



Keeyask Generation Project
Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Monitoring Plan

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Monitoring Report
ATK-2024-FLCN



KEYYASK GENERATION PROJECT

FOX LAKE CREE NATION

REPORT #ATK-2024-FLCN

ABORIGINAL TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE MONITORING 2023/2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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1.0 MAKESO SAKAHIKAN INNINUWAK: ASKI KESKENTAMOWIN - FOX LAKE CREE NATION TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) is the baseline, the First Peoples way of life since time immemorial. This knowledge is spoken, seen, stories shared; learned by doing – a feeling. All is instrumental to the future of our territory.

“We are the Inninuwak, placed here on Aski by Manitou (Mother Earth). We are part of Aski. We are sustained by Aski. We care for Aski.

Aski is the word used by our people for the whole of the land, water, animals, plants, people, and all creatures, as well as interrelatedness and equality of all things. All things are alive, have a spirit, and come from Aski. Aski and all things come from something greater than us – Manitou. Our culture, spirituality, and history are part of Aski. Everyone and everything in Aski are sacred to us.

Our relationship with Aski is important to our culture, identity, spirituality and history. Our relationships are based upon trust and respect for all parts of Aski.

Mino-Pimatisiwin means living a good and honorable life. It includes many things, such as being a good person, respecting Aski, harvesting and consuming healthy Ininew foods, and following the values.

When we act disrespectfully or in a harmful way, we must acknowledge the harm we’ve done and make sincere attempts to put things right and strive for balance and harmony. To set things right, we often use rituals and ceremonies. We maintain our teachings and traditions by living them and teaching them to our youth and future generations”.¹

1.1 FLCN ASKI KISKINTAMOWIN MONITORING PROGRAM

Fox Lake Cree Nation (FLCN) Impact Assessment Unit (IAU)/Environment Department monitors the Keeyask Project footprint, which includes FLCN Traditional Territory. We share these areas and territories with the Keeyask Cree Nation (KCN) partners: Tataskweyak Cree Nation (TCN), York Factory First Nation (YFFN) and War Lake First Nation (WLFN). These areas have been monitored since the beginning of construction and will continue to be monitored post construction.

¹ Paraphrased from: Keeyask Generation Project: Response to EIS Guidelines – Chapter 2: Partners’ Context, Worldviews and Evaluation Process (pgs. 2-3)

The IAU undertook the following activities as outlined in the Aski Kiskintamowin Monitoring Program, Environment Monitoring Plan, (including a Socio-Economic Monitoring Plan and a Mercury and Human Health Risk Management Plan):

- Monitor seasonal changes: land, water, animal, people (including livelihood);
- Gather traditional knowledge from FLCN Elders, resource users, harvesters and youth. Information, related to the land, water, animals, people, teachings and spirituality;
- Participate in ongoing resource users forums, community gatherings, ceremonies, community information sessions, home visits with Elders/Elder harvester group, harvesting and school visits;
- Provide employment opportunities for FLCN members, utilizing their expertise of the land, water and traditional knowledge of FLCN traditional territory/project footprint;
- Participate in fieldwork activities with consultants, advisors and FLCN members;
- Work together with Manitoba Hydro as partners to gather, share, use and apply ATK and technical science in the operation and stewardship of Keeyask;
- Share project information/updates with FLCN members via Fox Lake Environmental – Facebook page, memos, and information sessions;
- Participate in on-going professional development opportunities including GIS exercises, office administration training, snow machine safety, boat patrol operation, maintenance and safety;
- Collaborate activities with other Fox Lake events such as Community Harvesting Gatherings; and
- Attend collaboration meetings and workshops with KCN, First Nations and others related to environmental monitoring.

The Fox Lake ATK team consists of three full time staff members and one staff who splits their time between ATK and the Mercury and Human Health program. The ATK program focusses on the following activities:

- Community and Youth Trapping Programs;
- Caribou, moose, goose and fish monitoring & mapping;
- Community harvesting events;
- Monitoring of heritage sites and traditional territory to observe changes to the land, water and animals;
- Visiting the Keeyask site to observe the post-impoundment environment and operating systems;
- Engaging with youth through student visits, youth camps on the land, and the summer student program; and
- Teaching youth about caribou conservation and respectful harvesting on FLCN territory.

2.0 FLCN ATK 2023/2024 HIGHLIGHTS

The FLCN IAU work continued with another successful year of environmental monitoring and community activities. The IAU team also welcomed one new and two returning staff members to the program. Below are the highlights from this year's activities.

2.1 FLCN YOUTH GOOSE HUNTING CAMP

The goose hunt started in March 2023. The IAU monitors harvested many geese and shared the meat with the community. In May 2023, the IAU monitors assisted with the annual FLCN Spring Goose Camp by teaching and encouraging respectful goose harvesting. The number of geese caught was not recorded this time, but there was plenty. The IAU team also hosted a youth-based program during the Goose Camp. They set up a goose blind in the Keeyask study area by Cache Lake, taught youth how to build a hunting blind, how to respectfully harvest geese and basic wilderness survival techniques. All together there were six youth registered for this program.

2.2 ATK CARIBOU MONITORING

The IAU team monitors different areas in the territory throughout the fall and winter seasons for caribou. The team observed and recorded species, habitat conditions, herd size and migration routes. Other animal observations were also recorded. It is important to monitor caribou movements because these animals are important for community harvesting and can be impacted by hydro development. In addition to monitoring, the IAU team aims to teach youth about caribou conservation and respectful harvesting on FLCN territory.

This winter was warmer and saw less snow than other years. These unusual conditions combined with fluctuating water conditions lead to dangerous and unpredictable conditions on the snowmobile trails. The IAU team observed less caribou activity in the area compared to last year. Other mammals observed included a polar bear, moose, wolves, and a wolverine. Two bull moose were harvested by the IAU team from the Keeyask Study Area and the meat was shared with the community. The IAU team also brought FLCN youth to the Keeyask Caribou Coordination Committee meeting in January 2024.



Photo 1: Drayden Jobb (IAU Monitor) with caribou harvested in October 2023



Photo 2: Very low water conditions in October 2023

2.3 ICE FISHING

From late March 2023 to early April 2023, the IAU team ice fished on Stephens Lake near the FLCN Fish Camp, Keeyask and Gull Lake. Only 10 jackfish were caught and were from Gull Lake near the Keeyask dam. The fish ranged in length from 40 – 63 cm long. Staff and resource users were advised that fish from Gull Lake have high mercury levels as a result of Keeyask impoundment and were not recommended for regular consumption. It was suggested to have hair mercury levels tested, if the fish caught were going to be consumed.

2.4 OPEN WATER FISHING

The ice melted quickly in the spring of 2023, and Resource Users were fishing by boat by the end of May. During this time, the IAU team caught no fish on Stephens Lake, but caught (and released) numerous jackfish and pickerel on Gull Lake. They noted that the fish from Gull Lake seemed larger than normally seen in the past, with the jackfish caught ranging over 53 cm and pickerel over 40 cm. The IAU team speculated that the larger fish in Gull Lake could be because more food was available after Keeyask impoundment. They also reported a noticeable change in water colour (clearer and bluer) since Keeyask Impoundment, which may be in part because of the recent zebra mussel invasion. As part of a larger Keeyask Cree Nation initiative at the MAC, all fish harvested were checked for zebra mussels in the stomach, but none were reported.

In June 2023, the IAU team took FLCN youth fishing at various dykes in the south access area towards Keeyask. The lack of current around the dykes meant the fishing conditions were not ideal. Next year, the youth want to try fishing by canoe in the middle of the lake. Other activities included sharing stories, making fires and tripod smokers, nature walks and discussing life on the land.



Photo 3: FLCN ATK Summer Students fishing near Gillam Manitoba



Photo 4: Brook trout caught near Gillam Manitoba



Photo 5: Measuring a Lake Sturgeon caught in Stephens Lake - June 2023

2.5 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND MENTORSHIP

In July 2023, two summer students joined the FLCN IAU team. Over the course of the summer, they job shadowed the environmental monitors, learned how to read maps, and assisted with fishing trips in various tributaries and along the Nelson River.

In August 2023, the IAU team participated in a youth exchange with students from Rankin Inlet. IAU staff played an important role in knowledge / skills exchange and chaperone. The youth explored the FLCN Territory and went on a boat ride on Stephens Lake to the Keeyask area. The youth found many similarities in lifestyles despite living in different environments.

The IAU team has also been collaborating with other community and school programs to educate youth about the importance of harvesting and trapping on the land. This year, the IAU team shared stories to elementary aged students about local animals and their important roles. This also included skinning demonstrations, showcasing different furs / animal parts, and preparing moose and caribou meat to eat with fresh bannock. Next year, they would like to expand the program to include older students.



Photo 6: Skinning a Moose Hide at FLCN Culture Camp



Photo 7: Youth from FLCN and Rankin Inlet touring the FLCN area for Youth Exchange Program

2.6 UPCOMING WORK

With new and returning staff joining the IAU team, the focus is to continue to monitor the land and water connected to Keeyask. The IAU Coordinator recently completed a boat operator training designation and plans to train and certify youth in boat operations and maintenance to prepare for future employment opportunities. There are also plans to grow the youth trapping program by investing in a new trapping cabin.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The FLCN ATK team is happy and grateful to be able to work on the land and with the community again for the 2023/2024 year. It is important for the IAU team to continue to learn from the community Elders and Resource Users, and to pass those teachings on to the next generation.