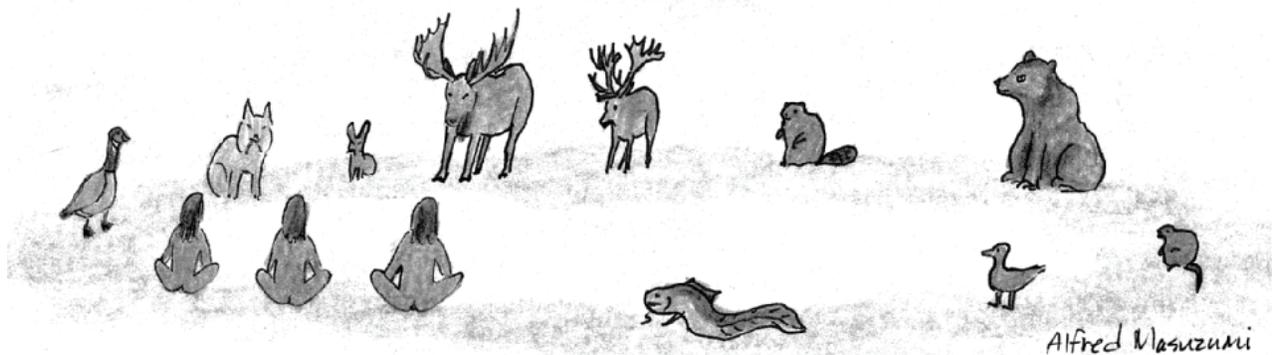


# ?ekwę Hé Naidé

## *Living With Caribou*

Traditional Knowledge Program 2005-2009  
Preliminary Review of Management and Policy Implications



Prepared for  
The Sahtu Renewable Resources Board

Prepared by  
SENES Consultants Ltd.



Co-



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA



Northwest  
Territories



January, 2010

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## ***Living with Caribou***

**Traditional Knowledge  
Program 2005-2009**

### **Management and Policy Implications PRELIMINARY REVIEW**

December, 2009

***Prepared for***

**Sahtu Renewable Resources Board**  
PO Box 134  
Tulita, NT X0E 0K0

***Prepared by***

**SENES Consultants Limited**  
4915-48<sup>th</sup> Street, Unit 23  
Yellowknife, NT X1A 3S4

***Co-Sponsors***

University of Manitoba  
Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program  
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***Illustrations***

Alfred Masuzumi

## Introduction

In 2004, the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board (SRRB) took steps to develop a traditional knowledge research program in collaboration with communities of the Sahtu Region. By 2007, this program had begun to focus on Dene and Métis relationships with caribou. The purpose of this work was to provide the SRRB with tools for understanding the management implications of caribou traditional knowledge. Work still remains to be done to unfold the full meaning of the large body of knowledge shared through this study, and its relationship to existing literature; this work is planned for 2010. This document offers a summary scoping of key messages from the research, many of which were crystallized during the Caribou-Communities workshop with Renewable Resources Council delegates in March 2009. Many of the messages in this report have been presented at a variety of public forums by Walter Bayha, Deborah Simmons and study collaborators including Ann Marie Jackson, Dora Grandjambe and Richard Kochon.



**Caribou Stewardship Workshop (Tulita, March 25-26, 2009)**

## Acknowledgements

This study is dedicated to the memory of Alfred Masuzumi, whose illustrations help to bring alive the messages in this document. Alfred had planned to lead the caribou traditional knowledge study in Fort Good Hope before his untimely death. His passion for traditional knowledge research and for keeping the old stories alive continues to be an inspiration. Thanks also to the many people who contributed to this study, especially Walter Bayha, Jody Snortland, and the SRRB, without whose support the project would not have been possible.

## Dene Hé Métis Hé Náoweré Chets'elə

In 2003, Darwin Bateyko completed an assessment of co-management in the Sahtu Region that focused on the experience of the SRRB as part of his Masters research. Bateyko recognized a number of areas in which the SRRB had been successful. However, he also pointed out a number of weaknesses, including: high staff turnover; lack of ownership and understanding at the community level; lack of available traditional knowledge; and lack of participation by Renewable Resource Councils. Since that time, the SRRB has made conscious efforts to address these challenges through various measures, including development of a traditional knowledge policy, and initiation of a traditional knowledge research program. A Renewable Resource Communication Officer position was also established in order to facilitate community understanding and participation in resource management.

Dene and Métis of the Sahtu Region understand all too well the dangers of relying only on the knowledge of outsiders in resource management. In the words of Jane Quitte, “I find that the non-Dene government has always made so many rules for us Dene people to follow and if we don’t we pay for it. I resent this, because our way of life has been torn apart because of it” (Délina First Nation 2005). Jane’s bitter memories were echoed in many stories shared during the study. Dene and Métis of the Sahtu Region feel strongly that their knowledge and stewardship of the caribou must be renewed for the well-being of both the communities and the caribou.

In the Sahtu Region, the concept of traditional knowledge is known as Dene hé Métis hé náoweré. The concept of náoweré is much more than data that can be collected and stored – it is a combination of lived experience, stories, understanding, wisdom and spirituality. Traditional knowledge research has come to be translated as Dene hé Métis hé náoweré chets'elə, gathering Dene and Métis knowledge. Chets'elə (gathering) bears its own disciplines and responsibilities, including that of helping to keep the knowledge alive in



practice, across the generations.

The Déline First Nation report *Dene Ways of Respecting the Land and Animals* (2005) provides the following conception of traditional knowledge: “Traditional knowledge includes the cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and subsistence ways [of Dene and Metis]. It involves being in touch with the land, the animals, plants, weather, other environmental conditions and the spiritual connections. It also includes knowing the protocols and values of how one should behave in our environment.” Similarly, the SRRB’s policy describes traditional knowledge as being spiritually based, involving human, natural and spiritual interactions, and factual information (as an accumulation of experience passed down through the generations). This knowledge embodies rules and principles with the aim of achieving ecological and social balance for the benefit of present and future generations.

The caribou traditional knowledge study program has addressed in significant ways the four main components of the SRRB’s traditional knowledge policy: taking direction from the people closest and most dependent on the resources being managed; engaging in traditional knowledge research; establishing a traditional knowledge library; and documenting language and placenames.

The study has shed light on four key aspects of traditional knowledge as it applies in a resource management context. This knowledge is a core **strength** of Dene and Métis as participants in co-management; it is an important source of **learning and understanding** through research; it is a methodology for monitoring, or **watching for changes** on the land; and it is the basis for **decision-making** and responsible stewardship. Most

importantly, traditional knowledge is useful only insofar as it is kept alive among Dene and Métis in cross-generational dialogue and in the practices of survival on the land.

Through this program, we learned much about the methodology and tools needed for successful traditional knowledge studies, and we became aware that the learning cycle will continue over time. The



caribou program demonstrated that traditional knowledge studies need to be focused in order to achieve depth. At the same time, in focusing the research on caribou and protocols related to caribou it was possible to learn a lot about peoples' relationships with animals more generally, as well as general principles governing people's survival on the land. In collective discussions about their own traditional knowledge, people also gained confidence to engage in problem-solving dialogue with scientists about caribou management. However, it became apparent that pure oral dialogue is not enough for scientists and resource managers to gain a full understanding of the value and implications of traditional knowledge. As in the domain of science, the research cycle of documentation, analysis/synthesis, and cross-cultural interpretation remains necessary. Trained researchers are required to lead such a cycle so that the quality of the results is assured.

## **What Has Been Learned?**

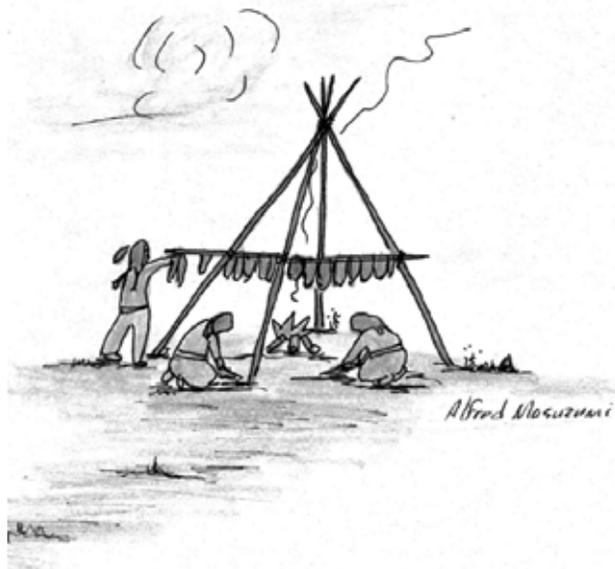
Dene and Métis of the three Districts of the Sahtu Region consider their relationship with the caribou within their traditional territory to be part of their identity – they are stewards of the caribou. As a result, they feel that they have a strong role to play in caribou management processes. People have differing perspectives on the appropriate approach to caribou stewardship when the herds are in decline. Some maintain a strong traditional belief that hunting is key to maintaining their relationship with the caribou. For these people, hunting is important for the health of the herds and the health of Dene and Métis communities. Others are in favour of imposing regulatory measures to limit harvests, despite the traumatic memories of the elders about the history of harvesting regulations in the region prior to the land claim.

It is possible that those who support regulatory measures have a sense of confidence about the role of their community organizations in determining and policing such measures resulting from positive experiences with co-management since the land claim. Beyond establishing harvest limits, participants in the 2009 regional Caribou-Communities workshop agreed that there are a number of ways that communities can work with external institutions to strengthen caribou management, including: working with community-based Environment and Natural Resources Renewable Resource Officers; providing input into development of educational materials and coordinating community-based educational activities; collecting harvest data; and providing input into

development license and permit applications affecting caribou habitat.

But this study did not aim to test the validity of measures imposed by government, nor did it measure levels of support for such measures. Rather, the emphasis was on documenting Sahtu Dene and Métis traditions that could be recognized as part of a multifaceted and robust caribou management system. This being said, people made it quite clear that from a traditional knowledge perspective the concept of “management” is inappropriate. Any attempt to be the boss of caribou is a violation of Dene *weyah* (law). Aboriginal relationships with caribou were established in ancient times. The *weyah* of these relationships is outlined in the stories carried by each of the communities.

Participants in this study have told us that the caribou exist in order to feed the people, and this gift has been offered as long as people follow the protocols for being respectful to the caribou. An example that is repeated in every community is the rule against hitting caribou with a stick. If a person acquires a deep understanding of what this rule means, they will understand the principle that underlies protocols for harvesting, butchering, processing meat and sharing. Study participants have spoken at great length about Dene traditions in restricting harvests so the herds are maintained as a source of food for future generations, and so the leaders needed by the herd to guide and protect them on their migration routes are protected. Caribou carcasses, bones and meat are treated with deep respect. Meat is not hoarded, and nothing is wasted. Caribou habitat is also kept clean so that the caribou will continue to return. Women’s special power and role in relation to hunters and the family is recognized and strengthened in rules against stepping over blood, hunting equipment, and men’s bodies. This boundary permits harvesters to nurture an intense and focused relationship with caribou. When they hunt, they cross over into the caribou world. The protocols bind the spirituality of the people to the spiritual essence of the caribou and their habitat. Violations of the protocols threaten both the survival of caribou and the well-being of the community.



The challenge faced by the communities is that younger generations no longer have the same opportunities to learn about their sacred relationship with caribou that their grandparents did. Neither are they hearing the old caribou stories. So even if the caribou protocols are taught to them, their meaning will not be fully understood. Without the stories and the experiences on the land bringing together youth with adult harvesters and elders, the community is left with no basis for continuing to serve as stewards of the caribou herds. The consequences are dire. Not only will the herds go away, but Dene and Métis people will lose a source of their own identity, health, and well-being.

But it is not necessary for people to harvest caribou at all times in order to keep the traditions of respect strong. In the past when the herds have gone away, people have harvested other species including fish and moose, and very similar principles and protocols apply. So it is important that caribou be understood as just one aspect of people's relationship with the environment. In learning about protocols for caribou, younger generations are also learning skills for survival when caribou go away. And by harvesting other species, people are preparing for the return of the caribou, which according to Déline elders is heralded by a thundering sound.

Dene and Métis harvesters have always cherished opportunities to gather and share stories about their hunts. This is how they can compare experiences, measure these

against “baselines” from stories handed down to them by their parents and grandparents, develop an understanding of how the herd is doing, and make wise decisions about future harvesting. This is a traditional knowledge approach to monitoring and stewardship. Such monitoring must involve all three generations: elders and adult harvesters need to tell the ancient stories and stories from their own experiences, and youth need to hear the stories and experience them on the land. Traditional knowledge monitoring is not isolated within a single community. People have always



travelled long distances to follow the caribou, and in so doing they meet people of neighbouring regions. There are many stories of these encounters, and traces of other languages from elsewhere can still be found in the dialects of the Sahtu Region. This is how the stories travel, and people gain an understanding of the herds that spans the entire migration route. So there is a tradition that Dene and Métis wish to renew in regional and cross-regional caribou stewardship, or “management planning.”

The elders once rightly believed that the only way to maintain the stories is by telling them orally and thus maintaining relationships among the generations. This is still true. But oral traditions have become fragmented over time, and it will take a major effort to revitalize people’s ability to tell and listen to the stories. People are now using new ways of sharing stories and experiences, including telephone, video, radio, formal meetings, digital stories, and documents. We are learning through this study that youth have a special role to play in facilitating use of these new methods. Because young people spend so much of their time learning new skills in school, the schools also need to be a space where young people can learn about the stories and make these stories their own. There is a role for the elders and adult harvesters in the schools, just as there is a place for learning out on the land. Teachers also need to have tools to reinforce the knowledge shared by elders and show how this knowledge relates to scientific perspectives. Since students have become accustomed to the learning approaches introduced by the school system.



People would like to see a balanced approach to learning by new generations.

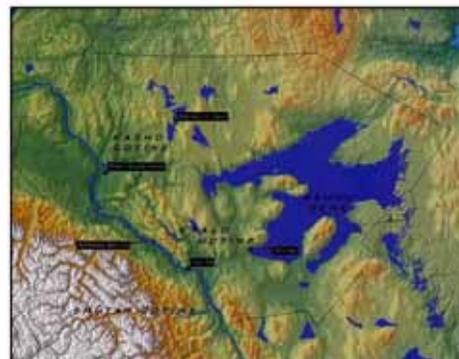
Documenting the stories and translating them from their original languages has become a high priority for the elders, who recognize that this is an important means of preserving their experiences of life on the land for future generations. But this is neither easy nor straightforward. There is a high level of training and discipline required to bridge the languages and cultures. The specialised role of traditional knowledge research as a foundation for revitalizing community based caribou stewardship needs to be recognized and supported. This study has shown that a collaborative research process bringing together elders, harvesters, youth, and scientists can lead to the creation of new knowledge about the changing environment for decision-making about caribou. Such research can also be a powerful influence in revitalizing people's sense of responsibility toward the caribou. Because traditional knowledge research is always about people's relationship with the environment, it remains an important tool for understanding what successful caribou management would be like.

## How Was the Study Done?

A pilot traditional knowledge study took place in Déline during 2004-2005, and resulted in a technical report and plain language brochure entitled *Dene Ways of Respecting the Land and Animals* (Déline First Nation 2005). This project outlined a Sahtúot'ineę (Great Bear Lake Dene) conception of land stewardship that recognizes the interrelationships of people, land, and animals and is founded on the principle of respect. Stories and experience on the land were emphasized as the vehicles for maintaining knowledge and stewardship practices.

In 2006-2007, the SRRB supported a second traditional knowledge study sponsored by the Fort Good Hope Renewable Resources

Dene Ways of Respecting the Land and Animals  
June 2005



Brochure produced by:  
Déline First Nation  
Déline, NT



Funding provided by:  
Sahtú Renewable Resources Board  
Tulino, NT

***Dene Ways of Respecting the Land and Animals* booklet (Déline First Nation 2005)**

Council in partnership with the University of Manitoba. It was during this time that results of scientifically designed caribou surveys began to show declines in the barren-ground caribou herds that travel through the region – known in the dialects of the region as ᖃᓃᓃᓃᓃ (Sahtúot’ine/Tulít’agot’ine), ᖃᓃᓃᓃᓃ (Shúhtagot’ine), or ᓃᓃᓃᓃᓃ (K’asho Got’ine), and by scientists as East and West Bluenose herds.

Dene and Métis in the Sahtu Region became concerned about the validity of the surveys, and about the caribou stewardship practices that could best sustain the herds. For this reason, it was decided that pending approval by Sahtu Renewable Resources Councils, traditional knowledge studies supported by the SRRB in each of the communities of the Sahtu Region would focus on caribou. Thus began a four year research program. The research process was iterative. Each community-based study built on its precursors in terms of both methods and outcomes. Study design in each community was also derived from specific local research experiences, questions and interests. And so the study took on a somewhat different character in each community. It was possible to expand the program beyond the original scope through a series of funding partnerships. A total of at least 50 individuals from the five communities of the Sahtu Region have participated in the study, not counting participants in regional forums. In partnership with the Déline Knowledge Project and with the participation of caribou ecologist Dr. Micheline Manseau (University of Manitoba/Parks Canada), a three day focus group meeting was held in Déline in preparation for the Barren-Ground Caribou Summit that took place on



**Caribou Traditional Knowledge Research Cycle**

January 23-26, 2007. Déline delegates to the Summit were asked to share key messages from the focus group.

Soon after the Summit, a similar focus group was held in Fort Good Hope. Participants reflected on key messages from the Inuvik Caribou Summit. Traditional knowledge about people's relationship with caribou and about changes in the herd was also recorded. The following August Fort Good Hope researcher Anne Marie Jackson and Deborah Simmons joined Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake community members in the annual Horton Lake caribou hunt, in partnership with veterinary scientist Dr. Susan Kutz (University of Calgary), where Anne Marie recorded both traditional practices and scientific sample for a caribou health study. PhD student Erin Freeland Ballantyne also began work with Fort Good Hope on a youth video project during the fall of 2007, exploring perspectives on caribou and climate change. Erin is now completing her PhD dissertation based on this work. Colville Lake's formal participation in the study began with a series of sessions with the local Elders Council that spanned three weeks. Following from the elders' commitment to involve youth in the project, a storytelling session with Grade 3-4 students was held at the school. This led to a student book-making



**Illustration from *The Caribou Boy* by Colville Lake Grades 3-4 (2008)**

project that was completed before the end of the school year. Building on the success of the elder-youth encounter, a digital storytelling workshop was organised for the following March in which youth worked with trainer Dawn Ostrem to create a mini-documentary video about the Horton Lake hunt. The community of Tulita initiated its study with a three day elders focus group discussing Dene and Métis relationships with mountain boreal caribou (t̥ɔdzié). Following the elders' recommendation, a hunting trip to Tets'ehxe (Drum Lake) was planned during February 23-March 6, 2009, in partnership with Chief Albert Wright School and the Tulita District Land Corporation's traditional knowledge study of the proposed Shúhtagot'ı̄ne Néné National Wildlife Area and Nááts'ı̄hch'oh National Park Reserve. Finally, the Norman Wells Land Corporation led a trip to Palmer Lake to kick off their study of t̥ɔdzie traditional knowledge. This will be followed by a digital storytelling workshop with the school in late January, 2009. Contingent with this, the Deline Knowledge Project will be holding a digital storytelling workshop in early February.

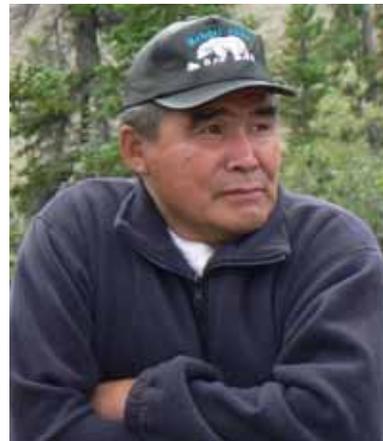
Concurrently with this study program, the SRRB and Dr. Deborah Simmons have provided support for complementary research entitled *Community Perspectives on Changing Caribou Populations*, led by Dr. Brenda Parlee (University of Alberta).



**Caribou Hunt at Tets'ehxe, February 23-March 6, 2009**

Deborah has provided assistance to Masters student Roger McMillan with his project in Fort Good Hope through discussions about research design and provision of focus group transcripts. She will be coordinating completion of the Déline portion of the research during January-March 2010.

During the period of the study, the SRRB has also supported several efforts to develop a cross-community, cross-regional and even national understanding of traditional knowledge and the role of communities in wildlife management, with caribou being a central focus. SRRB Chair Walter Bayha played a leading role in such efforts, with important assistance from Executive Director Jody Snortland and consultant support from Deborah Simmons (SENES Consultants Ltd. and University of Manitoba). Beyond presentations and discussions at regular SRRB meetings, the first experience in cross-community discussions within the Sahtu Region took place during the *Taking Care of the Land* camp at Lurek'ale Túé (Kelly Lake) during August 7-9, 2007, involving delegates from the five Renewable Resources Councils, the SRRB and NWT Environment and Natural Resources. A crucial second event was the Bluenose West Caribou Management Hearing held on November 21-23, 2007. The caribou traditional knowledge study was



Top L: Walter Bayha  
Top R: Chief Richard Kochon  
Bottom L-R: Dora Grandjambe and  
Anne Marie Jackson  
Cultural Impact Assessment Conference  
Yellowknife, Feb 28-29, 2008

not represented at this hearing, but the transcripts are available for incorporation into the study analysis. More recently, a three day regional workshop of Renewable Resources Council delegates was held on March 25-26, 2009 to discuss management implications of the caribou traditional knowledge study to date. These events have been important in building a collectivized understanding of the meaning of traditional knowledge and the role of Dene and Métis harvesters in caribou management.

Beyond the Sahtu Region, Walter and Deborah were founding members of the Learning Communities Network, which now has established international linkages. They helped to establish a cross-regional network of traditional knowledge practitioners, which to date has held three workshops (February 2008, March 2009, and November 2009). Walter and Deborah have also jointly presented at a variety of NWT and national forums on community-based resource management over the course of the study. Currently Deborah is assisting in the planning and coordination of the 13<sup>th</sup> North American Caribou Workshop entitled *Sustaining Caribou and their Landscapes – Knowledge to Action*, which aims for the first time to incorporate significant indigenous participation. She has also been invited to co-edit and contribute a chapter to a volume provisionally entitled *Community Perspectives on Changing Caribou Populations* along with Drs. Brenda



Top L-R: Alestine Andre, Florence Catholique, Madelaine Chocolate  
Bottom L-R: Jonas Antoine, Walter Bayha, Camilla Zoe-Chocolate  
Traditional Knowledge Practitioners Workshops 2008-2009

Parlee, Ken Caine and Micheline Manseau.

## **Conclusion**

This caribou traditional knowledge study has been an important opportunity to work with elders, adult harvesters and youth in documenting Dene and Métis perspectives about peoples' relationships with caribou. The next step will be for Renewable Resources Councils, the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board, and scientists to talk among themselves and with each other about how best to use what has been learned. Study participants have expressed hope that traditional stories and practices can be used to keep the knowledge alive, teaching new generations about their responsibilities for the maintaining the caribou herds. The stories show that communities have a strong role in monitoring caribou and ensuring that the herds remain a source of survival and well-being for future generations. The challenge will be to find ways of supporting this ongoing stewardship role in the context of social and environmental change.