

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

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

WASKAGANISH

**Compiled by the
Eeyou Planning Commission**

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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 Waskaganish 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 Waskaganish representatives to the Eeyou Planning Commission are:

- Barbara Hester, Commissioner
- Thomas Stevens, 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 Waskaganish 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 Waskaganish, and what issues and objectives matter most to Waskaganish Crees, the Waskaganish Commissioner and Alternate 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 Waskaganish.

In addition to the focus groups, the Commissioners and the Cree Nation Government held an Open House in Waskaganish on February 22nd 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 through qualitative analysis by theme pertaining to values, issues and vision, these themes being described below. Participants are described as Waskaganish Crees or Waskaganish 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 Waskaganish 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

There are many things valued by Waskaganish Crees, and almost all of them relate to living on the land: Cree knowledge of the land, the health of its animals, the long and deep history that connects Crees to this place they have occupied seemingly forever. This connection is powerful; as one participant said, home is not a house in the community, it's the land itself.

2.1 Cree activities on the land: hunting, trapping, fishing, harvesting

“The resources we use, the land itself, what we use it for, all is valuable.”

“People still do that tradition. You go home and give the mom or woman the animals to cook. There is excitement when the hunter comes home, or when people see moose or geese near the community, that's still a big part of life here.”

When people talk about practicing Cree culture, they often mean doing what Crees have always done: hunting big game and geese, trapping, fishing on the bay and at Smokey Hill, harvesting firewood, blueberries, etc. The continued practice of these activities is in large part what defines Waskaganish Crees, and that practice might be what is valued above all else. These activities are also how Waskaganish Crees learn about their territory, their Elders, and their culture.

2.2 Camps

“I have good memories from the land, my grandfather coming in at the end of the day asking me to empty his bag at the camp, I'd take out marten, groundhog, stretch the fur, listen to people on goose radio in the background. I used to love that part when he had me open the bag.”

“The camps, that's home to me. I want to retire there, I think about it when I want to get away. We're always connected to out there, it's all the same place.”

Camps are in many ways a focal point of Cree life on the land, a place where people can connect to culture, to history, to the land, and to each other. Spring goose camps are particularly beloved in Waskaganish, with the goose hunt being here, as elsewhere in Eeyou Istchee, a cherished tradition.

2.3 Smokey Hill

“Smokey Hill is a big part of what makes Waskaganish”

For generations Smokey Hill has brought Waskaganish Crees together. In the old days, it was a critical stopover as the river's generous fish population allowed people to stock up for fall travels. Today, it is still bringing the community together in yearly celebrations that play host not just to Waskaganish Crees but to guests from all over the world. Community members have voiced the importance of this site to proponents like Hydro-Quebec in the past, and it's clear that the preservation of the site remains a priority.

2.4 Access to the land

“The freedom to just go off into the bush”

As important as the activities such as hunting, fishing and trapping that make up such a fundamental part of Cree culture, is access to the land that permits these activities. What is so special about living in Waskaganish is that it is in the heart of the territory, so close to the animals and the land that allow for good hunting.

2.5 Cree knowledge and its transmission

“When an Elder teaches young people from community, he or she is not only teaching how to make snowshoes, but also stories of how they hunted, how it was a long time ago, how they should go out and hunt, what kinds of trees are needed for

snowshoes. The names of the trees are important for snowshoes, finding the right trees.”

As so much Cree knowledge is wrapped up in the practice of life on the land, the only way to learn the old ways is to live them alongside someone who knows them well. In this light, the vast reservoirs of knowledge held by Elders is a critical resource for Waskaganish community members we spoke to. Not only are Elders deeply valued, but so are programs and other opportunities that allow Elders to showcase and share their knowledge, especially with youth.

2.6 Cree values and teachings

“Our Cree value system is still in place. We follow traditional values that have been passed on from grandparents, how to use the land, show respect to the animals and wildlife.”

Cree values and teachings are, like so much else, embedded in the practice of activities on the land. When Waskaganish Crees spoke of Cree values, it was in the context of the practice of these activities: getting up early, working hard, being self-reliant, taking only what is needed, showing respect to the land, Elders and others, and taking pride in one’s work. The fact that these and other Cree values remain at the core of their identity is important for Waskaganish Cree community members.

2.7 Cree language

“What I like living here is I can speak to any one of my community members in my own language. That’s how we can preserve our traditions”

Language plays a critical role in every culture and community, and in Waskaganish as elsewhere, it is an important way to keep knowledge, values and stories alive. Waskaganish community members value their language, the ability to speak it fluently with other members of the community. They also value its ability to preserve elements of Cree knowledge.

2.8 The role of Elders in decision-making and governance

“We engage our Elders in the process of making decisions. The core of each family is the Elder. They have a lot of wisdom about where to go, where not to go, at certain times of the year. We have to work with them closely.”

As important knowledge-holders in Cree society, Elders play a key role in guiding governance. Their in-depth knowledge of the land and of Cree history, tradition, language and much more is sought after in decision-making. At all times, but particularly in times of crisis or uncertainty,

Waskaganish community members made it clear that the contribution of Elders to the resolution of issues and the charting of a path forward is a valued one.

2.9 Archaeological/historical sites

“They found a stone originally from Labrador at the gravel pit at km 29, an artifact. That is our original homeland. Waskaganish is the “beach”. They can't touch that area, it's an ancient land.”

“Waskaganish is special because of its heritage; it's probably the oldest Cree community. Used as a trading post for a long time”

Cree history goes deep in Waskaganish, as evidenced by the quotes above. Archaeological sites are especially valued as they bind Waskaganish Crees to a distant past, Likely due to the abundant wetlands around Waskaganish, archaeological sites occur often in and around gravel pits, exposing them to potential damage. A good example of a valued archaeological site is km 29, which is important to Waskaganish Crees for its historical artifacts and its cultural potential. Other sites of importance are associated with the Hudson’s Bay Company, whose presence in the community goes back hundreds of years.

3. Issues that Waskaganish Faces

When asked about the main issues faces by Waskaganish Crees, there is a thread that unites almost all of them: they are threats to the ability of Crees to continue living on the land as they have always done. Whether this takes the shape of decreasing knowledge of Cree culture and practices in the younger generations, or the impacts of development projects, it usually seems to come back to concern about the connection between Crees and the land.

3.1 State of Cree occupation of the territory

“One of the things we see, we have a decrease of young people that go out trapping and hunting. But there are a lot of programs for transferring of skills and knowledge of traditional way of life. Youth have identified these activities as a priority”

There is a deep concern that the Cree population in general, and youth in particular, are not spending as much time out on the land as they used to or as they should. Many factors come into play on this issue: how hard it is to make a living off activities on the land (discussed further below), pressure from school and jobs, lack of programs and opportunities to develop skills

needed to live on the land, and more. Whatever the causes, given how critical time on the land is to Cree knowledge, culture and identity, it's hard to understate the importance of this issue.

3.2 State of Cree knowledge

“One Elder who recently passed made me think about our culture a lot, what he said was I only know 50% of what my father knew, my children will know 50%, their children will know 50%, we have to find a way before it dies down”

“You don't get to hear too much these days. Back then we heard a lot of stories, almost every night. After meal, everyone would tell stories. Every night was like that. They would pick up stories, skills along the way. Always given stories in the evening. And they used to live together in one dwelling. Now it's one cabin here, another cabin there.”

Closely linked to Cree occupation of the territory is Cree knowledge. There is concern that not enough Cree knowledge is being transmitted to younger generations, in part due to insufficient opportunities to acquire this knowledge. The availability of these opportunities is linked to occupation of the territory described above, and the oral and experiential nature of Cree knowledge.

3.3 Overharvesting

“Back then, they didn't overharvest, only took what needed. Now it's not because people are bad, but people don't have jobs, have kids, need the food. There are other pressures now. When you talk about overharvesting...if you consider the context it's complicated”

In Waskaganish, as in many communities, overharvesting by Crees as seen as a real issue, if a complex one. There is concern especially related to moose and woodland caribou populations, but there are different beliefs about the underlying reasons why people overharvest. Some believe it is due to a lack of cultural knowledge, or to greed, while others believe it is due to population growth and financial pressures on families these days.

3.4 Challenges of making a income from life on the land

“We used to get more money for beaver fur, it takes a lot of resources to go hunting and now you don't make as much money from the fur. It's harder for the younger generation to go out on the land, because they need gas money, food money, money for supplies but it's not coming from the fur market”

Several Waskaganish community members mentioned how challenging it is to make an income from hunting and trapping these days. Two of the principal issues mentioned were the low price of furs compared to the past, and how difficult it is to enter the ISP program, which requires that new participants spend months on the land – with all the expenses that entails – before drawing an income. This creates a real barrier for young families who cannot go without income for months.

3.5 Access to the land

“Access to the land is an issue. Because sometimes you can't use the trapline, you don't have the equipment or the tallyman says no.”

Access to the land is complicated for some Waskaganish community members for several reasons. Some of the causes mentioned include: a lack of experience which prohibits certain people from going out on the land alone, a lack of funds or equipment required to go out on the land, a lack of familial or other social connections to tallymen or others who play a role in regulating use of traplines, and also simply because tallymen refuse in some cases to grant access to people who wish to use their traplines.

3.6 Waste management (Cree)

“Even canoe brigaders they leave a lot of trash. Tin cans, and other stuff. We tried to get campaign going, respect the land campaign. We got a story from Elders, printed it on there, sent them to other communities too...Even after fishing derby, a lot of trash on the shore. Tournaments too. Even people driving, open their window. There was a time when people really respected the land. I don't know what happened to that.”

Waste management was a big topic of discussion, and addressed practices both by Crees and by non-Crees/proponents (covered below). Regarding how Crees manage waste, the quote above is a great summary of the concerns. Many people litter in and around the community, at their campsites and elsewhere, leaving traces across the land that other people and animals then have to live with. This is seen as a lack of education, and/or a lack of respect for the land and for Cree values.

3.7 Waste management (non-Crees/proponents)

“One time when I was till young, my parents took us to NBR, there was this hydro camp, they just dumped everything, left everything there. They abandoned buildings. I remember my brothers and I would go to these buildings and my father would say, remove the nails! And we removed nails and plywood. The community

came and they took most of the leftovers, and built a recreation hall there. That was not our mess but we cleaned it up.”

According to some in Waskaganish, non-Crees – specifically project proponents – leave litter and industrial materials behind on the land when they leave, or dispose of it poorly. The quote above is a case in point. Given the prohibitive costs of accessing some remote areas where mining exploration, hydroelectric development work, or other activities are taking place, proponents sometimes burn noxious materials or simply leave them behind.

3.8 Impacts of hydroelectric development

“What affects us most is the diversion of the river, there are a lot of impacts on land also. On the Pontax, in the spring when the ice melts, the ice hits the shoreline and chews up riverbank. Ice also chews up small islands offshore, they will disappear soon because of the impacts. There's a lot of damage you don't see.”

The EM1A project has altered how rivers and ice behaves, in some cases compounding the dangers associated with other causes of environmental change such as climate change. The net result is more difficulty, uncertainty, danger and cost around navigation. It has also changed the behaviour and in some cases the population of waxies, fish and aquatic plants in and around Rupert's Bay and Waskaganish.

3.9 Impacts of mining and forestry

“Certain standards for contamination are ok down south, but up here we still use the land. Buffer zones are an issue, e.g. tailings from a mining site near a major waterway but only a small buffer of trees. We eat the fish, those issues need to be addressed in planning.”

Waskaganish has more limited experience with mining and forestry than some other Cree communities, but the impacts of these industries have nonetheless made themselves known. They affect the land users and create great concern around the possibility and reality of contamination of land and water.

3.10 Climate and other environmental change

“With climate change, we used to have access to Charlton, many families depend on it to hunt, but no access because it doesn't freeze over. Have to use aircraft or helicopter to access land, it's very expensive.”

Climate change, along with other environmental changes such as forest fires and isostatic-rebound, were mentioned by Waskaganish community members as potentially being an issue for them and their activities on the land. Climate change in particular complicates navigation by changing ice and weather conditions, while also changing the behavior of the animals that Cree hunt, especially waterfowl.

3.11 Gravel – lack of material near community

“I hear people talking about a lack of granular material nearby, possibly we’ll look into getting material across the river here. It’s really expensive to build here.”

The lack of gravel materials in and around Waskaganish is a problem for the future development of the community. Being surrounded by wetlands, there are few locations around the community where granular materials can be obtained. Also Hydro-Quebec and other proponents have need of these limited resources as well. These factors make it difficult for Waskaganish to obtain what it needs for its development projects.

3.12 Population growth

“There’s a lack of good hunting spots in Eeyou Istchee. Here in Waskaganish we average 40-60 babies/year, there is a population issue”

Waskaganish, like other Cree communities, has a fast-growing population. This creates many opportunities, but also challenges, including the question of how more and more Crees can continue to harvest wildlife sustainably, and how the size of Category 1 lands has not changed despite the population growth.

4 Elements of a Waskaganish Vision for the Future

Waskaganish community members’ vision for the future of their lands is one in which Crees have the ability to live on the land in which they have always done; that is, one in which the land is healthy, Cree culture is strong, and Crees have the power to make decisions about their land to ensure this is always so.

4.1 Enhance Cree occupation of the land

“I would like to see more people occupying the land, living off the land in a respectful way.”

There is a strong desire in Waskaganish to see more Crees, especially youth, spend more time on the land and acquire the skills necessary to do so. In so doing, they will enhance their knowledge of Cree culture and values. There was much discussion of programs and other initiatives, some already in place and some prospective, that could help youth and others increase the amount and quality of the time they spend on the land.

4.2 Protect the land, the animals and the sensitive areas for animal

“What I really want to see in the future is preserves. Make sure we don’t kill off all our game animals.”

“That’s a way of protecting the environment: utilising the land”

Cree occupation of the land goes hand in hand with protecting the land so that Crees may be able to live on it for many years to come. In Waskaganish, a strong desire was expressed to preserve the integrity of the land by, amongst other things:

- protecting sensitive areas for wildlife
- protecting culturally significant areas such as the Broadback river
- creating sanctuaries
- creating a National Eeyou Istchee park
- implementing some form of wildlife management.

4.3 Enhance Cree knowledge and culture

“Nowadays we have to engage with our young people, teach them to respect the land, respect the animal. We need to engage with them more.”

Enhancing Cree culture is part and parcel of enhancing Cree occupation of the territory and protecting Cree land. There are a number of possible initiatives mentioned in connection with this, including but not limited to:

- the creation of language programs
- the creation of year-long cultural programs at the gravel pit at km 29
- the prioritization of traditional knowledge
- the promotion of the Hunting Law
- the creation of websites where Cree stories could be accessed

4.4 Create development opportunities that sustain Cree lands and culture

“For sure there will be development somewhere, but we want Cree values to be respected, to be honored, because it’s history. It’s historic land that we use. We have children, that’s our culture, we need it for our culture.”

“I would love to see as the community expands, that the culture would expand too in whatever ways we can do, instead of seeing it diminish.”

Waskaganish community members are looking to engage in development, and with proponents, but on their own terms. Those terms involve keeping the land healthy and Cree culture strong. To accomplish this, there is a desire to take ownership of development, either by creating partnerships with proponents or by Waskaganish Crees themselves taking the initiative in leading development projects, for example, in exploring possible eco-friendly energy sources.

4.5 Play a bigger role in governance of territory

“As Crees we are skilled negotiators. We learned that from Elders and leadership. There is room for a lot of improvement from the government’s end. We understand our territory, and we want to govern it. We want to see the next generation really take control. We want to have ownership of territory rather than ask the government”

Re-asserting Cree control over the development of the territory is part of enhancing the Cree role in the governance of the territory. This involves not just proponents but also provincial and federal governments. This stronger role in governance passes through more Cree activities and presence on the land, and the authority that confers. Some initiatives for governance work include the expansion of Category 1 lands, and working with other communities to learn from each other and where possible work together.

5 Conclusion

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

Topics	Description
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Cree occupation of the territory	Ensure that Cree traditional use and occupation of the territory is sustained or increased.
Environmental protection	Protect ecologically and culturally sensitive sites, including camps, the Broadback – refer to tallymen, Elders and knowledgeable land users in doing so.
Wildlife management	Look into how best to monitor Cree harvesting so as to be able to regulate harvesting as needed to ensure wildlife populations remain healthy
Waste management	Integrate sound waste management practices into Cree life on the land and the activities of proponents
Climate and other environmental change	Minimize the impacts of these changes on the Cree way of life
Smokey Hill	Protect the Smokey Hill site
Access to the land	Ensure all Crees have the opportunity to practice the Cree way of life
Archaeological/historical sites	Inventory and protect sites of archaeological and historical significance, including gravel pit at km 29
History associated with HBC	Acknowledge the role of HBC in the development of Waskaganish
Challenges of making an income from life on the land	Address low fur prices and qualifying period for ISP program as barriers to making an income hunting fishing and trapping
Development on Cree terms	Take initiative with governments and proponents to ensure that Crees are equal partners in decision-making and governance
Impacts of hydroelectric development	Acknowledge and monitor/mitigate impacts of hydroelectric development
Impacts of mining and forestry	Acknowledge and monitor/mitigate the impacts of these industries on the land and the Cree way of life
Gravel – lack of materials nearby	Inventory gravel resources in Waskaganish region, assess current and future needs and make a plan for meeting those needs

Cree knowledge	Create programs and policies that support the growth and development of Cree knowledge (e.g. cultural program at km 29, see other suggestions in previous section)
Cree values and teachings	Create programs and policies that support the transmission of Cree values and teachings
Cree language	Create programs and policies that support the growth and development of Cree language
The role of Elders in decision-making	Integrate Elders into decision-making on governance, land and culture
Population growth	Address impacts of population growth on harvesting, Category 1 lands.