



A Conversation to Set Goals for Land Use Planning

**WEMINDJI 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**. Wemindji's representatives to the EPC are:

- **Elmer Georgekish**, Commissioner
- **Johnny Mark**, Alternate

Land use planning in Wemindji starts with understanding what matters to Wemindji 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 Wemindji: 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 Wemindji, and for Eeyou Istchee, and is described in this report.

The Eeyou Planning Commission and Cree Nation Government will continue this conversation with Wemindji 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 WEMINDJI CREES VALUE MOST IN THEIR LANDS?

Hunting and Being on the Land

“Hunting is the most important to us, being on the land. Gathering and harvesting of fish at camps, sturgeon, whitefish. Out in the Bay and on the coast. Preserving meat, goose, fish in barrel by salting. We used to have dog teams to help us hunt.”

Cree Hunting Skills and Knowledge

“It is important to keep sharing knowledge about the land. There are dangerous spots, and a lot of youth don’t know much about where to go on the land...Like what to do if I get lost, it’s important we can teach that to the youth.”

Access to a Healthy Environment

“People need to value and preserve the land in order to have future generations be able to practice hunting and other cultural activities on the land. **For the land to support these activities it needs to be in a good state.**”

“We need more protected areas, and regulations must be respected. We need to sustain and protect wildlife. That language is our language, our culture.”



Respect of the Animals

“We need to **teach our youth again, to not kill too much, we need to respect land**, the animals. For example, fireworks might disturb the animals, so we make sure to not use them. We must take care to ensure that fire ashes are not thrown into the water because fish are sensitive to them.”

Protection of Water

“Water is the most important thing, and **care must be taken to not spoil it**, to protect it wherever there is development.”

Facing Development while Respecting the Land

“The land provides us a great deal of opportunity. **It's a very sacred thing. We are always looked at as protectors.** But we can't stop development. We always need to adapt to change. Elders say they can't go back to the past, they would starve, there is not enough for us to go around.”



Inclusive Governance

“Getting everybody’s views when making decisions, listen to their concerns, identify the trade offs in order to **move forward with development projects to make sure it is done in a good way.**”

The Historical Roots of Wemindji

“One thing that is important is the Old Factory visit, the Gathering at the old settlement, and **our effort to preserve and hold on our Cree culture.** This coming July (2017), we are celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of this visit. Continuous funding is provided each year so this continues into the future.”

A Clean and Welcoming Community

“**The pavement of the streets and the lawns have added to the quality the environment.** Landscaping, the paving of the streets has made the community much less dusty. Before that we had problems with asthma. Our recycling stands out from other communities. This is instilled in young people at a very young age.”



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

Inadequate Monitoring of Mineral Exploration Activities

“Prospecting and drilling are taking place all over Eeyou Istchee and their locations are not properly documented. **Contaminants could negatively affect water sources.** How about all the water sources, small lakes, streams that flow into the Maquatua river estuary?”

Projects Happening while Undergoing Environmental Review

“During the environment impact review study, the road is already being built. There is a problem of **projects being built while they are still under review.**”

Shortcomings in the Consultation Process about Developments

“The **decisions of the Cree peoples with respect to mega projects are not respected,** the developers go ahead anyways. Cree management of the land is not recognized.”

Distribution and Landscaping of Housing Lots

“There are lots of hills around Wemindji, so **lots of bedrock blast need to be done in order to build buildings.** House owners have smaller lots because of complicated blasting of bedrock.”



Construction Contracts in Category III Lands

“One issue is the way contracts are awarded. For example, it’s especially very difficult for us to get contracts from Hydro Quebec. **In category III, there is a lot of competition from southern companies.** Companies want to make profits and they are only in place for a short time. We want to develop our people, we stay here.”

Over-Fishing and Over-Hunting

“Over-harvesting is an important issue. Fishing at Lake Yasinski for example. The fishing derby. **The sale of fish does not sit right with the people.**”

“Resting” the Animals so They Can Replenish

“Elders speak about the goose hunt out on the bay. Before there was a day to start goose hunting. This tradition is not respected now. People start hunting when they want to. There is a day when the goose hunt closes in Wemindji. **We should bring this tradition back to enable the geese to regenerate.** Let them fatten up. Same with other animals.”

Issues with Non-Cree Hunters

“With sport hunters and caribou, currently we see abuse, so we need to address this in the future with stricter regulations, sections. Even other big games, people dispose of some parts improperly. **We must look at the possibility of sport hunters adopting the Cree ways of using all parts of game.**”



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

Closely Monitored and Controlled Hunting and Fishing

“To protect the land **we need conservation officers** that will issue permits to hunters in order to control harvest.”

Continuity of Cree Culture and Language

“We would like to have **a cultural camp for land based programs** linked to culture, to do things close to the road, on the islands and in different places.”

Collaboration Across the Cree Communities/ Nation

“Competition between the communities for economic development does not maximize wealth production in the entire Cree Nation, nor does it help arrive at the best use of the land. Some communities they have problems with developing human resources, competencies. So a goal would be that **individual communities cooperate, work together to benefit the Cree Nation as a whole.**”

Proactive Work Cree-Led Development

“To create of jobs though development is a longer term vision. **We want to be ‘masters of our destiny’: that the Crees be the owners of development companies,** for example, hydroelectric exploitation. Any future hydro-power generated from Eeyou Istchee should contribute to meeting the needs of the Cree.”

Economic Diversification

“Where will the money come from after the mine? **Alternative development opportunities should be explored so that after the mining activity in finished we have other opportunities for economic development.** Forestry and tree plantations could be a viable new opportunity. Planting trees. We have lots of projects like greenhouse, recycling, blueberries and cranberries harvesting, eco-tourism.”

Eco-Tourism to Balance Culture, Environment and Development

“Tourism would be a good vehicle to help **preserve the traditions, culture and lifestyle of the Cree Nation.**”



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

PLEASE CONTACT

YOUR LOCAL EPC COMMISSIONER OR
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