



Keeyask Generation Project

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Monitoring Plan

Askiy Nanakacihtakewin Stewardship Program

Annual Report

ATK-2017-YFFN



KEYYASK GENERATION PROJECT

YORK FACTORY FIRST NATION

REPORT #ATK-2017-YFFN

ASKIY NANAKACIHTAKEWIN STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

2016/2017 ANNUAL REPORT

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June 2017

This report should be cited as follows:

York Factory First Nation, 2017. Keeyask Generation Project, *Askiy Nanskacihetakewin* Stewardship Program, 2016/2017 Annual Report #ATK-2017-YFFN. June 2017.

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1.0 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Askij Nankacihetakewin means, “to watch out for and take care of the lands, waters, wildlife, plants, and people of the land”. YFFN has chosen the term “stewardship” for its “monitoring” program, as this word is better aligned with *Ininiw* perspectives on caring for *Askij*. The Program is designed to incorporate traditional science and *Ininiw kiskenihtamowin* (ATK), with cultural, educational, and traditional elements in understanding the effects of the Keeyask Project on YFFN’s members and their traditional lands.

The *Askij Nankacihetakewin* (A.N.) Program now has two permanent staff members - the YFFN Stewardship Coordinator and Stewardship Assistant - and a contracted Monitoring Support Worker.

1.1 WORK PLANNING

The A.N. Program began the year operating under an Interim funding agreement. Staff and Steering Committee members spent much of the year meeting internally and with Manitoba Hydro to come to an agreement on a work plan for future program activities. In early February, YFFN and Manitoba Hydro finalized a contribution agreement, work plan, and budget that cover the program until March 31, 2018.

2.0 MONITORING ACTIVITIES

In addition to work planning and budget discussions with Manitoba Hydro, the A.N. Program conducted a number of community-based activities between April 2016 and March 2017:

2.1 STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The *Askiy Nankacihtakewin* Steering Committee met more than ten times to review program activities and provide direction to A.N. Staff. The steering Committee is made up of 12 YFFN members, including youth, elders, resource users, staff from the Keeyask Implementation Office, a member of Council, a member of the YFFN Resource Management Board, and others. This broad membership provides grass-roots direction for the program and ensures linkages to other First Nation programs and activities. Steering committee meetings focused on setting priorities for the Program, developing and amending the work plan, planning stewardship activities, and disseminating information from project committees and technical studies.

2.2 COMMUNITY SURVEY

The A.N. Program conducted a survey of community members. The survey focused on identifying changes that have occurred since the beginning of the Keeyask Project, and on priority areas for community monitoring. It used a combination of group discussions, one-on-one interviews and individual surveys to hear from a range of community members. This work built on baseline monitoring categories identified during YFFN's 2004 Keeyask Community-Based studies. The survey has helped to inform development of the long-term work plan and identify priority topics to be addressed through the Keeyask Implementation Office. A draft report of the survey approach and findings has been prepared.

The survey findings suggest that areas of concern and priority for the community are much as they were in 2004. Key points of concern identified through the survey are:

- **Travel safety** – Members note increasingly uncertain ice and water conditions on Split Lake and the Aiken River. They see these conditions as influenced by system operation, watershed management, upgrades at the Kelsey GS, climate change, and other factors. Members continue to be concerned about the potential for Keeyask to contribute to challenges with safety, access and resource use in the area.
- **Water quality** – Like travel safety, members see water quality as the product of multiple factors. They report an on-going decline in the quality of water for drinking, swimming, and ecosystem health. Skin conditions are reported, particularly among children, and fishers have struggled in recent years with silt and algae coming downstream through the Kelsey GS. Again, members are concerned that Keeyask will further contribute to these problems.

- **Barriers to employment** – A number of barriers were identified, including the quality of pre-project training, employment databases, access to site, lack of advancement on site, dismissals from camp, and resignations – often due to workplace problems and family separation.
- **Income** – Survey results suggest that the standard of living has improved somewhat for YFFN members employed with the project, but members note that money earned on-site has in some ways contributed to social problems in the community.
- **Environment and way of life** – Environmental change in the region continues to affect YFFN members' access to traditional resources and family gathering places. The survey report emphasizes the need for land based healing and reconciliation programs involving community elders. Reconciliation is seen as a long-term process that must be navigated and led at the community level.
- **Caribou** – The survey also documents concerns with an apparent decline in caribou in the York Landing area over the last several years. Members question whether current construction has affected caribou movements and if recent experiences will transfer into long-term trends.

The survey outcomes confirm a number of on-going priorities for YFFN. The Askiy Nanakacihetakewin team, the Keeyask Implementation Office, and community leadership will continue to address these concerns through their respective work.

2.3 FIELD TRIP

An 8-day Elders and youth retreat was held in YFFN's home territory along the Hudson Bay coast. The retreat took place between July 29th and August 7th, 2016 and involved 24 YFFN members. It provided an opportunity for elders to revisit and observe changes in the York Factory area; for youth to see and learn about their history and traditional lands; and for members of YFFN's *Askiy Nanakacihetakewin* Stewardship Program to document oral history, practices, knowledge and observations shared during the trip. Activities involved fishing, net-setting, medicine and berry-picking, food preparation, moose hunting, a visit to the York Factory community and Depot site, and lessons about navigation and tidal cycles. Participants indicated that the retreat reawakened their values with respect to stewardship and relationships with *Askiy*. It left them with a renewed commitment to knowing, and caring for their traditional lands.



Source: Gilbert Beardy

Photo 1: Boating on Hayes River



Source: Gilbert Beardy

Photo 2: YFFN's Ten Shilling Camp

2.4 CARIBOU WORKSHOP AND MAPPING

Program staff have been meeting with Elders and resource users to document community observations of caribou on a year-by-year basis. This work builds on a baseline study, *Oral History, Traditional Knowledge, and Hunting of Atikok (Caribou)* (October 2016) that was developed through YFFN's Lower Nelson Community Studies Program.

2015/2016:

- Community observations indicate that in 2015/16, caribou migrated into the area east of York Landing (along the railway tracks towards Ilford), but did not use areas burned in the 2013 fire, and did not travel as far west as York Landing or Spit Lake.
- Discussion with elders from other First Nations, at a joint ATK workshop raised a concern that, in early 2016, animals may have encountered linear disturbances (new cut lines and power lines) in the Gillam area, and turned away from their regular course.

2016/2017:

- YFFN resource users indicated no caribou in the York Landing or War Lake areas in the winter of 2016/2017. The only caribou observed by YFFN harvesters in were near Panko Lake (northeast of Gillam), and near Shamattawa. Discussions with neighboring communities indicate that caribou moved through the Oxford Lake and God's Lake areas this year – near the southern extent of their routes.

YFFN plans to continue to document caribou observations on a year-by-year basis. The A.N. Program is looking to foster discussions with other communities, as well as with other research programs, and build an understanding of regional caribou movements, and changes over time using all available knowledge systems. YFFN continues to endorse development of a regional caribou management committee in Northeastern Manitoba.

2.5 STURGEON WORKSHOP

The A.N. Program teamed up with YFFN's *Kichi Sipi Namao* (sturgeon stewardship) committee representatives to co-host a community workshop on sturgeon. 7 Elders participated in the workshop, along with *Kichi Sipi Namao* representatives and A.N. staff. The group reviewed the KSN management plan, and discussed sturgeon stewardship. The elders underscored the importance of teaching young people about sturgeon stewardship and encouraged *Kischi Sipi Namao* representatives to continue with education and awareness activities such as field trips to sturgeon releases and a 'sturgeon days' event at the school.

2.6 SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES

The A.N. provides regular funding support to traditional spiritual activities in York Landing including sweat lodges, teachings, and other events. These activities support on-going relations with *Askiy*, providing opportunities for learning, reflection, and healing at an individual level.



Source: Gilbert Beardy

Photo 3: Heading out to pick Medicines

2.7 ICE AND WATER MONITORING PROGRAM

Ice and water conditions are among YFFN's top priorities with respect to Keeyask monitoring, as was confirmed in the 2016 community survey. The *Askiy Nanakacihetakewin* Program has been designed to include an ice and water program that will document past and present conditions on Split Lake and the Aiken River, building on data currently available through Manitoba Hydro, the Keeyask Project and the provincial Coordinated Aquatic Monitoring Program. *Askiy Nanakacihetakewin* staff have begun to develop a monitoring strategy, and hope to begin pilot monitoring activities in 2017.

2.8 MEETING WITH KEEYASK PARTNERS

In addition to carrying out community based monitoring activities, *Askiy Nanakacihetakewin* staff represent the First Nation on a number of partnership committees and working Groups.

- Keeyask Monitoring Advisory Committee (MAC)
- Keeyask Caribou Coordination Committee (KCCC)
- Keeyask Mercury and Human Health Implementation Group
- Socio-Economic Monitoring Program (SEMP) Steering Committee

2.9 FIRST NATION COLLABORATION SESSIONS

Each offers a forum to share community perspectives and monitoring outcomes; to build understanding of *Ininiw kiskenihtamowin* (ATK); and to advance the Partnership's efforts to provide 'equal weight' to ATK and western science.

This work has not been without its challenges, but YFFN remains committed to bringing *Ininiw* perspectives to the Project.