

Níio Nę P'ęné Begháré Shúhta ʔepé Narehʔá



Restoring the health of caribou and people in their mountain homeland

Shúhta Goʔepé hé, Dene Ts'įlį hé (health of mountain caribou and health of Dene ways of life) were at the heart of an on-the-land workshop bringing together Sahtú and Ross River Dena delegates July 26 – August 2, 2017.

The workshop was held at Dechenla Lodge in the heart of K'á Tǎ – a unique place in the Mackenzie Mountains that has deep

cultural meaning for Ross River Shúhta Dene, Kaska Dena and Shúhtaot'įné (Mountain Dene), as well as special habitat for Bedzih / Gudzih / Shúhta Goʔepé (Mountain Caribou).

"We've got to find a way to move forward. Our people always did that – every time they struggled to find a way, they'd get together like this," Leon Andrew

TRAILS OF THE MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

Joint planning for Shúhta Goꝑepé¹ was initiated in 2014, when the Ross River Dena Council (RRDC) hosted Sahtú delegates in Tu Łidlini (Ross River, YT) to talk about problems like disrespectful harvesting, declines of Mountain Caribou and habitat degradation in shared traditional territory. In 2016 the Tulít'a and Norman Wells ʔehdzo Got'Inę (Renewable Resources Councils) hosted a meeting in Tulít'a, NWT, with the intent of working with the RRDC to address concerns about the well-being of Shúhta Goꝑepé, including the idea of collaborating on a joint conservation plan.

These meetings clarified problems, created dialogue and built relationships between regions, government, business and communities, helping to set a foundation for future action.²



Embracing community-driven conservation planning

In 2017, when we gathered for a week in the mountains at Dechenla Lodge, our goal was to create a draft community-led conservation plan. After much hard work, we reached our goal, and now return to our communities to present the draft for review. Your feedback will help us improve the plan.

"I don't want to see government imposing their way on my land. This is where things have really got to change,"

Frederick Andrew

We named the plan **Nío Neꝑ'ęnę Begháré Shúhta ʔepé Narehꝗá – Trails of the Mountain Caribou** to honour the importance of the area to Dene, and refer to the Mountain Caribou trails that cover the landscape. The last page of this newsletter has a map showing the area we are talking about.

"We want to protect it now while there's still caribou out there," Gordon Peter

¹ Most of the indigenous terminology included here is Shúhtaot'Inę. We acknowledge there are at least three language groups that traditionally used this area and have interests here. In the future we hope to have better representation of all dialects in planning materials and meetings.

² Reports summarizing the 2014 and 2016 meetings are available from the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board.

All photos by Stuart Cowell and Janet Winbourne

TRAILS OF THE MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

Nío Nę P'ęné is a series of ridges and peaks stretching from Twichya River down to the Redstone River and Nááts'įhch'oh Mountain. Shúhtaot'įnę elders say Nío Nę P'ęné is like a backbone for Dene people – it holds everything in nature together. The area contains headwaters of several main rivers. Caribou migrate there from many different places. If disturbed too much, the animals won't come back. K'á Tá refers to the willow flats within the broader planning area that we would like to see protected better.

“We need to teach people our ways and everything will go more smoothly,” Dorothy Dick

The plan is rooted in traditional Dene values, principles and knowledge. Three key principles are *bets'erįchá* (respect) for the caribou, *ęęets'erįchá* (respect) for each other, and *ęęexé ęęgháats'eda* (working together).



Nío Nę P'ęné – the backbone that holds everything together

With help from Australian facilitator Stuart Cowell, workshop participants agreed on a vision to guide the planning process:

Shúhtaot'įnę, Métis and Ross River Dena continue to peacefully coexist with shúhta goęepé in an ecologically diverse and healthy mountain landscape as they have for thousands of years – travelling, harvesting, sharing and gathering throughout their territory, keeping Dene káda (language), Dene ts'įł (ways of life), and Dene ęęąą/ąą (law) strong.

We also worked on things like the assets or values we're working towards, the scope of the area under discussion, the main threats we're facing, and some ways of monitoring our success.

Our strategy for addressing threats is made up of seven program or action areas, including:

1. A Guardian program
2. Reducing disturbance of shúhta goęepé
3. Land protection with protected areas
4. Land-based healing program
5. Education and communication of Dene/Métis laws
6. Indigenous resource laws and agreements
7. Keep moving forward.

Once Tulít'a, Norman Wells and Ross River Dena leaders and community members have reviewed and made suggestions on the plan, the working group will revise the plan, then the signed plan will go to the ęęhdzo Got'įnę Gots'ę Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board) and RRDC.



Map showing draft Nío Nę P'ęńę Planning Area and K'á Tǎ Proposed Protected Area.