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“Partnerships in Indigenous-Led Land-Use Planning for an Environmentally and Economically Sustainable Future”

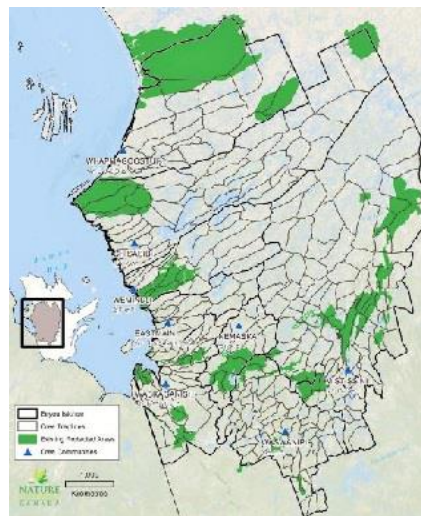
Implemented by Nature Conservancy of Canada

Project Summary

Part I. Description

Participating organizations and geographic location(s) of the project

Cree Nation Government (offices in Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City and across Eeyou Istchee); Seven Cree communities: Chisasibi, Eastmain, Mistissini, Ouje-Bougoumou, Waskaganish, Waswanipi, Wemindji (see attached map); Government of Quebec - Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques (MELCC) (representatives engaged in this process located in Quebec City); The Canadian BEACONS Project at the Northern Centre for Conservation Science (University of Alberta in Edmonton, AB, with members also affiliated with Université Laval, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and Oregon State University).



A one paragraph background or problem statement (why was the project carried out?)

Canada has signed on to the international Aichi conservation targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity, pledging to protect 17% of its terrestrial and freshwater areas by 2020. At the same time, the Government of Quebec has committed to protecting 20% of its northern territory by 2020. Currently, about 15% of Eeyou Istchee, the territory of the Quebec Cree, is under some form of protection. In 2015 the Cree Nation Government responded to these national and international commitments by developing the Cree Regional Conservation Strategy, which aims to ensure full Cree participation in the protection of Cree traditional lands, waters, resources, and way of life. The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and the Cree Nation Government (CNG) developed a partnership to identify at least an additional 5% (approximately 20,290 square km) of terrestrial and freshwater areas within Eeyou Istchee to recommend be designated as

new protected areas by the Government of Quebec, in order meet these national and international goals through the lens of the Cree Regional Conservation Strategy.

A one-paragraph general description of the project (what was done?)

NCC and CNG used conservation planning tools developed by the Canadian BEACONS Project to identify large, intact, hydrologically connected areas representative of biodiversity to serve as components for the design of comprehensive protected areas networks. At the same time, we worked with Cree tallymen and land-users from seven communities to identify priority areas based on importance to the Cree way of life, conserving wildlife populations, and enhancing food security for Cree people. We wove the results generated using these two knowledge systems (Cree cultural knowledge and conservation science) together to identify areas that were both ecologically and culturally significant. Several options for protected area network designs were then presented to community leaders (Band Councils) and land users. Further consultations helped us to refine boundaries to develop protected area proposals for each community that have been submitted to the Government of Quebec. Additional consideration was taken regarding possible connections with existing protected areas, projected interactions with resource development operations, and community specific conservation goals.

A one-paragraph description of outcomes and follow-up (what did the project achieve?*

In November 2018, seven communities submitted final protected area proposals to the Government of Quebec. In 2019, NCC will continue to work with Cree communities to finalize protected areas proposals and develop all necessary supporting information. At the same time, NCC will use all products developed through this partnership to support CNG in discussions with Quebec to delineate and designate at least 20,290 square km of new protected areas within Eeyou Istchee. Information generated on the cultural and biophysical features of Eeyou Istchee, and the results of our conservation assessment, will be compiled to produce finalized reports for distribution to each community and shared openly online, wherever possible, in support of ongoing land-use planning projects. These reports will be shared with the CEC when and if they are made publicly available.

NCC plans to build on the success of this project by initiating new Indigenous partnerships, through which NCC can further support Indigenous-led conservation initiatives in northern Canada. Finally, NCC also plans to communicate about the successes and lessons learned from this project to the greater conservation community to encourage similar partnerships in support of Indigenous-led conservation.

For more information about the project, please contact: Christie Macdonald, Nature Conservancy of Canada, 245 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 410, Toronto, ON M4P 3J1

Project Summary - Part II. Analysis Successes*

The foundational success of this project has been NCC and CNG's partnership based on mutual trust and respect for each other's skills and experience. Flexibility in our methods and planning approach has enabled us to adapt our original vision and design as we went, resulting in much broader success. This type of approach could be an example for how the conservation community can implement the concept of "ethical space" (quote ICE report: "a place for knowledge systems to interact with mutual respect, kindness, generosity and other basic values and principles. All ... are equal; no single system has more weight or legitimacy than another"), when engaging with Indigenous government, organizations and communities. This approach is one of the key recommendations of the Indigenous Circle of Experts for reaching Canada's commitment to meeting the Aichi targets. For example, stemming from our original goals of developing data, performing a conservation assessment and sharing skills, we also incorporated the knowledge and values shared by Cree land users through in-person meetings and adapted planning tools to account for the full spectrum of available information. We are now preparing to submit final community-specific proposals to the Government of Quebec for designation of new protected areas based on Cree values. By 2020, this will likely result in the establishment of new protected areas representing at least 5% of Eeyou Istchee. Information generated through this process will extend to support CNG's future land-use planning work and potential future conservation zoning over an additional 30% of Eeyou Istchee by 2035. This project has also changed the way NCC operates – to achieve greater conservation by acting in support of Indigenous-led conservation,

as well as to serve as an example to the greater conservation community of how to elevate Indigenous governments and communities as leaders in conservation planning in the true spirit of reconciliation.

Challenges*

- Given federal and provincial commitments to significantly increase the total area of land and freshwater under protection by 2020, much work must be done in a very short time period. This was one of the most significant challenges given the amount of time that effective engagement with various Cree communities required.
- As previously discussed, multiple Indigenous nations (e.g. Inuit, Innu, Naskapi, and Cree) call northern Quebec home, and each, understandably, want to ensure that new protected areas are equitably distributed across their traditional territories. This can have the unfortunate impact of pitting Indigenous nations against one another for “their share of the pie”.
- This work has involved meeting with community representatives, many of whom are elders who speak exclusively Cree and many concepts of conservation science do not translate easily from English.
- As a new partner (NCC had no previous experience working in Eeyou Istchee) establishing trust and developing proposals in meaningful collaboration with CNG and Cree communities required investment – both in time and in terms of financial contributions – to travel to (often multiple times per community) and meet in-person with community leaders.
- Identifying the most effective mechanisms for communication about the planning process and reaching consensus to advance protected area proposals is not always clear, but it is critical to facilitate engagement by community members and leaders who are balancing our requests among the many other important demands on their time (e.g. housing crises, youth suicide, increasing employment opportunities for members, etc.)

Lessons Learned*

One of our first lessons was to expect the unexpected. Initially, NCC did not expect to attend community meetings and meet and interview tallymen and land-users about their conservation values. We weren't always able to anticipate the format of these meetings or the potential contributions we might be responsible for. However, the invitation to participate was a privilege and in-person community engagement proved to be invaluable to the success of the project. By allowing initial project timelines and deliverables to be flexible, NCC and CNG travelled together over the course of this project, allowing us to listen first-hand to values and perspectives of Cree community members. We also learned to be adaptive in our planning approach, even when applying standard tools and principles of conservation science. We worked with the Canadian BEACONS Project team to find innovative ways of incorporating cultural knowledge and values into the planning framework and modified analysis tools to develop results that would be meaningful to each community.

The success of this project is worth more than the sum of its parts. NCC staff's learning was far greater and the process far more collaborative than we initially expected. NCC's contribution to conservation achieved through this project has not just been the list of originally agreed upon deliverables; it has been the value of our partnership to support and elevate the CNG as leaders in conservation planning and protecting their way of life. In the last phase of this process, NCC and CNG have leaned on each other and focused on the elements with the greatest impact in the protected area proposals in order meet submission deadlines set by the Government of Quebec.

Engagement and support by local Eeyou Planning Commissioners in each community has also been critical in sharing this process with community members and land users, as well as facilitating the final approval of protected area proposals by Band Council leadership.

What next?*

In 2019, NCC plans to continue to support CNG in their discussions with the Government of Quebec to delineate and designate new protected areas, by generating summaries of the biophysical features and cultural values of the proposed protected areas to populate full proposal reports for each community. We will also continue to provide technical support to Roundtable meetings with the Government of Quebec as final boundaries are negotiated. NCC will work with CNG to ensure meaningful Cree participation at the local community level in the establishment of at least 20,290 square km of new protected areas in Eeyou Istchee

based on Cree cultural values and the principles of conservation science. NCC will continue to share this project as a case study to promote how the conservation community can support Indigenous-led conservation in Canada, as well as initiate new partnerships with other Indigenous nations to facilitate the development of new Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) to help meet national and international conservation goals and commitments. NCC will also continue to work with conservation software developers such as the Canadian BEACONS project to improve the function and accessibility of these types of planning tools for Indigenous land-use planning. NCC will work with the BEACONS team to apply lessons learned from this project and evaluate opportunities to make further modifications to planning tools to effectively incorporate important Indigenous cultural features into site selection.

For more information about this project, please contact:

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