



Keeyask Generation Project Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Monitoring Plan

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Monitoring Report

ATK-2017-FLCN



KEEYASK GENERATION PROJECT

FOX LAKE CREE NATION

REPORT #ATK-2017-FLCN

ABORIGINAL TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE MONITORING PLAN

2016/2017 ANNUAL REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING PLANS	1
1.1	INNINUWUK SCIENCE	1
1.2	ELDER SESSIONS	3
1.3	GROUND TRUTHING.....	3
1.4	CONSTRUCTION MONITORING	4
1.5	COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION	5
1.6	SALVAGE WOOD PILE	5
1.7	COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	5
2.0	REPORT ON ANNUAL CARIBOU MONITORING	6

LIST OF PHOTOS

Photo 1:	Blueberry harvesting	2
Photo 2:	Soil sampling	2
Photo 3:	<i>Muskwa</i> (bear footprints).....	4

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING PLANS

The Fox Lake Cree Nation (FLCN) Impact Assessment Unit (IAU) consists of a team of environmental monitors that are monitoring the entire Keeyask Project footprint, which includes the South Access Road, Keeyask Transmission Lines and all known heritage and cultural sites. These areas have been monitored since the beginning of construction and will continue to be monitored through the construction and operational phases of the Keeyask Project.

The IAU undertakes the following activities as outlined in the monitoring plans:

- Monitor and report on the presence/absence of wildlife, rare/important plant sightings, work done in the area, concerns from FLCN members, seasonal events (migration, spawning, hunting/fishing/trapping seasons), access trails, and heritage/cultural sites observed.
- Provide environmental liaison employment opportunities for community member within the communities, Fox Lake Cree Nation Traditional Territory, Keeyask Project area.
- Report any protection and prevention measure to the proper resources: Natural Resources.
- Assist by locating and identifying environmentally sensitive site: Heritage sites: settlements, graves, artifacts.
- Work with Environmental Inspectors, researchers, with persons relating to the project and report to the Senior Environmental Assessment Officer.
- Report information regarding monitoring to FLCN: Community update(s) and information sessions and inform FLCN members through social media (Facebook) and Newsletters.
- Gather information from FLCN members through Interviews and questionnaires.

1.1 INNINUWUK SCIENCE

The foundation on which we operate is the compilation of knowledge gathered through millennia of activity, experimentation, and observation of past generations of FLCN members. This is *Inninuwak* Science. This education is gained through teachings and activities out in the field. The Impact Assessment Unit is constantly engaged in the pursuit of this education to remain effective in our roles and responsibilities.

This science heavily emphasizes our connection to the world, and identifies the most effective and meaningful ways with which to interact with it. While western science is necessary for measurement and documentation, *Inninuwak* focuses on relationships, as well as traits and behaviours. For these reasons, its inclusion throughout our monitoring approach is critical.



Photo 1: Blueberry harvesting



Photo 2: Soil sampling

1.2 ELDER SESSIONS

Meeting with elders regularly has provided a level of knowledge and understanding otherwise impossible to attain. Their experience is valued highly and depended upon for our monitoring activities. Through these sessions, we are able to understand what it was about this region that attracted and sustained us. These sessions are integral for their ability to provide an understanding of the current situation, and the journey that has brought us here.

The previous absence of environmental studies and most other studies in general, pertaining to our land, underscores the need for knowledge of the past. By piecing together this knowledge with monitoring excursions on the land, we are able to get a good understanding of changes already experienced, and those yet to come.

Knowledge from our Elders is contradictory to some positions that Manitoba Hydro holds. Though this life experience does not hold weight in all forums, we remain confident in our beliefs.

1.3 GROUND TRUTHING

Going out on the land is done regularly and is key in our monitoring activities. Key areas are targeted, as well as areas of concern that arise. Consistency is maintained to provide us with the best possible level of understanding.

Ecosystems are compared from past project areas, current project areas, and areas yet undamaged. Prime examples are that of the Kettle River, and the creeks dried up around the dikes on the Kettle fore-bay. Without the knowledge of our elders and the ability to compare these areas with undamaged ecosystems, we would not understand the true extent of which these areas functioned as oases. This gives us the ability to accurately predict the upcoming changes to ecosystems like that of the seasonal oasis Looking Back Creek.



Photo 3: *Muskwa* (bear footprints)

1.4 CONSTRUCTION MONITORING

Regular inspections are done to monitor work being done, as well as identify and record the changes that occur and compound. Inspections of work being done posed a challenge as our team lack familiarity in the exact processes of these particular construction activities. We have, however, been fortunate to have guidance from the Manitoba Hydro employees who accompany us from time to time.

These activities have identified numerous optimistic indications of the way in which some employees of this project care for and respect the land. However, the need for continued monitoring exists as there have been concerns raised about some behaviours related to respect for the land. These concerns and other inputs from construction monitoring have been brought

forward at Monitoring Advisory committee (MAC) meetings where they have and will continue to be addressed and necessary changes and solutions implemented.

1.5 COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION

Regular communication with elders and resource users is maintained to ensure they are informed of construction activities. This includes permit alterations, site access and harvesting rights, wildlife sightings and interactions.

Community meetings are also held throughout the year. These provide a larger forum to review construction project details and gather input from our members. These activities allow us to maintain relationships with the community, and ensure the safety of our community.

1.6 SALVAGE WOOD PILE

On April 13 2017, we met with Manitoba Hydro to talk about the salvage wood pile we had out along the South Access Road. This woodpile is set aside for our Fox Lake Cree Nation members to take as needed. There will be arrangements made for this wood to be moved to a better location so our members can take.

1.7 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In addition to the above, the IAU has implemented and continues to plan ongoing traditional activities/practices and outings with FLCN members. This includes harvests, traditional education, and site visits/tours. FLCN members are encouraged to take part in these activities.

2.0 REPORT ON ANNUAL CARIBOU MONITORING

It is often told to us by our Elders that without the caribou herds, our people would not be here. Arguably, one of the most invaluable resources in our land, Fox Lake Cree Nation takes great pride in the caribou.

This past year has been quite notable to our people since the caribou did not migrate through our land. This obviously raises great concern throughout our communities, but more importantly, it raises the level of difficulty involved with survival in an already unforgiving landscape. Concerns also included the increasing loss in independence that accompanies this loss of caribou.

Monitoring activities over the past year consisted of a multi pronged approach, including the efforts of IAU monitors, as well as Elders, harvesters, and other community members. Excursions on the land, interviews and discussions with community members, and historical reviews were some of the main methods employed this year.

Excursions on the land produced findings that echoed that of community harvesters. There was no sign of migration through our area this year. The lack of migratory indications was most worrisome in our most consistent migration corridors and crossing points. Caribou sign was observed in certain areas over the past year within our territory, but these were “resident caribou” and not active in the large migratory herds. These signs indicated the presence of only a handful of animals, not nearly enough to provide for the protein requirements of any community.

Interviews and discussions with community members helped our team strengthen our understanding and knowledge of the caribou in our land. Through these discussions, our strong dependence on the caribou herds was reiterated many times. We were also more deeply educated in the historical relationship, discussing ancient settlement and harvesting, all the way up to the present.

The biggest suspects causing the loss of caribou are believed to be from human activity deteriorating the quality of the earth. These include local degradation and destruction caused by Manitoba Hydro’s methods of wealth extraction as well as from projects all around the world.

Furthermore, this year provided an example of what our lives would be like without these great herds. Discussions with our community revealed the extent of just how much we still depend on the caribou for survival. Each person discussed with us the feeling of being unable to provide this food for their families, who depend on the caribou meat to fill our freezers for the winter.

Fears were also shared with us that if these conditions were to continue, that we would not be able to provide food and families would face serious problems. This would result in dependence on foreign food sources, both high in cost, low in quality, and also high in chemicals and hormones that our people try to avoid.

Effects of the absence of the herds touches more than just people. We learn that when the caribou are late, or do not show up, wolves come into our communities much more frequently.

This was the case in both Gillam and Fox Lake this year. But this relates to all animals that depend on the caribou and not just wolves.

Concerns of hungry families and dangerous encounters with hungry wolves were not the only ones. There were also great concerns regarding the loss of our culture and the loss of the many things that make up our identity and our very beings, such as the specialized skill sets that allowed us to exist in this region in the first place.

Findings from this year were compared with that of other years, both recent and historic. Through these monitoring activities we have been able to gain deeper understanding of the caribou herds in our area as well as gain a greater understanding for the relationship we hold together.

Feedback was not from any targeted groups and reflects the general concern of the First Nation.

Moving forward we hope to expand and enhance our methods and activities as we progress