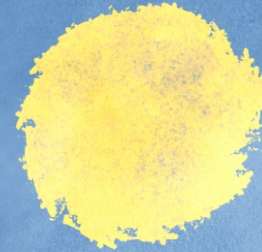


Athabasca Denesų́iné
Indigenous Protected & Conserved Areas
Guiding Values

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1. We must protect the land and water

The Denesų́iné have a strong connection to the land, a connect so strong that makes us inseparable. The land, which includes everything, (i.e. the plants, animals, rocks, medicines, spirits, air, etc.) has provided for our ancestors and continue to support us to this day. We are truly fortunate that we continue living our culture by accessing our traditional territory “Nuhenéné”. Nuhenéné must be protected, the Denesų́iné cannot exist without land, water, and air. The land provides and defines the Denesų́iné; therefore, it must remain for future generations. We found through our research that the value of protecting the land, air, and water was critical. The following quotes highlight the consistency in the messages:

“The land provides”- Hatchet Lake Elder

“Like protecting your family, you need to respect the land” – Hatchet Lake Elder

“Creator provided all to us, all is important to us.” – Black Lake Elder

“Caribou go far away, and I wish they are respected so they will come back. All animals and birds should be respected. We need them to sustain us, then we will live happily. All the things, like water should be respected. Without water, we cannot live.” Elder Hatchet Lake

“Land and water is our future” – Hatchet Lake Elder

“Since the world has begun, since the Denesų́iné existed, we are sustained by animals.” – Fond du Lac Elder

Although all land and water are important, the communities also explain that some areas are more critical for protection than others. This was reflected in the development of the Athabasca Land Use Plan. After many discussions and consultations, the following were determined important when considering lands and water that need to be protection¹:

- They are important ecosystems and important for maintaining healthy animal populations.
- They are important for maintaining the cultural traditions and values of local people.
- They are scenic areas or areas where local people and visitors can go to enjoy the outdoors and nature.

In addition, the 2006 Athabasca Protected Areas Workshop, community members identified important fish and wildlife areas as in need of special protection from more intensive industrial activities².

- Fish spawning areas
- Woodland and Barren-ground caribou, moose, bear denning, eskers (wolf denning, wildlife corridors,)
- caribou migration routes, water crossings

¹ *Núhenêne K'eyághy æyáá æéghádáidá*, Athabasca Land Use Plan: A Northern Perspective. January 2008. Athabasca Land Use Office.

² Athabasca Protected Areas Workshop – March 2006 (AD Negotiation Team/Athabasca Interim Advisory Land Use Planning Panel).

2. Denesų́liné are part of the ecosystem

You cannot remove the Denesų́liné from the landscape. We are part of the ecosystem along with fish, water, rocks, and animals. We are guardians, we watch over the land because the land watches over us. We have formed a relationship with the land and water over thousands of years. Land and water are the essence of Denesų́liné culture.

“If you take away the land, the Dene will not survive.”- Black Lake Elder

“The land is lonely when Dene are not there.” – Black Lake Elder

The primary objective in developing the Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCA) is to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values that are essential to specific areas. The continued use of these lands by the Denesų́liné are a priority in protected areas. By recognizing the Denesų́liné as part of the landscape, it requires that lands for IPCAs are also selected with identified cultural and land use values.

Highly sensitive values include³:

- Barren-ground caribou habitat
- burial sites
- medicinal plants
- healing waters
- fishing areas
- trapping areas
- water networks/travel routes
- treed areas

Management Plans and governance structures must include the original stewards of the land; the Denesų́liné. By having a voice in managing these protected lands, it will ensure that not only the land and water is protected but will also ensure the continued health and well-being of the Denesų́liné people. The Denesų́liné have identified some aspirations and concerns when looking at land management, and these must be considered to respect the past and honour the future (see Appendix B).

Barren-ground Caribou and other Cultural Keystone Species

Cultural keystone species are important when considering the locations for the IPCAs. Cultural keystone species are significant to the Denesų́liné and are important for ongoing survival of our people, our ability to be on the land, and our interactions with the land (e.g. Barren-ground caribou).

³ Athabasca Protected Areas Workshop – March 2006 (AD Negotiation Team/Athabasca Interim Advisory Land Use Planning Panel).

Caribou are considered the lifeblood of the north, and intrinsically linked to the health, subsistence, and culture of the Denesų́łnė́. We are known as the Caribou people –  đtth n Heldeli. The Denesų́łnė́ are caribou; caribou are Denesų́łnė́ (See Appendix A for protocols surrounding Barren-ground caribou).

Safeguarding the Barren-ground caribou herd, its habitat, and migration corridors is paramount when selecting protected areas. They top the list of priority species for the Denesų́łnė́. The caribou herds have been declining recently and are being considered “threatened” under the *Species at Risk Act*. It is important that their habitat is protected, and we have an opportunity to assist with the development of Indigenous Protected Areas.

Other Important Species

When discussing other species, Elders and Traditional Knowledge keepers consistently refer to the following species as being culturally important. However, they were also very quick to state that ALL plants, animals, trees, and birds’ matter. Important species to the Denesų́łnė́ are listed below, ranked in order by the number of times they were mentioned.

Animals

- Beaver
- Moose
- Fish (whitefish, lake trout, pickerel, burbot, jack)

Trees

- Spruce
- Birch
- Tamarack
- Jack Pine

Plants

- Blueberries
- Labrador tea
- Spruce gum
- Rat root

Birds

- Spruce grouse
- Canada geese
- Ptarmigan
- Ducks

3. Traditional Ecological Knowledge helps us understand Nuhen n 

We are the original occupants and stewards of the land since time immemorial, and the Denesų́łnė́ have been the keepers of valuable knowledge and history. This knowledge is a powerful tool and critical

⁴ Kasstan, S.C. 2016. *Caribou is Life: An Ethnoarchaeology of Ethen-Eld li Denesų́łnė́ Respect for Caribou*. Simon Fraser University.

for best land and resource management practices. Traditional Knowledge must be used as a foundation for all work done in IPCA development. This includes finding ways in determining locations, governance, management plans, monitoring and research, etc.

Ecology taught the Denesų́líné way:

“Plants grow on their own. Even after a fire, they grow back. In the fall time we see plants die and disappear, but in spring things come back, and bloom again.” – Hatchet Lake Elder (translated from Dene). When asked what teachings she had related to humans and their impact on the environment. Nature does not need our intervention; we must leave nature alone and it will come back as it has for many generations.

Conservation taught the Denesų́líné way:

“One time, while I was trapping, I came across some wolves on the lake. I came up to them and started talking to them. They can understand you when you talk to them. I thanked them and told them that they had provided for me for so long, it was time to not hunt them anymore. From then on, I stopped hunting and trapping wolves. That was 10 years ago.” – Fond du Lac Elder

4. Elders Guidance

At the core of our community is the wisdom of our Elders. Their stories, words and insight guide all aspects of Denesų́líné life. They are the holders of the knowledge and ensure that Denesų́líné culture continues through time, as it has done for thousands of years. An important part of Denesų́líné culture is the presence of Elders in all community functions. Elders provide training and teachings on survival on the land, how to raise strong babies, Denesų́líné laws and guiding principles (see Appendix C) and provide information at important community meetings.

“Get advice from Elders, they will tell you what to do and what not to do to be successful”

– Fond du Lac Elder

The inclusion of Elders in guiding this process is of utmost importance. The only way this project will succeed is with a strong group of Elders guiding the way. They not only provide wisdom but can ensure that the project follows appropriate protocols and is culturally appropriate.

“Respect the land, offer something, give, talk to the land, tell it how you feel. Talk to animals, they know you and understand.” – Fond du Lac Elder

When seeking guidance from Elders, the most consistent message that is conveyed to all of us is the importance of working for protection of the land and water for our future generations.

5. We do this work for Future Generations

Everything we do is for our youth. They will benefit from the work we do today, and in return they will work towards the next generation’s health and well-being, and the cycle continues.

It is at the fundamental core of Denesų́líné conservation and wildlife management, to leave enough for the next generation to benefit. Thus, it is important that the next generation witness and be taught their culture and values.

“As a parent, it is your responsibility to teach your children about everything. When I go hunt, my children observe at least three or more times to learn. I teach them during all seasons.” – Elder Fond du Lac

“The children that are in school should watch and observe the elders. They can learn by watching. This is the way they will learn, by doing this. They will not learn on their own.” Elder – Hatchet Lake

“Traditional ways need to be taught to youth. We used to know our way without getting lost, how to make fires, our plants, trees, and other animals well. Not anymore”. – Elder Black Lake

Youth must be involved in the development of the IPCA and have access to the land and be familiar with the IPCA parcels. Youth are living in a modern world and have easier access to education and technology. In this way, by involving youth, they can be motivated to continue their education by looking at science, environmental or land management fields and learning from TEK and their Elders. It is important to bring Elders and youth together to transmit important knowledge. It is possible to live in a world that is balanced between modern advances and traditional ways.

6. We Are Our Language

There is a deep interconnectedness between the land and the Denesų́líné language. There are many terms to describe events, life cycles, and locations and are only found in Dene. The language is very descriptive and a valuable resource for culture preservation. For this reason, it is important for the IPCA project to assist our communities in continual use and maintenance of language. They will do so by describing and naming elements within Nuhenéné.

“If you lose the language, you lose so much of the understanding of the land.”

– Black Lake member

In recent years, there is a sense that language is being lost in our communities and our population is increasing; therefore, we must include fluent Elders to facilitate language maintenance. Dene is taught in the schools and is spoken at Youth and Elder Culture Camps. Elders support remains imperative in providing land location names in Dene.


Naming Nuhenéné places is important because we must acknowledge and reinforce Denesų́líné presence on the land. In fact, in recent North of 60 land claim negotiations, Denesų́líné names for places and lakes were identified and have replaced English names. This is reclamation and is part of reconciliation with the Crown, this reconciliation will be necessary when names are chosen for all attributes of the Indigenous Protected Areas.

Conclusion

Athabasca Denesų́líné values arise from our deep connection to the land and the culture created by our ancestors. By protecting the land and water, integrating the Denesų́líné, incorporating TEK, being

guided by Elders and ensuring youth involvement and respecting the original language of the Nuhenéné, we will ensure that the Denesų́íné are respected. This document does not cover all values that are important to the Denesų́íné communities and our members but attempts to guide the

development of the IPCA project. By following these six (6) values: We must protect the land and water; Denesų́íné are part of the ecosystem; Traditional Ecological Knowledge helps us understand the world; Elders guide us; We do the work for Future Generations; Our language is who we are, our work will ensure that the IPCAs are truly Indigenous-led and Dene owned.




Athabasca Denesuline

10 Traditional Protocols for Hunting Caribou

(as taught by our Elders)

1. Use the caribou drum
2. Do not chase caribou
3. Harvest only what you need
4. Respect cows
5. Do not play with food or wildlife
6. Use all parts of the caribou, do not waste
7. Bring all waste to land, do not leave on the lake
8. Store meat properly
9. Teach the future generation
10. Do not hunt under the influence of drugs or alcohol

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Appendix B – Hopes and Fears

The 2008 document *Núhenêne K'eyághÿ æÿáá æéghádáidá*, Athabasca Land Use Plan: A Northern Perspective includes a list of the hopes and fears the communities expressed when developing the draft Land Use Plan. This list is included in this document as a reminder of the discussions that were had and the dreams and frustrations that the Denesúliné hold when discussing and planning for Nuhenéné.


Hopes:

- Continued access to minerals for mining companies
- Better communication
- Set aside several large natural areas
- Government supports the plan's recommendations
- Less conflict
- That the mining companies hire more people from the Athabasca region
- Not having to fight over our land
- Local control over land and resources including water
- More and timely communication at the community level
- More respect of the land
- Mining royalties for Athabasca communities
- Supporting education system
- Better land and resource management
- Continued cooperative planning and management
- Environment respected and protected
- Develop a practical, workable & balanced plan that addresses local and provincial needs and concerns
- Treaty Rights recognized
- Protection of the environment
- Conserve the land and resources for the future
- Royalty and benefit sharing
- Control of resource for traditional use
- Local people and interests maintain land resource input
- New mines established to provide northern jobs
- Royalties sharing with First Nations

Fears:

- Too many layers of regulations – unequal enforcement
- No setting aside of natural areas because mineral potential is “Too High”
- Unequal influence, corporate vs. community
- Lack of support for future planning and management
- No consensus
- Loss of development control
- Loss of traditional and sacred lands
- Issues will not be resolved and no preservation for traditional use areas
- No compensation for any environment or wildlife impacts
- Continue to hire ‘Northerners’ instead of local Athabasca people
- Issues not resolved
- No recognition of Treaty Rights
- Government will not give up control of resources and associated benefits
- Development negotiations will not include First Nations

Appendix C – Dene Laws



DÉNÉ LAWS

SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE
Not that long ago, people needed to share in order to survive. Today, sharing what you have is just as important for our community, culture, and elders. Share all the big game you kill. Share fish if you catch more than you need for yourself. There are always others who don't have any.

HELP EACH OTHER
Help elders cut their wood and other heavy work. Help sick people who are in need; get them firewood if they need it. Visit them and give them food. When you lose someone in death, share your sorrows with the relatives who are also affected by the loss. Help out widows as much as possible and take care of orphaned children.

LOVE EACH OTHER, LOTS
Treat each other as family, as though you are related. Help each other out and don't harm anyone.

BE POLITE + DON'T ARGUE
Don't harm anyone with your voice or your actions. Don't hurt anyone with your medicine power. Don't show your anger.

SLEEP AT NIGHT
Don't run around and laugh loudly when it gets dark. Everyone should sleep when darkness falls.

WORK DURING THE DAY


PASS ON THE TEACHING
Elders are to tell stories about the past every day. In this way, young people learn to distinguish between good and unacceptable behaviour. When they are older, they will become the storytellers who will keep the circle of life going.

BE THANKFUL TO CREATOR
The Creator has given you a great gift, Mother Earth. Take care of her and she will always give you food and shelter. Don't worry - just go about your work and make the best of everything. Don't judge people, find something good in everyone.

BE RESPECTFUL OF ELDERS
Don't run around when elders are eating. Sit down until they're done eating.

YOUTH SHOULD BE RESPECTFUL
Don't make fun of each other, especially in matters of sex. Don't make fun of your elders. Be polite to each other.

+ EVERYTHING AROUND YOU




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Dene Laws. (n.d). Adapted from <https://www.athabascahealth.ca/Documents/Northern%20Health%20-%20AHA%20Newsletter%2048%20-%20Jan.pdf>