

**Cree Nation Land Use Planning
Values, Issues and Vision**

**Report on community input
on land use planning goals**

CHISASIBI

**Compiled by the
Eeyou Planning Commission**

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Introduction

After millennia of caring for the land, but being largely excluded from government planning for their homeland, the Crees finally had their right and responsibility to plan for the future of Eeyou Istchee recognized in the 2012 Cree-Quebec Governance Agreement. Shortly afterward the Eeyou Planning Commission was formed, with a representative from each of the 10 Cree communities, to work on land use plans in Eeyou Istchee, ensuring they stay as true as possible to Eeyou Eetuun.

Land use planning for Eeyou Istchee starts with understanding what vision Crees have for their communities, and what issues stand between them and realizing that vision. To this end, in 2017 the Eeyou Planning Commission working with the Cree Nation Government conducted open houses and focus groups in the Cree communities. The goal of this exercise was both to better understand the values, issues and vision that need to be at the core of a Cree land use plan, and to share information about the new land use planning processes in place. This report describes some of how the Crees of Chisasibi see their community, the challenges they face, and their vision for the future of their lands.

1.1 History of Cree Land Use Planning

In ancient times as in the present, Crees have always planned their use of the land. Understanding that the well-being of Eeyou Istchee is a pre-condition to the well-being of Crees, and that everything on the land is deserving of respect, Crees considered and planned out their hunting, fishing, trapping, harvesting and travels across the land with the greatest of care.

As the years went by and the presence and activities of non-Crees increased – including not just fur-trading but mining, forestry, hydroelectricity, tourism and more – Crees continued to plan their lives on the land with the same care they always had. But things had changed. Ecosystems transformed by forestry or hydroelectric development did not respond the same way they once did. Mining or even whole new communities displaced traditional hunting spots. The animals behaved differently, responding not just to Crees but to non-Crees whose own occupation of the territory made itself increasingly felt. At the same time, communities became more sedentary and the need for jobs increased. Crees saw opportunities in these new activities and industries occurring on the territory, and in partnerships with the non-Crees with whom they now shared Eeyou Istchee – opportunities to live from and care for the land in new ways, to draw from Cree tradition and ingenuity to meet the needs of a changing world.

In the 2012 Cree-Quebec Agreement on Governance, Crees obtained formal mandates with respect to land use planning – the right and responsibility to compile and share a Cree vision for Eeyou Istchee, shaped by the Elders' teachings that have always informed and guided Cree land use. Basically, land use planning offers Crees the opportunity to do as they have always done,

which is to create and implement a plan for how they want to use the land. There are many more activities to consider now than there used to be, and many more people and partners to work with. But the value Crees place upon balance, that is, upon developing and caring for Eeyou Istchee in a way that ensures that future generations will have as many opportunities to hunt and trap, and work and learn, as possible – that hasn't changed.

1.2 What is the Eeyou Planning Commission about?

As mentioned above, the Eeyou Planning Commission was created as a result of the 2012 Cree-Quebec Governance Agreement. It is composed of a Commissioner from each of the ten Cree communities including Washaw Sibi, as well as a Chair from the Cree Nation Government – currently the Deputy Grand Chief. The Chisasibi representatives to the Eeyou Planning Commission are:

- L. George Pachanos, Commissioner
- Matthew Chiskamish, Alternate

The mandate of the Eeyou Planning Commission is to work towards building a collective Cree vision and the capacity to engage on land use planning related activities throughout all of Eeyou Istchee. The EPC will work collaboratively with regional planning partners in order to harmonize the various land use plans so that they work as best as possible with the collective vision, interests and aspirations of the Crees. This mandate includes:

- The drafting of a land use plan (Regional Land and Resource Use Plan) for Category II lands
- Collaborating with the EIJBRG in harmonizing Category II and III land use plans, and providing Cree content and information for Category III plans
- Collaborating with the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission in harmonizing terrestrial and offshore land use planning and implementation
- Any other responsibilities the Cree Nation Government assigns to it.

1.3 How does land use planning work?



There are seven main stages for land use planning in Eeyou Istchee.

The first is determining what the main goals of a Cree land use plan need to be (1. Pre-planning, goal setting). The Values, Issues and Vision we hear about in Chisasibi and other Cree communities will help us understand and describe those goals. Each community will have its own unique goals, and still others will be common across many or all Cree communities.

Once these goals are established, the Eeyou Planning Commission and the Cree Nation Government will collect the background information related to these goals (2. Research, data collection).

Next, the Eeyou Planning Commission and the Cree Nation Government return to communities to ensure that the information they collected is accurate (3. Analysis, validation).

Using the information collected, the Eeyou Planning Commission and the Cree Nation Government will work with communities, planning partners and others on developing land use plans that move Crees closer to the goals they have named (4. Writing the plans).

These plans then need to be approved in public hearings held in the Cree communities (5. Public hearings, plan approval).

After this they are put into action (6. Implementation) and finally, once in action, they are assessed to check whether they are successfully helping to reach the goals established by Crees (7. Evaluation, monitoring).

Here is an example of what the land use planning process looks like using the goal of protecting culturally sensitive sites

Stage of Planning	Work Involved
1. Pre-planning, goal setting	Protect culturally sensitive sites
2. Research, data collection	Collect information from Elders and land users on where culturally sensitive sites are. Determine which, if any, are already protected.
3. Analysis, validation	Validate information on culturally sensitive sites with the communities, to make sure we know where many or all of them are.
4. Writing the plans	Develop plan for land use that gives a special status to valued culturally sensitive sites.
5. Public hearings, plan approval	Present plan to communities for approval, ensure it meets the goal they envisioned
6. Implementation	Put plan into action
7. Evaluation, monitoring.	Check to see if the culturally sensitive sites are being protected as envisioned by the community

1.4 On the Values Issue Vision Exercise

In order to understand more about Chisasibi, and what issues and objectives matter most to Chisasibi Crees, the Chisasibi Commissioner for the Eeyou Planning Commission (EPC) worked with the EPC Secretariat to hold focus groups with community members. The objective of these focus groups was to gain a better understanding of what is valued by community members, what issues they see in relation to land use planning, and what is their vision for the future of their community. Different groups were targeted for input, including local government employees whose mandates touch land use planning (e.g. those who work in Environment, Economic Development, Cultural Development, etc.), as well as representatives of different demographic groups: women, Elders, youth, and land users. Members of these groups were invited to participate in focus groups, and the composition of these groups was mixed and determined mainly by the availability of participants. Several focus groups were held over three days in Chisasibi.

In addition to the focus groups, the Commissioners and the Cree Nation Government held an Open House in Chisasibi on August 8th 2017. At the Open House, community members had the opportunity to hear a presentation on land use planning, pick up pamphlets and information, and ask questions of the Commissioners and Cree Nation Government representatives. They also had

the opportunity to give their own feedback on the values, issues and vision that matter most to them in relation to land use planning.

Comments and perspectives from participants were grouped into a table and then sorted by theme pertaining to values, issues and vision, these themes being described below. Participants are described as Chisasibi Crees or Chisasibi community members in the text, but as only a limited number of community members participated in the exercise, it should be understood that the views they describe and the themes discussed here are indicative of broader public opinion in Chisasibi but not a definitive take on it. This document and the land use planning goals that emerge from it will continue to evolve along with the development of and dialogue within the community.

2. What is valued

In Chisasibi, the strongest values that emerged was the importance of the land, the community being out on the land together, and the transmission of Cree culture, knowledge and values.

2.1 Being Together...

“When we're in the community we hardly see each other because we're working, when we're at the camp we're together, we hunt together, family gathering for 2 or 3 weeks. It comes back to us, what our fathers and our forefathers did way back when. Pass on the knowledge.”

“Just getting the Elders and youth and families together is very important, most important thing besides hunting fishing trapping. When we're in town that doesn't happen, that family togetherness. But once we're out in the bush everyone has a responsibility, everyone is included. In town youth and Elders are separate, everyone is separate.”

Chisasibi community members value the greater sense of community integrity and belonging that comes with being together out on the land. This is very different from life in town where people feel divided from each other by the pressures of work and other obligations, and the realities of conventional housing where families retreat into their own private space. The context of life in a hunting camp and the work and coordination that goes with it prompts people to talk more than in town, to get to know each other better. It helps Elders and youth interact more and so helps youth develop new skills and acquire knowledge related to traditional Cree ways. Life on the land improves relationships between family and community members and creates important bonds.

2.2 ...On the Land

“One of the things my father told me, the land is our hospital, our healing center, body and mind begin to heal because everything on the land is in connection with you when you're on the land, he's right, that's what I went when I wanted to stop drinking, it helped me, of course I had a hard time at the beginning, but my father and the knowledge helped me. Everything that's around you out there is talking to you, even the wind, even the trees, even the birds, you're connected.”

“We were born here, we were raised out on the land, mostly spring and fall, and sometimes in the summertimes, parents took us fishing, that's what they mostly did. In spring trapping muskrat and otter. Other furbearing animals goes until March. Goose hunting during months of May. Continued through end of May. Going out on the land was like coming home to us.”

“Elders used to say they left their home to come to the community, home was the land.”

The connection that Chisasibi community members enjoy with the land, doing traditional activities with family such as hunting, harvesting, setting up camp, etc., this is critical for Chisasibi Crees and something to be preserved for generations to come. There is a powerful sense that the land is the first and main home of the Crees, and a place that is restorative for Crees both as individuals and as society. Doing activities on the land is highly social, both in the sense of working with others but also being in touch with the animals, the trees, the different elements on the landscape. It is through participating in these activities on the land that culture, language, stories and values are passed on. Critically, the connection requires being present on the land, which can be difficult in a time of in-town employment and schooling.

2.3 River

“Chisasibi Eeyouch: it means great river, not the big river. We are the people of this place, the people of the river.”

“The reservoirs covered the river valleys, this is where the game used to be.”

“Protecting the land and the use of the land, and the river.”

The Great River, all that it was, all of its impacts, and all it remains, is a big part of Chisasibi's identity, down to the name of Chisasibi itself. Often known as the La Grande river, Chisasibi community members clarify that the name actually means the Great River, and was changed by non-Crees mainly to avoid confusion with Whapmagoostui. The river plays an enormous role in the history of the community, as it was for generations a highway to and from the coast, and along its banks are several gathering and harvesting sites of high cultural value to the community. Sadly, many of these sites were heavily impacted by the hydroelectric development that transformed

Chisasibi territory from the 1970's onward; many are underwater or under hydroelectric infrastructure. Even so, the significance of river – with all its impacts, with all its history that now lies beneath the reservoirs – has remained undiminished by the years and the changes it has endured.

2.4 Old camps and cultural sites

“When you see an old trail, burial site, camp site, those are important, we have a connection to these places.”

“Camp sites are important, the older generation recognize them. Those are important archaeological sites that are out on the land.”

Old camps and cultural sites are highly valued by the participants in our discussion on land use planning orientations. These sites have much historical meaning and significance, and can breathe life into stories that have been told about the past. In one example discussed, one of the participants told of connecting a site with a particular rock formation with stories that featured these rocks as the setting of an important cultural event. But these sites can also have personal meaning, and/or be linked to identity: for example, places that embody the connection between residential school survivors and their family and culture, that are the context for important memories or community events. The connection these and other meanings create between people and the land are very important to community members, and when those connections are broken through impacts or destruction of the sites, the effects are felt on a personal and community level for generations.

2.5 Respect for land users/knowledge holders

“The other thing we try to respect the traplines, the tallymen, the first thing we do is ask for permission to go on the trapline, we use tallyman as resource person or leader of the group. We don't just go onto anyone's trapline without permission or consent.”

“We try to respect the people who are responsible for that area (tallymen), that's one of the thing that needs to be encouraged...whenever we have on the land project, we make sure we involve people who are the land users, and we encourage the young people, Elders, etc. to respect the area and to clean up when they leave because you'd want to do the same thing if you had people coming into your hunting grounds. “

Respecting the leadership of the primary land users (usually tallymen) and knowledge holders is an important practice to many participants. This respect is shown through asking permission of the tallyman to access certain areas of a trapline, involving them to the extent possible in events (e.g. cultural programs) on the trapline, and keeping the traplines clean after events are held. It

is also shown through the high regard held for Elders and their knowledge. The need to engage these people when carrying out activities on the land is thought to be critical to creating deeper social bonds within the community, to renewing the sense of respect that community members and especially youth should have for those who know and care for the land.

2.6 Cultural heritage

“I believe the stories my Elders tell me. The way the legends are connection, the stories are connected. That's what I mean by intangible heritage. We tried to put that into their natural resource policy, but couldn't.”

“The old people had that knowledge that they passed on, to sons, daughters, grandsons, from generation to generation: legends, how the Earth came about and civilization, the teachings and the legends that was their schooling, that was their high school, university...The land is there for us to heal our minds and bodies, because it seems that everyone that had issues in their lives have said that when they went out on the land it was peaceful, it healed me... We need to revive our culture, our spirituality. That's the teachings from the Elders, that are sort of disappearing, some of us around still have that knowledge.”

“Those are the kind of things we don't think about but that still connects everyone to that land, the songs and the stories. Especially the stories that you hear about stories of young men, preteens that walk for miles to get food, bravery, that's something you don't hear about enough. There are a lot of stories about us being lazy, but these stories about what we did on the land, those are important, people need to hear those stories. Even our own people, they need to hear those stories of survival and hardship. People in the world need to hear this. There's too much stereotype, but that's not the way they are, our ancestors were hardworking people.”

Chisasibi has a powerful sense of its cultural identity and heritage, and preserving these is one of its priorities. This includes knowledge of how to live on the land as the ancestors did, and also the stories of the trials and accomplishments of ancestors. These are important not only for renewing critical cultural knowledge and knowledge of the land, but also for instilling a sense of cultural pride and identity. The dramatic changes to the Cree lifestyle in recent decades have made the preservation of cultural identity and heritage more challenging, but the value people place on this reflect a determination to keep this heritage alive for generations to come.

2.7 Respect for the animals

“We don't overkill, if we see 4 or 5 during the day, or 7, we don't try to kill them all, we kill one or two that's it. It's because we were taught not to overkill.”

“Because the families back then, when they killed an animal, they used every part of the animal. Even the bones were used for us. I guess the Elders had so much respect especially for the bear, you hung the bones on a tree so that they don't get disrespected by the other animals.”

Showing respect for animals by responsible harvesting, which involves (among other things) killing only what you need and using all of what you kill, is a practice valued by Chisasibi community members. There is an awareness that animals can sense whether they are being respected or not, and can react accordingly. One participant spoke of how women could impact game simply by delaying going to get water for the camp, which would hold game back. Thus showing respect to animals extends to many facets of Cree life, especially on the land.

3. Issues that Chisasibi faces

Many of the issues that came out most strongly relate to the impacts of hydroelectric development on Chisasibi territory, particularly with respect to damage to the land and reduced opportunities to practice Cree culture.

3.1 Hydro impacts – our own Smokey Hill lost

“We have impacts here that other communities have trouble understanding. Life along the coast is not the same as life in Mistissini. No matter what happens and what is being proposed, that impacts guaranteed level of harvest.”

“Where my camp is, is far from reservoir but I feel that it's somehow still affecting the water. The Elders told me that the lake where my camp is used to be very clear, but since the hydro project it's turning darker now. They say it's affected even the areas around the reservoirs. The reservoirs covered the river valleys, this is where the game used to be, what's left is swamp and rock, no river valleys left to hunt. So there's fewer and fewer game. The habits of the animals are changing all the time, for example the geese: no more geese on James Bay coast. The migrations of the caribou, there are changes to the fish, taste of the fish. I've heard Elders say that there has to be more research in the reservoirs to see what else is there besides mercury, things in the water that we haven't learned about yet, because the taste of the fish on the La Grande river has changed so much that the Elders don't want to eat the fish anymore.”

“A big difference is the change that came with the La Grande complex, people, some of them are stuck here. There's a guy from here, an Elder, his trapline was flooded, he's only got 1/8 of his trapline. He loves to go hunting but he can't go there all the time, people invite him to their traplines to trap marten or beaver. This poor guy was always in the bush in the 70's. When we kill ptarmigan or beaver, I give it to

this guy sometimes because he doesn't have anything on his trapline. That's the big difference we're facing here."

"LG1 dam, where we used to net the fish. It was our own Smokey Hill, it was a rock slab, dragged a net from one point to the other, there was a kind of whirlpool we would drag the net through. That's where LG1 is."

Few communities, Cree or otherwise, have seen their territories transformed as quickly and radically as the Chisasibi Crees have seen theirs transformed by hydroelectric development. This transformation drowned a good number of traplines and part of several other traplines, restricting the territory on which community members could hunt fish and trap. It also saw the destruction of a very significant cultural site for the community in the shape of the fishing site/gathering place at LG1 that was used for many years until one of the La Grande hydroelectric complexes was built there. The project required that the community of Chisasibi move from their former site on the island of Fort George to their current site inland. The transformations to river flow and hydrological cycles created by a working hydroelectric project have impacts all over Chisasibi territory, from far inland to the coast, which are too many to document here and are well documented elsewhere. For the purposes of this report, it is important to underline the great significance of the La Grande project and its impacts for the Chisasibi people.

3.2 Loss of waterfowl

"One of the things that we've seen is that back before there were any impacts...we used to have a lot of geese. Especially with this eelgrass issue that we have, or the lack of eelgrass, just looking at the numbers from the past to the present, it was estimated that one person may have killed at least 80 on average geese per year or season, but now it's down to 10% of what it used to be. That's a big sacrifice of livelihood for the Crees. It's like taking away a livelihood of people who depend on the animals. Someone was even saying if you take away a farmer's cows, what would they say? For the Crees it's like that, they're taking away our animals."

"What gets taken into account when you're goose hunting, the tide, its direction, etc if it's a calm day you let them be, that's what the Elders taught us. I learned to read the waves. The youth have no reason to go out and learn that because there are no geese."

The goose hunt is a cornerstone of Cree life on the land, especially in the coastal communities. This hunt played a significant role in terms of both culture and sustenance, as an event that brought families together to harvest hundreds of birds or more. But significant changes in coastal ecology, which many Chisasibi Crees link directly to hydroelectric development, have diminished this hunt greatly as the geese no longer migrate along the coast as they once did. The goose camps that Chisasibi Crees gathered at for generations along the coast often sit empty now, and with

that emptiness goes the loss of opportunities for young people to learn about the bay, the goose hunt, and the Cree way of life more broadly.

3.3 Move from Fort George Island to Chisasibi

“Because when we moved here we were separated. When we were there we made our own decisions, where we were going to live, when we moved here we were separated that caused a lot of confusion. When the young people go out on the land and come back, they create a bond with the people they went out with, they recognize them and find out how they are related to them. That's why it's important that all these connections have to be there.”

“I'd like to move this village to a safe place where don't have to think about the reservoir, lots of dams upstream, huge reservoirs on the way to LG1, people talk a lot about this situation. For me I'd rather move somewhere else, a safe place for the future generations.”

Still today, the move from the island of Fort George to the current site of the community of Chisasibi is remembered as an event that created a lasting sense of disempowerment and social disruption among Chisasibi Crees. The abrupt shift to the setting and structure of the current Chisasibi, which had nothing to do with the community's evolution and collective memories that developed while on Fort George Island, scrambled the social fabric and left people alienated from each other and from the land that was undergoing such massive changes. Additionally, some people are uncomfortable with being downstream from massive hydroelectric dams and infrastructure, and the possible risks that entails.

3.4 Damage to water

“The developments that will be coming, e.g. mining, we've heard so much of what mining can do, contaminants and all that, we won't be able to stop every project that will come up, especially the water we need to take care of because we all depend on water. 80% of our body is water, animals too.”

“Once you are there...you realize that you need good clean water and a habitat for the animals, clean water for the fish. Elders don't want to go in reservoir areas to hunt, the fish there are no good to eat so they'd rather go where the lakes haven't been touched so much. You cannot fool them, if you give them a fish from the reservoir they'll know it's from the reservoir. There are special lakes in Chisasibi territory where you can get very good fish, and the Elders will know where it's from, salt water or fresh water. My father in law was over 90, we got a whitefish from Cape Jones and gave to him, he knew which lake the fish was from.”

“What we've learned over the years is the information that we're given for the flow of the river, the change to the water cycle, they release the water during the winter and the extra freshwater affects the mouth of the bay right to Hudson Bay. The fresh water affects the equilibrium, around the bend and all the way up to Richmond Gulf.”

Chisasibi, like many communities, is deeply concerned with the state of its water resources. This concern is understandable given the extreme changes in the hydrology of the Chisasibi territory and the consequences this has had for Chisasibi Cree land use and culture. The impacts of these changes, mainly related to hydrological development, have deeply affected many lakes and rivers and drinking sources and harvesting sites the Crees have used for generations, in some cases making these resources unusable. For a community rooted in its history and land base, this hits hard. For these and other reasons, the conservation of water resources in the face of future development is a real issue for Chisasibi community members.

3.5 Occupation declining

“One of the consequences is that when the young people don't go out as much, there's the loss the language, of geography (understanding the land), weather conditions they can't really tell what the weather's going to be like. Elders could tell what the spring was going to be like just by looking at the birds and the animals, they could know what was coming. If you look at the whiskeychan, grey jay, when their plumage bulks out it means it's going to be cold the next day. During the summer you don't see they plume out like that, they look slender.”

“After there was damming, the hydro project, people weren't able to eat the fish they would normally harvest, also the birds that feed on the fish we don't see as many as we used to. One thing our Elders noticed, after they had the migration of the geese, they had the migration of red-throated loon, smaller than common loon, that used to be part of the diet especially for the coastal people. Now if we got out there we're lucky if we see even one. Also a lot of people, especially older people can recognize what kind of duck it is, but our young people can't do that. They won't know which duck it is, because we're not able to learn.”

Cree life has been greatly transformed by recent decades, becoming increasingly sedentary under the demands of schooling and employment, and also as impacts from hydroelectric development made it more difficult to access, harvest and be safe on the land. This transformation of Cree ecological and socio-economic landscapes has reduced the amount of time that Crees are able to go out on the land and practice their traditional way of life. This reduced Cree presence on the land is clearly identified as a problem, because occupation is so relevant to governance, and because a reduced occupation means a reduction of cultural knowledge that just multiplies with every passing generation – this point will be further explored next.

3.6 Culture and language declining

“I find that whenever people kill animals today, they don't respect it as much as they used to back in the day. The way I was brought up, you hardly ever threw out anything. With goose, everything was eaten, nowadays they don't save as much, they don't use as much, they throw out wings, feet, head, intestines, they don't save them. Even the goose fat, some people today don't know how to make it.”

“It's not just the hunting that's lost, it's the language that goes with that activity.”

“That's the consequences of not being able to practice the culture, a loss of the language, certain terms that you use specifically for certain activities out on the land, when you're just in the community they don't have the chance to collect that vocabulary, traditional vocabulary and knowledge, teachings, medicines that go with it, that are out on the land. That's what we're losing out on just by sitting inside our houses.”

Reduced Cree occupation of the land means a reduction of opportunities to practice Cree culture and learn Cree language and values. The culture and language emerge from, are rooted in the land and traditional way of life of Eeyou Istchee, and much of its complexity is revealed through the practice of this way of life. Limiting opportunities to be on the land in turn limits the quantity and depth of Cree knowledge that can be acquired. As each passing generation is more limited in how much time they can spend on the land, they are limited in the knowledge they can acquire and pass on, making the problem progressively worse. That said, Chisasibi community members are determined to address this problem and ensure the ongoing vitality of their language, culture and way of life.

3.7 Non-Cree hunters

“For non-natives it's a sport, for us it's more like hunting, like our ancestors.”

“People aren't getting out as much as they used, because of schooling, work, health issues, they go out on the land as much as they can. I guess it was in the 80's or 90's it declined, because the caribou hunters were out there and it wasn't safe.”

“The caribou sport hunting, people afraid to go on the land because they're afraid of getting shot at.”

The spike in the migratory caribou population particularly in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s brought with it a spike in the number of non-Cree caribou hunters coming onto Chisasibi territory. These hunters operate differently from Cree hunters and in ways that they feel undermine both their safety and their cultural values. Specifically the non-Cree hunters were more reckless and trigger happy in hunting the caribou, and much less inclined to use the whole animal as the Crees do. While the wasted animal parts showed an alarming disrespect for the caribou, the increase in

hunters and shooting made Crees more reluctant to hunt in areas where non-Cree hunters might be present. With the migratory caribou population falling as shockingly as it is at present, the issue of non-Cree hunters seems like it might resolve itself as the population becomes too small to support a commercial hunt.

3.8 Overharvesting/poor harvesting

“Even nowadays I still teach my daughters and granddaughters to respect the animals that have been killed. Because nowadays it's like they're overkilling, for some people they sell what they kill but the way I was taught is you're supposed to share what you kill, not sell it. Some people do it for profit.”

“The hunting practices are not the same. The respect for the animals is not the same. Even how you clean them.”

There is a widespread concern today about how harvesting is done and how that's changing. The concern related both to the number of animals harvested and how they are harvested. There is a fear that certain people are harvesting more animals than they need, sometimes to make a quick buck selling meat. At the same time, the way animals are processed is changing, with some people being less preoccupied about using the whole animal and discarding parts that were used or consumed by their ancestors. Also, sharing is a critical Cree value that some people feel is disappearing, especially when it comes to sharing meat which was such a common practice not long ago.

3.9 Trapline system

“Even if it's one trapline you may now have several families on that trapline and families are fighting other families within the same trapline. Because they don't follow the same mentality. For some people it's all about the money, the dollars from pursuing certain activities or getting certain compensation. Some families are ostracizing other family members, preventing them from going to their area. I think when traplines first started it was all about conservation, now it's all about ownership.”

“There was no concept of ownership of anything, my father didn't talk about my land, my trees, my food, my fur. Wherever you went, you shared everything. Now that's changing, I hear people saying this is my trapline, mine mine.”

There is a perception that the way some Crees interpret the trapline system is changing, and not for the better. Whereas the tallyman position was traditionally one of leadership in terms of leading families successfully through the hunting season, some see this shifting to a position of ownership and control. This transition, to the degree it has occurred, is associated in part with the financial stakes which are now attached to traplines and the tallyman position, including but not

limited to compensation for projects offered by proponents on a trapline basis. This change in interpretation of the trapline system is not well perceived, as people who perceive themselves as controlling the trapline try to exclude others for their benefit. This exclusion limits opportunities for some people to go on the land, and goes against the long established Cree tradition of sharing and viewing the land as a collective resource.

4. Elements of a Chisasibi vision for the future

Underlying it all, what emerged in the vision that Chisasibi Crees have for the future, is a fierce attachment to Cree culture and a willingness to ensure it survives and thrives through protecting the land it is rooted in, and also through conducting developing in a way that complements Cree culture.

4.1 Conservation of the land

“We'd like to keep what's left of it as pristine as possible, keep our water clean, less pollution, not to over exploit it.”

“We want a biodiversity reserve, so it's going to be there for generations. Preserve the land as long as you can.”

With the changes that Chisasibi has seen happen on its lands in the past 50 years, conservation of the land has become increasingly important. There is a sense that many areas have already been altered, and those that are still intact and good for harvesting urgently need to be protected from the negative impacts of development. At the time of the writing of this report there has been protected areas work ongoing in the community for two years, and community members very much look forward to completing and building on that exercise to protect as much of their land as possible.

4.2 Conservation of cultural sites

“It's like that in every trapline, you have gravesites. It's one thing to mark the area where the grave sites, they need to be protected.”

“Camp sites are important, the older generation recognize them. Those are important archaeological sites that are out on the land.”

“That area is where my father used to hunt, I'm not the tallyman my brother is, we have a grave in there somewhere, our mother, I suggested that it shouldn't be touched, but my father told me there are some other graves in the territory. There's been a lot of prospecting there, I see them every year, in the winter they're using skidoos. I want to put a marker there, so people know not to go there.”

A key category of sites that Chisasibi Crees seek to protect are cultural sites: camps sites, grave sites, archaeological sites, sites associated with stories, etc. These often coincide with sites of ecological value (fishing, firewood, etc.) but also have a profound cultural and sentimental meaning to Crees. This is obvious in the example listed above of someone whose mother is buried on the family trapline, and frequently Chisasibi Crees do have close relatives buried out on the land in locations that are often not well indicated. Understandably there is a great interest in ensuring that these sites remain undisturbed.

4.3 Cree-led development

“Of course we need economic development also, but on our conditions. If there's a mine that could be developed anywhere in Chisasibi territory we have to be a partner.”

“But I believe that we can hold onto traditions and still have economic development. I love the story of my father, when he was trapping they told me he was a good trapper, but when he died my uncles said he was a very good trapper, and even though the fur was at a high value he didn't keep it for himself, he shared it with the whole family, he didn't see the monetary value as being as important as seeing that the whole family was taken care of.”

Chisasibi Crees who participated in this exercise were not opposed to development projects in general, but specifically to development that is out of their control and that violates Cree values with respect to how the land is treated and how the benefits are distributed in the community. That means creating partnerships with Chisasibi in developing projects, and ensuring that Cree land and culture do not deteriorate to an unacceptable degree as a result of those projects.

4.4 Limit damage from Hydro

“Remove all the dams, put the land back to its original state. Send all the water to Africa where they need it.”

“Not put more turbines in the hydro dams, I think they were planning it, I don't know where that's at. I don't like them doing that without the Cree Nation's consent.”

In the same vein as the Cree-led development, there is a sense that the management and any projected development of the hydroelectric infrastructure on or affecting Chisasibi lands should be done in collaboration with Chisasibi, and in a way that respects the community's wishes. People might yearn for a time before the dams went up, but most realize that the best case scenario now is to manage and mitigate the impacts of the project through protecting the intact land, completing remedial activities where damage has been done and strengthening the culture and traditional activities where impacts might have weakened these.

4.5 Transmission of cultural knowledge

“We need to teach our grandkids our knowledge, we need to pass it on to them. We have a lot of knowledge, and the Elders too, that we have to leave it with them when we leave.”

“Young people forget is that's our birthright the heritage that is given to us is to live on the land and protect the land...We really need to tell those kinds of things, and be proud that this is our land.”

Passing on and strengthening Cree culture is a priority looking towards the future in Chisasibi. There is a recognition that these are challenging times and the threats to Cree culture in the form of development impacts, reduced occupation of the land and reduced opportunities to transmit Cree language and culture, are real. That said, advocates for the promotion of Cree cultural knowledge are strong and passionate, and seeking to put in place programs, measures and whatever it takes to ensure the younger generations are just as strong in their culture as their Elders are.

5. Conclusion

The values, issues and vision described by Chisasibi Crees focused on a handful of main topics. These topics and related descriptions, as seen below, broadly describe some of the main goals and considerations for a Chisasibi land use planning process:

Topics	Description
Environmental protection	Protect sensitive environmental and cultural sites
Cree culture and language	Improve and increase opportunities to learn Cree culture and language, so that the knowledge of Elders is passed on
Hydroelectric development	Limit impacts from existing hydroelectric development and refrain from adding to existing infrastructure
Cree-led development	Carry out economic development through partnerships and collaborations that allow Crees to have a strong say, to ensure development respects Cree values
Cree occupation	Increase the Cree presence on the land through programs and other opportunities to make it easier for people to go on the land
Non-Cree hunters	Ensure non-Crees engage in safe hunting practices that do not affect Cree safety or rights, and observe Cree values regarding respect for the animal

Water	Protect water as a critical resource for people and wildlife so it doesn't become contaminated by development
Harvesting	Teach Crees to hunt and harvest as their Elders did, without overkilling and while using all of the animals
Trapline system	Revise the trapline system and its implementation to ensure that the way it is being implemented respects Cree values (i.e. traplines aren't about ownership)