objectives:

Objectives of this study were adapted to the specific interests and needs of the three participating communities.

- **Research method:** Develop a model participatory procedure specific to the experience and needs of each community (and drawing on other existing models) for design, implementation, analysis and communication of TEK baseline research and monitoring.
- **Ecological change:** Document ways that Dene people understand change at different ecological scales (locally and at the level of ecosystem or landscape).
- **Dene law:** Document traditional Dene rules for respecting the land and animals.
- **Policy development:** Develop recommendations for incorporating project learnings in SRRB and ENR policy, including: participatory research protocols and methods; and TEK access and use; ecological monitoring and stewardship.
- **Capacity-building:** Build community capacity in TK research and monitoring, including training and research activities with youth.
- **Education:** Conduct educational activities in schools and on-the-land programs. Develop plain language educational tools.

Research Team (Personnel)

Principal Investigator

Dr. Deborah Simmons is Assistant Professor in Native Studies at University of Manitoba, and Senior Social Scientist with SENES Consultants (Yellowknife). Working for the Sahtu Land Use Planning Board and Déline Uranium Team during 1999-2004, she trained community researchers and facilitated participatory research processes with communities. She aims to support community objectives in the Sahtu Region by maintaining a research relationship over the long term; she also engages in dialogue and collaboration with other researchers in the social and natural sciences to ensure that research in the Sahtu Region are of the highest standards. The current program has allowed her to continue ongoing research with Fort Good Hope and Déline, and initiate a new project with Colville Lake.

Community Researchers

Déline Knowledge Project Team: This team has evolved over time. The initial research for this project was led by Michael Neyelle in 2007-2008. During 2008-2009, the team was led by Jane Modeste Goulet and Edith Mackeinzo. **Jane Modeste Goulet** (Déline First Nation) has approximately 25 years of experience in Dene language programs, curriculum development, and cultural promotion. She is a member of the Deline Self-Government Team and advisor to the Déline Knowledge Project. **Edith Mackeinzo**

(Délina First Nation) has studied Dene language teaching at Aurora College, and has become one of the top interpreters in the community. She was one of a team of three community researchers (Dene Náowéré Chets'ele/Gathering Dene Knowledge) with the Deline Uranium Team (DUT); the team underwent training through a rigorous Participatory Action Research program involving on-the-job learning as well as academic upgrading, including Dene language and English literacy. Edith is currently a researcher and language program coordinator with the Délina Knowledge Project. She has been involved in the archiving project, the youth and community radio projects, and activities to build awareness and capacity in Dene language and literacy.

Anne Marie Jackson (K'asho Got'ine First Nation) is a film-maker in training with a strong interest in documenting Dene traditional knowledge in her chosen medium. She has worked with Deborah Simmons at the Sahtu Land Use Planning Board (2000-2001), and as an employee of Diavik in Yellowknife and at the minesite. Most recently she has been hired in an on-the-job training program to assist the National Film Board with a project in her home town of Fort Good Hope.

Jerry Huculak (Colville Lake Elders Council) is an educator of many years with a strong interest in elders literacy and documenting traditional knowledge. Jerry has made his home in Colville Lake and is an active member of the community. He is employed as an adult educator with Aurora College and facilitates weekly Elders Council meetings. One of the Elders Council's current objectives is the completion of a book with photographs, drawings and narratives in English and Dene language authored by participating elders.

Ricki Andrew (Tulita Dene Band) is well known for his knowledge of the land and traditional knowledge of the Shuhtagot'ine Nene (Mountain Dene territory). He is a regular teacher of Dene traditional skills at Chief Albert Wright School, and is co-author and illustrator of a number of bilingual childrens' books.

External Collaborators

The team of external researchers is designed to bring together expertise in traditional knowledge, social science, and ecology, with experience specific to the north. Team members have a strong history of collaboration and roots in the north that strengthens their contributions to the program. Simmons has worked with various Sahtu communities in participatory traditional knowledge and social science projects since 1999. Simmons and Manseau are colleagues at the Natural Resources Institute; they serve together on two graduate research committees. Simmons and Gal have participated in a project led by Manseau to design a new system for computer mapping of aboriginal land use and traditional knowledge. Gal and Simmons have collaborated in GIS training and land use mapping for the Délina First Nation. Freeland Ballantyne has already initiated a research relationship with Fort Good Hope, having assisted in organizing the Indigenous Youth Summit in that community in 2005, and Dr. Simmons is an advisor in her research program. The collaborators are strongly committed to participatory research approaches designed to benefit aboriginal communities.

Dr. Micheline Manseau is a northern ecologist and is particularly interested in the relationship between human, large mammals and landscape characteristics at different spatial scales. She is a co-investigator in ongoing traditional knowledge research with Déline and Fort Good Hope. She has done extensive work in barren-ground caribou ecology, and is actively involved in incorporating aboriginal conceptions of landscape into protected areas and natural resource management. She has recently co-edited a book entitled *Breaking Ice: Renewable Resource and Ocean Management in the Canadian North*, and the accompanying video *Community-based Monitoring in Northern Canada: Watching, Listening and Understanding Changes in the Environment* (2005).

She has also written a number of papers on traditional ecological knowledge and environmental monitoring. Dr. Manseau's involvement will strengthen the research team in making strong theoretical and practical contributions to the research on how Dene and Métis people understand ecological change. Such understanding will contribute to decision-making in resource management, encouraging sustainable human activities on northern landscapes, and maintaining the dynamic cultural landscapes that are of fundamental importance to northern aboriginal communities.

Ruthann Gal has served as Director of the Fort Smith Aurora Research Institute for many years and has extensive experience in community based research. She is a GIS specialist and an ecologist. She has been involved in a number of community GIS training projects, including two projects involving land use and traditional knowledge mapping with the Déline First Nation.

Dawn Ostrem (Dawn Ostrem Communications) is a former CBC radio documentary producer. Dawn has experience in facilitation of community-based radio programming in Africa. To date, she has collaborated with Dr. Deborah Simmons in three youth training projects, two radio/podcasting projects in Déline and one pilot digital storytelling workshop in Colville Lake – each of these workshops was strongly supported by the community. Dawn is strongly committed to building upon and expanding her relationships with Sahtu communities. Dawn has recently undertaken formal training at the Centre for Digital Storytelling (CDS) based in Berkeley, California, and now is CDS facilitator.

Erin Freeland Ballantyne is a PhD student in geography and environment at Oxford University. Her research focus is on the interactions between youth and elders with respect to understanding environmental and community health. Born and raised in the NWT, she is our first recipient of the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship. Erin will assist with researcher training, video production and youth activities in her research community of Fort Good Hope.

Methodology/Traditional Knowledge

This program has a traditional knowledge focus and draws upon a participatory methodology in which each community defines the specific research questions and tools within the scope of program goals and objectives.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were very successful in all four communities, reflecting the collective nature of traditional knowledge. A pool of approximately eight representative individuals, including men and women, were selected in each community to participate in a focus group to develop research protocols and method, verify and analyze research results, and design the community pamphlet, final report, and academic presentation.

Participant-Observation: On-the-Land

Researchers were able to participate in on-the-land trips with participant communities. These were invaluable sources of understanding about people's evolving relationship with the land and how this is informed by evolving cross-generational and cross-gender relationships. Integral to these social-ecological relationships was the enactment of ongoing monitoring processes at micro and landscape levels, involving observations while harvesting, and collective discussions with elders and other harvesters at base camp.

One-on-One Interviews

One-on-one interviews provide opportunities to record the more detailed (long) versions of specific narratives by particularly knowledgeable individuals. During focus group sessions, participants would identify which narratives were important to record and who should be asked to share the narrative. In the case of Fort Good Hope, a semi-directed interview guide was used.

Documentation

Documentation methods varied in each community, depending on skills and interests of community researchers. Video and audio recordings were variously used, and transcription was either bilingual or unilingual English.

Conference Presentations

Preparation of conference presentations provided research team members with opportunities to work together to synthesize, and evaluate research results, communicate the research to a broader audience, obtain feedback, and identify next steps.

Activities in 2008-2009

Colville Lake

The Caribou and Communities program assisted in coordinating a digital storytelling workshop in partnership with the Colville Lake School and the Behdzi Ahda First Nation, with funding from the Literacy Program of NWT Education Culture and Employment. The workshop took place during March 9-17; students produced a documentary about the Horton Lake community caribou hunt, including interviews with elders and youth. The documentary was presented at a public townhall. The workshop took place in conjunction with an elders focus group and storytelling interviews during March 9-12. During the

focus group, the elders discussed transcripts of stories recorded the preceding year. As well, students presented the book *Caribou Boy* that they had created the preceding year, and were given feedback by the elders. The elders decided that they would like to record additional stories for use in the school, although they have concerns about how these stories will be translated and documented.

The Elders Council is now focused on completion of a book of photographs with related stories, and has proposed that follow-up work on the stories recorded through this project be deferred. The Behdzi Ahda First Nation is also requesting that no research take place until they have resolved caribou management issues being negotiated with the government of the NWT and the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board. A trip to Colville Lake to discuss the ongoing projects should be planned for early 2010. An important next step may be to support a collaboration with the NWT Archives in developing a community archive that can preserve recorded stories and make them accessible for use in the community.

Déline

This past year in Déline has been one of preparation for work in 2009-2010. We have been engaged in further developing the community archive, and coordinated an archiving workshop involving participants from various community organisations as well as delegates from Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake. We established a collaboration with PhD student Sarah Gordon (Folklore, Indiana University), who will assist the community in research related to the caribou stories. Sarah's work will be funded by the Social Economy Network of Northern Canada, and will involve an exploration of caribou harvesting as an aspect of the mixed economy – and the nature of the mixed economy as a form of social economy. We have also received additional research funding from Health Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada that will support further research on evolving community relationships with caribou in the context of change. These programs will support work with youth in digital storytelling and mapping.

The Communities and Caribou program is also collaborating with Masters student Tiarella Hanna (Rural Economy, University of Alberta), who under the direction of Dr. Brenda Parlee and Dr. Peter Boxall has analyzed the caribou harvesting data for Déline, and will be addressing gaps in the data by investigating harvesting choices in the context of scarcity through both qualitative and quantitative means.

Fort Good Hope

Erin Freeland Ballantyne continued her work on caribou and climate change with Fort Good Hope, supported by Health Canada funding. She will be completing her PhD dissertation over the coming year. We established a collaboration with Masters student Roger McMillan (Rural Economy, University of Alberta), who wishes to understand the

role of youth in sharing networks in a time of caribou scarcity. Roger will build on the youth research approach developed by Erin.

Tulita

The new initiative with Tulita was the main focus of this year's activities. A focus group was held with Tulita elders, along with several interviews during October 22-25. A caribou harvesting trip to Drum Lake involving elders, harvesters and youth during February 23-March 6 was planned in partnership with Chief Albert Wright School, Tulita District Land Corporation (Shuhtagot'ine Nene and Nááts'ihch'oh Traditional Knowledge Study), Tulita Dene Band, Tulita Land Corporation, Tulita Roman Catholic Mission, NWT Environment and Natural Resources, and NWT Industry, Tourism and Economic Development. During the trip, youth assisted in recording mapping interviews and old time stories. They also completed their own projects for the Heritage Fair – two of these projects were directly related to caribou: a project on cooking caribou, and another on caribou anatomy.

This was the first community harvesting trip of its kind in many years – and the first community-school partnership of this kind. The next step for this project will be a detailed report on the Drum Lake trip, jointly written with teacher Alison Dejong. The report will identify the lessons from this inaugural trip, and will include a proposal for next years' on-the-land program with the school and the Tulita Dene Band. A digital storytelling workshop is planned with the school.

Knowledge Sharing

Supported by the NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program, we have been engaged a strategic planning effort aimed at strengthening the role of community Renewable Resources Councils (RRCs) in land stewardship and monitoring. This was initiated at a regional *Taking Care of the Land* workshop in August, 2007, where caribou were seen as a central priority (see Appended report and plain language summary). A second workshop focused on caribou stewardship was held on March 25-26 in Tulita.

Walter Bayha and Deborah Simmons jointly authored a presentation on traditional knowledge and caribou management, presented by Walter at the First Nations Marine Forum, *Marine Planning and Sustainable Community Development* in Prince Rupert, BC, November 20-22. Walter and Deborah also presented on the Sahtu Caribou-Communities program at the Traditional Knowledge Practitioners Workshop in Yellowknife, March 17-19. Deborah Simmons participated in a number of Learning Communities knowledge sharing events: the Subsistence Economies Learning Circle teleconference on July 3, the South Africa-Canada exchange on September 23, and the conference in Stephenville, Newfoundland on October 4-5 (for podcasts, transcripts and reports see <http://clcn.seedwiki.com/>).

We initiated a Sahtu Caribou-Communities network to provide a forum for coordination and knowledge sharing among academic and community researchers engaged in complementary research. The first meeting of this network was held on March 23.

Evaluation

The following table assesses progress to date on the three year objectives for this program. A diagram showing community involvement and evolution of tools used is appended to this report.

Objective	Progress/ <i>Plans</i>
<p>Research method: Develop a model participatory procedure specific to the experience and needs of each community (and drawing on other existing models) for design, implementation, analysis and communication of TEK baseline research and monitoring.</p>	<p>Four communities have been engaged in this program – Déline, Fort Good Hope, Colville Lake and Tulita – and the following methods have been explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community focus groups • On-the-land experiences • Youth research, including video and digital storytelling • Regional meetings • Cross-regional meetings. <p><i>On-the-land research is planned with Norman Wells for 2009-2010; digital storytelling planned in Déline, Tulita and Norman Wells.</i></p>
<p>Ecological change: Document ways that Dene people understand change at different ecological scales (locally and at the level of ecosystem or landscape).</p>	<p>Narratives have been documented in four communities; analysis and verification remains to be completed. <i>Erin Freeland Ballantyne PhD dissertation to be completed in 2010; documentation of narratives from Norman Wells planned for 2009-2010; digital storytelling planned in Déline, Tulita and Norman Wells.</i></p>
<p>Dene law: Document traditional Dene rules for respecting the land and animals.</p>	<p>Narratives have been documented in four communities; analysis and verification remains to be completed. <i>Documentation of narratives from Norman Wells planned for 2010; digital storytelling planned in Déline, Tulita and Norman Wells.</i></p>
<p>Policy development: Develop recommendations for incorporating project learnings in SRRB and ENR policy, including: participatory research protocols and methods; and TEK access and use; ecological monitoring and stewardship.</p>	<p>This has been initiated through two regional Renewable Resources Council delegate workshops, in fall 2007 and spring 2009 – as well as through discussions at the cross-regional TK Practitioners workshops and the national Learning Communities meetings. <i>A regional meeting of the Sahtu Caribou-Communities Research Network and RRC delegates is planned for 2009-2010.</i></p>
<p>Capacity-building: Build community capacity</p>	<p>The participatory methods used involve strong</p>

Objective	Progress/Plans
in TK research and monitoring, including training and research activities with youth.	capacity-building aspects, including on-the-job training for community researchers. Youth involvement is summarized under the “education” objective below. <i>Community researcher on-the-job training is planned for the collaboration with Norman Wells in 2009-2010.</i>
Education: Conduct educational activities in schools and on-the-land programs. Develop plain language educational tools.	School and youth participation has been strong in Fort Good Hope, Colville Lake and Tulita – these programs have included development of educational tools including videos (Fort Good Hope), digital stories (Colville Lake) and Heritage Fair displays (Tulita). <i>Youth will be engaged in producing digital stories as educational tools in Déline, Tulita and Norman Wells in 2009-2010.</i>

Appendices

Tulita Caribou TK Study poster
Tulita Drum Lake Trip report
Drum Lake photo story – *News/North*
Colville Lake digital storytelling report (Dawn Ostrem)
First Nations Marine Forum abstract (Walter Bayha and Deborah Simmons)
Sahtu Renewable Resources Council Caribou-Communities workshop report
Sahtu Caribou-Communities Research Network meeting notes

Tulit'a Caribou Traditional Knowledge Study

Ricky Andrew has been hired to work with Deborah Simmons in a project to document traditional knowledge about caribou. The focus will be on mountain caribou and Caribou Flats. We will be working with elders, harvesters, and the school. ***We welcome people's suggestions about how we can make this a good project for the community.***

Topics

- Experiences in hunting
- How caribou is used
- Elders' stories
- Dene language
- Changing caribou populations
- Caribou stewardship

Activities

- Youth/elder trip to Caribou Flats
- Interviews
- Focus group meeting
- School program



A partnership of the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board, the Tulita Renewable Resources Council, and the University of Manitoba.

For more information, contact Ricky Andrew (3655) or Rosa Etchinelle (4724).

40051 Shuhtagot'ine Néné and Nááts'ihch'oh TK Study Summary Activity Report - February

Compiled by Deborah Simmons
SENES Consultants Ltd.
March 8, 2009

Project Team

Angus Lennie, Coordinator
Leon Andrew, Interviewer-Interpreter
Deborah Simmons, Researcher-Writer

Key Milestones

- Completion of draft workplan
- Working Group meetings
- Hiring of interviewer-interpreter
- Drum Lake trip, focus group and interviews
- GIS Mapping Workshop Planning



Draft Workplan

A detailed budget and narrative workplan including a list of tasks to be completed and time allocations for team members was completed. The workplan was approved by the project Working Group.

Working Group Meetings

Conference calls took place on February 3, 12 and 18. Notes were taken by Deborah for the first two meetings, and by Angus for the last meeting. These were distributed to Working Group members for review. The meetings clarified the project objectives, and led to approval of the draft workplan submitted by the Project Team.

Hiring of Interviewer-Interpreter

A job advertisement was distributed in the community, and the Project Team selected Leon Andrew as the most qualified candidate among 3 applicants. A letter of offer was delivered to Mr. Andrew on February 19 – this included the project workplan with the outline of objectives, tasks and possible maximum budget for the position – with the caveat that the workplan is a living document that would likely evolve within the constraints of the budget.

Drum Lake Trip

This trip was made possible through a partnership with the Tulita Caribou TK Study (Sautu Renewable Resources Board and University of Manitoba), Chief Albert Wright School, and the Tulita Dene Band. The aim was to enrich the TK documentation through

the experience of travelling on a traditional route, experiencing traditional activities, and teaching traditional skills to youth. This was a pilot project, and it was not possible to include as many youth as originally hoped – a total of 5 participated, with the addition of 4 youth visitors from the concurrent program at the nearby Drum Lake Lodge who joined a caribou hunt and an evening storytelling session. Six elders participated along with 12 Dene/Metis adults and 2 non-Dene resource people, for a total of 25 participants.

The trip successfully achieved a number of project objectives, as follows:

1. Identification of sites of cultural significance and record oral histories; identification of cultural and heritage resources
2. Centralize archival materials
3. Community consultation
4. Training opportunity for students and community members

1. Cultural Sites and Oral Histories, Cultural and Heritage Resources

Sites, oral histories, and resources were identified and documented principally through audio recordings, photographs, mapping, and note-taking with details about numbered points, lines and polygons on the maps. The mapping was summarized to camp participants and key stories referred to in mapping sessions were told to the youth during evening sessions – it became clear that it would not be possible to include the “long versions” of the stories within the scope of the mapping sessions, and the stories helped to bring meaning and shape to the maps for the youth. In addition, the knowledge and skills needed to survive in the traditional Shuhtagot’ine way was shared in youth-elder meetings. The three Grade 9 students each chose school projects for the Heritage Fair, and participated as photographers and audio recorders. The Grade 9 teacher, Alison Dejong, was a strong support for involving the students in the research process.

Information recorded included:

- Traditional placenames and their meanings
- Traditional trails
- Spiritual sites
- Wildlife areas
- Moose skin boat making areas
- Old time stories

The research activities were as follows:

Activity	Team
Youth-elder meetings (2 meetings were held, one was recorded)	Morris Mendo (elder) Angus Lennie Ricky Andrew (traditional teacher) Deborah Simmons Alison Dejong (teacher) Youth
Focus group – mapping (a total of 63 items mapped over 4 hours)	Angus Lennie Leon Andrew Deborah Simmons Youth photographers and audio recorders

Activity	Team
Evening stories (2 were audio recorded)	First session: Morris Mendo (elder) Angus Lennie Leon Andrew Deborah Simmons Youth Second session: Various elders Angus Lennie Ricky Andrew Leon Andrew (1/2) Deborah Simmons Youth
Interview with Gabe Horassi (2 sessions totalling about 5 hours)	Angus Lennie Deborah Simmons Corrine Andrew (1 session) Ricky Andrew (½ sessions x 2) Boniface Ayah (½ session)
Student Heritage Fair Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andrew family mapping (interview with Walter and Leon Andrew) • Shuhtagot'ine tents • Shuhtagot'ine food 	Youth Alison Dejong (teacher) Deborah Simmons Leon Andrew (interviewee for Andrew family mapping project)

2. Centralize Archival Materials

All audio recordings and photographs related to the trip are now stored on the project hard drive, and a filing system has been initiated (the archive database will be established at a future stage of the project).

3. Community Consultation

The Drum Lake trip opened up new opportunities to build awareness of the study and discuss it with community members. The study objectives were presented and discussed at a Tulita Dene Band meeting, a planning meeting for the trip, at a meeting of all camp participants during the camp, and at both of the evening storytelling sessions. Community members at these events have had opportunities to ask questions and provide input.

4. Training opportunity for students and community members

Three youth (Rosalie Andrew, Deanna Horassi and James McPherson) were involved in the study as researcher trainees. The three Grade 9 students each chose school projects for the Heritage Fair, and participated as photographers and audio recorders. The Grade 9 teacher, Alison Dejong, was a strong support for involving the students in the research process. In addition, several adult community members provided assistance in interpreting, photography, audio recording and mapping and thus were developing an understanding of basic TK research techniques.

photo stories

The traditional way of life



Hunter William Horassi, ENR officer Ron Doctor and Darcy McCauley work together with others to send appreciated caribou back to Tulita via Northwright's Twin Otter.



HUNTING
Feature

by Andrew Livingstone

Northern News Services
Tulita/Fort Norman

Grade 9 students at Chief Albert Wright school and their teacher joined a group of elders and hunters at Drum Lake to learn traditional skills and stories as well as participate in the mountain caribou hunt.

The preparations for the trip began in January 2009 with the elders and students meeting weekly to learn bush trip preparations, bush skills training, and traditional teachings and stories about caribou.

On Feb. 23, 12 Ski-Doo's set out to break trail to Drum Lake, including an 82-year-old elder. The students and elders flew out by Twin Otter charter to Drum Lake to meet the group on Feb. 25.

A successful hunt followed

with more than 25 caribou harvested. The group also learned activities related to traditional knowledge, natural and social sciences and literacy.

The students and elders returned to Tulita on March 5 along with enough meat to distribute to all households in the community. The hunting group will return to Tulita via Ski-Doo on March 6.

Follow-up activities for both the school and community will include a narrated slide presentation and a book by the students about the trip written in both the Dene language and English. The book will include key vocabulary and phrases, old time stories, experiences on the trip, traditional knowledge, illustrations including art work and photographs.



Elder Maurice Mendo, students Deanna Horassi and Rosalie Andrew and instructor Ricky Andrew participate in a traditional knowledge mapping and place name study of the Drum Lake area.



Instructor Ricky Andrew spent his evening making dry meat after a successful day of caribou hunting.



Hunters Michael Etchinelle (far left) and Jack Horassi (far right) work with Chief Albert Wright school students Jay Ayah (back to camera) and Lyle Etchinelle, to teach how to dress out and skin a caribou.



Instructor and camp cook Corrine Andrew and Elder Boniface Ayah work together cutting caribou bones for soup.

Colville Lake Literacy Project

Digital Storytelling • Mahsi Dene Hįshake

Project Report • Dawn Ostrem Communications • April 6th, 2009

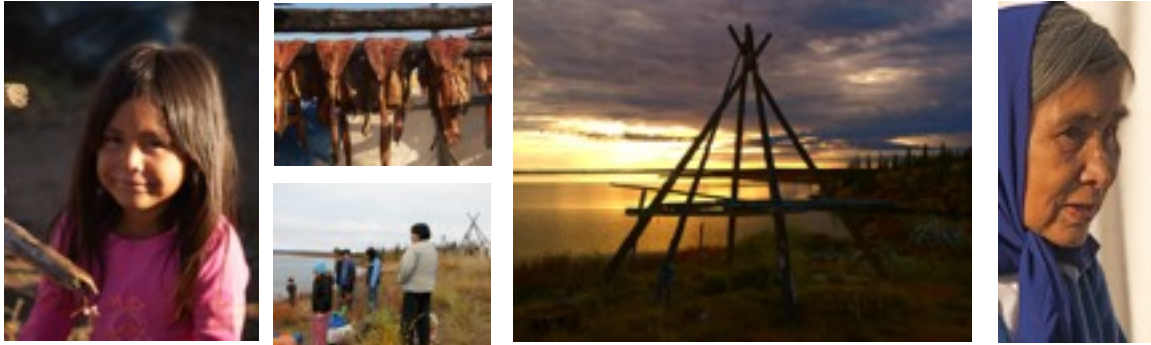


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OVERVIEW



The consequence of functioning literacy for communities in the Northwest Territories is profound. Without some sense of literacy, the ability to relate and tell stories to one another is seriously jeopardized. It is stories that contain the lessons, values and understandings that many cultures and subcultures in the Northwest Territories rely upon to learn. The Colville Lake Literacy Project, which took place from March 9th to March 17th, 2009 set out to promote literacy using both storytelling and digital media as major tools of literacy and learning. This project focused on five components of literacy specifically tied to aboriginal youth of the Northwest Territories. These values are oral storytelling and transfer of knowledge, digital media literacy, community ownership and partnerships and culture and language vitality.

The Project

Dawn Ostrem Communications is a consultation sole proprietorship that specializes in teaching storytelling and multimedia skills to children in the Northwest Territories.

Oral storytelling is key to Dene culture. However, reading and writing literacy skills are below standard levels due, in part, to existing language structures in communities. Most children of this generation have grandparents that speak very little or no English. In Colville Lake many elders chose not to speak English, especially when it comes to passing on stories of the past. These traditional stories may seem diminished when not told in Slavey. The stories become even more dif-

difficult to share when translated into written English. But, the children in Colville Lake are not fluent in Slavey. English is the main language for speaking and writing.

People in Colville Lake are also disinclined to tell stories to outsiders, people they do not know well. As stated above, there are even some difficulties in speaking to their own youth.

For all of these reasons the effort of passing down traditional knowledge, alongside a rapidly evolving and changing culture, is at a disadvantage. An existing fraying of the historic cultural fabric of Colville Lake, like many other Dene communities in the Northwest Territories, prompts even further distancing between generations. All cultures evolve, but, loss of language, specifically, causes an exceptionally large rift in cultural vitality. A traditional language is a tool for telling stories rich in traditional lessons, values and ways of adapting, perceiving and making overall life choices.

The Colville Lake Literacy Project was meant to help the entire community understand and learn to use a set of tools to help strengthen cultural vitality in some way. Digital media can be blamed for disengaging youth from traditional and cultural activities. Youth everywhere pay much attention to newer novelties brought on by digital media. In the North, it has been a very short time since communities have gone from having no communications with the outside world besides mail or word of mouth conversations with others. Quickly that turned to shortwave radio at hunting camps and then suddenly to satellite television, radio and wireless Internet, enabling instantaneous access to almost any public information network in the world. Youth are fascinated with the evolution of communications everywhere. The Colville Lake literacy project aimed to capitalize on that interest and use of multimedia tools.

In the end, eight girls took part in making a short documentary about an annual community hunt north of Colville Lake, at Horton Lake. A small website was also created to display some written text about the project, more photos and as a venue to display the documentary movie. The technical skills available to the youth included digital audio and video editing as well as website construction. Story development was observed by the class of girls* and some were taught to prepare and conduct interviews.

The class gathered sound from the community (fires crackling, snowmobiles, chainsaws, etc) to use in the documentary. They conducted interviews with both youth and elders who had been at

the hunt and prepared a sound track from the sounds and voices. They then chose photos and video to use for the digital story.

Perhaps most important was the opportunity for the entire community to watch a small group of girls take part in a production that inspired and motivated people. This literacy project, more than anything else, enabled the community of Colville Lake to realize a self-confidence around modern digital media, turning it into a tool to work with cultural content on their own.

**girls were chosen for the digital storytelling project in order to give them an opportunity to work on a specific cultural project. Most of the boys at Colville Lake School run and maintain their own trapline. Therefore, this project was meant to create a similar opportunity for girls.*

STORYTELLING/KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Perhaps one of the most important ingredients of literacy within Northwest Territories communities is the ability to transfer traditional knowledge, values and beliefs, all of which help to distinguish unique cultures in Canada's north. Oral storytelling is a strong building block of traditional northern communities. Colville Lake is a very traditional community.



Theresa Blanco records a younger student at a presentation to elders.

However, certain social problems, that in other places have dissuaded the continuation of key cultural practices, such as addiction, are also strong in Colville Lake. It is therefore extraordinary that the community of Colville Lake continues to take part in annual cultural traditions, such as the fall community hunt at Horton Lake. It is through such activities that cultural ties and a sense of belonging continue to exist. It is noteworthy that many children, asked if they want to leave Colville Lake in the future, reply that they do not. Even though mass media, such as television, exposes the children to outside influences, many of which draw youth away from a community in the physical sense as well as a socially, many children have chosen to retain community values and expectations. However the lack of interaction between generations, highlighted by loss of language and the introduction of mass media, can not be ignored. The link between generations is not, by any means, severed. It is strong in the obvious connection that the youth have with the land and people in Colville Lake. The connection is seen literally in activities such as traveling to Horton Lake. For this project Marie and Hycinthe Kochon, respected community elders, are interviewed by the students. Hycinthe speaks only Slavey and Marie interprets, adding her own emphasis to the message being sent, what Horton Lake means for youth. Historically, it seems the communication between generations was through actual teachings by elders and less through

discussion or conversation. However, in the making of the documentary the children are able to add their own insights and feelings in an indirect way. The story is one of depicting a certain thankfulness and respect for the annual caribou hunt and for the elders that guide it as well as for Colville Lake's traditional cultures among several generations. Therefore the story is somewhat abstract in its entirety, however, each child was able to add certain components, such as interviews, narrations, photographs and production work that made it whole. The result is a complex and relevant story that draws on feeling and insight that would not have been possible without using modern digital means. Therefore the digital story is not a replacement of oral storytelling, which is traditionally used as a teaching tool, managed by elders. It is a modern innovation to oral storytelling of the past (still very much alive) and it is more relevant to most community members than using written communications.

DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY

Like most teens, the youth in Colville Lake are interested in digital technology. The school has been instrumental in coaching them to make digital video recordings and use the basic software available for editing. This literacy project took that interest and developed it into a refined method of storytelling based on community and tradition. During the Colville Lake Literacy Project youth were taught to use technology as constructive tools for developing a complicated and worthwhile message within story.



Sydney Oudzi is interviewed about Horton Lake

Modern technology is valuable in communities such as Colville Lake where reading and writing literacy skills may be below standard. Computer literacy among youth everywhere is generally above average as the adaptation skills of youth tends to parallel constantly evolving digital media. The same can be said for youth in Colville Lake. The expense of high quality recording equipment and digital editing software is far less than it was only a few years ago. The capacity to teach digital storytelling and the ability to learn, therefore, exist simply today. The youth of Colville Lake have practiced downloading, editing, recording and mixing through intuitive play. Now, they have been shown the initial steps necessary to use the tools for a greater purpose. The element of story development and construction is a far more cognitive process. However, as observers of story boarding and building, youth are able to integrate those concepts into the technical aspects of digital media more thoroughly. For many, story development, too, can become an intuitive part of editing, recording, interviewing and other story elements. At this early stage the youth are

able to see a production form start to finish and realize the amount of work and reward involved. Such was the case during the community screening of *Mahsi Dene Hjshake* on March 16th. The screening was held at the school in the evening. A packed audience watched the film while chatting and having tea with other community members. After the screening people were extremely happy with the production. Students, such as Theresa Blanco, who did much work on the project, seemed very proud. Parents of the girls, maybe even more proud. Some of the girls who did not participate as much as they could have spoke to me afterward. For me it was plain to see that they would have liked to have another chance. This creates a wonderful, ripe environment for the school to continue with simple digital storytelling projects. Some ideas could include audio, visual journalling or layering audio (sound fx) and visuals (photos or video) into one-person, one-focus recorded interviews. The production and screening of *Mahsi Dene Hjshake* shows a good environment for digital literacy work in the form of chronicling thoughts, feelings, activities and emotions of youth in Colville Lake.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP/PARTNERSHIP

A large part of DO Communications' mandate is to initiate training and community development. In Colville Lake it is clear that stories, related to traditional knowledge, are valued as community and cultural resources that should remain in control of the community.



Marie and Hycinthe Kochon recorded by Sunita Kochon

Although the actual knowledge contained in the final product of this project—the Mahsi Dene H̄shake documentary DVD and website—may not be as significant as other stories, such as traditional stories/legends/prophecies, it serves as a starting point and capacity building measure. It serves as an introduction to tools and developing skill-sets that enable the community to work toward future documenting of further sources of cultural and traditional knowledge. This form of literacy, therefore, is based on the ability to share ancient information using modern tools to initiate new ways of learning. The ownership over this information is imperative to the well-being and security of the Colville Lake community.

It was apparent in early stages of the this project that some elder members of the community were uncomfortable donating information thought to be sacred within the community for this project. It was also apparent early on that the eventual content the content of the project would serve as a starting point in building trust in this use of modern technology, myself and DO Communications as the facilitator of the project. Finally, it would serve to credit the community's very own youth, who are only just beginning to learn the tools of documentation by way of digital media. Clearly this project has achieved its goals as far as developing certain literacy methods in this par-

ticular community, but it has gone much further. The Colville Lake Literacy Project is a very important step in the design of a cultural/traditional knowledge documentation process that is also cross-cultural in how it connects generations, mediums and therefore messaging. Ownership and partnership involved in the sharing of knowledge is key to the continuation of digital media projects that promote literacy measures dealing with deeply emotional information transfers (stories). Through the telling of all stories community subcultures are brought together as one overarching cultural entity, in some ways, by contributing to a shared experience; by giving and receiving messages or telling and interpreting information through story. The security in ownership of the information or stories is gained by the very fact that those who are developing the information digitally, may not be members of the same generational subculture, but are at least young members of the same community.

Although it is not copyrighted under either DO Communications or the Behdzi Ahda First Nation, any use of the production of Mahsi Dene Hishake for promotional, educational purposes or otherwise should not occur without either written or verbal consent from the Behdzi Ahda First Nation.

LANGUAGE (CULTURE) VITALITY

Language may be the most obvious tool for passing on traditional information that contributes to the cultural values of a community. When such a tool does not work as it should, obviously there are significant challenges in maintaining a base of knowledge and cultural understanding to observe a natural evolution through generations.



Theresa Blanco with her digital audio recorder

Culture, of course, is not easily narrowed down. Culture can exist within a community, a school, a workplace, a family as well as within a group of people sharing the same set of ideals or experiences living thousands of miles apart. However, the information sharing that goes on between subcultures within one geographical community, such as Colville Lake, is a main ingredient to how ideas and values evolve and progress. Cultures evolve on many levels. They evolve parallel to many kinds of evolution, such as generational or geographical interpretations or technological changes. Cultures never remain static. However, the information that is passed or not passed on is quintessential to the way in which certain cultures and subcultures evolve fundamentally. Again, the loss of language between generations creates a serious problem along that evolutionary line; creating a gap wider than maybe tolerated for a healthy progression or adaptation.

The Colville Lake Literacy Project has served to address the issue on two levels. Mainly, the production of the documentary Mahsi Dene Hjshake was introduced as a different way of communicating with one another on a community level. Digital storytelling created by and for one community may help modernize community communications in a healthy way as opposed to many

unhealthy results of modernization in Northwest Territories communities in the past. Clearly, digital media, involving interviewing and computer post-production, is not the traditional way of passing on traditional knowledge. It is far from an on-the-land experience involving youth learning from their elders. However, it can serve as a form of cultural analysis from within a community's own subcultures, in this case youth. Likely without realizing it the youth of Colville Lake investigated feelings, ideas and opinions of their elders, the keepers of the stories. Due to language deterioration this unconventional form of knowledge transfer and learning could be argued to be necessary, or at least viable. Learning to investigate the thoughts of elders, as is often done during an interviewing process, is not a traditional method of learning. It is the traditional way for elders to share information voluntarily in an appropriate setting. However, those settings, such as nightly campfires are decreasing. Probably the most significant barrier to the traditional sharing of information is that the information transfer is thought to be diluted when processed into English, and this is only if the elder relaying a story speaks English to begin with.

Another minor way that the Colville Lake Literacy Project attempted to address the language barrier is by promoting the use of North Slavey in the production of Mahsi Dene Hishake. Students were coached to use Slavey and help to interpret the title into the dialect of Slavey spoken in Colville Lake (Mahsi Dene Hishake: Thank you to our elders). Within the production of Mahsi Dene Hishake intentional post-production measures were taken to only edit the Slavey portions of the presentation where absolutely necessary.

CONCLUSION



Community camp at Horton Lake, fall 2008

There are several reasons digital media literacy techniques apply to youth in the Northwest Territories. The reasons overlap with many other literacy and cultural issues.

Computer and digital skills are not lacking in youth such as students from Colville Lake. Still, even I as a professional, will ask advice of my students when it comes to technical issues and they are often able to offer solutions. Therefore, what was accomplished in the Colville Lake Literacy Project was specific to computer literacy skills but also goes deeper into the transfer of information. In the Northwest Territories an element of literacy most necessary to address is the ability to take part in learning or schooling; education in a formal setting. In order to make this kind of education a success it is clear that what students in Colville Lake are interested in learning differs from what students elsewhere find important to study. However, what is similar is the interest and ability that youth have in digital media. Using digital media to promote computer and communications literacy, therefore, is a good fit.

Language proficiency and culture are directly connected when it comes to Colville Lake communications. Without a firm grasp of languages used to share important cultural stories of the past much is left unsaid when it comes to the evolving cultures of our Northern communities. Digital media can not replace the perfected and preferred practices when it comes to traditional knowl-

edge, but, it can offer a modern way to promote and protect some of the values carried in story as well as the constantly evolving interpretations and meaning involved in understanding stories.

Clearly, communities such as Colville Lake value story when it is used as a means of passing down traditional knowledge between generations. The knowledge passed on using traditional storytelling may be less clear as generations change so rapidly in the North. The Colville Lake Literacy Project taught story-development (critical to the understanding of story meaning and value) as a way to add analysis or a deeper understanding and thought (to what is being said and why) during the telling of these stories. Analysis is a natural part of storytelling at all levels of production. It can be argued the analysis is a necessary way for future generations to think critically about the cultural stories they are a part of.

Community ownership over this information is vital for the success of a new, modern form of storytelling and its adaptation. Thus ownership creates an open environment to literacy through knowledge transfer and computer technical skills among others. Many communities feel their stories are not to be shared before listeners have engaged in some sort of rite of passage determined by those telling the stories. Therefore, by taking and using any kind of story from Colville Lake would likely end up being taken as a sign of disrespect. During the Colville Lake Literacy Project the story told was not one passed down historically. It was a “lighter” story of thankfulness and appreciation regarding a cultural community practice; the annual Horton Lake caribou hunt. But, the principle behind who it belongs to (the community members helping to tell it and the youth producing it) is significant to the community’s willingness to support this kind of youth oriented literacy development in the future. Throughout the production of this story it is believed the community leadership of Colville Lake were inspired by the message and open to a modern version of more traditional stories in the future. Most importantly, because it was made clear that the goal behind teaching this kind of modern storytelling is for the youth of the community to learn the method and to be the documentarians of community stories themselves.

The Colville Lake Literacy Project was successful for these reasons. It now opens the door to further use of affordable digital technology and leadership to inspire and coach the youth of Colville Lake. The youth have the potential to take on very traditional and vital roles; storytellers wrapped in a modern package. This kind of storytelling enables youth to gain the proficiency in modern technological tools needed to promote literacy in the modern world of Northwest Territories communities.