

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

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

EASTMAIN

**Compiled by the
Eeyou Planning Commission**

December 2017

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1. 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 10 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 Eastmain 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 Eastmain representative to the Eeyou Planning Commission is:

- Raymond Shanoush, Commissioner

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 Eastmain 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 Eastmain, and what issues and objectives matter most to Eastmain Crees, the Eastmain 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 Eastmain.

In addition to the focus groups, the Commissioner and the Cree Nation Government held an Open House in Eastmain on May 31st 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 Commissioner 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 describes as Eastmain Crees or Eastmain 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 Eastmain 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

The aspects of land and land use that Eastmain Crees value the most pertain to culture and the environment. This includes first and foremost clean rivers and lakes, healthy animal populations, and the continuation of Cree identity and tradition.

When asked about the things that they like the most in their community Eastmain Crees speak of going out on the bay, to coastal islands and to sites and lakes inland to pursue traditional activities, bringing along youth and Elders. Programs and initiatives that facilitate like the fishing program and snowshoe journey are also appreciated. The availability of moose, beaver, sturgeon, pike and whitefish are especially well appreciated.

Using the land as in the past, with respect, is a very important value. This includes hunting together, with family and friends, gathering in the summer, and sharing the meat with friends and relatives. To some, the ubiquity of this practice in Eastmain qualifies it for the title of “the friendliest town in the Cree Nation”.

2.1 Water

“The natural freshwater spring that used to be at the site of the community was destroyed when the community expanded. We don’t want that to happen again. Water is a key source of life, it is important to protect it, we need regulation and policy for that.”

“Preserve water sources for future generations. These should be flagged, identified and protected.”

The protection of freshwater sources came up several times. Some expressed regret that the natural water spring that used to be at the site of the community was destroyed when the community expanded. There is a concern that a similar sources, for example the one further away on a hill at kilometer 37 of the access road, or others that have not been identified yet, may be eventually damaged or spoiled by future economic development.

2.2 Lakes and rivers

“Lakes should be respected because many of our teachings come from there.:

During interviews Eastmain Crees stressed how they valued rivers, especially the Opinaca and the Eastmain River and their tributaries. These were the “highways” via which the Crees have traveled for centuries; they embody a significant portion of their history and culture.

Many of these water bodies are valued because of the kinds of fish they host: the habitat of sturgeon and Cisco trout for example. Duckbury lake, Elmer Lake, Coldwater lake, Kamewatskat, Loon lake have been identified as especially culturally important.

2.3 Respect for the animals

The duty of respecting and caring for the well-being of the animals has been reported as a key element of Eastmain Cree values.

“A hunter must respect any animal that he kills. For example, killing a caribou on the road is not respectful.”

“Tallymen still have communication with animals, they respect animals. They talk to animals. Spiritual communications still exist between tallymen and animals. They know how to respect them.”

This commitment to respect the animals is in part reflected in the importance of “working in the given trapline system”: “hunt on one spot of area, count wildlife, such as beaver, and keep it for future harvest”. This system is seen by many as a cornerstone of Cree Nation land use planning.

2.4 Sensitive areas

“For people out on the land – they know where archeological sites are, game, where other resources are that need to be protected.”

“Within each tallyman land it is important to maintain the animal species. At one point, will need land to survive in the future. The key is to not destroy the habitats.”

Many areas on Eastmain territory have a particular status, either as wildlife habitat (productive lakes, moose calving areas, etc.) or as culturally significant sites. These areas are highly valued, as is their protection going into the future, to ensure game populations stay healthy into the future and that locations of key cultural importance are preserved.

2.5 Passing on Cree Knowledge

Another key value that has been identified to inform land use planning in Cree lands is the importance of cultural knowledge and skills. Part of this has to do with the point mentioned above: knowing how, when and where to respect and take care of the animals, with specific care for sensitive habitats.

“Traditions should be passed on for how to protect the land, animals, regulate harvest and habitat protection/regulation.”

This calls for measures to ensure the passing on of land related knowledge and skills, as well as the documentation of place specific information, such as place names.

“Teach young people to go out on the land – to know what to do.”

“We want to preserve our traditional way of life and our memory. For that Cree place names need to be included in maps.”

“I like to go out with elders, out on the bay, on the island, in canoe, take younger kids out on the land to pursue traditional activities.”

2.6 Cultural Gatherings

Important sites and moments of cultural transmissions are the traditional ceremonies and cultural gatherings. These play a key role in the continuation of Cree culture and relation to the land, and Eastmain community members place great importance on these.

“The traditional ceremonies are very important. For example, walking out ceremonies, weddings, feasts in the summer.”

“What’s important is being together on the land, hunting together during the summer – family and friends gathering, meat sharing following hunting”

3. Issues that Eastmain faces

Issues affecting land use concerns at Eastmain pertain primarily to environmental impacts of industrial developments (hydro, mining, forestry); difficulties with ensuring access to the land; issues of over-harvesting, and littering and pollution.

3.1 Impacts from hydroelectric developments

The landscape surrounding this community was greatly altered as part of the La Grande complex, the first hydro-electric project that started in the late 1970s. Over 90% of the Eastmain River was diverted to flow to Sakami Lake to the north, reducing it to a much smaller flow on its natural path toward the Bay. Subsequent phases of these projects in the 2000s, most notably the creation of the Eastmain-1 reservoir, has led to the flooding of the basin near the middle of the river.

The construction of the Eastmain-1, and later on Eastmain-1A and the Sarcelle powerhouse, a road connecting that site to the Nemiscau work camp to the south, and countless related structures, dikes, weirs and other hydroelectric works have had a considerable impacts on the area.

“There is not as much fish now because the diversion has impacted them, Fish are sick because of water contamination. “

“We should have studies to look into areas where activities took place so nothing was left behind... And there should be regulations concerning the chemicals that control vegetation along dams.”

3.2 Concerns about impact of mineral exploration and exploitation

As is the case across most of Eeyou Istchee, there has been a significant increase in mineral exploration around Eastmain. The impacts from these activities add to the impacts from hydroelectric developments.

“Mining, exploration, hydro, they leave everything behind. Punctured fuel containers leak and pollute the water. Beavers can’t eat as well because the shorelines have been transformed.”

Related to this are concerns about the future impacts of eventual mines being built and exploited in the area, especially as there is currently one lithium project which is in the later stages of development (undergoing environmental and social impact assessment) and another in the early stages of development.

“Mine projects are coming up. Water should be tested now before the mines come, to be able to identify which contaminant comes from the mines.”

3.3 Constraints on land use due to activities from southerners

The influx of workers that accompany hydroelectric development has led to an increase in the numbers of non-Cree hunters and fishers in the area. The problems brought by this increase of activities, especially pertaining to wildlife, has been one of the main land use related issues identified by Eastmain Crees.

“Game wardens no longer protect the area after a hydro project. Without warden, there are many cabins belonging to external people.”

One example that was brought up is the federated network of off-road vehicles trails in the southern portion of the James Bay territory. Some report that tallymen have been fined for using these trails.

3.4 Lack of forest

An enormous forest fire affected a number of Eastmain traplines several years ago. This has seriously reduced the amount of habitat available on several of these traplines, and made remaining forest that much more important.

“There is not a lot of forest. 80% was wiped out. Future logging needs to protect that area.”

3.5 Littering and pollution

Waste and equipment materials left behind from hydro and mineral exploration workers and from non-Cree hunters in the area have been reported as a problem. In which case it relates to the issues mentioned above.

There is a broader set of problems concerning waste management in general, at camps and in the community, that also involves community members. Some feel that not all community members take proper care of their waste and this impacts the land.

“We have problems with garbage, disposing of different things anywhere. Old tires are left at the gravel pit.”

“Waste management is an issue at goose camps. Tide takes the garbage out in the water. This is not the kind of respect for the land that we preach or strive toward as a First Nation people. A program to address this existed in the past. Or taking out the trash with Ski-Doos during the winter time is possible.”

3.6 Over-harvesting and break down of the tallyman system

Some of the reported land use issues point to a pattern of animal over harvesting.

“Tallymen and elders stress that there is more of an open season concept now to the hunting areas, lakes and rivers. People just hunt whenever, that’s a problem.”

“When you harvest something, they are no rules or regard for the animal or the number of kills. People go on Facebook to sell moose meat.”

This leads some to call for a revision of the harvest management system to again ensure that tallymen can work together to alternate hunting sites over time to preserve game across traplines.

3.7 Breakdown of the trapline system

“The current system is kind of a free-for-all. There is no respect for the tallymen and wildlife with the way exploitation goes forward now. Tallymen’s agreement for giving access are not respected and over-harvesting goes on.”

“Some people do not have traplines but want to spend time in the bush and are unable to do so.”

Some indicate that the trapline and tallyman based system of harvest management struggles to keep up with growing pressure, changes in social relations, and changing ecological conditions. For those that do respect this system, it seems that it sometimes serves to block people from using

the land, especially those whose close family doesn't include tallymen. But in the view of other community members, many don't respect the authority of the tallyman over the trapline and proceed to overharvest. Both these situations are problematic and stem from a state of uncertainty around the trapline system.

3.8 Access to hunting areas

In addition to issues affecting the monitoring and overseeing of hunting pressure in traplines, some have reported challenges for hunters, including tallymen, to access and to spend adequate time in hunting areas. This can be due to monetary costs, time constraints due to work and other obligations in town, or simply not having formal family access to a trapline.

“Not everybody has the privilege of access to the land.”

“It's costly to go out on the land, \$20000 to go out and back as a couple.”

“Now people who go on the land have full time jobs. Before, land was backyard, it allowed for sustenance and someone could make money selling fur.”

4. Elements of an Eastmain vision of the future

Eastmain Crees vision for the future of their community and Cree Nation lands includes improvements in environmental management, monitoring and protection; curbing overharvesting; maintaining and enhancing access to land and ability to live from it; fostering Cree-led development, and the establishment of a new community cultural site.

A strongly recurring theme is the idea of laws and regulations made for and enforced by the Crees to ensure their ability to continue their traditional way of life and of animal populations. The concept of “law” figured much more prominently in Eastmain than in the other communities.

“We need to set up better laws to protect the Cree way of life and the animals, to preserve them for generations to come. And we need inputs from Elders and land users in crafting these laws.”

While most of the suggestions on this point pertained to wildlife management, some have also talked about a need for more patrols on the road to enforce highway traffic regulation.

“We need game wardens out there and police to police the roads.”

4.1 Governance

A strongly recurring theme is the idea of laws and regulations made for and enforced by the Crees to ensure their ability to continue their traditional way of life and of animal populations. The concept of “law” figured much more prominently in Eastmain than in the other communities.

“We need to set up better laws to protect the Cree way of life and the animals, to preserve them for generations to come. And we need inputs from Elders and land users in crafting these laws.”

4.2 Environmental monitoring and management

In Eastmain as elsewhere, there is a strong desire for improved lands management, which passes through better monitoring and better awareness of and information on what is happening on the land. This also requires good coordination with land users in order to get the best information from them about what is happening on the land, inform them of upcoming developments and consult with them regarding potential impacts and mitigation.

“Tallymen should be informed of any activity on the land, and people should respect the specific places he would want to be protected for his harvest.”

“We need a progressive way of monitoring the land to properly maintain the land and its natural state before a project goes ahead.”

4.3 Environmental protection

Eastmain community members expressed a desire for more environmental protection, particularly protection for lakes and spawning areas, of which relatively few on Eastmain’s territory remain intact. There is also an interest in ensuring that animal populations remain healthy and receive whatever protections are required in order to make this happen.

“Lakes should be protected, and all spawning grounds need to be protected because very few remain.”

“We should have a Cree law or regulation that protects the animals.”

4.4 Maintained and enhanced access to land-based activities

The ability to access the land and to derive a living from it figures prominently in Eastmain Crees vision of the future of their communities and their lands. This access is perhaps the key instrument in ensuring that the Cree way of life is passed on.

“For generations to come, we should be able to harvest what we need. We want greater options for youth to access the land. Young kids need to be able to go on the land and be taught how to live from it.”

“Trails for walking and hiking are good projects to help for jobs and for being around the community.”

4.5 Addressing potential over-harvesting

The issue of over-harvesting, both by Cree and non-Crees, is what brought up the greater mentions of a need for stronger regulations and monitoring and enforcement capacity. This is seen as necessary to contain what many consider as a free-for-all that will cause problems to animals and people alike.

“There should be regulations on poaching, every harvest should be registered.”

“Laws should be set by Cree Nation Government to preserve animals through or quotas for game, and create a registry, even for the Crees.”

“Regulations should be passed on on how to protect the land, animals, how to regulate harvest and protect habitats/regulation Coordination with CTA.”

Many of the comments on this topic touch on tallymen and game warden. They wish for a greater “mutual respect between hunters and tallymen” and for programs to help tallymen to be present on the land for the duration of hunting seasons. They also wish for more game wardens, whose numbers are seen as inadequate. The benefits of greater wildlife officers being active in the territory were observed and appreciated during the programs set to that effect in the wake of the Sarcelle hydro-electric project, and some have voiced interest in such programs being renewed and expanded.

4.6 Cree-led development

One important element of the Eastmain Cree vision for the future of their community is the wish to we move forward with greater economic development for the community while also respecting the land. Much of the focus in this regard is in recreational activities such as tourism, sports, etc., but non-timber forest products are also of interest. The main thing is to promote the economic development of the community through activities and in ways that are compatible with the Cree way of life.

“We could develop more tourism business. We could provide access to community through trails for economic development. We need to be in-sync ideally with other uses like use of the Quebec federated trails. And for bird watchers, who are more frequent. We have potential, and we have experience with cabins and camps.”

“Berries and mushrooms are plentiful here. That could allow some new economic activity. For example we could try to start with Quebec and Japan to foster local economic benefit.

“We should hire people locally to oversee things locally.”

“We could have a golf courses, people play golf more and more. Whapmagoostui has a small golf course, maybe we can do that too.”

4.7 New community cultural site

A cultural site of cultural center for the community was mentioned several times as an example of the kind of initiative that could help the continuity of Cree culture and the passing on of skills and values. Such a site would be protected from industrial development.

“It could be possible to create a place for the Cree of Eastmain to gather, a new cultural place for people to go and that’s accessible place to all people. Sort of a new Smoky Hill.”

“We should create a cultural camp where no outside companies could go, for traditions to be passed on.”

5. Conclusion

The values, issues and vision described by Eastmain 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 an Eastmain land use planning process:

Topics	Description
Governance	Develop more governance structures that will protect the Cree way of life
Environmental management	Improve management monitoring of the land, in part through integrating land users into information-gathering and decision-making
Environmental protection	Protect sensitive areas that are critical for harvesting, culture, animal populations, water protection
Cree-led development	Increase local influence over development, including through pushing industries (tourism, non-timber forest product harvesting) that are more compatible with the Cree way of life
Cree access and occupation	Enhance the Cree presence on the land by make it easier for Crees to go out, through cultural programs, subsidies, etc.
Cultural programs and site	Improve and increase cultural programs and establish a new community cultural site
Harvesting	Ensure that Cree harvesting respects a set of rules based on Cree culture and the sustainability of wildlife populations
Trapline system	Revise the trapline system to ensure Cree ways (e.g. terms of access given by a tallyman) are respected

Hydroelectric development	Limit impacts of existing hydroelectric development (e.g. chemicals used to control vegetation) and enhance restoration efforts
Mining development	Take care to minimize chances of contamination and ensure full restoration
Waste management	Put in place better management of Cree waste disposal especially at camps and remote locations