

CHIPEWYAN PRAIRIE DÉNÉ FIRST NATION PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN (LARP)

CURRENT SITUATION

Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation is encouraged by the Government of Alberta's decision to establish a regional land and resource management planning process. It is with ever-increasing concerns that we have been observing and experiencing the cumulative environmental impacts of accelerating oil sands and forestry extraction activities within our traditional lands. We want to fully participate in a process for establishing a balanced approach to industrial development and environmental protection. The survival of our culture, our homeland/*No Ha' Nene*, and our future generations rests on successful outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation Traditional Lands

We are a *Déné'suline* people, a sub-group of the larger Déné Nation. Our people have long occupied the northeastern boreal forest regions of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation traditional lands extend north of *Tzi' Gan Tue'* (*McClelland Lake*), east to *Ejar As' Tue' Aza'* (*Peter Pond/Dillon Lake* in Saskatchewan; south to *Tlu' Cho Tue'* (*Cold Lake*), and west to *Tha Na Eha Tue'* (*Big Rock Lake/Wabasca*) (Figure 1).

Within this extensive territory, as is documented in stories which have been passed down orally through successive and countless generations, the ancestors of Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation specifically selected the lands within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed (Figures 1, 2) because they would sustain us in a future of co-existence with non-Aboriginal newcomers to our land. Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation clan families have continuously occupied the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed for many generations; at least six generations are documented in living memory. The archaeological record dates back thousands of years.

These lands, *No Ha' Nene*, were chosen because fish, wildlife, berries and everything else we needed as Déné people was in plentiful supply. We know our land intimately - the animals, the birds, the fish, the plants, the trees and shrubs, as well as their habits and habitats and the complexity of their inter-relationships. Our language reflects knowledge of these relationships. .

While all our traditional lands are important, the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed is of particular significance to us because this is where our ancestors were born, lived, and are buried; where our ancestral and current settlements, traplines and sacred areas are located; where our

harvesting needs, practices, patterns and responsibilities have been passed down without interruption for generations; where our stories, history, and language reside; and where an abundance of resources from the waters and forests have consistently been available to sustain us physically, mentally, and spiritually, despite concerted efforts over the past century to force us to abandon our Déné ways and assimilate. Figures 3 and 4 provide selected overviews of cultural landscape features and longstanding harvesting areas, respectively.

As Déné people, we have a sacred responsibility to care for and protect *our land*. We are obliged to speak for our people today and for those yet unborn. We are also obliged to speak for all the life forms sharing the land with us, for they cannot speak for themselves. The *land* and Déné people are one. We were here long before industry arrived and we intend on being here long after industry leaves.

Lower Athabasca Regional Planning (LARP) Area

The Lower Athabasca Regional Planning (LARP) area encompasses a significant portion of Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation's traditional territory (Figure 5). Oil sands deposits underlie most of our primary interest area, the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed (Figure 5). The majority of this same area is also licensed for coniferous and deciduous forest harvesting. Much of the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed has already been affected by conventional oil and gas, oil sands and forestry extraction projects and there are numerous, planned oil sands projects, both new and major expansions (Figure 6). All have ramifications for our cultural, spiritual, and community needs and aspirations, including food. They also have ramifications for all Albertans and Canadians and worldwide for the health of the boreal forest and the accumulated knowledge of human kind.

Community Workshop

On March 17, 2010, more than 75 Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation's Elders and harvesters of all ages, spent a full day exploring community needs and visions for conservation/protected areas and the requisites for sustained traditional use. This document is an outcome of the workshop and summarizes key considerations for immediate inclusion in the LARP planning process.

In support of this submission, traditional land use and occupancy maps, which are part of our ongoing traditional land use and occupancy study efforts, have been prepared and are appended. These traditional land use and occupancy maps are based on hundreds of years of knowledge, accrued through continuous observation and respectful, gentle living with the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed lands.

Related western scientific analyses, prepared by the Nation's environmental consultants, relevant to the key considerations outlined in the following, are included as Appendix A.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

This preliminary presentation primarily utilizes visual formats (Figures 1 - 9) which we believe will assist LARP planners in better understanding our situation and our homeland (*No Ha' Nene*) within the planning area. We anticipate that the visuals will support an immediate understanding of where there are congruencies between the goals, objectives and aspirations of both Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation and the Province of Alberta and where there are obvious differences. Most importantly, we believe they will be of assistance in finding common ground in the ultimate resolution of differences and conflicts.

Matters overarching the key considerations discussed below are (1) clean air and watersheds which are the fundamental requirements for all life (and all economies); (2) the recognition and protection of Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation's Treaty and Aboriginal Rights; and (3) a moratorium on any new industrial project tenures and approvals until a regional land and resource management plan, which recognizes Aboriginal needs, interests, and rights, is in place.

1. ACCESSIBLE

We concur with LARP that the conservation and protection of boreal forest lands and waters which are not underlain by oil sands deposits is a wise and precautionary measure. However, our community requirements for current and future harvesting and heritage retention will not be met unless conservation/protected lands for Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation traditional use are delineated within or in close proximity to the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed - our daily/recent past/historical/ancestral use area (see Background preceding; Figures 3 and 4).

2. INTACT AND HEALTHY/WITH POTENTIAL FOR RESTORATION

The establishment of a percentage target for conservation/protected lands within the LARP planning area is a welcome first step, given the essential and non-substitutable services provided by intact functioning forest and wetland ecosystems and their irreplaceable species habitat support functions. We expect these targets to apply to each of the various boreal sub-regions which are encompassed within the LARP planning area, rather than the aggregated whole. There is a difference.

Within the sub-region which includes the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed, Chipewyan Prairie Déné Elders and harvesters raise concerns that a proposed target of 20% for conservation/protected lands within the LARP planning area as a whole is too low for combined Aboriginal/non, Aboriginal harvesting, particularly with the influx of recreationists and sports hunters/fishers (development related) who are competing for rapidly decreasing food resources.

Much disturbance within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed has already occurred, the full extent of which we have not currently assessed on the ground. A preliminary desktop analysis of intact lands which was prepared for the Nation indicates that cumulative disturbance within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed is extensive (Figure 7) (see Appendix A;). Intact lands which are not already declared parks or provincial protected areas are in short supply. For this reason preferential consideration of intact/less disturbed areas is warranted for protection/conservation for our Nation's traditional use.

We believe that the forest fragmentation situation can be improved, with significant gains for forest and species protection/conservation, if the land is managed more in accordance Déné principles and customary practices. Some possibilities are immediately apparent to us; others rest in the realm of longer term restorative projects. Improvements and innovation in reclamation regulations and practices (e.g. more stringent and immediate) would undoubtedly result in immediate gains.

In regard to the LARP planning process, there are existing/emerging safety concerns, with profound negative implications for the health of our community, which require immediate attention. They include concerns and reports of elevated mercury levels in fish from Winefred and Christina lakes and the effects of a toxic waste site recently established in one of our primary harvesting areas (considered to one of the Nation's Fridges), in close proximity to our community and to a tributary of *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River*, our water source (Figure 6).

3. SUFFICIENT SIZE/ECOSYSTEM DIVERSITY

Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation conservation/protected Lands for traditional use must be sufficiently large and diverse to ensure sustainable harvesting success (now and for future generations). As evident in Figure 4, our long established harvesting areas, within and in proximity to the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed, are both intensive and extensive. The need for tradeoffs in a planning process is clearly recognized by the Nation. Our immediate attention will be directed to the security of our food staples (moose, whitefish, and berries).

We are currently working with our Elders, harvesters, and environmental consultants to determine the size and nature of a land base which would sustain moose harvesting and species diversity within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed. This analysis includes a range of ecosystem types (reflective of our Déné classifications). The water-based analysis for whitefish will soon get underway.

The protection of all waters (lakes, rivers, muskegs, wetlands/riparian areas) within Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation traditional lands is paramount (Figures 8, 9). Within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed, wetlands and small water bodies, such as Horseshoe Lake, Otter

Lake, and Hook Lake cannot be overlooked (Figure 9). They are very important to us. Muskegs are highly valued in general. In particular, the *White Muskeg/ Nil tale' ghi' a/Egg Lake/Egeze Tue, a* (Figure 9). *Nil tale' ghi' a*, is a unique muskeg ecosystem, as well as a sacred area of extremely high importance to us (See Section 8, Sacred Areas). It is the source waters of *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River*. Moreover, it is the birthing grounds for woodland caribou which is a sacred Déné icon and a recognized Species at Risk (see Section 5, Diversity).

As part of our internal planning, we are also engaged in a process of determining what quantities of safe staple food resources (moose, whitefish and berries) our members require, now and 50 years into the future, and what sized land/water base(s) will support such harvests. Our analyses will include margins for error (i.e. catastrophic events, unexpected consequences, spills and malfunctions and the potential effects of climate change within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed.

4. CONNECTIVITY

The benefits of ensuring that traditional use areas are connected to already existing protected lands and conservation areas, both within Alberta and Saskatchewan (Figure 6) are recognized. For the most part, however, under current parks/conservation management regimes in Alberta, traditional use is not an option nor is it usually comfortable for our members. In the creation of protected/ conservation lands for Aboriginal peoples' traditional use, new management approaches and policies will be required.

We have much in common with our neighboring Déné/Aboriginal communities and there are potential benefits to ensuring that there is connectivity between all Aboriginal conservation/protected use areas, both in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Given the similarities in our communities' needs, land use values and belief systems, collaborative and complementary efforts can be expected to lead to greater success.

5. DIVERSITY

The very core of our Déné identity is rooted in our land and the diversity of species which it supports and, in turn, the foods and medicines they provide. The recent unprecedented rapid rate of disturbance and destruction of habitats necessary for the survival of the vast array of boreal forest species, long noted within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed, is a cause for great concern by our people. If the animals disappear, so go Déné people. The growing scarcity of resources within the Nation's *fridges* (Figure 4) is perhaps the most alarming sign that critical thresholds/tipping points are fast approaching or may have already been crossed.

While food staples are understandably a primary concern for community today, as Déné people we know that all life forms, whether we eat them or not, are necessary for the health and

wellbeing of the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/ Christina River* watershed land/ Déné people. Both in a specific local sense and in the broader global sense, the loss of biological and ethnic-diversity is recognized as a matter of increasing concern worldwide. A monoculture plantation forest of mutant poplars, treated with chemicals, is arguably alive. However, it is not *living* in that it does not sustain the natural diversity of an endemic ecosystem.

Our direct, on-the-ground observations and experience with decreasing fish and wildlife populations within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/ Christina River* watershed are corroborated by Independent scientific analyses (See Appendix A). In this regard, we share with a broader public (provincial, federal, and international) deep concerns about the mounting evidence of species and cultural extinctions worldwide. We want, and we need, to be involved in efforts to protect vulnerable species within the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/ Christina River* watershed.

We have much offer in genuine collaborative efforts to protect boreal forest species deemed to be at risk or sensitive. Because of our relatively recent transition to a permanent settlement (1960s), our Elders have lived on (with) the land, where our very survival depended upon the consideration and application of traditional knowledge accumulated over generations of living in the same place. For this reason alone, our Elders are an unrivalled repository of detailed information about the species which belong to the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/ Christina River* watershed, including their movements, behaviors, and reproductive cycles, and critical habitat requirements.

In our examination of ecosystem requirements which would sustain our current and future harvesting, we are focusing specific attention on the habitat requirements for moose, woodland caribou and whitefish. Because their requirements are very different, we are assuming that planning, on this basis, will ensure a broad range of protection for a wide variety of other species as well (see Analysis Appendix A).

6. BASELINES AND MONITORING

The success of LARP in regard to environmental protection/conservation will ultimately be gauged by measurable outcomes, which are contingent upon the establishment of baselines and ongoing and continuous monitoring and information feedback loops. In this regard, Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation and the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/ Christina River* watershed are an invaluable resource for the envisioned LARP process. Our Elders and harvesters can be of immense assistance in establishing credible population baselines, for 1970 and earlier; 10 years ago (“*when the animals were still good*”) and the present, for they have seen and lived (and continue to live) the changes.

Ensuring that there is a full and complete catalogue of species, present in the boreal sub-region encompassed by the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/ Christina River* watershed, is a requisite first step in a

regional planning process. We have good reason to believe that the existing catalogues for *Kai' Kos' Deseh/ Christina River* watershed (the sub-region) are currently incomplete. In studies of ungulates in the region, for example, references to wood bison are absent, yet we know they are/were present and seen as recently as 1995. If such is the case with large mammals, which are relatively well documented in environmental assessments, we can only wonder what the situation might actually be with birds and plant species which are less so. Moreover, what about the insects, upon which birds and plants depend (e.g. food/pollination)? In this regard we note the peripheral consideration that has thus far been afforded to the 'lower orders' of species in western scientific classification schemes and environmental assessments, despite their fundamental importance.

Comparative analyses between western and traditional sciences are definitely in order, recognizing that our Elders will only know most of the species by their Déné names. Photographs and collaborative on-the-ground investigations can bridge the gap in the documentation process. The first area we suggest is Winefred Lake based on our Elders repeated accounts of the numbers and variety of birds (resident and migratory) at *Doltu'chogh (Winefred Lake)*. Boreal species already known to be at risk or in decline or threatened (e.g. songbirds, such as warblers and chickadees, swans, whooping cranes, barn swallows) could (should) be the starting point.

Because we are fortunate to have a consultant linguist who is fluent in our Déné dialect, such an investigation would immediately move beyond strict cataloguing to detailed observations about behaviors and relationships between species through time. An added advantage of the Déné language, highly relevant to the establishment of baseline conditions, is that the language structure differentiates what a speaker has personally observed and what he/she has heard. We want to work with western scientific disciplines (e.g. the ornithologists, etymologists, rare plant specialists); we have an invaluable contribution to make. However, it must be done quickly, for this knowledge is at risk with the each passing of one of our Elders.

7. ECONOMIES/LIVELIHOODS

Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nations recognizes the economic significance of oil sands and forestry industries within the LARP planning area and to our community. At the same time, we fear that the essential services provided by a healthy environment are too often overlooked in the rush of technological and industrial innovation. A healthy market economy is inextricably imbedded in a healthy environment. There are no substitutes for air, water, forests and soil. There is no economy in the absence of a healthy environment.

Nor do we want the importance of our traditional sustenance economy/livelihood to be ignored or dismissed as something in the past. Not only does sustenance harvesting provide our community with appropriate foods. It is the central integrating factor which connects individual

activity with family and group welfare and our heritage and history. It also provides community harvesters and processors with direct information about the state of animal and plant populations and the state of the ecologies of *No Ha' Nene (Our Land)*, on a daily, seasonal, and annual basis. This characteristic feature is of particular relevance to the establishment of credible regional environmental baselines and monitoring activities (see Section 6, preceding).

Moreover, we believe that there are numerous and new and alternative economic opportunities which can and must be created within the larger LARP planning area to avoid the creation of an industrial wasteland/desert). In this regard, innovations related to the reclamation of lands, propagation of indigenous species; protection of endangered species and restoration of endemic ecologies can have both an immediate and a broader applicability. In the tourism arena, as one example, meaningful travel alternatives that combine research and cross-cultural collaborations are in growing demand. Support of such developments would undoubtedly counteract international environmental concerns which are being raised about the province of Alberta's oil sands development and would fit very well with our plans and our resolve to protect/restore the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed.

As a Nation, we are actively exploring the potential for a number of such projects which are based in both traditional and western science. These projects would be uniquely relevant the *Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River* watershed and support community aspirations and heritage/language retention efforts. At the same time, they would be relevant and necessary components, supportive of LARP regional planning and information-based resource management decisions.

8. ANCESTRAL SETTLEMENTS/SACRED AREAS/BURIALS

Locales of special importance to our heritage and history are noted in Figure 9. They include combinations of ancestral settlements, sacred areas and burials, and valued landscapes ("living on the land places" which were repeatedly identified by participants in the planning workshop.

- ***Doltu' chogh/Winefred Lake***
Ancestral Settlement; Burial s; *Living on the Land Place*; *Sacred Locales*
- ***Doghostu' /Cowper Lake***
Ancestral Settlement; Burials; *Living on the Land Place*
- ***Ho Gai Cho/Big Prairie/ Chelatu' /Bohn Lake***
Janvier Current/Ancestral Settlement; Burial Grounds. *Living on the Land Place*
- ***Taske' / Christina Crossing***
Ancestral/Archaeological Settlement; Burials

- **Garson Lake/Luaztue'**
Ancestral Settlement; Burials; *Living on the Land Place*
- **Kai' Kos' Deseh/Red Willow/Christina River**
Source waters for the Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River Watershed/Nation;
Medicines
- **Winefred River/Doldeze'**
Ancestral Family Settlements; Burials; Medicines
- **Nil tale' ghi' a/White Muskeg and Egeze Tue/Egg Lake**
Sacred Area; Source Muskeg Waters of Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River;
Medicines; Woodland Caribou Birthing Area and Range.

GOING FORWARD

Chipewyan Prairie Déné First Nation is prepared to participate fully in a regional planning which seeks to create a meaningful balance between environmental, economic, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' needs and interests in the Lower Athabasca region. We are ready to work collaboratively in a process which recognizes and respects different worldviews, ethics and values and believe that better planning will be the outcome of such an exchange.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, traditional knowledge does not only relate to the past. Our detailed knowledge of our homeland (*No Ha' Nene*) within the Kai' Kos' Deseh/Christina River watershed is relevant NOW. The time depth which comes from continuous generations of living in the same place will be even more relevant in the future, given the influx of newcomers to the province and government agencies managing lands and resources. In a planning process which must take many different interests and considerations into account, we have much to offer. Since we know our land and its characteristic patterns so well, we bring to the LARP planning table the advantage of being able to create and craft options which provide the foundations to meet multiple Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal objectives.

As an example, our ancestral settlements/burials located on the shores of lakes are noted in Section 8 were always established in areas where an abundance of all foods/resources needed were close at hand. Such areas are known as *living on the land places*. These areas are very important candidate areas for the creation and establishment of nurseries and protected/conservation areas because they have already withstood tests of time. If we keep such areas *still living*, our values and needs are met in terms of foods/medicines, language and heritage retention. At the same time a wide range of non-Aboriginal peoples' values and needs can also be realized.

The future well being and survival of our people and our boreal forest homeland is contingent upon the development of a robust and comprehensive regional land use plan and management framework. We have a vested interest in a successful process. We are prepared to do our part and will provide additional information related to any or all matters which have been outlined in the foregoing as required.