

Sambaa K'e Dene Band

Dehcho Land Use Planning Committee Workshop Presentation Text¹

March 30, 2005

The Sambaa K'e Dene Band has always been a strong supporter of the Dehcho Process and the regional land use planning process. It has also recognized two levels of land use planning – regional and community levels – working in cooperation.

The draft Dehcho Land Use Plan (draft DLUP) being presented this week is a broad regional plan and provides a framework for more detailed community-based planning, which is already happening to varying degrees in all Dehcho communities.

Importantly, one of the driving elements of the DLUP is the traditional knowledge of the elders and harvesters, which has been gathered:

- during the 1970s as a part of the Dene-Metis Comprehensive Claim process (traditional trails mapping),
- during the 1980s through RWED trapline mapping initiatives (family trapping areas),
- in the early 1990s through the short-lived Deh Cho Regional Council land use mapping project (seasonal land use patterns), and
- during the late 1990s through the Dehcho First Nations TK mapping project in anticipation of land withdrawals (density mapping).

Much of this mapping information was brought forward and used to identify and establish 'interim protected areas' under the Interim Resource Management Agreement (IRMA). These 'interim protected areas' now form core areas within the draft DCLP and set the tone for a process of managed development within the context of significant land protection measures.

The traditional knowledge that formed the basis for this broad plan is still in the hands of the communities and is now being expanded and deepened to guide more detailed community-based land use planning decisions. The Sambaa K'e Dene Band, similar to other Dehcho communities, has been carrying out ongoing TK research in order to continue developing a comprehensive record of land use patterns and values.

This work has included extensive mapping, but has also focused on documenting and celebrating the stories associated with the land, because these stories help define the strong and intimate historical and cultural relationship the Sambaa K'e got'ine have with the land. These stories must be an essential component of further land use

¹ The presentation slides have not been distributed because they incorporate traditional knowledge information that is currently deemed to be confidential.

planning processes. The elders are fully aware of this need and have generously shared stories and knowledge of their collective history and of the land.

One of the most important elements of storytelling is traditional Dene place names – because many of the elders’ stories are attached to lakes, rivers, ridges, points, creeks, camps, sacred sites, special animal habitat, etc. So a key element of community-based land use planning is the identification and documentation of place names.

Sambaa K’e is one of a number of Dehcho communities that is mapping and documenting the stories associated with traditional place names. With the permission of the chiefs of the K’ágee Tu, Sambaa K’e, and Jean Marie River First Nations, we want to illustrate the extent and complexity of place names in the Dehcho, beginning at Tsá Tú, moving south-westward through K’ágee Tu toward Sambaa K’e and then northward to Tthets’ék’ehdéli.

These names include geographical, ecological, historical, and cultural references. To date, among the three communities mentioned, we have documented approximately 650 traditional place names. Other communities are documenting their own names, such as the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation, which is currently completing a digitized place name map for their own planning purposes. We estimate that there could be up to 2000 place names throughout the Dehcho, all of which either define the landscape or reference a story attached to the land.

The Sambaa K’e Dene Band has recently begun the process of moving all of its traditional place names forward for official status, so that Dene names will eventually appear on all official topographical maps of the land use area.

Aside from place name mapping, the Sambaa K’e Dene Band has been using existing TK information and documenting new information to support the current DLUP and to address proposed resource development activities. Other communities are doing similar work.

The Sambaa K’e Dene Band has undertaken two projects to further define and justify the Sambaa K’e Candidate Protected Area and one project to identify key heritage sites. Mapping associated with this project has included (among other things):

- identification of cultural and heritage sites -- including flint quarries, wind nests, eghúdzih habitat sites, and cabins and campsites,
- comprehensive mapping of past and current trail and trapline usage,
- and identification of mbedzih (woodland caribou) habitat.

Importantly, the stories behind these maps have been documented in Slavey, translated and transcribed into English, and, where warranted, developed into a report format.

The Sambaa K’e Dene Band has also responded to resource development pressures by using the traditional knowledge of elders and harvesters to identify environmental

and cultural values that might be threatened by resource development and to recommend mitigative measures to reduce impacts. Video has been used as a tool to capture the landscape and stimulate the memories and interests of the elders and harvesters.

Two recent research projects involve the Mackenzie Gas Project (MGP) and a proposed 2D seismic program to the west of Sambaa K'e. In the case of the MGP, the high concentration of cultural and ecological values in the K'éotsee (Trainor Lake) area lead to the relocation of the proposed MGP corridor, 2.5 km further east, away from the lake. Negotiations are still taking place regarding the location of other MGP facilities, and no decisions or commitments regarding the MGP have been made.

At least one borrow site has been removed to date from this project due to its proximity to Shihndáákaá Tselaá, which has a very old cultural story attached to. In this case, the Sambaa K'e Dene Band simply placed a buffer zone around the site and asked that this zone be respected.

In the case of the 2D seismic program, the Sambaa K'e Dene Band carried out a TK assessment of a proposed seismic grid located outside of the Protected Area. This assessment identified and documented (through maps and stories) a significant number of cultural and environmental values, and recommended that further cumulative impact studies be carried out before deciding whether any development could take place. The seismic program did not proceed, partially due to the conditions set by the community.

Both of these research projects were funded by industry but carried out by the community. The Sambaa K'e Dene Band has copyright to all of the information and data collected, based on its Yúndíit'õh Policy.

The Sambaa K'e Dene Band is currently supporting a boreal caribou collaring research program initiated by RWED to identify mbedzih habitat and seasonal movements. Some of the early results from this study appear to corroborate (support) TK information generated by the elders. The SKDB has also agreed to work with the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre to carry out a preliminary archaeological study of key heritage sites within its land use area. SKDB also continues to work closely with the Protected Areas Strategy Secretariat, World Wildlife Fund, and other supportive agencies to move the Candidate Protected Area forward.

The point that needs to be stressed from this work is that the draft DLUP provides an excellent regional framework for more detailed community-based land planning. Given the amount of TK information available and the complexity of the Dene relationship with the land, it is important to continue more detailed planning at the community level to guide decisions with respect to specific projects and land use activities. This detailed planning should continue to be initiated ahead of proposed resource development activities, as is currently happening.

Ideally, this work should be coordinated through a combined regional land management / heritage resources board or office of some sort under Dehcho First Nations. This would ensure that the TK information gathered is properly archived, protected, utilized, and shared. Aside from being useful for land planning, this information can also provide a foundation for Dene-centred educational programs in the schools, cultural-tourism initiatives, language development, and a wide range of other positive social purposes.

The TK information being shared by the elders is meant to be used wisely to ensure that Dene language, history, culture, and values are not lost or diminished.

In summary, the draft DLUP is a good framework for land use planning and should be supported. Those individuals and agencies involved in developing it need to be thanked. But there are still key elements of the plan that need to be filled in at the community level. Any support that government, industry, and other agencies can provide to continue this planning process is appreciated.

As elders have continually said – “When it comes to important decisions, take your time and do it right”. And nothing is more important than the integrity of the land. Mahsi.