

A Conversation to Set Goals for Land Use Planning

**WASKAGANISH COMMUNITY MEMBERS ON WHAT THEY VALUE,
THE ISSUES THEY FACE AND THEIR VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

Compiled by the **Eeyou Planning Commission**

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LAND USE PLANNING

In ancient times as in the present, **Crees have always planned their use of Eeyou Istchee**, their homeland. As the years went by and the presence of non-Crees increased, Crees saw the challenges and impacts involved in developing the territory, but they also saw **opportunities to live from and care for the land in new ways, to draw from Cree tradition and creativity to meet the needs of a changing world.**

In the 2012 Cree-Quebec Governance Agreement, Crees acquired responsibilities 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.** 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.



THE EEYOU PLANNING COMMISSION

The 2012 Cree-Quebec Governance Agreement led to the creation of the Eeyou Planning Commission (EPC), formed of Commissioners from each of the Cree communities and chaired by Cree Nation Government. The mandate of the EPC 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**. Waskaganish's representatives to the EPC are:

- **Barbara Hester**, Commissioner
- **Thomas Stevens**, Alternate

Land use planning in Waskaganish starts with understanding what matters to Waskaganish Crees: what is important to them about their lands, what issues they are facing, and what is their vision of their future. For this, we needed to have a conversation with the people of Waskaganish: representatives of local government, Youth, Elders, Women, and last but certainly not least, tallymen and land users. **This conversation will help define the goals for land use planning** in Waskaganish, and for Eeyou Istchee, and is described in this report.

The Eeyou Planning Commission and Cree Nation Government will continue this conversation with Waskaganish through several activities in the community in the coming months and years, before a plan is tabled for consideration and approval by the community.



WHAT DO WASKAGANISH CREES VALUE MOST IN THEIR LANDS?

Cree Activities on the Land: Hunting, Trapping, Fishing, Harvesting

“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.”

Camps

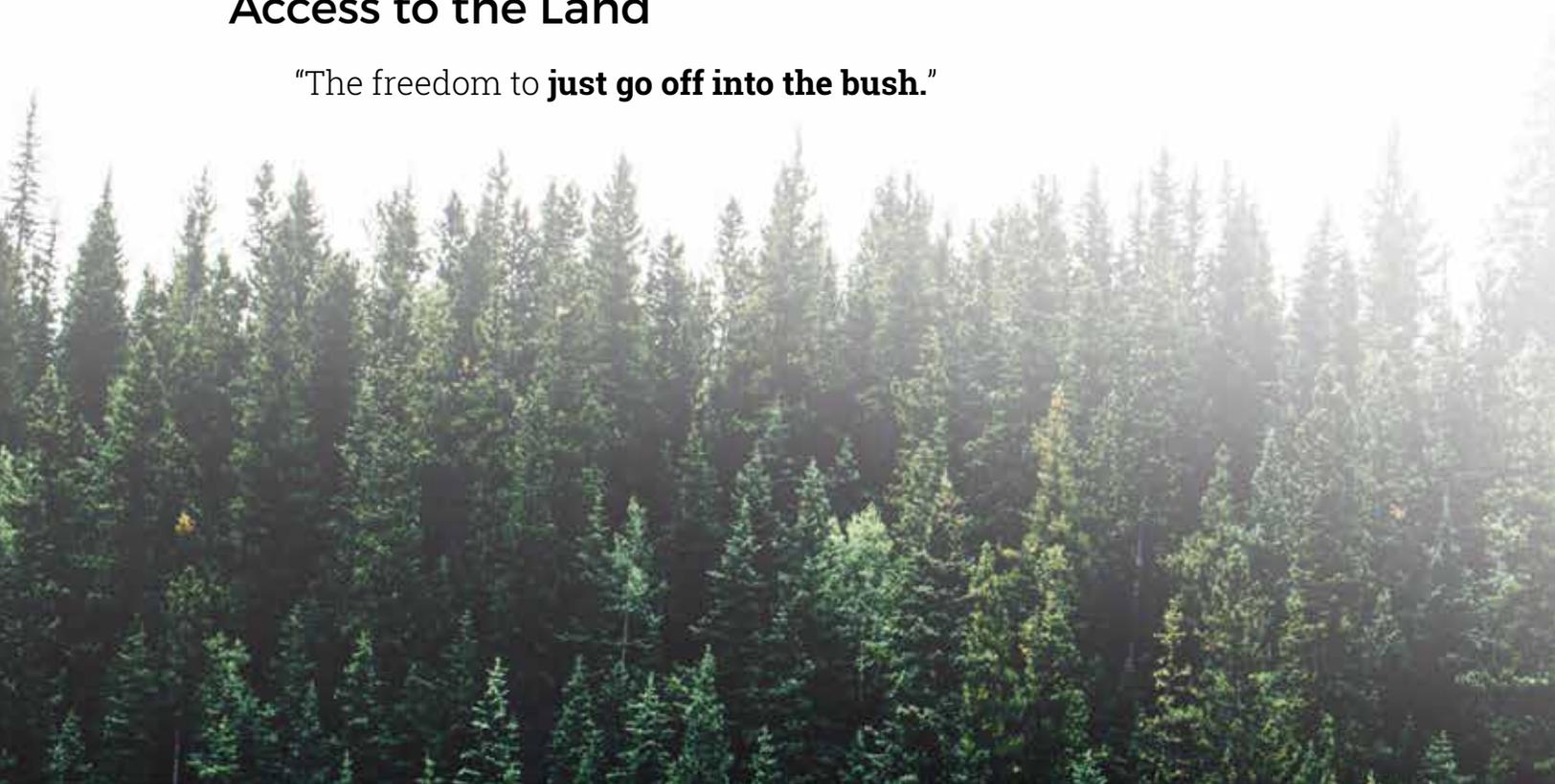
“**The camps, that’s home to me.** I want to retire there, I think about it when I want to get away. We’re always connected to out there, it’s all the same place.”

Smokey Hill

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

Access to the Land

“The freedom to **just go off into the bush.**”



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.”

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 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.”

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.”

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.”

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES THAT WASKAGANISH CREES ARE FACING ON THEIR LANDS?

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.”

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.**”

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.**”



Challenges of Making an 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.”

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.”

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 the fishing derby, there's 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 (Non-Crees/Proponents)

“One time when I was still 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.”

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.”

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.”

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.”

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.**”

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.”





WHAT IS THE VISION THAT WASKAGANISH CREES HAVE FOR THE FUTURE OF THEIR LANDS?

Enhance Cree Occupation of the Land

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

Protect the Land, the Animals and the Sensitive Areas for Animals

"What I really want to see in the future is preserves. **Make sure we don't kill off all our game animals.**"

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."

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."

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."

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE EYOU PLANNING
COMMISSION OR LAND USE PLANNING,

PLEASE CONTACT

YOUR LOCAL EPC COMMISSIONER OR
THE EPC SECRETARIAT AT **514-861-5837**

