

Summary Report

Joint Caribou Meeting – Ross River Dena and Sahtú Region



Held July 23-24, 2014
At Tu Łidlini (Ross River)
Yukon Territory

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Cover photo:

Deborah Simmons, ʔehdzo Got’ıne ʔots’ę Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board)



Meeting Summary and Resolutions

For two days in July 2014, the Ross River Dena Chief, Councillors and community members hosted Sahtú delegates in Tu Łidlíni (Community of Ross River, Yukon Territory) to discuss concerns about *Gudzih / Shúhta Goꝛepé* (Northern Mountain woodland caribou) in the Mackenzie Mountains. Approximately 50 people attended the meetings, including representatives from the Government of the Northwest Territories, Renewable Resource Councils and Boards, small businesses, researchers and youth.

The main goals of the Joint Mountain Caribou Meeting were to:

- Encourage dialogue on the situation surrounding mountain caribou, with a focus on the shared traditional territory at *K'á Tá* (Dechenla/Macmillan Pass/Canol), and
- Identify solutions to address the problems of disrespectful harvesting, population decline, and the degradation of habitat that is important to *Gudzih / Shúhta Goꝛepé*.



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

Shúhta Dene are mountain people and include Ross River Dena and Shúhtagot'Iné from the Yukon and Northwest Territories. We share a long history in this part of the Mackenzie Mountains and are very concerned about the decline in numbers of *Gudzih / Shúhta Goꝛepé* that we have witnessed in recent years. At the same time, we have seen an increasing number of hunters coming here from other areas, and have concerns that their actions are impacting caribou and the sensitive habitat here. We want to act together as *Shúhta Dene* to address these concerns, and to develop a strategy to deal with increasing impacts of climate change and the numerous industrial projects that are proposed in this area in the near future.

Discussions at this first 'cross-boundary' meeting helped to clarify the challenges we are facing, share information, renew and build relationships, and set the foundation necessary for future cooperative action. We feel that urgent action is required, so are happy that the meeting was so solution-oriented. We are also happy that our elders were present to share their stories with us.

Ross River Dena Council and Sahtú representatives
 Consensus was achieved with respect to five recommendations for immediate action to be considered by the Tulít'a and Norman Wells ʔehdzo Got'ıne (Renewable Resources Councils) and Sahtú Secretariat Incorporated. These resolutions represent the consensus of the Sahtú beneficiaries and Ross River Dena present at the meeting:

1. Permission to hunt

That the Tulít'a Renewable Resources Council put in place a requirement for all non-Sahtú beneficiaries and non-Ross River Dena land users to obtain permission to harvest in the Dechenla/K'á Tá shared traditional territory.

2. Resident and non-resident hunting

That the Government of the Northwest Territories put in place an immediate closure on the resident caribou harvest in the Dechenla/K'á Tá area for at least two years.

3. Caribou stewardship planning

That a two year joint caribou stewardship planning process be undertaken including delegates of the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, Tulít'a Renewable Resources Council, and Ross River Dena Council.

4. Ross River check station

That check stations operated by Ross River Dena and Sahtú Dene (or Government of the NWT enforcement officers) be established in Ross River and at Mile 222 respectively for at least two years to monitor permitting and big game harvest for the area encompassing Ross River and Dechenla/K'á Tá

5. Friendship treaty

That Ross River Dena and Tulít'a Dene leaders take the necessary steps to establish a Friendship Treaty.

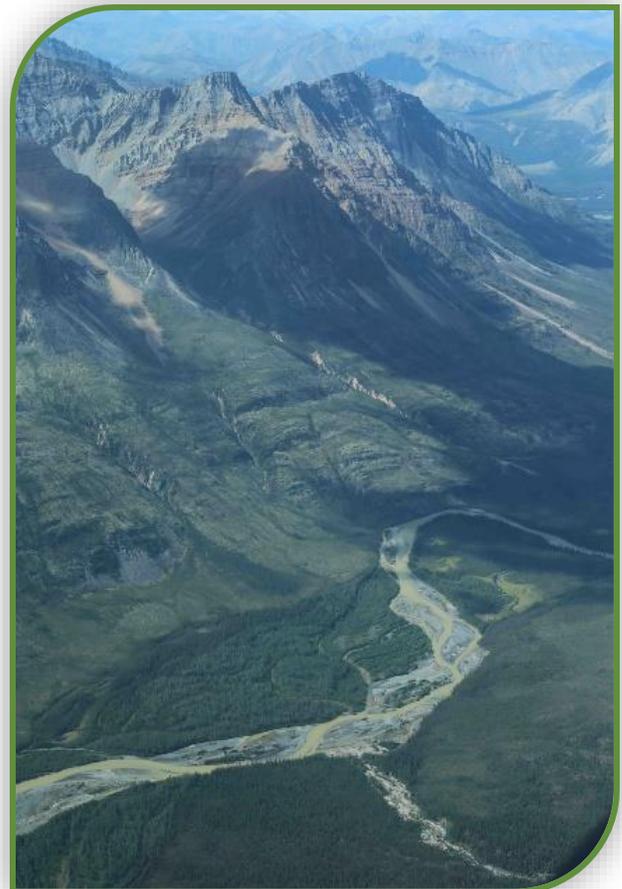


Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

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This is an historic meeting

Welcome

The Mackenzie Mountains are home to several herds of Northern Mountain caribou – a distinct type of woodland caribou. Some of these caribou herds are sedentary, travelling little from season to season. Other herds are migratory, moving longer distances and gathering into large groups seasonally.

Located near the headwaters of the Keele, Caribou Cry, Ross and MacMillan Rivers, *K'á Tá* is an especially rich part of this landscape, known not just for its high numbers of mountain caribou, but also moose, migratory birds, and healthy populations of fish and beaver.

For many generations, *Shúhta Dene* from both sides of the Yukon / Northwest Territories border have travelled to this area to hunt caribou and moose, gather goose feathers, and share food and knowledge with neighbouring families. Traditional use sites are evident over much of the landscape and our family histories and stories are deeply entwined here.



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

It's a paradise

dwindled. Moose are also getting fewer and fewer. The land itself is showing signs of change, mountain ice patches are getting smaller each year, permafrost is melting, and fires are increasing in size and intensity so much that they threaten important caribou habitat.

Amidst these changes, human activities and industrial presence are on the rise. Each year, more and more hunters come from other areas to harvest caribou and moose. Helicopters fly them into remote areas and four-wheel vehicles tear-up the landscape. Mineral exploration and development expand at a rapid pace, and roads and other infrastructure are developing to keep up. Perhaps at no other time has the environment changed so much, so quickly. If the animals go extinct, where will our grandchildren live? How are we going to feed them? We need somewhere for our younger generations to hunt.

Over the last five to ten years people knowledgeable about the area have started to witness disturbing changes. The large herds of caribou that used to colour the landscape have

but it's at risk

We carry the same interests



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

A lot of our members are concerned. But in the face of these changes we see opportunity. At this place a long time ago, there was a lot of sharing and a lot of wildlife. Our traditions were to share all of our foods with our neighbours. It is also our tradition to care for this shared area together. We have the same concerns about wildlife, water, and the land. We want to look after our land as stewards. We want to help caribou numbers come back.

On July 23 and 24 the Ross River Dena Chief, Councillors and community members hosted Sahtú delegates in Tu Łidlini (the community of Ross River, Yukon Territory) to discuss concerns about caribou in the K'á Tǎ area. Approximately 50 people took part in the meeting, with participants from Tu Łidlini, Norman Wells, Tulít'a, Yellowknife, and Déljñę. There were representatives from the Government of the Northwest Territories, Renewable Resource Councils and Boards, small business, research and youth; Appendix A includes a list of people who attended the meeting.

The meeting was an opportunity to share again – share our local concerns with each other – not only about caribou and their habitat, but about moose and all the other animals and things we depend on, about development, the impacts that it is having on our lifestyle, our social life, political life, and economic life.

When we meet like this we have good discussions and we find solutions. During this meeting we found that we have a strong desire to renew and rebuild these relationships and work together – we have a friendship treaty and want to continue in that spirit. Our objective here is to work cooperatively towards joint caribou stewardship in the shared area of the Ross River Dena, *Shúhtagot'jñę*, and all Shúhta Dene so that we can minimize impacts on mountain caribou. Our overall interest is much bigger than the caribou, but this is just a start. We feel it's critical to act now, and if we start with the caribou, then maybe later we can look at a more holistic approach and develop a longer-term strategy for conservation.

We can move mountains

Background:

Shúhta Dene (mountain people)

The host of the 2014 Joint Mountain Caribou Meeting – the Ross River Dena Council (RRDC) – is a Kaska First Nation located at the confluence of the Ross and Pelly Rivers, near the Campbell Highway and the North Canal Road in the southeast Yukon Territory (YT). The meeting was held in Tu Łidlini (the Community of Ross River, YT). Sahtú Dene came to the meeting in Kaska territory from Tulít'a, Norman Wells and Dél'Inę, representing the Tulít'a Renewable Resource Council (TRRC) and the ʔehdzo Got'Inę Gots'ę Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, SRRB) in the Northwest Territories (NT).

Ross River Dena, Shúhta Dene, and Shúhtagot'Inę are mountain people that have a cultural history spanning this part of the Mackenzie Mountains. In this report, we use the terms as follows:

- **Ross River Dena** – Dena people that live in Tu Łidlini (the community of Ross River), including members of the Kaska First Nation and other First Nations. Most Ross River Dena speak Kaska, but some speak Slavey
- **Sahtú Dene** – Dene people from the Sahtú Settlement Area (Sahtú = Great Bear Lake). Most Sahtú Dene speak Slavey; there are three dialects of Slavey within the Sahtú region
- **Shúhta Dene** – a general term to refer to Mountain Dene
- **Shúhtagot'Inę** – the term for Mountain Dene in Tulít'a dialect.



Photos: Ross River Dena Land Stewardship Office

Traditional Knowledge (TK) indicates that over countless generations, Shúhta Dene were mobile hunter-gatherers in the Mackenzie Mountains – regularly travelling to places like K’á Tǎ to hunt northern mountain caribou and gather goose feathers, among many other activities. Research has documented and compiled some of the many travel routes, hunting areas and techniques, place names and other archaeological sites, as well as a lot of ecological information about mountain caribou and this landscape.¹ This knowledge comes from a time when Shúhta Dene followed a nomadic lifestyle, following the cycles of the seasons and animals and travelling many miles over the course of a year.

For Shúhtagot’Inę, the main pattern during the time of the fur trade was to spend the summer months fishing and hunting near Tulít’a and the trading posts in the Mackenzie Valley, then travel by foot into the mountains for seven to eight months of the year. We would return to the lowlands once rivers were navigable (around late May) using moose skin boats. Ross River Dena had similar patterns throughout the year that took us northeast into this shared area. Figure 1 shows K’á Tǎ in relation to the present day communities of Tu Łidlini, Tulít’a and Norman Wells; harvesters also come here from other areas.

K’á Tǎ (the place)

The area shown in Figure 1 centers on K’á Tǎ – a location between MacMillan Pass and Caribou Pass in the Mackenzie Mountains – a place for which Shúhtagot’Inę names translate as “willow flats” or “the end of the treeline”. This area is part of the Mackenzie Mountain barrens, an expansive, high alpine, tundra plateau near the headwaters of the Keele, Caribou Cry, Ross, and MacMillan Rivers. River names such as Turíchi and Mǎcho Tsíé / Mitchotse reflect the fact that bull caribou are known to migrate to and use this area in the fall. There are numerous ways of referring to the area, as well as traditional place names in the different dialects that speak to the long shared history here. Some other names that are used to refer to specific locations or the broader area as a whole include Dechenla (“the land at the end of the sticks”), Dechłǰ and Xaichu, among others.

While some work documenting traditional place names has taken place, at the time of writing this report, published sources that could confirm the correct use of many Shúhta Dene terms were not available. As a result, we have included few traditional names or references to place here, but hope to be able to access and include many more in the future. Determining an exact outline for K’á Tǎ and other important areas is also work that will need to be done in the future.

K’á Tǎ is important area both ecologically and historically. Shúhta Dene have identified many special places in traditional knowledge work, lots of different caribou mix here, and the area is important to hundreds of species of birds, as well as moose, wolves, wolverines, grizzlies and countless small creatures including marmots, ground squirrels, pikas, and voles. The Mackenzie Mountain Barrens were identified as an ecologically significant area as part of the International Biological Program in 1975.

¹ Andrews, T., G. MacKay, L. Andrew, W. Stephenson, A. Barker, C. Alix and the Shúhtagot’ine Elders of Tulita. 2012. Alpine Ice Patches and Shúhtagot’ine Land Use in the Mackenzie and Selwyn Mountains, Northwest Territories, Canada. ARCTIC Vol. 65, Suppl. 1 (2012) P. 22-42.

Ross River Dena Council. N.D. Dene Dechen Tah Néde’ Living in the Bush: Traditional Lifestyles of the Kaska and Mountain Slavey People of Ross River. A resource reader produced for the Ross River Dena Council.

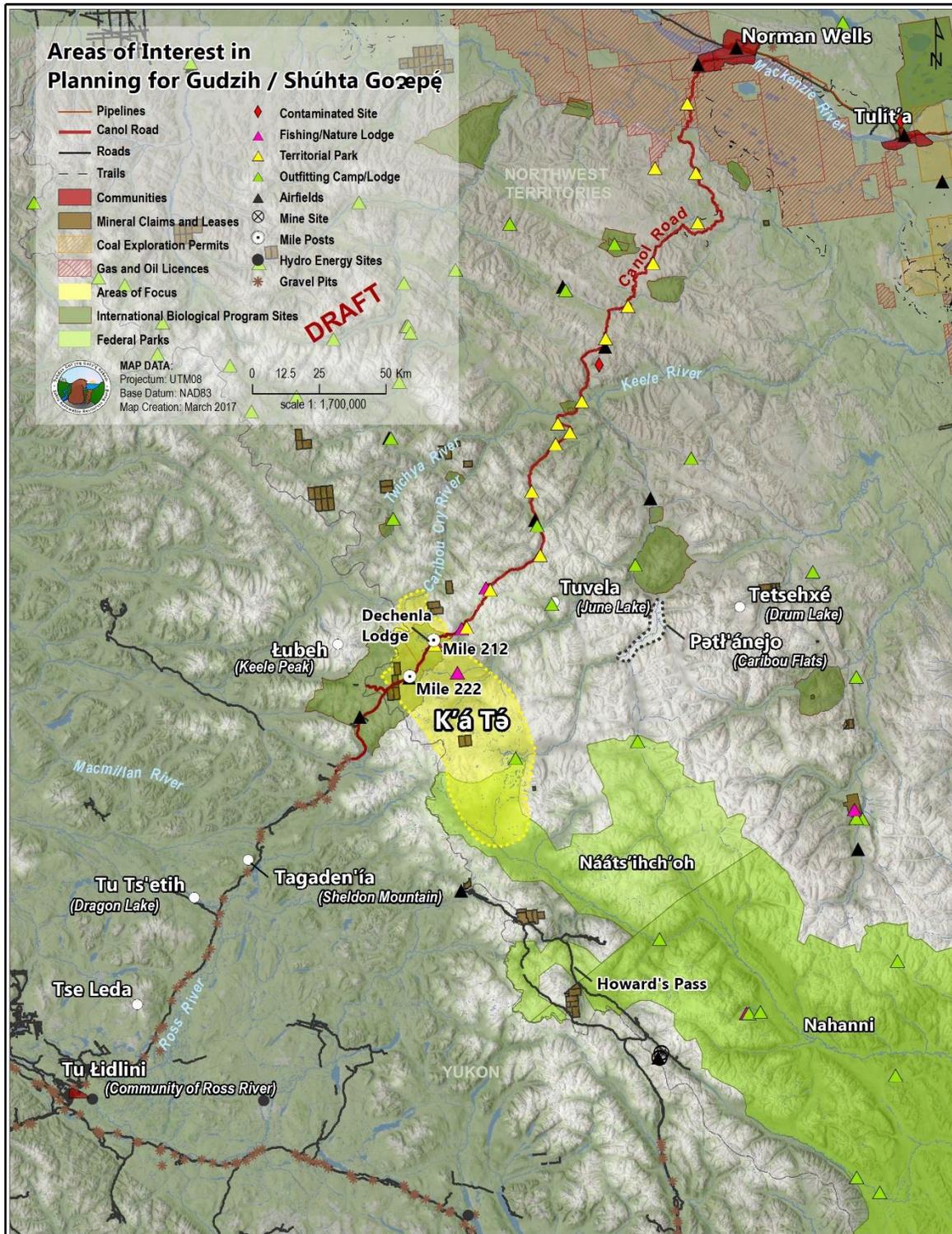


Figure 1: Map showing areas of interest in planning for Gudzih / Shúhta Gozépé in areas of the Mackenzie Mountains that have traditionally been shared by Ross River Dena and Shúhta Dene from Tu Tidlini and Shúhtagot'ine from Tulit'a and Norman Wells. The area outlined and indicated as K'á T'é on this map was not defined by the participants of the Joint Caribou Meeting, but was instead derived from work published by Andrews et al. (2012).

Gudzih / Shúhta Goᑭepé (the caribou)

Amongst the Ross River Dena and Shúhtagot'jñę, relationships with caribou tend to be place-based, and communities are traditionally responsible for caribou stewardship in their established harvest areas. While we have many similarities in language, we use different dialects in our communities, meaning that there are several ways of referring to mountain caribou when doing cross-boundary work. To Ross River Dena, these caribou are known as Gudzih, and to Shúhtagot'jñę they are Shúhta Goᑭepé. Generally, we consider the caribou to be all of one type, even though differences are noted in body size and coloration, antler size, and in behaviour and movement patterns. Gudzih / Shúhta Goᑭepé are known to come to K'á Tá from many different directions, and all rely on the unique habitat they find there.

Scientists usually define caribou herds by their known winter ranges and movement patterns. Research indicates that at least three herds of northern mountain caribou rely on K'á Tá. Northern mountain caribou are a type of woodland caribou, and while they are similar to their boreal counterparts, they have different habitat preferences and behaviours. Those that migrate have two types of movement patterns: they move up and down in elevation as food quality and availability changes, and they move seasonally between their winter and summer ranges. In the summer they are typically found in open alpine and sub-alpine areas where they seek out snow patches for relief from insects and heat. In the winter they move into more forested areas where there is less snow. There are also mountain caribou that do not migrate. However, relatively little scientific research has been done in this area.

Through our travels, Shúhta Dene have come to know the land, the caribou, their behaviours, and their movements very well. For example, Shúhta Dene elder Leon Andrews' grandparents talked about going to Dawson City and Ross River, past Keele Peak, and along Caribou Cry River in times when Shúhtagot'jñę were more nomadic. In this way, generation after generation, a wealth of knowledge was built about caribou. Other non-indigenous community members with decades spent on the land at K'á Tá also have valuable observations to provide; some further relevant information about mountain caribou movements documented during the 2014 meeting is included in Appendix B.

As Shúhta Dene we know that the land and the caribou have changed in a way that is worrisome in recent years. Oral histories indicate that the caribou used to travel much further north in their migrations. Now there is some uncertainty about what the caribou are doing and where they may be going, but overall we all know we are seeing fewer caribou or witnessing them moving away from their usual areas. We wonder how climate change is playing a role in these changes and what we can do to help Gudzih / Shúhta Goᑭepé adapt. While further scientific and traditional knowledge research would undoubtedly shed more light on what is happening around K'á Tá, those of us with the longest shared history with these caribou feel that we already know enough to be concerned and to take action.



Photo: Ross River Dena Land Stewardship Office

This report

The 2014 Joint Caribou Meeting was the first gathering in which Shúhta Dene from the Yukon and Northwest Territories came together to share stories from both sides of the YT/NT border and explore ways of addressing concerns about Gudzih / Shúhta Goᑭepé. The meeting did not follow a formal agenda, but was characterized by personal and emotional accounts about K’á Táh and what is happening there. Some individuals were asked to speak or present information as representatives from specific organizations and/or communities; other speakers represented themselves and their own experiences or history in the area.

This report was written in a way that would capture the main messages of the meeting in the voices of the participants as much as possible – we have included many first-person narratives and few analyses or interpretations of the information. The meeting was audio recorded with participants’ permission, and verbatim transcripts were prepared as a meeting record. Sequential interpretation was provided during the meeting – Michael Neyelle was interpreter for Shúhtagot’jñę and Norman Sterriah for Ross River Dena – however, no translation was done as part of the transcription. This report was prepared using the meeting transcripts; quotations are in a larger, gray font and have been edited for clarity or brevity as necessary. Participants were given opportunities to review and edit their meeting input. More formal presentations made during the meeting are summarized and isolated in text boxes.

The proceedings are presented here in three main sections that loosely follow the order of discussion:

1. The Context

- Shared history, shared territory, shared culture
- Shared future

2. Challenges we face

- Harvesting Practices,
- Industrial Activities,
- Environmental Change

3. Finding solutions/Taking action

- Shúhta Dene joint stewardship,
- Increasing knowledge,
- Protecting the land for caribou and culture
- Restricting and monitoring hunting.

Within each section information is organized into the main themes that arose; topics that seemed to be of highest interest, concern or priority are presented first. A short preamble introduces each main topic and provides additional historical and background information to provide a fuller context for the reader.



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

1. The Context

Shared history, shared culture, shared place

There has been a strong connection between Ross River Dena and Shúhtagot'Inę for a very long time. Many participants at the Joint Mountain Caribou Meeting have family connections that span today's political boundaries and pre-date contact with Europeans. Shúhta Dene from Tu Łidlini, Tulít'a, and Norman Wells alike carry stories of regularly travelling back and forth to K'á Tǎ to hunt and share. Today, we also have non-Dene who have made our communities their home. Some have learned our traditions to know how to live in and behave respectfully in this place.

Ross River Dena and Shúhtagot'Inę have a wealth of traditional knowledge about Gudzih / Shúhta Goᶇepé. However, because the focus of this meeting was on the situation currently affecting caribou at K'á Tǎ, relatively little of this knowledge was shared over the two days of discussions. Appendix B includes some local observations that were shared about caribou movement patterns in the area. The Ross River Dena Council and the ʔehdzo Got'Inę Gots'é Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, SRRB) both have further sources of relevant traditional and local knowledge.



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

Shúhtagot'Inę would go there a long time ago, before the white people even exist or come around. There used to be a lot of geese there when they shed their feathers; that's where they get the feathers for their arrows. That is an important area not only for caribou going back and forth too, but our ancestors that walked before us.

Frederick Andrew

I know there are a lot of relations. My dad, William Peter, used to walk 11 days to make it to Fort Norman on foot. He had taken some foods with him, the dry goods, to keep him going up that way. The last time I went up to the NWT and bartered for meat was in the '70s as far as I know. It was so beautiful to see the young children in the camp learning the skinning techniques and sharing and language and everything. I was packed around in those areas when I was a little kid. I was born up at the old Ross and we used to live across the river. We do have connections between the Sahtú; the sharing accord long ago was so great. There was such a strong feeling

and connection many years ago up in North Canal between the Ross River people and Tulít'a, NWT, Sahtú. You had a lot of support. *Jessie Peter*

We call ourselves Dena people regardless of where we live, either from Colville Lake, Fort Good Hope, Déłı̄ne, or elsewhere. We have the same code of ethics when it comes to protection of land; I hear that from the people we work with, the elders, the land stewards. We have traditional laws that go along with traditional knowledge. There are certain things that we can't do. One of them is don't shoot the leaders to ensure the caribou return next year. We've got our laws from way back when. We call them Sugayeh Dene. You guys call it Yámoŕıya. This told us, 'This is your responsibility as a caretaker of this land.' *Norman Sterriah*

We are at Mile 212 – it's ten miles from the Tischi River airstrip and as you go from the Yukon side, you climb up to that high elevation plateau. It's right there at the plateau and the lodge sits on top of it. It's really important for caribou in the fall; in August, they start moving in. There's a lot of willows up there and, as you know, the caribou are really shifting on to willows and mushrooms, and so they come up in that area in big, big numbers in August. That's where we really notice them, but any time of year we used to notice them, and not so anymore. Even in the fall now, we just don't notice those numbers. Big bulls used to come late in August or early September, with the big white manes, they'd start coming up out of the Caribou Cry River. Again, we just don't see that anymore. I think that's a real good point about just how important the area is generally, aside from caribou. It's a tundra area, so what we see up there and the reason the lodge was built up there it's got a lot of tundra birds, you don't find them anywhere else unless you go to the North Slope – longspurs and long-tailed jaegers and all these tundra birds are living up there in the summer as well, to make it very special as well. *Norm Barichello*



Photo: SRRB

Shared future

Today, the area around K'á Tó is starting to look very different. We are worried that the dwindling populations of animals won't be able to support our children in the future, that the land and weather is changing, that industry has many interests in the area, and that we are increasingly feeling pushed out of our traditional hunting and camping places. We are frustrated with not being able to have a greater say in what happens on the land. We want to be able to protect the wildlife as well as Shúhta Dene ways of being on the land.



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

We are concerned about our future, the future of our children. What we care about is our connections to the land, the animals on the land – that is our livelihood. We had a lot of previous relationships between our two strong nations. When we come together it is going to have a deep meaning for our children. If we care for our land, then our land will provide. *Mary Maje*

This is the message I am hearing from my elders – we are borrowing this land for our future, for the kids that are not born yet. It's more for them. So it's really important to try to protect as much of the values and the interests we have on our land. We have had some successes. Back in the day, when I was in leadership and even before that, we were just a stakeholder. We were outside of the building, outside looking inside the window. We see government, industry and other decision-makers sitting inside making decisions on our land without us, without our

participation. Pretty soon, they felt sorry for us, I guess. They said, 'You guys sit around in the back corners, observers.' So we sat down quietly, we never said anything. Pretty soon we said, 'We are starting to see these impacts that's happening on our land. We can't keep quiet.'

Pretty soon we were at the table, but we're going to set the agenda. So we are sitting at the table now and we are starting to have input. We have to fight for what we've accomplished over the years through court cases, through agreements and through memorandums of understanding. Now we need to step farther. We need to raise the high watermark more and say, 'We have to be part of this process. We have something to offer. We have traditional land use, we have traditional laws. We have these tools that we can offer, observations from many generations behind us.' That's what we can offer, not to be considered as land use in some legislation we have, but we want to see stronger language to see traditional knowledge play a major role, equal to science, not subservient. We have to be equal. These are the goals we have as elders. *Norman Sterriah*

The land we live on the government promised us, 'This land is yours.' Okay. Now all the hunters go up in August – hunting caribou, moose, everything. I tell those boys put up a sign, 'No hunters'. A lot of people go up. About five years ago, I would see five or six caribou horn in the back of a pickup. How much hunters are up there? We used to use those animals to make dry meat before white people. That's a long time ago. People from Tulít'a walk over this way and we meet. That was quite a while ago.

I am talking today because I want to make sure there are animals for the next generation; that is how we eat. Take those kids hunting and talk to the kids, tell them how to live off the land. My job is to teach the younger generation about the importance of the Dena lifestyle, living off of the land, taking care of the land, about the environment and the responsibility of passing on traditional knowledge to younger people. The passing of knowledge about our land and responsibility as land stewards is very important. Land is important to us, caribou, moose, sheep other natural food sources are really important to us. We continue to use them and we need to make sure that it's there for us, not only for me, but for the next generation also.

I still continue to live the Dena way, like my parents and elders. They told me how to take care of the land. I still do that. I live off the land when the opportunity presents itself. I still sleep under the trees. I don't set up a tent, just throw brush under a big tree, use a blanket and set a fire. I still do that. The visitors, the white people and other foreigners, Europeans, they come and take a lot of game from our land, the outfitters and other hunters, with total disregard for our way of life. Game is important to us for subsistence and clothing. I am responsible to maintain a healthy population, environment and make sure the population is stable.

One of the areas being impacted is Finlayson Lake area. That's where I am from and my family. I've seen development happening in that area. I am seeing impacts it has created on the environment, game, habitat. I don't want to see that happen all over the areas of traditional use. *Charlie Dick*

Local and Traditional Knowledge Presentations:

Dorothy Dick, Shúhta Dene Elder / Land Steward



For a number of years, I have been going up there and doing a lot of hunting – me and my family, my sisters, my brothers, my parents, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, Grandpa Mac, everybody in Ross River knows who I’m talking about.

My mother went up there in 1944 or something like that. She said that in front of the lodge it was just black with caribou and moose – back then there was a lot. Then she went up there, it must be about five years ago, and they didn’t see anything. She said it’s really bad because there’s no animals around and people have to go a long way to get their caribou. Myself and my sisters, my daughters, we all have concerns about the caribou herds. We rely on the caribou up there.

The first year I went up there in 1975, where the lodge is situated now, we used to see hundreds of caribou, right from the border on to Caribou Pass – lots of caribou and moose. I usually go up there every year and get my caribou. We always see caribou every time we go up there, but in the last maybe five years, we haven’t seen anything. For the last five years I have to travel away from the road. I have to walk into the mountains and get caribou. I know that the caribou really is depleting, and it’s depleting rapidly. That’s from talking to people from Ross River and Watson Lake and the Northwest Territories.

I’ve been involved with caribou since 1994. I’ve done caribou surveys, moose surveys, sheep surveys, goat surveys, but the caribou herd in the Northwest Territories is going down every year and it’s getting worse and worse. We need to determine what the cause is. Through my experience with working with caribou, the noise factor is one of the things that drives the animals away from their habitat. Like if they had the calving grounds, they would not use it because of the noise, including choppers, planes, those kinds of things. Is it the cause of human factors? Is it the predator rate? Maybe it’s because of the climate change, I don’t really know. I think we really need to do a study on that before it gets too late.

I know in the last few years there have been a lot of hunters from Northwest Territories coming up – from Yellowknife – it started with like five people and then every year it doubles. One year we had 50 hunters from Yellowknife. They come up with quads, four-wheelers, side by sides – all of these kinds of things.

While everybody was talking, I was sitting there thinking about my great-grandmother. She said, ‘People have got to start looking after the caribou up there. If they’re no longer there, what’s going to happen to the people, the native people? Because that’s their source of food, their source of clothing and their source of shelter.’ And she always said, ‘Up there we’ve got to look after the water, the animals and the land. Those three things are the most important things in our lives.’

Norman Barichello, Dechenla Lodge, Ross River Dena Council TK Program

I first came to the Mackenzie Mountains close to the border in 1976 and I've been there primarily since then every summer. I've observed some great big changes up there. When I was there in '76, you could go into some of these high elevation cirques up around Caribou Pass and see 40 big bulls in one group. We would see caribou every day in July, and in August you can see them on the hour. For contrast, we were just up there for two and a half weeks and we saw one caribou on the drive out. There has been a steady decline in the number of caribou we're seeing. Probably six to eight years ago, the caribou have just been gradually disappearing. We've noticed that the calf:cow ratios vary from year to year but it seems reasonable; there's no reason to fear the cows aren't having calves. In any case, there is a big change in caribou.



We used to see moose along the Intga River; we could see 25 moose without looking. That area, particularly in July, is a very important moose area and we've heard this from the Tuli't'a folks too. The outfitter has a camp there, which speaks to the importance of that area for moose, and later in the summer they move up toward Caribou Pass. At Caribou Pass itself there used to be an aggregation of bull [moose] in the fall. Helicopter pilots would speak of 50, 70, 100 moose there in November.

So we've seen great big changes in the number of caribou and the number of moose. We don't see the snow packs the same – they're disappearing, as the glaciers are disappearing. You could always see caribou on snow packs. Now we really have to look hard on those snow packs to see caribou. As far as the hunting that's going on and the quad use, we never used to see the quad use up there and now we are very concerned about the amount of trails that are on that high elevation plateau. That's a piece of tundra up there and its underlain by permafrost, so when you get quads running around there, they compact the soil and melt the permafrost, and then you get mud holes. As they're used more and more there are side trails to by-pass the mud holes. It's just really a lot of damage on that tundra area. You only have to fly over it to see how much damage it is and the alpine area is the same way.

There are phenomenal changes. I think the greatest difference in the hunting is the number of hunters from Yellowknife and Hay River. It's been a growing phenomenon and we've seen 50-plus licensed hunters that have come into the area – that's on top of First Nation hunting. We see camps up there where trailers are brought up, they convert into cabins, deep freezers, lighting and they look like small cities out there. There's been a noticeable difference in the degree of hunting. We are concerned with the disrespectful hunting practices we see. We are also very concerned about safety. It's almost like we need some kind of a hunting manual for some of these hunters. They're from somewhere else. They've had no history in the area. It's almost like they need an education in how to respect the land and the wildlife, how to hunt and how to look after the kill. We also have real concern about the mine down the road, and about the upgrading of the North Canol Road to become an all-season road, to fix the grade so that you could probably get up there in three hours. Unless the hunting and quad use is regulated somehow, I would forecast that you would have major wildlife problems above and beyond what we see right now. It would mean people could go in there any time of the year.

Norman Sterriah (facilitator), Ross River Dena Council Traditional Knowledge Coordinator

We see a lot of changes over the years, huge changes. It's gone from almost zero impact to a lot of use in that area. We see industry starting to come in there. We see more hunters coming up. Climate change is starting to change the landscape – it changes water quality, the plants, a lot of things that are happening now.

The way the Dene people look at land use is it's holistic. They want to see the whole picture, what's happening with caribou, not only in one region but all over. Some of the on-the-ground complaints or concerns that have been raised is that traditional camping areas have been devastated by others coming in. Tent poles are being used for firewood. There is garbage laying around.

There are hunters who are shooting into herds. You see a bull caribou standing up in front and there's maybe three or four more standing up behind it. They shoot it. The bullet goes right through the other one and wounds about two or three more animals. They just think about caribou. We hear about people removing horns only or choice cuts of meat like hind quarters and leaving the rest behind. There are all kinds of stories like that coming out.

You get people coming back who usually camp in one given area. Time and time again, they see four or five trailers there that they used to camp in that's gone now. They can't use that area, they have to find someplace else. Four wheeler trails all over the place. People chasing caribou with four wheelers, ATVs – a total disrespect. Dene people have ethics, traditional laws, about how to look after the land, how to respect other living things besides ourselves. Those things are thrown by the wayside, not by us, but by other people.

We've raised this with governments and other people, but to no avail really. We say, "What can we do about this?" We've written proposals, we've done caribou studies, we've tried to access the money from the federal government, the local territorial government, to no avail. They've just ignored us.

What we need is a more comprehensive approach. We need different parties. I want to see a friendship treaty happen fairly soon, not only with the Sahtú, but the Deh Cho and other groups that make up that area, so we can try to preserve some areas and that as a group of people we can say we've succeeded here – not only Mack Pass but Howard Pass. I want to see Dena people working together because there's too much to lose. We are going to see social problems that comes along with development. We are going to see the family unit lose its cohesion. I see that in our community already. We are starting to lose those Dena values. We have to start someplace.

We have to take a look at those. We need some say. We have to be at the table – as a collective body – to sit down and say, "We want to see these things happen. Here is our traditional laws. Here is the best practice that comes out of traditional laws." We want to be at that table. We want to be part of that development.



2. Challenges we face

Challenge: Harvesting practices

Over the last five to ten years we have been witnessing big changes with the land, the animals, and how the area around K'á Tá is being used. We feel that the most urgent problems impacting Gudzih / Shúhta Goᓇpé today are caused by poor harvesting practices. Most of these problems stem from the fact that there is an increasing number of hunters coming from elsewhere.

We worry that too many caribou are being taken, and that the big bulls are being taken the most. We are also witnessing a disturbing shift from more traditional hunting methods to the use of disruptive technology like all-terrain vehicles (quads or four-wheelers), helicopters, and planes. There is a lot of noise, a lot of habitat disturbance, and many disrespectful practices taking place, like wasting caribou meat and wounding animals. Peoples' camps and cabins are being vandalised. We have safety concerns about some shooting and butchering practices, such as not dealing with gut piles adequately. As these activities increase, we find ourselves effectively excluded from our traditional camping and hunting areas – places we have used for generations.

One of the reasons I am at this meeting here is because of my concern for the caribou. Where are my grandkids going to hunt in the future? Where are your grandkids going to hunt in the future? I did all my hunting down there and quite a bit of hunting down the Cantung road. When I first went out there about 35 years ago, I seen a lot of moose, caribou and everything. A lot of game, grizzly bears, wolves. I went back there last year and you should see some of the vehicles, the licence plates on them – Alberta, Alaska, British Columbia. Some of those guys are packing freezers in their trailers, Argos. This has got to stop. I have seen the racks that come out of that place. Three or four caribou racks on there, bull moose. And you wonder why they're disappearing up there. They migrate through the Cantung road. I went up there last year and hardly seen any. I hope we get things done to alleviate some of these problems because I would like to see my grandkids go out there and harvest wild game like I did once. *Jerry Dickson*



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

Ross River Dena Council and Sahtú representatives

We do have concerns about people from BC hunting up here. They won't get permission from the band office, the people from Yukon who go up there don't stop to get permission from the band office. The Conservation Officer here can't cover everyone. *Dorothy Dick*

With the closure to caribou hunting for resident hunters in the majority of the NWT, it's coincided with a lot more hunters coming up to the Mackenzie Mountains. We've got to do something because now that they're told they can't hunt caribou anywhere else, we are getting a lot more coming all the way around. We know there's been a lot of use of that area by Shúhta Dene people from Tulít'a and Ross River for a long, long time, but these NWT resident hunters coming around from Yellowknife are new. And my concern is not only the number of caribou that are being taken, but also I've spent time here and I've spent a lot of time going out with elders on the land, with people from here that teach the Dena way and they teach about respect. They call it Dena Ah Nezen. I learned a lot about how to properly respect things. A lot of these people that are coming around, they have no connection with the land at all, they've never been there; they might be from Newfoundland or from further away. They live in the NWT for two years, they get their residency, and then they drive around through three or four different provinces or territories, thousands of kilometers back to the NWT; they are not really residents. *Josh Barichello*

We are not only blaming the NWT hunters. Sometimes we invite other Kaska people; the first time they come up there and they see caribou they shoot a few. A lot of our members will probably take one caribou, that's about it. Some of the other Yukon native hunters, they come up there and they see a lot of caribou and shoot two or three of them. They don't realize when they take that much out is not very healthy for the herd. I have been up there since the late '70s. I was a very young man back then, but I have seen animals all over. I have seen moose in almost every little pasture and I've seen caribou all over the place. We have seen caribou by the hundreds just passing through. Right now, we see caribou but not very much. Maybe we seen one bull caribou and maybe 30 or 40 caribou and only one little bull caribou. You don't hardly see any more big caribou. *Gordon Peter*

I see a lot of outfitters and some of them regulate themselves, some don't. The biggest thing I see in the NWT is they use helicopters and they use planes and all of that has to stop. What happened to the traditional way of hunting with horses? It's not very good when you're using helicopters and you can land right on a spot and start hunting. Some of them say they follow their 12-hour regulations, but I don't think it happens. Who is watching them when they're out there? Nobody, except for themselves. *James Dick*



Photo: Ross River Dena Land Stewardship Office

Scientific Presentation:

Heather Sayine-Crawford, Wildlife Biologist, ENR, Sahtú Region

There are an estimated 15,000 to 25,000 caribou in the Mackenzie Mountains – roughly 5,000 animals in the Bonnetplume; 10,000 in the Redstone; and about 3,000 in the Nahanni Complex. The last classification survey was done south of the Keele River by ENR in 1999, and more than 2,700 caribou were classified. The calf to cow ratio was 28 calves per 100 cows.



In 2002, the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board put ten collars on female caribou within the Redstone Complex – we call it that because we know that is not one whole herd. The collars showed us that there might be at least three different herds out there, both migratory and some that don't migrate. We have proposed more monitoring on the Redstone Complex, so we can get a better definition of the herds and some more information. It's just a lack of funding we're facing right now.

As for the hunters that come into Mile 222, we have non-residents who come for caribou, and they are only allowed to take bulls – they go out with the outfitters. Between 1991 and 2012, there was an annual average harvest of about 150 bull caribou taken across the entire Mackenzie Mountains – not just this area. The resident hunt on average takes about 30 animals every year and those are mostly bulls – though they are allowed to take cows. Resident hunters get one tag per year.

Between 25 and 50 resident hunters usually come from the Northwest Territories, driving. As far as I understand, last year there weren't that many. It's a big deal for them to come all the way around. It's a lot of planning, a lot of things they need to get together, and that's why they come with a full trailer. These guys normally want to come and get a caribou and a moose. The moose season doesn't open until September 1st, so they normally come the September long weekend for the first two or three weeks of September. That's when you will see most of them.

The GNWT passed a new Wildlife Act last fall. Under the new Wildlife Act, any new hunters looking for a licence have to go through a hunter education program. Right now most of the modules for this program have been completed; we haven't got the hunter's education program up yet, but that will be happening soon. There is a traditional knowledge component to this hunter's education program. Every region was asked to add region-specific things to this program, so that we make sure things like the traditional Dene laws are being taught to the resident hunters.

It's a problem that the officers posted at Mile 222 aren't there for very long. We would like to see them there longer, but again it's a lack of funding. Our officers see a lot of people, not only from Ross River, but from across the Yukon and even from BC. Hunters need to show identification, that they have the right to be there to hunt. Normally your treaty card is sufficient for that. We don't know the levels of subsistence harvest that are happening out there; it would be good to know how many caribou and how many moose are being taken out of the area. We also have concern over the ATV use. Currently we don't have any legislation that addresses the ATV use, but we are aware of the problem and we are looking for solutions.

Challenge: Industrial activities

We are seeing a steady increase in industrial activities that can have negative consequences for Gudzih / Shúhta Gooᑭepé. There are many types of impacts occurring at the same time, and while it is important to consider the individual impacts, there are also over-all or cumulative impacts on caribou and other animals that can be harder to understand.

Road access into the Mackenzie Mountains was driven by the Canol Project, a World War II pipeline. The corridor for the pipeline was selected by Dene guides who knew the country well after generations of living in the area. They selected the route along a traditional, well-traveled trail between the Mackenzie Valley and the Yukon. The road was completed in 1943 with the joining of the Yukon and NWT highways at Macmillan Pass. While the pipeline only operated for about a year then abandoned, there are numerous contaminants and remains from past mining and military operations along the route. Federal programs continue to targetting the clean-up of these materials.

Currently, several mining companies have interests in the Mack Pass area. We are worried about the potential impacts to caribou and their habitat from the mines, and feel it is important for the companies to work with the First Nations that could be affected. The proposal to upgrade the north Canol Road to a year-round haul road is also of concern, as are the broader, indirect impacts that could result from the developments.

We have huge challenges. There are all kinds of developments happening, all kinds of mining claims. With development comes challenges. They are going to upgrade this road to a haul road; it's going to be year-round. We have North American Tungsten up here, Colorado down here, [Hudson] Bay right in here. There are others we haven't really talked about – Eagle Plains, Overland Resources, Silver Range – I don't know how many. Down here we have Three Aces, lead/zinc right in here, Selwyn Mine, precious metals in here, tungsten in here. There's a lot of interest. Howard's Pass is a huge concern to us also. It's a mega project. They are talking about hydro, the haul roads, pipelines, service roads, railroads – everything that will serve a mine over a period of maybe 50-plus years. We are talking about airports that will handle 737s, narrow [gauge] railroads. What kind of impact is that going to bring to us, not only population wise but also social and economic problems? *Norman Sterriah*

I know from my elders, especially from my dad, Fred Andrew, that they finally settled in Tulit'a maybe in the early '30s or '40s. Back then people were so peaceful with animals. The Creator put it here for us to rely on and live life in a peaceful way. Pretty soon we had 'mója' come around – when I say 'mója' I mean white people – into our territory, especially in mining, and then oil and gas exploration. Our territory was full of riches with minerals such as diamonds, gold, gas and oil. Because of that, slowly our animals are declining, caribou especially. People rely on caribou, even in Nunavut and the Tłı̨chǫ, and us too. Caribou have their own migration route over into NWT, Yukon and back and forth for us specifically to live on it generation after generation. But the animals are really peaceful animals and they can't stand the noise or the smell of diesel, oil and gas. Because of the Canol Road, it brought a lot of tourism, a lot of people. Choppers are number one with impacts, especially in the month of May when all the animals, especially caribou, are calving in that month. When you hear a chopper flying, you can hear it for at least 20 or 25 miles and you can hear the ground tremble under you, that's the

impact. Just imagine when it's flying around the mountains, you know? The impact from mountain to mountain peaks, it must be really hard on the mountain goats. The goats hang around the really, really short cliffs. That's a big impact from a chopper because of the mining. Now that we have more mining going on in our territory, it's closing in on both sides of our territory and we don't do anything about it. There is going to be more impacts and less and less caribou. They are going to go away where there is less noise. We will have a concern in the other territory too because there is a lot of drilling going on from Norman Wells to Tulít'a and to Shúhta. It's getting worse and worse. Money is so powerful. We need to control the money because that's where all the negative stuff comes in, railroads and mining companies. If we really want to do something about our land, we have to talk about how we are going to handle this and how we are going to deal with it. *Frederick Andrew*

One of our main concerns is the telephone wires that are still there. They should be cut or removed. There are still caribou getting caught and moose getting caught by their antlers. We find a lot of skeletons with telephone wire wrapped around their horns. A few years ago, one of the hunters found one caribou but it was still alive. Back in the early 1980s, around then, on the Yukon side they cleaned up a lot of the wires. I am not sure how far up they went, but they went quite a ways up cutting the wires, rolling the wires and taking them out. They took out quite a few of the oil drums, but as soon as you hit the NWT border it's still there. *Gordon Peter*

The Second World War junk is laying around here all the way up to Whitehorse all the way to Norman Wells. The most dangerous part for caribou or moose is that telephone strands. That telephone strands runs all the way back into Norman Wells. There's piles and piles of old drums. Some are half full with some kind of chemical and all these camps over to NWT is all polluted with oil since 1942. Now what I want to talk about is the part where the caribou calving grounds are. The caribou calving grounds start from [Green Branch?] all the way up over towards the next river. There's maybe 100,000 cans and drums and stuff all through that part. Now all these things, what happened is when they drain and it comes summer, all these things go into the water and goes into the river that goes down to Fort Norman, down the Mackenzie. All these polluted stuff is going to that area there. You've got to have somebody do something with the poison stuff in that area. There is one little area where you see dead marten, dead wolverine. We have to deal with these things first. We have to look at the land itself. *Robertson Dick*

Over a 20-mile stretch of road that I'm familiar with, I've seen over 12 to 15 caribou and moose [tangled]. What happens is if the poles fall down and the wire is suspended, when the animals hit it, they get into a frenzy and they tangle but it's usually where the poles have fallen and you have suspended line, I think. I've noticed three of them in the vicinity of Caribou Pass over at Godland Lakes and between Godland and Caribou Pass probably another half a dozen anyway. Down between 222 and mile 212, again I think I've seen about four of them. Quite a few. At mile 208 to mile 216, we removed the wire actually. We coiled it all up and dumped it in a gravel pit. It was part of a program we offered to clean it up. We also gathered up drums with fuel or grease or any petroleum products in them. We identified over 50 drums that had either grease or diesel or crude oil right at 208, in the vicinity of 208, that had remnants of fuel. Of course, what happens is when the bung comes off the water... the oil surfaces to the top. At 208 in particular, there are some sites there that are all plasticine. They have had a lot of seepage in that area. *Norman Barichello*

Scientific Presentation:

Candace DeCoste, Project Officer, Canol Remediation Project, Contaminants and

Remediation Division, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)



Our program is responsible for the remediation of the Canol Trail and a group of mine sites on the shores of Great Bear Lake. In trying to move forward with the Canol Trail remediation we've completed an assessment program on the trail, a risk assessment and we are working on developing remedial options. We want to hear your concerns and try to incorporate those concerns into the remedial options development.

Today I've heard that the concerns for caribou are not only from hunting pressures but from the helicopters, improving access to the area, as well as the telephone wire.

CARD is looking at ways to address the telephone wire and definitely would like to hear feedback from you if that's a concern and which areas are most impacted. If you can tell me how many caribou have been tangled in the wire, each time I can show pictures or give evidence, that actually helps our case to get funding to start the wire removal.

We are also working on our plans for next year. We are proposing to remove the hazardous materials that are on the site, which includes mainly drums of fuel. I think of the 5,000 barrels that remain on the site, we detected contents in about 167 of them. A barrel removal program in 1995 took most of the fuel off site, but there are still some remnants there.

We've identified 25 nodes along the trail where there is infrastructure and we would be looking at dealing with those nodes through the remediation program. If any of that overlaps with your campsites, it would be good to let us know so that we can avoid those areas.

What we've seen on the NWT side of the Canol Trail is everything from the original pipeline construction is still in place. It hasn't been touched. No action has been taken to remediate the majority of the trail so far. One of the other things we are doing is working with the Government of the Northwest Territories who is working on establishing the Canol Heritage Trail and the Doi T'oh Heritage Park. What we're trying to understand is how the GNWT will establish their park and what artifacts they would keep from the remnants on the trail. Once we have completed the cleanup, the land will be transferred to the GNWT and they would take the lead on developing the park with the Sahtú region. The area that was excluded from the land transfer in Devolution is just one kilometre on either side of the trail, except in the Sahtú titled lands where it's narrower. Outside of that boundary, the land has been transferred to the GNWT. What I'm working on is the remediation of the trail, so that the land transfer can happen.

Right now we access our funding under the federal Contaminated Sites Action Plan; I could envision it could take up to five years to complete.

Challenge: Environmental change

Climate change is evident in many places in the north; K'á Tá is no exception. The impacts of climate change on Gudzih / Shúhta Gooepé can be both direct and indirect. Studies indicate that people are seeing similar impacts on both sides of the border; some of these include:

- Changes to timing of spring thaw and fall freeze-up
- Increased icing events that create difficulties for caribou to get to their food through the snow crust
- Warmer summer months making it difficult for caribou to get away from insects
- Wildfires destroy core winter habitats and the lichen the caribou depend on for food. They can also cause travel disruptions if the fires go through migration corridors.

While there wasn't a lot of detailed discussion about climate change during the meeting, we all recognize that the places important to caribou are changing. We see more wildfires lately, the permafrost and glaciers are melting, water levels are rising, and there are changes in the numbers of animals. While the numbers of caribou and moose have gone down, the high number of grizzly bears preying on caribou is a concern. Sahtú meeting participants talked about the impacts that muskox and bison can have on caribou when they move into an area. In addition, with the increase in hunters using the area, we see the tundra being torn up. We need to decide what we can do about these changes.

I've seen a lot of changes since 1989. There is climate change, you can see it around here, you can see it at Ross River. Take a run out to the junction and you'll see the water rising. The little puddles, they're rising because of the permafrost thawing out. *Dorothy Dick*

Climate change is starting to change the landscape. Climate change changes water quality, the plants, a lot of things that are happening now. There are more impacts happening. We talk about fires and what it's doing. We have raised this with the forest management branch, ENR, anybody that comes to visit us. We say we have to do something about these fires that are burning out key winter habitats. Maybe that's one of the problems. We know it's one of the problems that is preventing caribou from coming back to these areas. Science says it takes about 60 years for lichen to grow back. These large areas is where these lichen have burnt out and 60 years is a long time. We have to find ways to fight those fires. Right now key infrastructure like hydro lines, they protect those and they protect small communities, but when it comes to sacred areas, gravesites, they don't care really. That shouldn't really prevent us from pursuing our wildfires. *Norman Steriah*

Up here in the Yukon, we do the same thing. My theory is we let these fires burn out of control that's out of town and what's happening is they are burning the caribou winter habitat. So by government letting that happen, a lot of these caribou are moving away from the wintering grounds. Eventually in the summertime, they end up in a different place. One place that I always hunted for years there were just herds of caribou. You had your pick. I have been up there for two years in a row now and I am going to go back this year and one thing I don't see is those herds of caribou anymore. The Tay River herd winter grounds are completely burned right out except for the west. The same thing up by Marjorie Lake and up the North Canal. Those are all

Ross River Dena Council and Sahtú representatives

wintering grounds. By the government letting that happen, they are contributing to the relocation of the caribou herd. *James Dick*

So we've seen great big changes in the number of caribou and the number of moose. We don't see the snow packs the same. They're disappearing, as the glaciers are disappearing and so are the snow packs. You could always see caribou on snow packs. As far as the hunting that's going on up there and the quad use – we never used to see the quad use up there – and now we are very concerned about the amount of trails that are on that high elevation plateau. That's a piece of tundra up there and its underlain by permafrost, so when you get quads that are running around there, they compact the soil and they melt the permafrost, and then you get mud holes. And of course they're used more and more and there are side trails to by-pass the mud holes. It's just really a lot of damage on that tundra area. You only have to fly over it to see how much damage is on that tundra area, and the alpine area is the same way. When you get these quads in those fragile areas they can really vandalize the land, and we've seen a lot in the accessible areas. *Norm Barichello*



Photo: Ross River Dena Land Stewardship Office

3. Finding solutions / Taking action

Solution: Shúhta Dene joint stewardship

Working together

We are passionate about maintaining our historic connections to K'á Tá, our shared Shúhta Dene culture, and Gudzih / Shúhta Goᓇepé. We have a keen interest in continuing our tradition of sharing into the future – to cooperate and collaboratively work toward common goals for mountain caribou and their habitat. We are hopeful that if we act together and act now we will be able to ensure our children will also have these connections and experiences.

Today, we live in a more complicated political or stewardship setting than in the past. There are many agencies and jurisdictions that are involved in management planning for Northern Mountain caribou. While we recognize and respect that each has a role, we are concerned that government processes for implementation can move slowly. We feel a sense of urgency about all that we are witnessing.

Towards the end of the two-day meeting in July, it became clear that Ross River Dena and Shúhtagot'ıne can play an important role in Gudzih / Shúhta Goᓇepé stewardship. Our cooperation in the management of caribou hunting and access was formalized in 1989 when leadership from Tulít'a and Ross River signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). We think that agreement should be built upon, possibly resulting in a type of friendship treaty or other cooperative agreement between Sahtú representatives and the Ross River Dena Council. The idea of having annual gatherings is very popular. We have an interest in reaching out to the Deh Cho for their involvement. Overarching all, it is important that our decisions and actions are based in Dene values and made by consensus.

We are in a world full of problems and challenges. What we need is to have solutions to figure out how to move forward. Just the fact that we're meeting together and are wanting to sign a friendship treaty to work together is a solution. When there is unity and we're working together with our neighbours, we are going to have great results. We have a lot we can share. We have a lot of knowledge and you guys have a lot you can share as well. We are no longer going to be bystanders on what happens in our territory. We can't stand back and watch. If we're silent, then things are going to happen and we aren't going to have any part in it. We need to look at proactive ways to ensure that the caribou numbers don't start falling and then we don't have the opportunity to hunt. I don't want to be one to tell our people you can't go hunt caribou up there because the numbers are too low. We want to be involved right up front before we have declines that impact our people and our harvesting. That's where we're at here. We will move forward and work together. Working with our neighbours is a good thing. It just gives us that extra strength when we are faced with industry and government wanting to push their way in our territory. When we are standing in unity in numbers, we are stronger and that's where we want to go. We look forward to working with you. We need more of our neighbours working together. We can move mountains, we can move governments. *Chief Brian Ladue*



Photo: Deborah Simmons, SRRB

There was a mention of a memorandum of understanding that was signed in 1989 between Ross River and Tulít'a. It would be really good to see that memorandum of understanding. We could maybe upgrade it and add a few changes to it and take it back to our people. Then based on what our people say, we could come up with our next steps to invite people from Ross River to come and visit Tulít'a. *Michael Neyelle*

Long-term action: making a plan

We recognize that there will need to be a comprehensive approach that reaches not only across borders and traditional territories, but also enables coordination and cooperation with industry and government (e.g., to clean up contaminated sites, develop proposals for research, land protection, etc.). One idea is to form a working group to focus on joint stewardship of the Sahtú and Kaska shared traditional territory. There are already successful models for this type of stewardship in the north, such as the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM), for herds spanning seven land claim areas in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

One way of helping to ensure that the momentum from the 2014 meeting continues would be to draft a joint stewardship plan for Gudzih / Shúhta Goᑕepé in the K'á Tá area. This would help let people know what we are doing.

We've had a tendency, or at least science has, to define a herd. Then you get into the problem if the herd is 120,000 animals, you are going to have to shoot an awful lot of them before science will register, so it's too late by the time we react to it. What we are trying to do I think is very simply try to respond to a local problem. If the problem extends more than that, great, build it in. But what I've heard anyway is the problem seems localized to this end. It's helicopter overflights, it's vehicles, noise disturbance, hunting and disrespect, the lack of guardianship up on the road, all of which I hear are the problems. So, to me, I guess I see us at some sort of a local response but maybe something broader, as well, as maybe a long-term thing which speaks to the linkage between two people, the comprehensive heritage issue, but the local issue I've heard about is all about what's going on from Mack Pass all the way to Caribou Pass. That's where we see it the most. *Deborah Simmons*

I like the idea of a Dene management plan really. I would like to see the Sahtú, the Deh Cho, Tłı̨chǫ put together a Dene management plan or people management really. Caribou can manage themselves, always have. It's the people who need to be managed really. A Dene management plan would be similar to what the land use plan that we have that we're moving forward. That management plan should incorporate a traditional code of ethics. *Michael Neyelle*

Immediate actions

While larger planning processes take shape, we feel there is also a need for more immediate action to start to change what we are witnessing taking place at K'á Tǎ. Several ideas were discussed at the meeting, as well as potential sources of funding, such as GNWT, YTG, and community organizations. There is recognition that when the communities come together to voice their concerns it is helpful to both draw attention to an issue, as well as provide support to get funding.

What I hear is everybody is on the same page, so it should be easy to come to agreement on what the concerns are. The challenge is how do you solve those issues and how do you get somebody to listen and how do you establish priority in firefighting areas, how do you establish a special harvesting area, how do you establish a corridor of special management protection, how do you protect calving areas, et cetera? Both sides will have their own tools in how to address that. In the meantime, you can hire game guardians to start to monitor the situation, offer these programs to develop more game guardians, which I think could be really helpful, start putting up signs. There's nothing stopping anybody from putting up a sign. Start to identify areas that should be off limits or protected like these very important calving areas or migration corridors. It seems to me there's a lot we could do to kick start this. *Norm Barichello*

I'm wondering if we are too stuck on these big technical studies with the helicopters and all the biologists and that sort of thing. Isn't there something we can do with less money? We can put up signage. We can pay some local hunters in the area and have them monitor what's going on up there and go into some of these camps and talk to people. It wouldn't cost very much – you are not employing them for a whole year – but we need to do something in order to find out what's happening to the caribou. They may very well be moving. We don't know that. They may totally be depleting. They may be dying off because their winter grounds are burned out. We don't know and we'll never know unless we do something to try to save what's there. Once we find out, then we can start hunting again. *Marie Skidmore*

Resourcing is an issue, but we have industry knocking on our door too and they should really be springing these kinds of things too. So we will be holding their feet to the fire a little bit on giving us some resourcing for this because it's really important. *Chief Brian Ladue*

I want the Sahtú delegates going back to return to their community and tell this to their grassroots people: That we want to see something happen. I want to see government delegates there going back and saying there's a real problem here and we have to put some resources to address these real concerns that have been raised at these forums. I don't want to see us only depend on governments as a funding source to do these things. I want to see each of us put resources, both human and financial, to make this happen. *Norman Sterriah*

Solution: Restricting and monitoring hunting

One outcome of the 2014 meeting was a set of resolutions. Two of the five resolutions focused on restricting harvesting. We asked the GNWT for a two year closure on the resident hunter harvest in the Dechenla/K'á Tá area. We also resolved that the Tulít'a Renewable Resources Council put in place a requirement for all non-Sahtú beneficiaries and non-Ross River Dena land users to obtain permission to harvest in the shared traditional territory. In addition, we feel that outfitters need to be monitored to make sure they are respecting things like the 12-hour rule.

There were also preliminary discussions around the possibility of creating special harvesting areas under land use planning agreements, restricting cow caribou harvests, and how to enforce restrictions. There were several ideas of how to monitor hunting activities, including having hunters from other areas sign waivers and take a local guide with them when they hunt, setting up more check points on the road or at the border, and start a game guardians program. In many cases, more funding will need to be secured to extend existing monitoring and enforcement programs, or initiate new ones.

I just want to bring forward another potential court case we might have. I got our lawyer to look into the idea of suing the Yukon Government for offering permits to hunters to hunt on our traditional territory. We are saying it has impacts on our harvesting rates. He said he would look into it and he says now he believes it could be a win for us, a victory. Where we are coming from is a strategy really because eventually we want to limit the amount of animals taken out of our territory. Before they start talking about upgrading roads and bringing in infrastructure, we need something in place. Then we can go and have amazing leverage to say this is what we want. We want only a certain amount of animals taken out of our area every year. We want to have a big say into everything. *Chief Brian Ladue*

Ross River has got this potential legal action out there to address the permission aspect of it. That would be within the Yukon. They probably couldn't do too much on the NWT side of it under that. There is an interest in solving that problem as well. I see the licensed harvest is a very important gesture, if nothing else, at this point. I think it's a really important statement that there is a willingness to work together to meet the concerns of the community. It's not picking on one user group that is dealing with most of the issues around the licensed harvest. *Norm Barichello*

We should close the caribou hunt for everybody, including the outfitters, up there where there is no caribou that go there. *Mary Maje*

What I was talking about is maybe a group of people get together and come up with a lottery or a limit or a permit that you can draw. That's what we do with the Finlayson caribou herd. They are allowed I think 30 permits. Any resident hunters can go for that draw which is done in June. Then they go out and get their caribou. If they don't get their caribou, they just take it back. Then the outfitters, I know one outfitters who I deal with, he is quoted at 10 caribou for the hunting season, which never rises to ten. He usually gets about four or five a year. Maybe that's the kind of system that we need to look at. It's working with the Finlayson caribou herd. *Dorothy Dick*

What I heard was a request for some kind of consensus about what this group would like to move forward. What my understanding is from listening to Heather [Sayine-Crawford] is that the non-resident harvesters, there's only 30 and they are only allowed one each. The bigger

problem is that there are quite a few Aboriginal people from other areas that are going in there and they have nobody's permission. They are from outside the area. They aren't Ross River First Nation. They aren't Sahtú beneficiaries. That is the large concern. So what that does is it causes us to consider that we're not talking about non-resident harvests and we're not really talking about the GNWT either in a way – we are talking about the Tulít'a Renewable Resources Council, the ʔehdzo Got'ı̄ne, who would need to be asked if they would put in place some kind of rule that would require that people seek permission to harvest in their territory. That would address the larger harvesting issue. *Deborah Simmons*

We need a check station, or a game guardian... for the NWT and the Yukon side and I think that should be First Nations because they know the land, they know the outlook, they know the animals. *Dorothy Dick*

I don't think cow caribou should be hunted up in the Mack Pass area anymore. That's the biggest downfall – if you're going to let non-First Nations people come in and hunt cow caribou that depletes the populations really bad. We've got to look after all the female animals so we can survive and that's how the caribou population keeps growing. If Yukon outfitters aren't allowed to use helicopters and planes to go hunting, then it shouldn't happen in Northwest Territories at all. The number one thing is we've got to look after those female animals; they are the life givers, just like water. And regulate the outfitters because we don't know how many animals they are taking out there. Are they regulating themselves? They might say they are, but the biggest thing is we've got to regulate the outfitters as well. At the same time, we've also got to realize that we've got to regulate ourselves a little bit. *James Dick*

So what we've got to do is regulate our hunting, maybe shut it down or something because it's getting out of hand. The other thing is a waste of meat. We've seen a lot of meat that's wasted. You know the marrowbone, a lot of our people would prefer chewing on bones, ribs and marrowbone, things like that. They go out there and they see it in the river; people throw it away. That's another thing that should be regulated. *Gordon Peter*



Photo: Ross River Dena Land Stewardship Office

Solution: Increasing knowledge

Education

Widespread education about the issues and challenges affecting the land and caribou at K'á Tá is essential. It is also very important to educate people about more respectful ways of harvesting, and this education needs to be based in Dene traditions. Education should primarily target three groups of people: hunters that are not from the area, industry, and youth.

Hunters

People shared ideas for how education could happen, as well as the types of themes that are important. Representatives from GNWT talked about the new Wildlife Act that was passed last fall. Under the act new hunters will have to take a required hunter's education program before being issued a hunting license. Each module for the program will have a traditional knowledge component that will be developed in conjunction with every region. Cooperation with GNWT in educating hunters may be very helpful in achieving some of our objectives for education.

There's a lot of education needed – there needs to be some way to teach these people from a long ways away about how to be on the land respectfully and the Dene way on the land. *Josh Barichello*

There is also what people brought forth about disrespect to our camps – our camp poles are being used as firewood. Those things should be built into the hunter education to tell them they must respect camps that are out there, respect the wildlife and how they should be dealing with the game out there. I think right now is the opportune time because you are just developing that program. Once that's up and running, that would be good. *Chief Brian Ladue*

When my uncle John Dixon was alive, he said when people go hunting, you have to clean all the blood from the land. If you can't clean it, you've got to burn it. Leave no parts of the animal on the land. He says the animals too are really smart. They know something was killed there and they won't eat what was left there. *Mary Maje*

One of the other things I see up at [Mile] 222 when all the Yellowknife people come over, I have seen it a couple of times about three years ago, they get a caribou and they bring the whole carcass back to their camp and skin it up. What should happen is they skin it out and take all the meat off right where the caribou drops. By them doing that, bringing the whole caribou back to their camp, they are also bringing the bears around. That's why we have so many bear problems up there. They are throwing the bones off the road. So by them doing that, we are always going to have bear problems up there. I think they should be skinning that animal right where it drops. We all talk about respecting the animal, that's not respect when they bring the whole carcass back to their camp. *James Dick*

Elders told us when the caribou are coming, let the leaders go by, don't shoot them, they need to go to their traditional feeding grounds. If you shoot the leader they will turn back. Respect the animals, make sure you kill an animal, don't just wound them. If you wound them you have to follow them and don't club them with wood. Maybe there are no caribou around because the leaders are shot. *Michael Neyelle*

Youth

We would like to make sure that our youth are involved in any educational activities that take place. We would like them to be knowledgeable stewards and guardians on the land. There is a need to teach younger generations about respectful practices so that they carry on Dene hunting traditions.

We are slowly losing all our elders. They are the ones that passed on the knowledge. I was given that knowledge by elders. That's what our role is now today is to pass on what our elders have taught to our children. We have to do that because it's for our protection and for our cultures and traditions to continue. We need to pass that onto our children. *Edward Oudzi*

There is a real need I think for environmental monitors or game guardians up there. We are running a youth program up there and want to build that youth program, hopefully to start to hire some of those students to be wildlife monitors or game guardians. They can monitor both the wildlife as well as the activity up there and I think that would be a good investment for everybody to think about how you use such an educational program to build and to apply it to a game guardian program which would be trying to help look after the caribou out there. *Norm Barichello*



Photo: Ross River Dena Land Stewardship Office

Industry

Better dialogue is required with mining and development companies. There may also be a need for specific changes to activities, such as asking industry to not fly around during sensitive times like calving.

I know the mining companies have an interest in that area. That's another thing the First Nations have to deal with. You really need to get a First Nation to work with the mining companies. My great-grandmother said, "You have to work with them. You have to teach them – especially when it comes to land, water and animals. Sometimes we can stop industries, but you also have to work with them." When I worked with the mining companies, one of the things we did was we did studies like post-calving, rutting times and stuff like that. We determined what the exact dates the caribou have their little ones. Then they go and talk to the chopper company or plane company and tell them that this is the window that you do not fly over the caribou range or calving range and they did that, they listened. *Dorothy Dick*

Research

In choosing appropriate solutions to the challenges being faced by Gudzih / Shúhta Goᑭepé and those of us who rely on them, it will be important to determine the extent and causes of the population declines. An important first step will be compiling information that has already been documented, especially traditional knowledge about caribou behaviour, habitat use, migrations, and population trends. We see many different types of additional research that should take place, including:

- Baseline studies on caribou health
- Determine where people are hunting, how many people are harvesting caribou, and how many caribou are being harvested in total
- Survey caribou in NT to define/determine herds and population numbers
- Identify calving grounds and determine calf:cow ratios
- Survey what is happening along whole migration route
- Study predators and their impacts
- Identify forest fire plans and places that need to be protected, such as migration corridors

Currently the GNWT has no mountain caribou research and monitoring programs

We need to determine where the calving grounds are, and what the [cow:calf] ratio is. I compared Northwest Territories with Finlayson [herd] – in the last two years, they had maybe 23 calves to 100 – and when I go to the border and I observe the cows, they have a better ratio than they do at Finlayson. Maybe it's because of the predator rate, maybe it's because of the climate change. I don't really know. I think we really need to do a study on that before it gets too late. It's probably already too late now. Compare today to what my mother saw, and there is a huge decline. So we need to determine, is it human, predators, or is it the noise factor? Through my experience with working with caribou, the noise factor is one of the things that drives the animals away from their habitat. Like if they had the calving grounds, they would not use it because of the noise, including choppers, planes, those kinds of things. Is it the cause of human factors? I think we really need to do a study on that before it gets too late. I know when Jan [Adamczewski] used to be here we talked about doing a survey up in Northwest Territories. We both contacted the YTG and the GNWT, but they told us they couldn't do it because of a lack of funding. But if all parties get together I think you can make this happen. *Dorothy Dick*

Ross River Traditional Knowledge Research Presentation:

Norman Sterriah (facilitator), Ross River Dena Council Traditional Knowledge Coordinator

We started a TK program working with the elders about traditional land use in Ross River. We have a group of people. We collected all kinds of information. We mostly concentrated on our elders because they are up there in age and they are passing away. We put all our concentration on those people to try to get as much knowledge from them as possible.

We've engaged governments, NGOs, mine industry, anybody who has information. We want information – whether it be spatial data, baseline studies, whatever you've got, we want it. So we've built up a database. We just got this young guy who graduated last year. His name is Darren. He is our GIS person now... he does a lot of the on-the-ground interviews. We just recently got Josh on board also. He's got a bachelor's degree. He has lived with us since he was that small. So he is working with us. Also Norm Barichello is our technician, our writer. We prepare budgets, work plans, proposals for funding. A lot of our money is proposal driven, so we had to go out and look for it. Also we are all working on contract.

Our elders, we have worked with about 25 of them from different groups. We have done studies in the Faro area. We have done studies in the Ketza. I don't know exactly the number of reports we've done, but we've done a number of them already with industry and governments like forest management branch people.

Our goal is to try to get as much information as traditional use. We've got a big map like that and we put all our TK on there first. Then all the other layers like mineral claims, linear developments like roads, right-of-ways, we put them as overlays over that.

We have done caribou studies, plan studies, fish studies. These are strategic studies that are being impacted by resource development. We try to say fish habitat is water and mining gives us water. So we try to do those reports. We do have them and we are probably going to bring them in tomorrow so you can take a look at them. Medicinal plants, we do that. We've done a book on that. We have distributed it amongst our elders

We've written proposals, we've done caribou studies, we've tried to access the money from the federal government, the local territorial government, to no avail. They've just ignored us. So we had to fund our own caribou studies. We've worked with the Dena Kayeh Institute. It's a Kaska NGO. I am on the board of directors for that body. My friend Norman Barichello is a board member. Our main purpose is for traditional knowledge. We work with NGOs and things like Parks Canada.



Solution: Protecting caribou and culture

Land and habitat protection

Several different types of land protection or stewardship were identified during the two day meeting. Two main ones were: a need to clean up some areas (e.g., contaminated sites, telephone wire, cans, drums, pollutants), and a need to protect some areas (e.g., calving grounds, mineral licks, heritage/cultural sites, wetlands). There was some discussion about different ways of protecting land, and interest expressed in looking into working with Parks Canada to develop national historic or heritage sites, and extending Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve up into the Peel River area. Dene people on both sides of the border also can protect land through zoning, such as special management and conservation zones, to create areas with restricted or no development.

If we care for our land, then our land will provide. *Mary Maje*

Some areas need to be left alone for preservation of game and the Dena way. When I say leave some areas alone, as Dena people, when an area's population has dwindled because of natural forest fires, we leave that place alone. We don't hunt that area; we're going to go hunt elsewhere. When Dena gather, we say we are going to leave the area alone. The traditional land steward says there is a lot of game and you can go trapping over here. I want to see that continue to happen. *Charlie Dick*

The ancestors from around here too, they travelled back and forth many, many times. There is a heritage trail out there. When we come and visit you, we call the people Nahanni. Those people who used to travel on those lands aren't here with us anymore, but I feel really strongly that we should protect that heritage trail. Somehow we should jointly agree to protect that heritage trail. The government and the non-Dene, I don't believe that they are really going to try to help us protect this important area. We need to protect our history and heritage. *Frederick Andrew*

We need to keep the traditional ways alive and not only observe it but pass on how important the land is to us and how to preserve it. One tool is what you guys are doing here with the land use plan. It's important that we keep some areas away from development and those kinds of things. *Charlie Dick*

We see changes, especially these last few years. The impact we have been seeing is past Dechenla Lodge where we would go each summer. We want to do something about the changes, we have to stop some of the activities. They need to watch what they are doing on our land. It is for our children and our children's children. *William Atkinson*

The other matter at hand too is the calving grounds – build caribou fences around them for protection from predators and hunters. The calving grounds are in Howard Pass. There are three of them and one of them is the Redstone calving grounds there. The whole area up there needs to be protected. My mom said sometimes the caribou change their migration because there is no food. Maybe they went someplace else. I think we carefully need to look at their whole migration trail, whether it's the grazing trail, whether it's the route into the calving grounds, all of those things need to be protected when we talk about our caribou. *Mary Maje*

A long time ago, you guys are all mountain people, Shúhta Got'ıne. You have a beautiful country and beautiful animals and beautiful food. You have everything that's beautiful around here. My mother used to tell me, 'My son, you take care of the land good when you are on the

land. You take care of the animals. You show respect. Don't play around with animals. Don't play around with your food.' *William Horassi*

When we were participating in the Naats'ihch'oh Park, we put on the table maybe extending the park going over as far as up north as far as the Keele area up to Caribou Cry in that direction. That hasn't gone anywhere. The elders group said we should extend that just to address what you heard yesterday and today about the impacts we are experiencing – the caribou and the livelihood. During our comprehensive land claims discussion before it fell apart is there was a Special Management Area, to try to protect as much of that portion of the land as possible. Again the only thing we can build on is the zoning map we have. *Norm Barichello*

Joint forest and fire management

We think there is a need for joint forest management between First Nations and government to lessen the impacts of wildfire on caribou and on heritage areas such as trails and gravesites. When fires come through an area, it's not just the caribou but many types of wildlife that move away.

We are watching core wintering areas burn. Maybe we need to jointly go to the forestry branch and say we want to be involved in the priority firefighting. Maybe we've just got to stick our foot in the door and say this is how it's going to be. *Chief Brian Ladue*

We talk about fires and what it's doing. We have raised this with the forest management branch, ENR, anybody that comes to visit us. We say we have to do something about these fires that are burning out key winter habitats. Maybe that's one of the problems. We know it's one of the problems that is preventing caribou from coming back to these areas. Science says it takes about 60 years for lichen to grow back. These large areas is where these lichen have burnt out and 60 years is a long time. We have to find ways to fight those fires. Right now key infrastructure like hydro lines, they protect those and they protect small communities, but when it comes to sacred areas, gravesites, they don't care really. That shouldn't really prevent us from pursuing our wildfires. *Norman Sterriah*

Predator management

We must also consider whether predator management could help the caribou numbers come back.

If we are going to do any sort of predator control, you get the First Nations government involved, the Yukon Government or GNWT and the outfitters. Get trappers out there. There are a lot of trappers out here, but there is no predator control. They are only going out there for marten. Wolf is a lot of work when you start catching those animals. That is one thing I have been thinking about for a long time. If we could get all three together and somehow designate two or three trappers just to do predator control, that's one solution I thought. *James Dick*

Grizzly bears in Western Canada are a concern. Up at the border they are protected and there's a growing number of grizzly bears and it's outnumbering the moose and caribou. There's way, way too many. I think Tulít'a recommended they be protected on settlement lands up there. So nobody can hunt them there. They should open that for a hunt until then numbers are down a little bit. The other reason is because they have no food, they will suffer as a result. *Mary Maje*

Sahtú Land Use Planning Presentation:

Deborah Simmons, Executive Director, ʔehdzo Got'ıne, Gots'é, Nákedı (SRRB)



I want to talk about the Sahtú land claim agreement because it's a little bit confusing to try to deal across a boundary with a region that has a land use plan and the RRDC are working to assert rights and stewardship in a traditional territory as well and there's overlap. That's something that I think is going to be fundamental to build that friendship agreement that we're talking about.

The land claim agreement was signed in 1993 and it set up the structure for a co-management system for the environment. This guarantees a place for Aboriginal beneficiaries in decision-making. There are three boards that were set up within the region. The one board that was actually defined in this land claim was the Sahtú

Renewable Resources Board. In the land claim, it says we are the main instrument of wildlife management in the region. In 1998 the other boards get going; that required another whole act called the Mackenzie Valley Resources Management Act. This other law was put in place and then we got the Sahtú Land Use Planning Board and the Sahtú Land and Water Board.

The Land and Water Board issue permits and licenses for developers with conditions on them; they are the ones that define the rules and regulations that companies have to follow if they are going to do any development. The Land Use Planning Board just recently achieved success in getting the Land Use Plan approved by all levels of government. Again that was another co-management board; the federal government, the territorial government and the Aboriginal government nominate participants to each of these co-management boards. Then the board itself, the board members, they represent what the board is supposed to do. They don't represent their governments, they represent the mandate of their board. It's about working together.

The Sahtú Renewable Resources Board is set up in a similar way. We have nominees from each of the three districts of the region, nominated by the Sahtú Secretariat Incorporated, which is the land claim organization. Territorial and federal governments also have nominees. I can show you what the land use plan says about the Canol. They are just in the very early stages right now of implementing that plan. The new law is now in place. Bill C-15 was the bill that included devolution and it has now been approved. That was very controversial because it included getting rid of the regional land and water boards. It's going to be run out of Yellowknife as a super-board. The land use plan is federal law now, so that one is still in place and the Sahtú Land Use Planning Board is still free to operate.

I don't think the land use plan provides the solutions you are asking for. It identifies that there are species that are valued species in the area, the kinds of wildlife that are in the area. It doesn't talk about the overlapping land use. It doesn't really talk specifically about measures. I don't think it properly accounts for the harvesting interests in that area. At that time, we were asked only to talk within the communities of the Sahtú region. We probably didn't adequately account for overlap issues because the main focus was figuring out the Sahtú region.

The Sahtú Land Use Plan has a description of each of the zones. There are certain things that are not allowed in the park. You aren't allowed to take a lot of water out. Exploration and development of mining interests are not allowed. Oil and gas exploration and development are prohibited. Power development is not allowed. Forestry and rock quarrying is not allowed. There is some Sahtú surface and sub-surface ownership in that area. It describes why it was established, the values to be respected and numerous important wildlife areas including mineral licks, glacial areas, ice patches and things like wetlands. There is the international biological program site and some plants that are considered at risk. It talks about calving grounds and it mentions specifically the Bonnetplume herd, but the land use plan doesn't really talk specifically about measures. It talks about harvesting but I don't think it properly accounts for the harvesting interests in that area. In the very early days of the land use plan, we were asked only to talk with communities of the Sahtú region. We probably didn't adequately account for overlap issues, as the main focus was figuring out the Sahtú region.

During 1999 to 2001, we did a major community-based land use mapping project and one of the things we were trying to identify was areas that were really sensitive from the community perspective. One of the best sources of knowledge about the Sahtú region and elsewhere is the Dene mapping project from the 1970s. When we were designing our mapping project, we didn't want to redo all that amazing work; we wanted to learn about how people have been using the land in the previous five years. That might reflect changes on where the wildlife are as well. In addition, there was a traditional knowledge study with the Shúhta Got'jñę project that connected a little bit to the Canol area.

There is a five-year period before the next review of the land use plan. One of the things to note is that the Déljñę district decided they wanted to do more fine grained land use planning, so they developed a management plan for the Great Bear Lake watershed. Other communities may decide they want to work on more detailed planning as well. That could, for example, include more detailed work on the mountain area. Then it could be part of the five-year review and there could be a revision to the plan.

In regards to mineral licks, they are called Conformity Requirements, meaning in order to follow the land use plan, this is what you have to do. So they have to give a really good reason if they are going to go within that area, the same with archaeological sites. The conformity requirements are the rules to be followed in that area according to the land use plan. Some of it has to do with community interests and involvement, also fish and wildlife. A number of them are about development activities. It doesn't seem that there's a specific one about, let's say, recreational ATV use.

Special Harvesting Areas can be added or changed with consent of the renewable resources councils, the ʔehdzo ʔehdzo Got'jñę. The board shares the same chapter in the land claim, so we are supposed to work really closely together. The renewable resources councils are really the land claim version of the old hunters and trappers associations; they have a lot of power and influence on board decisions. So if the Tufit'a Renewable Resources Council says they would like to have a special harvesting area, the Mack Pass area, then that would be something the board would take very seriously. That would probably be the rule that would be established. The other thing in the land claim is the renewable resources council could play a bigger role in giving permission for people from outside the region to harvest.

Ross River Land Use Planning Presentation:

Norman Barichello, Dechenla Lodge, Ross River Dena Council TK Program

In 2010, the Ross River Dena Council signed an agreement with the Yukon Government to design their own land use plan. The idea was a collaborative approach; Ross River came to the table in a government-to-government process to come up with a way to guide resource development. There were three layers of data that were brought in: traditional knowledge was the base layer. There was the bio-physical layer, which was science-based data, with ecological representation and habitat information. Then there was the economic potential over the host of activities – mining, logging, hydro, oil and gas, etc. – a series of maps that would indicate the most probable economic opportunities.

Ross River began immediately to implement the traditional knowledge work. They developed a traditional knowledge manual based on the advice of the elders as to how the information should be collected and shared. It more or less set a framework on how to collect the knowledge. They broke it out into three pieces. One of them was what we ended up calling an inventory – the places, sites and interests on the land that are dear, the mineral resources and water resources, probably 70 or 80 plants that were culturally important, mammals, fish, all of them were on the inventory.

There are really two pieces we were looking for. One is the spatial data around the inventory – like the special plant areas, where are they, let's map them – then we needed to work with the elders to figure out how we wanted them protected. For example, a mineral lick was deemed to be extremely important and the elders said at the start it was a five-kilometer buffer. Other more benign activities, you have more tolerance. These sets of recommendations came out, an agreement trying to encourage industry to do the right thing, that we called "accommodation measures." You have an interest on the land, how do you accommodate that interest? It's the obligation of the Crown to consult and accommodate. Those are the two major pieces that Ross River developed, the spatial data and the accommodation measures.

There was a very favourable court case in December 2012 in regards to mining exploration. The court said two things. One, it said that the government had to consult with the Ross River Dena Council to determine which areas should be available for prospecting for exploration and, two, that with any exploration, the Crown has to notify and, where appropriate, consult with the First Nation. Ross River were overjoyed with the court case because now they essentially had a venue to implement the plan. They've done all the heavy lifting; now it's which land should be open for development. It turns out the government didn't do any of the work they agreed to. They didn't do any biophysical data. They didn't provide the economic databases until very much later when it became more urgent. We were given three months to complete the plan. It became a Dena land use plan. It identifies which areas should be open to development, in particular mining because the court declaration required it to address mining. What the elders came up with is about 30 different polygons, broad areas, with a whole suite of interests in the areas they wanted protected. It represents about 60 or 65 percent of the Ross River Dena traditional use area. There are really three types of areas: protected areas, special operating areas, and the areas where industry can go looking for minerals.

When we started our discussions with government about which areas should be available for prospecting or not, they said we'll give you 7.5 percent of your traditional territory to represent your title interest. Then the Williams Lake case came out. That's one of the very few cases that dealt with the question of title. It identified a big area of the Chilcotin, which they said was titled area for the First Nation. It meant that any development would have to get consent of the First Nation except for very special circumstances where there is a big public interest – then government can do it without the consent of the First Nation, but under very tight constraints. The case set up some rules for the assertion and declaration of title. There were three pieces to it – the First Nation had to demonstrate exclusive use, they had to demonstrate continuous use, and they had to demonstrate it has been used over a long period of time and regularly. Those were the rules attached, but on the basis of that the Chilcotin First Nation would have title to a big area, maybe 35 or 40 percent of their traditional area.

That really helps Ross now in trying to sell their land use plan. This is still going on. They want further discussions. They want a meeting right away. The government has the land use plan. Now they are going to have to implement it. They are having it reviewed and we are waiting to hear the response. So it's one of the first examples in the Yukon where the First Nation is essentially taking over and driving it. They've got the courts to help them now and the courts are really asking for the same thing: determine which areas are sensitive and you don't want development, and areas where development can occur.

One of the points we made in the land use plan is that anytime anybody makes a decision, it's usually based on a balance between benefit and risk. It's been very unbalanced through the colonial period where the First Nation incurs all the risk, the costs, yet they get virtually nothing in benefits. The position we've taken is that there's going to be no interest in development so long as there is an inequitable balance between risk and benefits. One thing we've asked for is a land and resource office. Because Ross River don't have a treaty they don't have a land and resource office. The courts have said you've got to notify, and where appropriate, consult before you do any exploration. We've said that it's dishonourable of the Crown to expect you to notify and respond to an application when you have no capacity to respond to it.

In the land use planning Ross River has identified from day one the area up at Mack Pass as a special area. It's been identified by Parks Canada as a candidate park. It's been identified as a United Nations biological program site. It's been identified by the territorial government. It's been identified by a group of scientists as an important area. I believe the Sahtú have even identified it as part of the three rivers candidates for protection. So there is absolutely no debate about the special nature of it.

The problem Ross runs into in terms of protecting it now is there is some advanced exploration and companies have been given certain rights to operate and short of going to court, it might be difficult to pull those areas away. That's why some of those areas have special operating conditions, because under the revision of the Courts Act, there's a provision that allows for the government to establish special operating condition areas where they impose a much higher bar on what can take place in those areas. We've demanded of the government that we sit down and decide how those areas best be managed. We're hoping to get into that debate down the road with the government in terms of raising the bar in these special areas where there is advanced stages of exploration.

This is just a start

Conclusions

The 2014 Joint Mountain Caribou meeting held in Tu Łidlini (the community of Ross River, YT) was the first time in recent history that Ross River Dena and Shúhtagot'Jne have come together from both sides of the Yukon / Northwest Territories border to talk about shared conservation concerns for the land and animals around K'á Tá.

Meeting participants identified many different factors that are currently affecting caribou and other wildlife, but our biggest concerns center on the negative impacts of harvesting by both non-aboriginal and aboriginal visitors from other regions. These harvesting activities are pushing us out of our traditional territories. The impacts have been increasing in recent years and we strongly feel that immediate action is required. In addition, there are several industrial impacts we expect in the near future that we will need a strategy for dealing with, so we will also be working on longer-term plans together.

Our discussions were critically important in helping to clarify the specific problems we face, create dialogue, share information, renew and build relationships, and set the foundation necessary for future collaboration and cooperation. We are pleased that the meeting was so solution-oriented and certain that our future generations will benefit from this gathering. Everyone came away feeling that they had learned something, and that when we are standing in unity with numbers we are strong. We look forward to this relationship continuing to grow; this willingness to work together is just a start.



Photo: Ross River Dena Land Stewardship Office

Appendix A: List of Participants

Sahtú delegates

Frederick Andrew, Tulít'a, NT K'asho Got'ıne

Leon Andrew, Norman Wells, NT K'asho Got'ıne

Candace DeCoste, Project Officer, Canol Remediation Project, Contaminants and Remediation Directorate (CARD) AANDC

William Horassi, Tulít'a, NT K'asho Got'ıne Elder

Michael Neyelle, Délıne, NT Interim Chair, SRRB

Edward Oudzi, Norman Wells, NT K'asho Got'ıne

Camilla Rabisca, Fort Good Hope, NT, Special Advisor to the SRRB

Heather Sayine-Crawford, Norman Wells, NT Wildlife Biologist, NWT ENR, Sahtú Region

Deborah Simmons, Tulít'a, Executive Director, SRRB

Ross River Dena Representatives

Brian Ladue, Chief of Ross River Dena Council

Jessie Peter, Ross River Dena Council member

Josh Barichello, Dechenla Lodge, Ross River Dena Council Traditional Knowledge Program

Gordon Peter, Shúhta got'ıne and Kaska, Ross River Dena TK Elders Group

Marie Skidmore, Ross River Dena Council and Development Corporation

Norman Barichello, Dechenla Lodge, Ross River Dena Council Traditional Knowledge Program

Mary Maje, Yukon Environmental, Economic and Social Assessment Board

William Atkinson, Interpreter for the Ross River Dena

Robert Mason Dick, Member of the Kaska Nation

Norman Sterriah, (facilitator), Ross River Dena Council Traditional Knowledge Coordinator

Also in attendance: John Acklack, Maclary Acklack, Phillip Atkinson, May Bolton, Jack Caeser, Jenny Caeser, Lloyd Caeser, Rose Charlie, Tootsie Charlie, Darrin Dawson, Amos Dick, Charlie Dick, Dorothy Dick, Cynthia Dick, James Dick, Robertson Dick, Gerald Dickson, Jerry Dickson, Doreen Etzel, Florence Etzel, Barbara Gale, Joe Glada, Juli-Anne Glada, Ceacil Jackson, Annie Jepp, Eileen Johnny, Grace Johnny, Linda Johnny, Sheila Johnny, Lash Ladue, Dennis Menacho, Verna Nukon, Jessie Peter, Elvis Presley, Dennis Shorty, George Smith, Grady Sterriah, Louie Tommy, Bruce Williams

Appendix B: Some observations on mountain caribou herds and movement patterns from the 2014 meeting

Norman Barichello is a biologist and wilderness lodge owner that has been spending summers in the Mackenzie Mountains since 1976. His observations about mountain caribou and their movements are informed by personal experience as well as close relationships with knowledgeable people in the Ross River Dena community.

During the meeting, Norman was asked to comment on whether he felt he was seeing a localized decline in caribou at K'á Tá (i.e., animals shifting the areas that they are using due to high traffic along the Canol Road), or whether it might be an overall decline in numbers across their range. Because there is relatively little information documented on these caribou, we felt it would be helpful to include the relevant excerpts here.

MR. NORM BARICHELLO: I can offer an observation and an opinion. When we talked to the elders, we identified four or five herds using that particular area. One of them is a herd that seems to come along the Keele River and go into the Yukon Territory and come back on the flanks of the Keele Mountain, but over in the Twitcha and west of the Caribou Cry River – that Twitcha area in particular. Those caribou, from what I understand, seem to be doing much better. People see them, the helicopter pilots coming back and forth, report more of them in that area. It seems to me it might be a herd or part of this complex that actually comes along the Keele.

Then there's a group that I think are probably what we've always called the Redstone that probably come across a little further south. They come up the Keele, that highland country and the border of the Northwest Territories and Yukon, kind of the flanks of Mack Pass where they are finding all the artifacts. That area seems to be another area where you get movement. That is based mostly on what I am seeing and people who are in helicopters in the area. That group of caribou seems like it's gone or moved off or in decline.

I also noticed that it's not been a sudden change in distribution like they are there one year and not the next. My observation in that area is it's been about a six to eight years and perhaps even a little more gradual decline. Like I said, we used to see caribou in July every day. It gets a little less every year and this year we went two and a half weeks without seeing a caribou, so it seems more of a gradual change in numbers. Again, I don't know if that reflects on change in distribution or population sites.

There is also one of the herds that Robertson mentioned, the Finlayson caribou herd. We've actually observed collars from the Finlayson herd. Robertson had some concern that they continue on and don't go back to the Finlayson area to winter. Again there has been some documentation to that kind of mixing. I don't know to what extent it might occur based on the research that was done.

Then there are caribou that the elders speak of that have a different antler morphology. The antlers are more tightly together and they come in from the Bonnetplume country. Again, this is another group that uses that area, although we've no idea to the degree to which they use it or not.

Then, of course, there are caribou that seem to be a little more sedentary that are moving more up and down mountains rather than across large landscapes.