

Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá (Planning for the Future) Workshop Report

February 9, 2024, in Tłegóhtı́ (Norman Wells)

Overview

In the context of the 2024 ʔełets'ė́hkwé Godı́ (Public Listening Session – PLS), on Caribou Conservation, Climate Change and Wildfires, the SRRB organized a workshop on Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá (Planning for the Future – PFF) concepts and terminology in the draft Guidance prepared for the PLS (circulated to parties on February 1, 2024). The workshop was facilitated by Melanie Harding, SRRB's lead Community Conservation Planner and attended by four Dene elders with long involvement in the SRRB's work on Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá: Leon Andrew; Walter Bezha; Micheal Neyelle; and Ethel Blondin-Andrew.

Agenda

The workshop involved discussions about key cultural concepts associated with Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá and how they could be expressed appropriately. The SRRB's approach to Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá is based on the SRRB's Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá policy. It is designed to enhance respect for Dene and Métis custom and practice related to harvesting and wildlife, and provide direct and meaningful involvement for Sahtú participants in planning.¹

Summary of discussions

Areas of support for the draft Guidance:

- The essential concepts for Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá are in the draft Guidance.
- The area that a plan addresses needs to be clear in a final written plan.
- Communities need to understand their responsibility, or onus, to make a good plan, to implement their plan and to measure their own progress.
- Sahtú Dene and Métis have always had the responsibility to care for the land, and to work together to make decisions about wildlife, the land, and waters. They sit together and make decisions together.
- Sahtú Dene and Métis have to teach each other and their children. Hı́dó Gogha Sė́nė́gots'ı́ǵá can be a way to involve and teach youth.
- Involving neighbours in consensus building during plan development is preferable to addressing those issues when the plan is being reviewed by the SRRB.

¹ This approach reflects objectives of the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (subsections 13.1.1(d) and (e)) and the SRRB's Strategic Plan (2020-2025) priorities recognizing and encouraging Dene ts'ı́ıı to support reconciliation.

- The most important thing is honouring what the grandfathers and grandmothers have taught the Dene and Métis. This can be reflected in the plans for the future.
- The PFF principles are aligned with Dene and Métis values about what is important.
- It is important to encourage telling stories rather than speaking directly about things. Stories are important for planning for the future and this is in the Guidance.
- Dene ts'įłı is the core focus of why planning should happen.
- Planning for the future recognizes that all things are connected. Looking at any one aspect of life, the land and waters, or wildlife is not good enough. Plans have to look at how all things are connected.
- Community engagement is very important. All voices are important. This is in the Guidance.

Areas where more reflection may be warranted with the draft Guidance:

- Dene have stories they use to explain their practices, so parts of the plan should allow for stories to be shared. However, the SRRB should be careful about asking communities to share stories because sharing stories is sacred.²
- The concept of “goals” is not congruent with Dene ts'įłı, which focuses on the big picture.³ Considering priorities, what is important to do before other things, could be a more suitable alternative.
- The importance of youth, and transferring knowledge to youth, needs more emphasis.
- The RRC is central to plans for the future because they represent people who are on the land. The RRC could build consensus and buy-in from community leadership and communicate members. This is harmonious with the Dene way of making decisions: at the family level, followed by discussion with other families and then deciding with elders.
- Dene translations should communicate the concept, and not be literal translations. For example, Hı́dó Gogha Sę́nęgots'ı́ǵá is more accurately expressed as “planning for a better world” and the principle of “ethical space” is translated, literally, as “making talk” which may not accurately reflect and communicate the concept as intended. Elders need to know what we are talking about.

² Caribou is often mentioned as one of the things that should not be spoken about directly. In past PLS Hearing Reports, the SRRB has expressed its understanding of this aspect of people’s relationships with caribou on the basis of submissions from parties. Dene ǵǵá, taught by elders, considers it disrespectful to talk about caribou. (See *Sahtú Ragóǵa (Hunting Law) and Approaches to Wildlife Harvesting: Colville 2020 Public Listening (Hearing) Session Report and Reasons for Decision*, October 30, 2020, at pages 9, 11, 115, 149; *ǵelets'ewéhkwe Godı (Living with Wildlife) – Predators and Competitors: Délıne 2021 Virtual Public Listening (Hearing) Session Report and Reasons for Decisions and Recommendations*, at pages 15, 16). This reinforces the belief we should not talk, or ask questions, about certain things directly.

³ Conservation is the big picture, and what this is all about. Dene believe there are relationships between all living things, everything is connected, and living in harmony with, and following, the natural world. “The land and the water tell us what to do” (Walter Bezha, during this workshop).

- Considering the story of animals and the land should include water, and all living things. This is not properly translated in the current Hı́dó Gogha Śnégots'ı́á principle for a “bio-cultural approach” (ʔası́ı́ Godı́ hé Dene Ts'ı́ı́ hé) but the concepts are aligned.
- Certain terminology, such as “management”, does not reflect the Dene understanding of conservation.
- The draft Guidance would benefit from additional reflections and dialogue about how Métis custom and culture is reflected in Hı́dó Gogha Śnégots'ı́á. The advisors at this workshop were committed to doing this.

Overall feedback from the workshop:

- The content outlined in the draft Guidance does not require specific modification, but the explanations of the content, and their translation into Dene, could be more culturally sensitive. Specific translation of phrases in the Guidance should not be rushed.
- There remains support from all sides about the SRRB’s work on Hı́dó Gogha Śnégots'ı́á, however more work is required on how to provide guidance, and how guidance can be prepared so it is more culturally adapted and understood by the audiences it targets.

Conclusion

This workshop will inform the SRRB’s development of additional guidance for community work to prepare Hı́dó Gogha Śnégots'ı́á (PFF). The SRRB wishes to thank all who attended and contributed to the gathering. Máhsı́ cho!