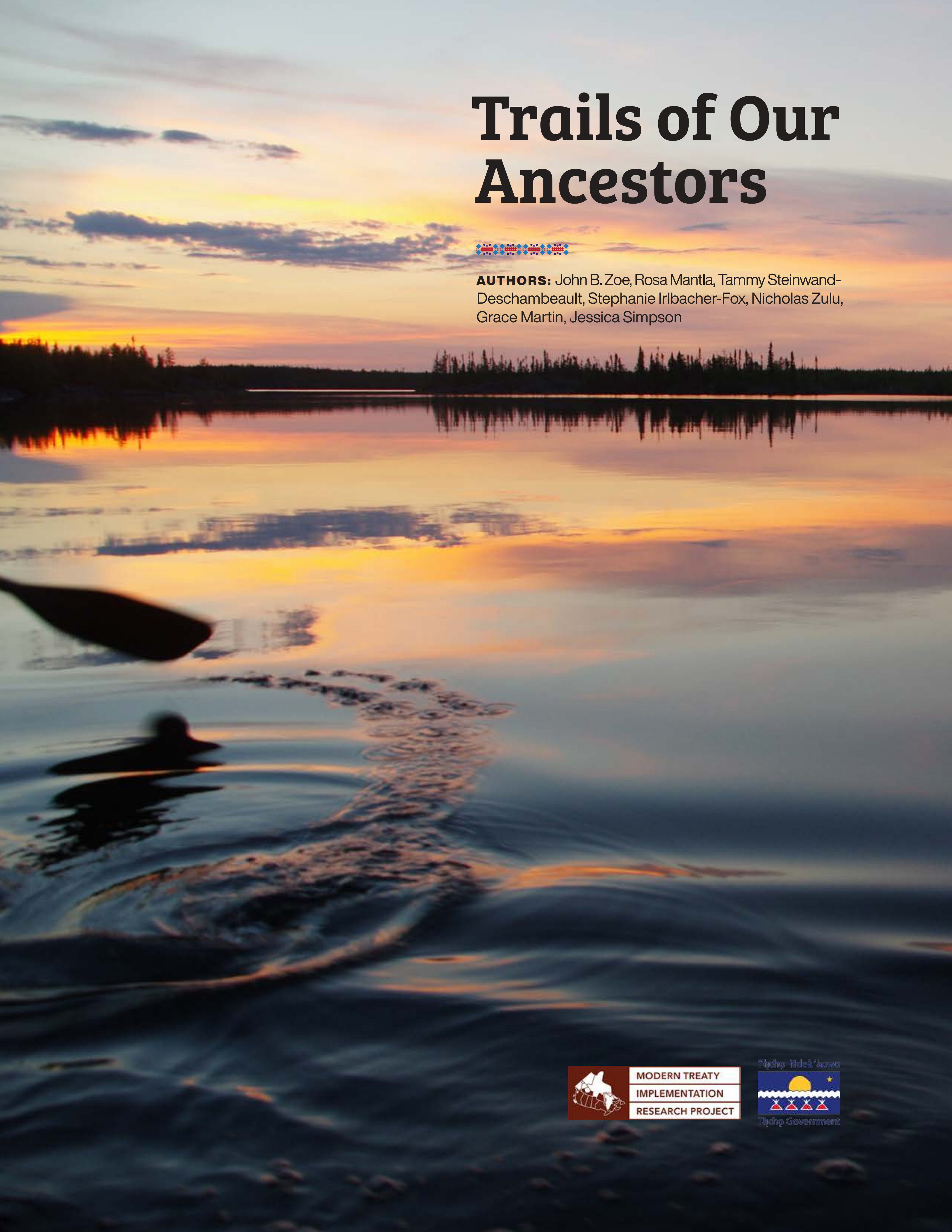

Trails of Our Ancestors

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MODERN TREATY IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH PROJECT

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The information provided from knowledge holders through interviews is not to be used as primary data without permission for any other research.

Cover image
Behchokǫ̀ to Wekweètì. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017.

Art / motifs
Blue and red motif: Belt 987.94.1 – Porcupine quillwork belt made in Fort Rae, maker is unknown
Teepees: Tłı̨chǫ Flag

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Introduction

Fig. 1. Map of canoe trails followed on the yearly journey, "Trails of Our Ancestors – Canoe Routes of Our Ancestors" in John B. Zoe, *Trails of Our Ancestors: Building a Nation* (2002), 54, https://tlichohistory.ca/sites/default/files/2120-042%20Tlicho%20Book%20LOW.pdf

Hundreds of Tłı̨chǫ citizens, mainly youth, have spent up to two weeks or more each summer following the ancient and storied trails within Mǫwhì Gogha dè Nı̨ı̨tłèè by canoe. The final destination is the community hosting the annual Tłı̨chǫ gathering. Fundamental to this effort are the Tłı̨chǫ Elders who share their knowledge of the ancient trails, placenames, and the stories, which mark the routes travelled from each community each summer.

At the annual gathering, the business of the Tłı̨chǫ Government (Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo) is reported, and its direction discussed. Relationships are renewed, through sharing of and engaging in cultural and land-based practices. The cultural grounding of the annual gathering is supported and encouraged by the Tłı̨chǫ Constitution.[1] Gathering participants establish, renew, and deepen relationships through discussions about the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo's accomplishments and potential. Its specific purpose is to "share in the social, political, and cultural activities of the Tłı̨chǫ."[2, 3] An assembly of the elected Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo representatives is also held, where laws are passed. The summer assembly is usually the fifth one held each year. All assemblies are open to Tłı̨chǫ citizens, and are constitutionally required to take place at least five times per year on Tłı̨chǫ lands.[4, 5]

1 Tłı̨chǫ Assembly, Tłı̨chǫ Constitution, Section 7.1, August 25, 2003, https://tlicho.ca/sites/default/files/documents/government/tlichoconstitution.pdf

2 Tłı̨chǫ Assembly, Section 7.1.

3 "13th Annual Tłı̨chǫ Gathering," Tłı̨chǫ History: Live, Learn, Experience Tłı̨chǫ, accessed March 2, 2022, https://tlichohistory.ca/en/stories/13th-annual-tlicho-gathering.

4 Tłı̨chǫ Assembly, Section 8.6.

5 "Assembly," Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo/Government, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.tlicho.ca/government/tlicho-assembly

The annual *Trails of Our Ancestors* canoe trips throughout the approximately 295,000 km^2 of the Mǫwhì area are the result of work that began long before the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement (2003) was signed. The Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo's *Trails of Our Ancestors* program (the *Trails* program) brings to life the profound importance and necessity of cultural knowledge being renewed and expanded through the relationships between and among the people and the land, and the stewardship of treaty responsibilities. The trails enliven and map the lifeways and relationships of Tłı̨chǫ and their lands. Similarly, cultural knowledge and land relationship are central to implementing the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement. These ensure the cultural wellbeing and continuity of Tłı̨chǫ through future generations. They encourage widespread access by Tłı̨chǫ to land knowledge critical for the caretaking of lands and resources responsibilities under the treaty. The knowledge and wisdom of Tłı̨chǫ Elders has guided the development of the program, and continue to be central to the success of the Trails program.

The Trails program was developed over many years, through the efforts of many individuals. In the mid-1990s, Tłı̨chǫ Agreement negotiations were initiated by a few individuals, after the collapse of cooperation among all Dene regions to negotiate a single rights-based agreement with Canada. At the same time, efforts were also being made to establish support for strengthening Tłı̨chǫ culture and language in education and within the broader community. Connections were made between the importance of that strengthening for the future of governance, as well as to protect the culture and language for future generations. Many people were involved in these multiple and mutually reinforcing efforts, and four are highlighted here: establishing the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement negotiations process; a friendship centre; a school; and, the Trails of Our Ancestors program. This chapter tells the story of the Trails program through perspectives of individuals involved at that time, highlighting the need for more research and documentation of the views and perspectives of others, which are not included, due to limitations at the time of writing.

Elder Rosa Mantla shared her perspective on the purpose of the Trails of Our Ancestors program:

> *My understanding is that John B. and a group of people had been working towards taking a group out on the land of our ancestors' trail. So, when they planned, and when they put the plan together, they wanted our young people, especially whoever participated to learn more about our land, our trails, and how our people had traveled from Behchokǫ̀ all the way to the three communities, or even to the barren land, just by paddling. And to see how the portage has been used over the years, long before us. Because we saw there were evidence of a lot of tools and old birch bark canoes that we have seen and places where they have set up teepees or their tents. So, there's been evidence of how to read the land. So, even though the land was overgrown, the elders knew there was people that lived there, that have lived there, that have died there, that know about the fishing area and how they had survived through the years. Even though the portage was like long or rough. We still have to go over the portage. That's the only way of getting to where our destination is. And if we want to come home, we still have to use the trail or the same portage back and forth. The rivers; some knew how to paddle down the river or up the river, that's not always using motorboats. But these canoes were different from birch bark canoes. So birch bark canoes that were used, or canvas boats. Canvas canoes were very taking care of in case of rips. But these canoes were used roughly but managed to stay undamaged.*[6]

"So, even though the land was overgrown, the elders knew there was people that lived there, that have lived there, that have died there, that know about the fishing area and how they had survived through the years."

6 Rosa Mantla, Interview by Jessica Simpson, Zoom, transcript, September 8, 2021.

The Trails program illustrates the relationship of collective land based cultural knowledge transmission for Treaty implementation. The Trails program, as one among many culturally based programs offered by the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo, contributes to strengthening Tłı̨chǫ governance. Ongoing, intergenerational cultural knowledge sharing, through shared land-based experiences grounds Tłı̨chǫ individuals in culturally based land and language knowledge, strengthening individual and shared cultural identities and ties. This promotes access to land and land-based knowledge, and individual, social, and cultural confidence in continuing to participate in land based culture and language activity. As a result, the Tłı̨chǫ strengthen the shared pool of knowledge, language and experience of their culture and lands that can be drawn upon to shape decision making, operations, and program content of Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo.

The Tłı̨chǫ Agreement

Ratified by 84% of eligible Tłı̨chǫ voters in 2003, the final agreement[7] came into effect on August 04, 2005.[8] The first combined self government and comprehensive land claim agreement in the Northwest Territories established the Tłı̨chǫ Region, currently inhabited by 2832 active Tłı̨chǫ citizens across the four Tłı̨chǫ communities of **Behchokǫ̀**, **Gamètì**, **Whatì**, and **Wekweètì**, with an additional 1664 active Tłı̨chǫ citizens residing outside the Tłı̨chǫ boundary, throughout the Northwest Territories, Canada, and beyond.[9]

Behchokǫ̀, Whatì, Gamètì, Wekweètì

Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo governance is a combination of arrangements which apply exclusively to Tłı̨chǫ; and, within Tłı̨chǫ communities, councilors are elected by all residents. Only Tłı̨chǫ Citizens may be nominated and run for the position of Chief. The Chief and two councilors from each community are assembly members of the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo. In addition, a Grand Chief is elected by all Tłı̨chǫ Citizens. All of these representatives together form the legislative council of the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo, which passes laws and sets the general direction of the Tłı̨chǫ Assembly. Generally open to the public, the assembly sits in session at least five times per year rotational in Tłı̨chǫ communities. An Executive Council consisting of the Chiefs of each of the four Tłı̨chǫ Communities of Behchokǫ̀, Whatì, Gamètì, and Wekweètì meets frequently to discuss and decide matters as they arise. The Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) makes decisions guiding the TG, meeting regularly and as required.[10]

The Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo has responsibility for stewarding rights described in the 27 chapters of the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement, over four areas throughout the first (and largest) area, the Mǫwhì Gogha dè Nı̨ı̨tłèe,

7 Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Canada, *Land claims and self-government agreement among the Tłı̨chǫ and the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada*, August 25, 2003, https://www.tlicho.ca/sites/default/files/documents/government/T%C5%82%C4%B1%CC%A8cho%CC%A8%20Agreement%20-%20English.pdf

8 Northwest Territories, "Concluding and Implementing Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements: Tłı̨chǫ," Government of Northwest Territories, accessed September 6, 2022, www.eia.gov.nt.ca/en/priorities/concluding-and-implementing-land-claim-and-self-government-agreements/tlicho.

9 Giselle Marion, email message to Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, September 6, 2022.

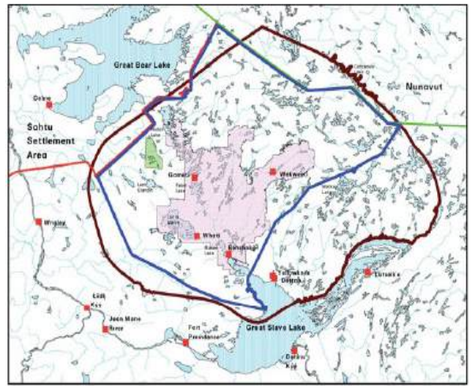
10 Giselle Marion, email message to Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, September 6, 2022.

Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo Gamètì Office. Digital Image, Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo/ Government, accessed June 13, 2022. https://tlicho.ca/contact-us

or the traditional territory of the Tłı̨chǫ. Inside the Mǫwhì Gogha dè Nı̨ı̨tłèe is the second area: the Wek'éezhìi Management Area, which is subject to authorities of two resource co-management boards. A third geographic area also falls within Mǫwhì Gogha dè Nı̨ı̨tłèe, designating what are known as "Tłı̨chǫ Lands"; the lands that the Tłı̨chǫ own in fee simple.

The fourth geographic area is called "Ezǫdzìtì", "an area of historical and cultural importance to the Tłı̨chǫ. The Tłı̨chǫ do not own this land, nor do they have any additional harvesting or management rights here. However, the area has been protected in the interest of preserving its historical and cultural importance to the Tłı̨chǫ people."[11]

Under the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement, the Tłı̨chǫ have surface and subsurface rights, and hunting, gathering, and resource management authorities within approximately 39,000 km^2 through contiguous lands adjacent to the four Tłı̨chǫ communities. In addition, financial compensation of $152 million over fourteen years was paid by Canada, along with guarantees of a share of annual resource royalties generated in the Mackenzie Valley of the NWT. The agreement guarantees Tłı̨chǫ participation on resource co-management boards including the Wek'éezhìi Renewable Resource Board, and Wek'éezhìi Land and Water Board which have authority throughout Wek'éezhìi. The former oversees wildlife and habitat management and makes recommendations on wildlife, forest and plant resources, and commercial activities.[12] The latter issues licenses and permits in the Wek'éezhìi as a regional panel of the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board.[13]



Legend
- Mǫwhì Gogha dè Nı̨ı̨tłèe boundary
- Wek'èezhìi boundary
- Nunavut boundary
- Sahtu Settlement Area boundary
- Tłı̨chǫ Lands
- Ezôdzìtì

Fig. 2. Map of Mǫwhì Gogha dè Nı̨ı̨tłèe, Wek'èezhìi, Tłı̨chǫ Lands and Ezôdzìtì, in Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs, *Land claims and self-government agreement among the Tłı̨chǫ and the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada* (August 25, 2003), 19, https://www.tlicho.ca/sites/default/files/documents/government/T%C5%82%C4%B1%CC%A8cho%CC%A8%20Agreement%20-%20English.pdf

11 Northwest Territories, "Concluding and Implementing Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements: Tłı̨chǫ."

12 "About WRRB," Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.wrrb.ca

13 "Who We Are," Wek'èezhìi Land and Water Board, accessed March 2, 2022, https://wlwb.ca/wlwb/who-we-are.

Self government provisions within the agreement provide for community governments having law making authority over local and municipal-type affairs, with Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo making laws about its internal governance, culture, and language. The Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo may also exercise additional law-making authorities. The agreement provides for intergovernmental service agreements in the areas of education, health, and social services. These are implemented through a Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency (TCSA) established by Government of Northwest Territories law, through which Tłı̨chǫ work closely with the Government of the Northwest Territories and Canada to ensure programs and services reflect and respect the culture and priorities of Tłı̨chǫ.[14, 15]

At the time of the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement negotiations, under Chapter 2 (General Provisions), the negotiating parties reached a "non-assertion" approach to rights, generally known as "certainty" (Government of Canada 2003). Previously, Canada had taken an approach confirming that agreement holders had the rights described in the modern treaty; all other rights were deemed to be extinguished. That approach was referred to as "extinguishment", articulated most clearly in historic treaties which contain language confirming that Indigenous peoples would "cede, release, and surrender" all rights other than those described in the treaty. Tłı̨chǫ did not agree to extinguishment; rather, the non-assertion approach enables the Tłı̨chǫ to negotiate, or failing that, go to court to confirm recognition of Aboriginal rights that may not be described in the agreement. This provides a way to ensure that rights not listed in the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement that may receive recognition in future, are recognized.

Since its establishment in 2005, the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo has grown to be a major employer in Tłı̨chǫ communities, with over 100 staff in the four Tłı̨chǫ communities and Yellowknife. It is organized into six departments and owns a variety of businesses.[16]

14 "Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency," Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo/Government, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.tlicho.ca/agencies/tlicho-community-services-agency.

15 "The Purpose of the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency," Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency, accessed March 2, 2022. http://Tłı̨chǫcommunityservicesagency.ca/our-agency/mission-vision-and-goals/

16 "Government," Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo/Government, accessed March 2, 2022, https://tlicho.ca/government.

End of Russel Lake. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017.

BREAKING TRAIL

Elder **Elizabeth Mackenzie**, **Chief Jimmy Bruneau**, and **Chief Mǫwhì** each played roles in setting direction for the Tłı̨chǫ.

Elizabeth Mackenzie

Elizabeth (Zaabe) Mackenzie, Digital Image, Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo/ Government, accessed June 23, 2022. https://tlicho.ca/sites/default /files/mackenzie.pdf.

Chief Jimmy Bruneau

"Jimmy Bruneau in the chief's jacket and hat, with treaty medal 1940s," Image, NWT Literacy Council, accessed June 23, 2022. https://www.nwtliteracy.ca/sites /default/files/resources/134195_nwt _literacy_jimmy_bruneau_web_0.pdf.

Chief Mǫwhì

"Chief Monfwi at Treaty payment, Fort Rae, Northwest Territories," Image, Glenbow Archives, Glenbow Museum, July 1935, http://ww2.glenbow.org/search /archivesPhotosResults.aspx?

WHO IS A "TŁĮCHǪ CITIZEN"?

Eligible Tłı̨chǫ people who are interested in becoming beneficiaries of the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement need to apply to be listed on the Tłı̨chǫ Citizens register. A "Tłı̨chǫ Citizen" is a beneficiary to the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement, whose name is on the Tłı̨chǫ Citizens Register, and is defined in the Agreement to be a person who is:

A "Tłı̨chǫ person" or meets the conditions of the "community acceptance" process set out in the Tłı̨chǫ constitution;

A Canadian citizen, or a permanent resident of Canada, or is Tłı̨chǫ and as a result of adoption became a citizen of a country other than Canada;

Is not enrolled under a different land claims agreement.[17]

17 "FAQ," Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo/Government, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.tlicho.ca/agencies/tlicho-community-services-agency

Strong Like Two People: Importance of Cultural Knowledge for Tłı̨chǫ

This section illustrates how the negotiation of the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement occurred during a time of increasing Tłı̨chǫ advocacy and action around Tłı̨chǫ culture and language and reflected a growing movement around Indigenous rights more broadly in the Northwest Territories.

The Tłı̨chǫ Agreement negotiations built on the work that had been done by Tłı̨chǫ leaders and Elders over many years. Among these were James Wah-Shee, a former president of the Dene Nation, and former Minister of the Government of the Northwest Territories, who was instrumental in establishing the Dogrib Tribal Council, the precursor to the Dogrib Treaty 11 Council. The late Eddie Erasmus was the first Executive Director of the Dogrib Tribal Council and was elected to the role of Chief for Behchokǫ̀ and Grand Chief of the Tłı̨chǫ Nation. Overall, Eddie Erasmus served for three terms as Grand Chief of Tłı̨chǫ Nation.[18] Joe Rabesca, who served as Grand Chief of the Tłı̨chǫ Nation for six terms, was instrumental in negotiating the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement. At the time of the start of negotiations in 1994, Ted Blondin, Eddie Erasmus, James Wah-Shee and John B. Zoe, formed the negotiating team for the Tłı̨chǫ, with Elder Alexis Arrowmaker being appointed as their advisor.[19] The importance of the contributions of these individuals to the Trails program, and the political development of the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo over time laid the foundations for the Trails program to be realized.

Throughout this period, Tłı̨chǫ Elders emphasized that the land claim and self-government agreement, and the government it would create, must support Tłı̨chǫ to go "back to the land". This was the impetus for John, other leaders, and ultimately the Tłı̨chǫ people to emphasize the importance of travel with Elders and leaders on the land:

> *"And so it was an eye opener for me going up all the way to the barren lands. And it took us a good 10 days to get there. And I would be fascinated with place names and burial sites and moose and where the fish and where the portages are and lots of stories, just amazing, amazing stuff."*[20]

Grand Chief Jimmy Bruneau's efforts to establish a school in his community of Behchokǫ̀ spanned decades, starting in the early 1960s.[21] Chief Bruneau had seen how difficult the separation of children from parents was for the whole community, and continually championed the creation of a school controlled and staffed by Tłı̨chǫ, serving Tłı̨chǫ students and families and was eventually established in Edzo in the fall of 1971 when it opened. Discussions of the school's mission statement, later adopted by the two Tłı̨chǫ schools administered by the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency, were guided by a recording of Chief Jimmy Bruneau providing a rationale for the importance of a school for Tłı̨chǫ children. Tłı̨chǫ Elders spent three days discussing the school's mission statement, and through those deliberations, emphasized the notion, attributed to Elder Elizabeth Mackenzie, that the school should be strong like two people: drawing on the best cultural practices of Tłı̨chǫ, and non-Tłı̨chǫ knowledge.

18 "Board of Directors," Tłı̨chǫ Investment Cooperation, accessed March 2, 2022, https://tlichoic.com/about-us/board-directors.

19 "Tłı̨chǫ Negotiate Their Own Claim," Tłı̨chǫ History: Live, Learn, Experience Tłı̨chǫ, accessed March 2, 2022. https://tlichohistory.ca/en/stories/tlicho-negotiate-their-own-claim.

20 John B. Zoe, Interview by Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, Zoom, transcript, September 2, 2021.

21 "Chief Jimmy Bruneau School Opens," Tłı̨chǫ History: Live, Learn, Experience Tłı̨chǫ, accessed March 2, 2022, https://tlichohistory.ca/en/stories/chief-jimmy-bruneau-school-opens.

> *We had everything that we needed to live in this area. And then the early explorers and traders came in and then we started catering to them. And then the mission schools and residential schools came and then we came into this dark period. And what Bruneau's talking about is emerging out of that darkness and back into the light. And that's what the mission statement should reflect. And so that's part of that document.*[22]

The Chief Jimmy Bruneau School of Edzo and Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School in Behchokǫ̀ Mission Statement[23]

Chief Jimmy Bruneau was born in 1881 and became Chief in 1936. He was a strong supporter of education for his people, and pushed to have a school established for Tłı̨chǫ children on Tłı̨chǫ land. Prior to the school being fully established for students from K–12, students were sent away to complete their education, outside of the Tłı̨chǫ area. Currently, the school provides schooling from grades K–12, as well as housing an early childhood centre.

The mission remains to be a culturally-centered community school, such as was the wish of Chief Jimmy Bruneau, who upon the opening of the school, stated, "I have asked for a school to be built... on my land... and that school will be run by my people, and my people will work at that school and our children will learn both ways: our way and the white man's way." The school strives to continually improve academically as well as culturally, with culture camps, Tłı̨chǫ language classes and traditional skills classes.

Another Tłı̨chǫ elder, Elizabeth Mackenzie, interpreted and explained the words of Chief Jimmy Bruneau, saying, "...one person would be like two persons: One, knowing everything of the white culture and one, knowing of our ancestors' culture. That person would become very strong for if we know everything like two persons... there may be no one greater than us." It is from this interpretation that comes our school and regional educational motto, *Strong like Two People*.

22 John B. Zoe, Interview by Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, Zoom, transcript, September 7, 2021.

23 "About Us," Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, accessed March 2, 2022, https://cjbs.tlicho.ca/about-cjbs.

Heading North, Ghost Lake. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017.

In 1995, the first trip that would eventually become the Trails program. It was organized with a focus on students and youth, in partnership with what was then the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education. John B. Zoe relates how the first trip was inspired by his travels on the land with Elders, and the realization that many youth did not have the means or guidance to experience their lands, a consequence of the many colonization impacts that had not only removed people from the land, but had the effect of removing and fragmenting their access to cultural and land based knowledge and its holders. Many lacked the money required to purchase equipment to undertake the lengthy and arduous journeys into the interior where our ancestors roamed.

> *The Trails of Our Ancestors program ...was a way of introducing young people back onto the land. And it was developed as a program back in 1995, because the idea started off with me and Elder Harry Simpson working with an archaeologist to do some surveys, archaeological surveys, we weren't digging, but were just looking on the surface, so we ended up going to the community of Gamètì and the approach that was taken at the time was that why don't we instead of just doing a search and trying to find out where all these artifacts are, why don't we just ask people? And so we ended up spending a lot of time in Gamètì, one of the smaller communities, and we went house to house to house to house, and we interviewed people as to where do the people travel to?*
>
> *And so they gave us place names and they gave us burial sites, they gave us camps where the hunting areas are, where the fish our whole inventory. And all we had to do was follow, follow the place names, so we ended up doing that. We went to each place name and discovered that the place names were a recording of the movement of people from the beginning of our own time, and starting with the oldest names and how things have developed to where we are today. So they kept a fairly good record about what happened to the people up until colonization.*
>
> *And then we discovered that there were new place names after colonization, which are more intrusive place names. That was when the colonizers came here. This is what they did. And this is where they went to look for minerals. This is where we kind of saw them. This is where they had their accidents and this is where we had encounters with them. So a whole slew of place names that were more modeled after the 1850s.*

Elder Archie Black has been on the trails before the inception of the Trails of Our Ancestors Program. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017

And we did that for about three years, doing a survey with the government, with canoes. And each summer that we went out we ran into individuals. We ran into teachers on holidays and we ran into bush pilots. We ran into prospectors. And one day, Harry, because we shared a tent we spent a lot of time talking. And then he said, you know, we have been paddling and we have run into people that are just visiting and are on holidays, but we haven't seen any of our people. They are all stuck in the communities, especially the young people, they have no way of accessing this knowledge. So we should really think about doing something about it.

"And so they gave us place names and the location of burial sites, they gave us camps where to hunt, where to fish; our whole inventory. And all we had to do was follow, follow the place names, so we ended up doing that."

The second time in 1996, was a longer one. We did the longest trail. Because we were already [negotiating] the claim and everybody was talking about Chief Mǫwhì, who signed treaty in 1921. And talking to an elder, he was telling me that there's a place called Mǫwhì trail one because he used a trail a lot, but the trail is actually called K`witi trail. So we thought we'd try that one. That one took about six weeks to make a round trip. And we saw so many stuff. We recorded as much as we could. And there were a lot of people that were influenced by these type of things. And so then in 1997, we were going to get a sponsor, that didn't pan out, so we didn't have access to our canoes, so we ended up going with three canoes that year to keep it going. So there were six of us. We went all the way to Wekweètì and back. And in 1998 and 1999, we didn't have a sponsor.

Through government contacts, John was put in touch with a representative of the Primate World Relief and Development Fund, who visited Behchokǫ̀ at John's invitation, and offered to provide two years of support to the Trails program during the 1998–1999 period[24].

And so it was after 1994 when I was on the Divisional Board of Education and I was the chair and Harry was a community representative, so we went to Jim Martin, Jim Martin was the CEO (of the Education Board) at the time, so we explained to him what we were thinking, and maybe we can get some canoes and develop this program. And we developed the program; we ordered, I think, five canoes. When we received the canoes they had to be modified and in later years we were able to contact the factory to standardize the modifications that were needed. And with and through the school, we recruited students and teachers and ended up going out for a little over two weeks. At that time, there wasn't that much jobs and stuff, so we left Behchokǫ̀, we paddled all the way to Gamètì and it took us two weeks. And then we paddled back, it took us about a month, and that's how we got hooked. This is the way to do it.

24 John B. Zoe, Interview, September 7, 2021.

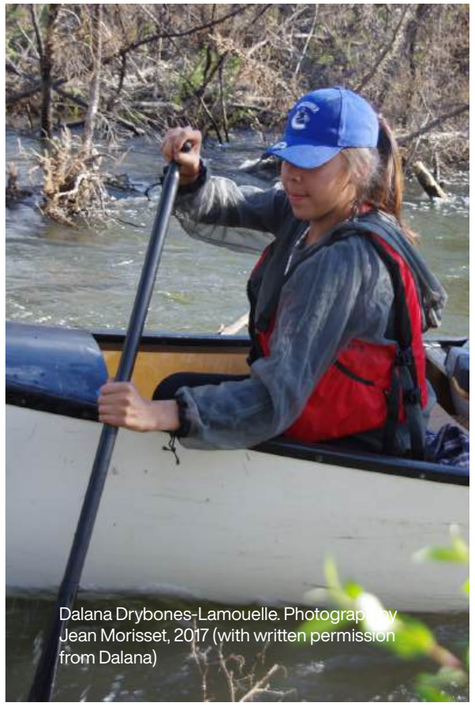
Negotiating the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement

The Tłı̨chǫ Agreement was negotiated in the context of a broader history of Indigenous rights activism and negotiation in the NWT. Between 1900 and 1922, Treaty Commissions traveled to the NWT to secure consent to Treaties 8 and 11, two of the eleven "historic treaties" in Canada. These treaties were written in Ottawa by federal officials, and handed off to Treaty Commissioners who then traveled by land, boat, and canoe, accompanied by Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers, a doctor, and the church officials. The Tłı̨chǫ representatives Chief Mǫwhì and Headmen Jermain and Beaulieu signed Treaty 11 in 1921 at Behchokǫ̀.[25]

"When the treaty party came and Mǫwhì represented the Tłı̨chǫ in the talks with the treaty commissioner. And so when the treaty party came in to Behchokǫ̀, the treaties were already written. But Mǫwhì knew that if you look at our place names, that we've had treaties with the animals and we had agreements that we've been making between Tłı̨chǫ and other peoples for a long time. We've been making agreements within ourselves, but not to the outside world. The outside world's way of making treaties was to force things like they do in relocations, like they do in residential schools, like they do in child welfare. Everything is forced, and the rule of law is what holds it down. What we're trying to get at is that Mǫwhì, when he was challenged with that, he refused it for many days.

Yet the church was on board with the federal government to kind of entice Tłı̨chǫ to sign the Treaty. And you have to... you've got to remember that 1921 was one hundred years ago. The only people that you depended on from the outside world were the Indian agents, they are the ones who can take your kids or can make you starve. And the churches are also, to some degree, involved with dispensing medicines, and they have this flock of people that they need to take care of, and the Hudson's Bay, there's trade going back and forth, and so what are you going to do when your closest allies tell you to go for it? Because they would benefit the most and we would still be under the Indian Act, you know, being serviced. So our chief finally said that he would sign.

And so the words that Mǫwhì spoke to at the time was that long as the sun rises, river flows, land does not move, that we would not be restricted from our way of life. And so the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement reached in 2005 is the place from where we will start rebuilding. Back to full strength, what we've always had. And so that we don't need to bother anybody, and nobody can bother us.[26]



Dalana Drybones-Lamouelle. Photography by Jean Morisset, 2017 (with written permission from Dalana)

25 Fumoleau, Rene. *As Long as This Land Shall Last: A History of Treaty 8 and Treaty 11, 1870–1939*. University of Calgary Press, (1975) 2004.

26 John B. Zoe, Interview by Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, Zoom, transcript, September 7, 2021.

Dissatisfaction with Canada's refusal to honor its treaty commitments, gave rise to boycotting a yearly treaty party visit to Tłı̨chǫ lands. The Nelson Commission of 1959 found that Canada had neglected to fulfill its obligations with respect to lands contained in Treaties 8 and 11. Over the next decade, Dene began to organize to work together to advocate for their interests, forming the Indian Brotherhood of the NWT (later re-named the Dene Nation) as a representative political organization of all Dene in the NWT. The proposal to build a natural gas pipeline from the Beaufort Sea to Alberta resulted in Chief Francois Paulette attempting to register a caveat on the Mackenzie Valley on the basis that during discussions with the Treaty 11 Commissioner, Dene did not agree to give up Aboriginal title rights to their lands.[27]

The Dene mounted an unsuccessful court challenge of the Government of the Northwest Territories' refusal to allow them to register a caveat on the Mackenzie Valley in 1976. However, the court found compelling evidence that the Dene did not agree to give up Aboriginal title rights in discussions prior to signing the historic treaties.[28] Only a few years before, a court in British Columbia issued a split decision over whether the Nisga'a of Northeastern BC had surrendered their Aboriginal rights, which prompted a shift in federal policy.[29] As a result, the comprehensive land claim policy was established, creating a process through which Indigenous peoples with unextinguished Aboriginal title could negotiate rights to lands and resources in their traditional territories.

As a result, throughout the 1970s, the Dene Nation and later, Metis Nation of the NWT jointly negotiated a comprehensive land claim agreement on behalf of all Dene and Metis in the NWT. As documented elsewhere, this effort which began in 1973, came to an end in 1990, when Canada insisted that the Dene consider a final offer, and the different regions could not reach agreement on how to proceed together. Specifically, some regions would not accept extinguishment of all Aboriginal rights in exchange for the contents of the agreement, nor would they accept Canada's view at the time that political self determination, or self government, could not be negotiated. Canada insisted that there was no option to negotiate further, launching negotiations between Canada, and later the GNWT, with five different regions (Zoe 2015).

But for the Tłı̨chǫ, getting back to the negotiating table took a number of years. In 1990, the Tłı̨chǫ lands were under a interim land protection agreement, where government agreed not to award new rights for land use to third parties on a temporary basis. At that time, the most northerly of the five regions, the Gwich'in and Sahtu, had undertaken their land selections within the total amount of 70,000 sq.mi. that Canada had determined was available, and the Tłı̨chǫ had not yet entered into those discussions with Canada. According to John:

> *After 1990 we went back to the table with a new set of things to say that we need to strengthen. We need to have self-government. We need non-extinguishment... When that didn't pan out, then the federal government pulled the plug on the negotiations. And very shortly thereafter, the interim provisions and land protections over our lands were removed. And that's when you had the biggest staking rush in the NWT.*
>
> *And so that's when we decided, well, we can't trust anybody; we have to do it ourselves. And so between 1990 and 1992 myself, Joe Rabesca, and Eddie Erasmus, we started talking about it with the Elders and we started going into the communities. We didn't have jobs. We just went into the communities in the summertime, went by boat and went visiting and got a feel of where people were, with respect to starting a negotiation process for Tłı̨chǫ.*
>
> *And then in the winter Joe Rabesca has a trap line towards Snare Lake, so we go there with skidoos, and stay on this trap line, eventually making it to Wekweètì and meet with the people, the old people. We go hunting, he checked his traps and then we go home. And then, after talking with the influential former Grand Chief Alexis Arrowmaker of Wekweètì, we finally got the OK to organize the first big regional meeting in 1992 to discuss entering into negotiations.*

> *Back in 1989 when I became the regional negotiator, I was telling those elders, that I don't know anything about that land claim, you know, these big documents. And they said, well nobody does. What you have, is you have us! We know what we want. There are people that are experts in writing the stuff, but they need direction, and we'll provide the information, so if you want to know more about what we're talking about, you're going to have to keep going to the land more.*
>
> *And so that's when I started going into the bush with other people, with skidoos and boats and canoes, going on every trail and collecting information. And then over time, I started to realize that these place names have categories from the oldest place names, to a second set (and I am just saying second set, because there is no way of describing it yet in English). The second set is about the animals and the people, as to who's going to be what and the legends that are attached to it. I've had a chance to listen to a lot of these legends.*
>
> *And the third set was the biggest piece: was how the animals and the people's rules were put together so that they would honour each other.*
>
> *And the fourth set is an application of that information on the landscape that talks about where to find the fish, where to find the caribou, where to find the moose, where to find the fur bearing animals. And what to do when you're in that area making offerings to the land, to ensure that those agreements with the animals are constantly alive.*
>
> *And the last set was about the overlap [between neighboring peoples], that there's a requirement for an overlap, and we had overlap agreements way before modern agreements, and some of those that we're developing.*
>
> *So a lot of the stories that are related to those agreements are still there. And so going to the land means that the more campfires you have, the more you know. So when you go out, you're sitting at a campfire. People are talking about their history, they're talking about the legends, they're talking about their stories, their family trees. And the knowledge transmission was a lot to take in.*

27 Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, *Finding Dahshaa: Self Government, Social Suffering, and Aboriginal Policy in Canada*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 15.

28 Johnson, Miranda. "Frontier Justice and Self-Determination in Canada's North". In *The Land Is Our History: Indigeneity, Law, and the Settler State*, edited by Miranda Johnson. Oxford University Press, 2016.

29 Foster, Hamar, Heather Raven, and Jeremy Webber. *Let Right be Done: Aboriginal Title, the Calder Case, and the Future of Indigenous Rights*. UBC Press, 2007.

Bruce Chocolate, John B.Zoe, Terrance Liske, Jerry Antoine, Joseph Rabesca. End of Russel Lake. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017.

And so the object is: how do we build this around the Agreement? So that the focus [in the agreement] is about rebuilding, because part of the story of those place names that have to do with our own story, we know what it is. But there was an intrusion of early explorers, the early fur trade, when all the fur bearing animals and the trees and the natural things were disrupted, in terms of the natural balance and the imposition of new authority on top of the categories I described.

...And so we became slaves to the early explorers and to the Hudson's Bay, where we're providing them with more than what we used to take out, and that was the demise of the natural progression of the renewal of animals. And so these big jurisdictions of the natural resources were drawn down, away from us, somebody else will take care of [those] decisions now.[30]

30 John B. Zoe, Interview, September 7, 2021.

Similar to other Indigenous peoples in North America and Canada, the arrival of the first non-Indigenous traders and settlers coincided with progressive assertion of their non-Indigenous authorities in ways that not only removed autonomy and authority of Tłı̨chǫ over their lands, but also over their lives. From the Royal Proclamation of 1763, asserting British control of most of North America which simultaneously described the principles the colonizers would follow in taking lands from Indigenous peoples, to the creation of Canada and its imposition of the Indian Act, a systematic removal of Tłı̨chǫ control over their lands and lives took place. The Tłı̨chǫ Agreement negotiations were intended to create an agreement that would position Tłı̨chǫ to restore control over their lands and lives, while also creating a basis for Tłı̨chǫ and other governments and their agencies to work together in respectful ways.

The Tłı̨chǫ were the first in the NWT to complete a combined comprehensive land claim and self government agreement, negotiating for 13 years, between 1992 and 2005.

So all this agreement ...it's a booklet that talks about the exchanges: annual exchanges of resource revenues, how those things are going to be redistributed, but this time some are going to go to Tłı̨chǫ, through that agreement for the first time. So all this phenomena about sharing money and stuff is very recent—16 years and it's still developing. The agreement is a rule book about how to share the "Western things" that everybody is ready for. But, a lot of the resources that we get through self-government is things that are related to your relationship to your stories, your early stories about your relationship to the animals and the rules between your animals and how you would honor your relationship to the natural resources, including your Indigenous neighbors. and Everything that we do is around our land, language, culture, our way of life which is what we've always had and retained, but the resources... to continue using and retaining [them] into the future was blocked off from us. And so part of the agreement is to get that authority back, and maintain that relationship on an annual basis through accountability.[31]

John B. Zoe and Kyson Rabesca. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017.

31 John B. Zoe, Interview, September 7, 2021.

Agreement Responsibilities Requiring Cultural Knowledge

The need for cultural knowledge, including knowledge about the land and associated practices, suffuses all aspects of Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo programs, operations, and intergovernmental relations, as well as being able to effectively communicate with and serve the needs of Tłı̨chǫ citizens. The need for the ongoing recovery and development of Tłı̨chǫ cultural knowledge cannot be discerned by identifying specific chapters or responsibilities within the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement. Instead, fundamental decisions about philosophical and functional approaches to governance are shaped by cultural considerations: to govern effectively, and meaningfully implement the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement, cultural knowledge and culturally-shaped reciprocal obligations and responsibilities are interwoven as considerations alongside all others.

This in turn emphasizes the need for Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo to operate in ways that support incorporation of this knowledge into its activities, and therefore dedicate resources to ensuring knowledge is known, shared, and that knowledge holders direct and determine how cultural knowledge and concepts shape programs and services from the idea stages to program design and implementation. Tłı̨chǫ themselves are holders of many aspects of knowledge and practice, which must continually be built, refined, shared, and applied in both anticipated and unanticipated ways. Elders and knowledge holders are crucial in guiding the processes and appropriate ways to understand and apply knowledge within Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo operations and programs.

Opportunities for the applications of Tłı̨chǫ knowledge are made explicit in the work of land and wildlife co-management boards that are governed by all signatories to the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement. Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo itself weaves this knowledge through all areas of Treaty implementation undertaken in all its departments, from the way it communicates and structures its governance procedures, to research and land management related responsibilities, and in areas such as health and education. The Trails program is a foundational knowledge building, reciprocation, and intergenerational relationship building effort that strengthens cultural knowledge as a resource that can be drawn upon in future by the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo.

Ensuring cultural knowledge is at the core of the implementation approach to the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement is both a strength and an ongoing challenge. Pressures on the land such as climate change, mining and infrastructure development, and third party uses, may limit or impact Tłı̨chǫ cultural uses.

The late Leon Ekendia, Joe Tlokka, Jayden Smith, Dallas Black, Raeleen Mantla, Davy Mantla, Leah William. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017.

At the same time, lack of access to the land due to requirements and realities of living in communities and participating in a capitalist wage economy, or the ability of Tłı̨chǫ to have cultural access to lands and resources in the face of competing rights and access by third parties such as mines, government restrictions, etc., presents a challenge for efforts focused on strengthening Tłı̨chǫ culture, language, and way of life.

"And that means that we can finance and develop programs around on the land programs, where we reintroduce people back to the land. Reintroduce them through programs and storytelling, through the usage of Elders and new cohorts [of participants] all the time. And start to use our own language so that we can understand the stories, can understand the place names, can understand our genealogy and bring back the traditional names."

"And so part of the money that we get from our lands, we used to set up these companies [for example, to generate revenues], and we set up our governments to look after how do we strengthen and connect and finance our ability to strengthen the core values that we had before Tłı̨chǫ were subject to all of the forces of colonization that worked to cut off access to our culture and way of life.

But now, through Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo there are resources to support those efforts. And that means that we can finance and develop programs around on the land programs, where we reintroduce people back to the land. Reintroduce them through programs and storytelling, through the usage of Elders and new cohorts [of participants] all the time. And start to use our own language so that we can understand the stories, can understand the place names, can understand our genealogy and bring back the traditional names. And also, we can practice our culture: the dances, the games, the arts, the storytelling, the travel, philosophy, all these kind of things, the stars, the world view; and, our ways of life, of how we use everything. Now we have the ability to redirect those resources, to strengthen that idea using our own governance systems.

But that governing system is two pronged. One is that it needs to be resilient enough so that it doesn't cave in to the larger entities that we're dealing with, big governments and big corporations. But at the same time, strong enough so that we can take and wrestle the resources and reinvest it into our own ways of life. Because we know that the silly notion that we've been living under from Canada for the last hundred fifty years was to kill the Indian in the person, in the people, in the child. What the agreement now makes possible for the Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo to do is going the other way: we're going to strengthen what we were being stripped of, and rebuild our lives in that way.[32]

Trails of Our Ancestors canoes, 2005. Photograph by Tessa Macintosh

32 John B. Zoe, Interview, September 7, 2021.

The Trails Program: Impact and Reflections[33, 34]

Vision

The Trails Of Our Ancestors allow us to retrace our path through eyes of our elders. In 1990, a plan to implement a vision was developed; The vision of Chief Jimmy Bruneau to teach our youth to be strong like two people.

It is our goal to **increase** youth participants on the Trails of Our Ancestors.

Preserve our language, culture & way of life.

Retrace our path through eyes of our Elders.

Renew spiritual growth, abundance, and gathering to renew kinship, revive stories, and share knowledge.

Strengthen unity among our youth, elders, families and communities.

Teach our youth survival skills required on the land. Teaching in geographical mapping, names, stories and recording.

Training opportunity in canoe safety, first aid course, firearm safety course, GPS training, policy, basic survival skills, roles and responsibility.

33 Gowhaèhdǫǫ Gits'ǫ Etǫ. *Trails of Our Ancestors: What Ti Trail*, 1998, https://tlichohistory.ca/sites/default/files/IMG_0004.pdf

34 Culture and Lands Protection, Tłı̨chǫ. *Trails of our Ancestors*, n.d. https://tlicho.ca/government/departments/culture-lands-protection/cultural-practices/trails-our-ancestors

The Trails program has been detailed in other publications, as a program available to all Tłı̨chǫ citizens, with an emphasis on youth participation. Participation requirements include making a commitment to completing the trip where possible, and also affords opportunities for individuals to join or leave at different parts of the journey. Director of the Department of Culture and Lands Protection (DCLP) Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, explains how Elders are central to the program, with knowledge holders' expertise and experience shaping the specific routes taken from each community to the annual gathering each year:

> *When we first started, the big focus...was learning the routes: the significant sites, the stories, the place names. Each of the Elders that went in the canoes, they were knowledgeable of the stories and the routes, they knew them very well. There are some times where when we're travelling, the canoes kind of get a little bit separated, so we wait for each other. It would be your lead Elder who would share stories with everybody while we are out there on the river or lake, and then in the evenings again, they are storytelling in the mornings before we go. There was always a review while after breakfast and prayers in the morning, there's a review of today's route: "This is where we are going to go, this is what we are going to see, this is what we are going to do"...and then again at the end of the day, recapping what happened, there was always an emphasis on safety and the weather and watching.*[35]

"Each of the Elders that went in the canoes, they were knowledgeable of the stories and the routes, they knew them very well. There are some times where when we're travelling, the canoes kind of get a little bit separated, so we wait for each other. It would be your lead Elder who would share stories with everybody while we are out there on the river or lake, and then in the evenings again, they are storytelling in the mornings before we go"

Organized by the Department of Culture and Lands Protection, this major annual undertaking has provided hundreds of Tłı̨chǫ with the opportunity to travel the trails and gain and practice land based cultural knowledge and language together. Each year the travelers are met with joy and respect by delegates at the Tłı̨chǫ Annual gathering, with all participants acknowledging the importance of what has become a tradition central to the spirit and purpose of the annual gathering.[36, 37, 38]

Extensive logistical planning takes place each year to organize the trip, and also to ensure that knowledgeable elders accompany participants traveling on the each of the trails. As Rosa Mantla explains:

35 Tammy Steinwand-Dechambeault, Interview by Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, Zoom, transcript, March 28, 2022.

36 Gowhaèhdǫǫ Gits'ǫ Etǫ Nıwhe?de. *Trails of Our Ancestors: What Ti Trail*, 1998, https://tlichohistory.ca/sites/default/files/IMG_0004.pdf.

37 Culture and Lands Protection, Tłı̨chǫ, *Trails of our Ancestors*.

38 John B. Zoe, *Trails of Our Ancestors: Building a Nation*, 2002, https://tlichohistory.ca/en/stories/trails-our-ancestors-building-nation.

There were all planning with... John B. could have sat with the elders of what their expectation was supposed to be, or what they are expected to hear or to do. And also to see and experience, even though they've been out on the land so many times, but there are some of the elders didn't really live in these areas, but they travel with them.

So in some places, some rivers, some special land that they saw, it has names. Some elders wouldn't know because they haven't lived in those areas or work in that area. So other elders, for example, we had an elder Johnny Eyakfwo from Wekweètì and he knew the area all the way to Wekweètì and he would give the names and how people have lived there and trapped there. Same thing with going to Gamètì and Whatì. So we had those knowledgeable elders with us. And the good thing about them too was they were spiritually strong. They believe in the young people, that they can do good work, that they would be capable. And some of the high school students that didn't do well in school, they know that they would do well out on the land so they took them. And it was good for them. They need hands on, concrete activities, to do physical work. And to feel the presence of our ancestors that have gone before us. They always remind us that.[39]

[...] The trips are for them [students] to experience the land, the work, and living, day and night with people that they usually don't know, and to share work like cooking and making fire. So these are the things that it's supposed to be an experience of learning. The language is supposed to be used at all times if there are elders with us. And place names, stories, legends, because I heard a lot just listening to the elderly men at that time.[40]

Spearheaded by the Department of Culture and Lands Protection, community directors employed by Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo in each Tłı̨chǫ community are involved with planning each trip departing from their communities. Since its inception over twenty years ago, the program has undergone significant development, including incorporating experiences and lessons as best practices. The program is regularly evaluated, and feedback has resulted in changes, including the development of a program manual, pre-trip safety education and team building efforts among those traveling in the same canoes together, and participants being fully engaged in trip planning and provisions. It is also designed to be as accessible as possible, to ensure that access and participation accommodates all age and experience levels, and that issues such as equipment, employment, and income level do not create barriers to participation.

Portage on Wekweètì to Behchokǫ̀. Photograph by Jean Morisset, 2017.

39 Rosa Mantla, Interview, September 8, 2021.

40 Rosa Mantla, Interview, September 8, 2021.

In addition, documentation of the program is being undertaken to provide a video record that may be used during trails journeys and incorporated into digital tools and archives to preserve Elders' knowledge for transmission to current and future generations. Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault explains:

We've started to ... document stories from the Elders. We started in Whatì to Behchokǫ̀ that route there. Getting stories from the Elders first by identifying the significant sites: what are they? where are they? And then locating those on the map. And then meeting with the Elders that have those stories and capturing that through interviews. And then going up [along that route]. Artless Collective (a multi-media and film production company) has helped us to document that route, using their state-of-the art [aerial filming] technology. And what we're trying to do is document each of the routes of Trails of Our Ancestors. Wherever it's being hosted—from Whatì to Behchokǫ̀—we have that route pretty well done now. This year the host community is Whatì. We'll fill in anything that's not done. Artless Collective might now join Gamètì and paddle into Whatì. Then we'll have that route completed. We're trying to get documentation of each of the different routes, and we're doing that for a few reasons. One is to get it documented. Two is to share that video or story mapping with our seniors and Elders and other people that are not able to take part. We want to bring it to them. If they can't come and take part with us, we'd like to bring that experience to them. So that when they see these videos—or the interviews that are being shared by the Elders, or the photos and videos of cabins, or of a grave site. Then as they are watching, it sparks potential for discussing what additional information or stories will they share? We want to add that to our information bank and continuously grow that information bank that we have from our Elders, especially the ones that have been there to those places. They know that area well. But because of health conditions, they're not able to go out. We're still trying to find ways to keep them included and involved by sharing information with us and seeing that we're still going out there, and keeping the trails open and alive.[41]

41 Rosa Mantla, Interview, September 8, 2021.

Elder Rosa Mantla has participated in the Trails journeys most years since it was established. She describes the activities participants engage in and the significance it has for individuals as well as the sense of connection among participants and together, with their lands, and the responsibilities Tłı̨chǫ have for its caretaking:

When I first went on the trip—and that was the first year, the first summer that the group organizers that took students out on the land—and they left a few days before me, and I flew while they were still going forward and I joined them at that time. So, on our Trails of Our Ancestors, we do have a role, with our group. We're always trying to work together, share, and listen to stories, especially when we had elders. When the elders came along, we had evening stories or even place names that they talk about when we camp out there. And they would talk about that area, who had lived there. And other than that, whenever we would come to a grave site, we all help each other to clean it and fix it, the crib around the graves.

"So, on our Trails of Our Ancestors, we do have a role, with our group. We're always trying to work together, share, and listen to stories, especially when we had elders. When the elders came along, we had evening stories or even place names that they talk about when we camp out there. And they would talk about that area, who had lived there."

[...] During the time that we were travelling with a group, I did have experience working out on the land. So, I was confident in travelling with the group. But, since it was a huge group, there were times when we all kind of shared the work together. But many times, we would take turns cooking... and making fire early in the morning. Even though it rains, it's windy, but we still did all the work because there was a limit... the limit date and time that we had to

be in a certain place. But what I find about myself was being raised on the land and knowing the land and the rivers was something that I was able to know more about the portages, paddling and then listening to the elders in our canoes of how and we'll continue to paddle even though it's tiring. Because some elders and some young people, I find that was hard for them. They didn't want to paddle sometimes they want to do their own things. But every campfire or overnighting, there's always a time when the elders, there's protocols of not to be too noisy, and not to swim in some areas. And also when we have fish or fresh meat or ducks, we all share in cleaning and cooking at the same time. But other than that, the language is always used because we had elders, we had workers that spoke more Tłı̨chǫ than English. So, the first few years that I've participated on Our Ancestors Trails, it was a credit course for high school students.

That's the reason why they took students in each of the canoes.

In each of those canoes, they had two or three high school students that participated, so that they earned their social study credits, their science credit, their cultural and language credit. So that was the purpose. It was land based cultural and language learning. And just watching and learning what the people do and that that's how many of those young people learn, and also to be capable of doing things on their own.

[...]Our people have been using the trails for many years going up to the barren land for caribou, and that's how they harvest meat. And harvesting was very important, in those days. So that was to teach our youth about how travelling was, even though it was hard, and long. They have to be able to survive. Through the survival of our people, we wanted our young people to survive through their education. It's something similar—getting up early every morning and working all day to meet their goals. Same thing that I see, sometimes in a different form, but it is in a different form.

The annual trip takes approximately two weeks, and affords participants an opportunity to travel from any of the Tłı̨chǫ communities to the community where the annual gathering is held. This affords participants opportunity to travel each of the main trails that have been used within the Tłı̨chǫ region since time immemorial. It provides the opportunity for youth in particular to learn of the cultural significance of the land through stories, as well as understand the geography, geology, hydrology, and flora and fauna of the land: the migratory pathways of animals, ecosystem interactions, and practical advice and protocols for living safely and mindfully within the living ecosystem. Elder Rosa Mantla describes the different trail journeys available to participants:

> *[...] If they're going to be leaving from Behchokǫ̀, they have to have a plan of which area they have to go. For example, if they are going to go to Wekweètì they are going to leave here, go through to Russell Lake, and all the way to the end of Russell Lake and start their trails at the first portage.And that's where they start to travel to Wekweètì. And then another one is leaving Behchokǫ̀ if they want to go to Whatì or even Gamètì, or even to Snare Hydro, they go from Behchokǫ̀ all the way to Marian Lake (the village). They go through the river, all the way up the river and then, they have to go left to Whatì and then the go right to Gamètì or to the barren land. But Gamètì, they have to go through lakes, big lakes. And then when they go to the barren land they go further on to the right and they go through another area where it's like going through Snare Hydro and way up to Mattberry Lake and all the way up. Some of these areas that people have lived for years, like Whatì, they have a great knowledge of traveling in summer and winter time. And with dog teams, they have trails for dog teams, whereas they have rivers and streams and lakes for canoes and boats. Same thing with the other communities as well too.*[42]

42 Rosa Mantla, Interview, September 8, 2021.

Tammy Steinwand, offered the following reflection about the impact of the program:

> *The four canoe trips that I was a part of have been very special to me. This was a time for me to connect not only with the land but also in a special way with the Elders, the culture and language of our people and most importantly, the students. I have many fond memories of our time out on the land.*
>
> *Each 10–20 day trip was set up pretty much the same way. With 30 people in total, five canoes each carried six paddlers; an Elder, guide/boss, teacher and three students. Each day one of the canoes was in charge of breakfast for the whole group, another canoe would do lunch for the whole group and the third canoe would do supper. The next day, the duties rotated so if you did breakfast one morning, you would do lunch the following morning and supper the third day. This gave a canoe at least one whole day of break from preparing meals. These breaks were very much appreciated. When it was our group's turn to make a meal, we would discuss who in our canoe would make the fire, start the tea, and do the other duties such as make bannock or peel potatoes. Everyone had a chore to do and everyone chipped in and helped out. The same with the clean up after supper; everyone helped to wash, dry and put the dishes and pots and pans away. It was a group effort and everyone worked well together.*
>
> *Each day began with prayers for a good day, a safe journey and sometimes the request for food. I remember on one trip when we were running low on protein and we happened to camp by a grave, the morning prayer led by the group's Elder included a request that we be given a big animal in exchange for offerings we left at the burial site. It was a beautiful day; the sun was very bright and warm, not much wind, a few clouds, just a gorgeous day! That afternoon we had seen at least one moose. There was our food. The group was happy and very excited, especially the Elder whose prayers were answered. The whole trip was like that. Sometimes things happened that were difficult to explain. I believe that it is the power of prayer and the spirits of the land that constantly guide us, protect us and lead us in the right direction. There have been many blessings like this on these trips and each was special in its own way.*
>
> *Evenings, after supper were spent in different ways. Some tired canoers would take a dip after a day of hard work paddling and portaging, others would spend the time playing cards, Scrabble or reading in their tents, and others got some much-needed rest. Each evening before bed people would gather around the fire to dry out their shoes and socks on racks above the fire. This time was also used to share stories and tell jokes, and this usually ended with prayers for a good sleep and thanks for the day.*[43]

"Everyone had a chore to do and everyone chipped in and helped out. The same with the clean up after supper; everyone helped to wash, dry and put the dishes and pots and pans away. It was a group effort and everyone worked well together."

The program's dependence on Elders and knowledge holders to identify trail routes and places along the routes, and share those with participants means that Elder participation is critical for success. In addition to documenting knowledge which can be used in cases where knowledgeable Elders may not be available, Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault reflects on the importance of working with Elders in advance of trips to ensure their safe participation:

43 Tammy Steinwand. "Memories: Reflections of a Magical Journey," in *Trails of Our Ancestors: Building a Nation*, ed. John B. Zoe (2002), 43, https://tlichohistory.ca/en/stories/trails-our-ancestors-building-nation.

Tłı̨chǫ Youth Canoe Trip, Basler Lake. Junior Chocolate, Casey Eyakfwo, Jarvis Lamouelle, Kirk Mantla, Clayton Apples. Photograph by Tessa Macintosh, 2004.

If we let them know now, maybe some of them will start, I don't know, walking a little bit more, exercising a little bit more, and really bring up their strength and stamina to maybe take part. Because if they're in the canoe, they don't even have to paddle. We can do that. We just want them to come and have that presence and share stories. That's mainly what we want them for. If we can find Elders that can still do that, I think that would be just so wonderful for everyone, for them and their own personal health and healing and well-being of being out on the land. And then the connections with our community, people and our youth. And just hearing the Elders themselves rather than through a recorder, you know? That's what we're going to have to do. We're going to have to bring a recorder to say, okay, for this significant site, this is the story that goes with it, and play it. You know? That would be a last resort. But we're getting to that place where we're having to depend on that last resort. But if we can have the Elders with us, ideally that's the best way.[44]

44 Tammy Steinwand-Dechambeault, Interview, March 28, 2022.

Conclusion

The Trails of Our Ancestors Program takes a holistic approach to intergenerational knowledge transmission, resulting in a range of positive outcomes at the individual, collective community, and institutional levels. For modern treaty implementation, its significance lies in part in the transmission and ongoing development of cultural knowledge that knowledge holders will be able to draw upon in ongoing implementation activities such as program and institutional design, and approaches to delivery.

Burn area on the way to Wekweètì. Photograph by Jean Morisset , 2017.

Tammy Steinwand-Deschambault reflects on the importance and impact of the Trails program for participants, future generations, and land claim implementation:

> *One big thing for me is: we're keeping those routes—those trails—open. We're using them. We're getting out on our land and being out there to interact with the wildlife, the environment. And really taking in the beauty of the land. We are seeing that that is Tłı̨chǫ land, that's ours. And how each of those different significant sites has a story. Some of those stories go back hundreds of years. Like when we get Hodoòdzo—Hodoòdzo is the story that John shares in the cosmology of the Wolverine—and how at the end of Hodoòdzo, that he had a trap there to catch the people. And so that place—you know, when I was there for the first time and heard that story through Harry Simpson—on one hand, like it, it was scary. On the other hand, it was so special and magical. And to know how powerful that place still is today. For me, it's really something. Things happen when you're out there and you don't really—hearing about these things, you know, through a story or anything like that from someone else, doesn't do it justice. But when you're out there and you experience it and you see it. It really does something to you. It changes you as a person. And it strengthens your—for me anyways, your pride as an Indigenous person, as a Tłı̨chǫ person. And to be able to listen and understand through the language what the Elders are saying. That, too is another layer of awe. It's just so special.*
>
> *And to hear the Elders talk about, "This is where I went on a dog team." You know, anything like that. It's just fascinating. It's so beautiful. And it's those kinds of understandings and relationship-building and strengthening our identity. All of that is what we want our young people or even new teachers to our region—at that time teachers came. To understand the importance of being out on the land and having that relationship with the land, the environment, and each other as we work through the portages and getting to our destination each day.*
>
> *I think one big thing is how—with the treaties—one of the the big things that we're trying to say there is we're Tłı̨chǫ people and this is our Tłı̨chǫ land. This is where we live and we want to continue doing what we've been doing before. For us to carry out our Tłı̨chǫ language, culture, and way of life; and all of the activities that encompasses. By being out with our Trails of Our Ancestors program, we're revisiting these routes that were used and, like I said earlier, want to keep those open. I think that that's what we're doing there. Strengthening with our young people that don't have another means to get out with their family. By offering that opportunity to them—I think that's really important. To help them to understand and to take part and to learn a part of their history that maybe they wouldn't have had the chance to if they didn't take part. I think all of that. And then also, the connections to the land, like the place names and what happened in some of those significant areas.*
>
> *It's really about identity; who we are as Tłı̨chǫ people. For me, that's what these programs mean. So continuing to strengthen Tłı̨chǫ language, culture, and way of life—and transferring that knowledge from generation to generation as best as we can is so important.*[45]

Healing from ongoing impacts of colonization events and colonial structures is demonstrated to be a significant element of the work that all Modern Treaty organizations are doing. Evidence of this can be found in ways that program, service, and institutional designs are grounded in culturally based and informed approaches.

The Trails program ensures accessibility for all Tłı̨chǫ: to their lands, and to the knowledge of Elders and cultural practitioners, transmitted during the journeys over the trials, in the context of land based relationship building among Tłı̨chǫ people.

45 Tammy Steinwand-Dechambeault, Interview by Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, Zoom, transcript, March 28, 2022.

Tłı̨chǫ Gathering Behchokǫ̀. Photograph by Tessa Macintosh, 2013.

◀ John B. Zoe, Image, School of Public Health, University of Alberta, accessed June 23, 2022. https://www.ualberta.ca/public-health/about/faculty-staff/adjunct-emeritus-faculty/zoe.html

▼ Photograph of Trails of our Ancestors program, Image, Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo/Government, accessed June 23, 2022. https://tlicho.ca/news/my-memories-trails-our-ancestors-2015

◀ Tłı̨chǫ 12th Gathering, June 23, 2022, Image, Tłı̨chǫ History: Live, Learn, Experience Tłı̨chǫ, August 24, 2015. https://tlichohistory.ca/en/stories/land-claims-agreement-signed

For More Information About the Trails of Our Ancestors Program

WEBSITE

Trails of Our Ancestors – Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo

RESOURCES

Download the Trails of Our Ancestors pamphlet [PDF]

Download the Trails of Our Ancestors brochure [PDF]

The authors acknowledge that there are many people over the years who have contributed to Trails and that time and resource constraints meant that work remains to be done, and this chapter does not reflect the many other contributions.

Glossary

WORD	MEANING
Mǫwhì Gogha dè Nı̨ı̨tłèe	(Boundary from the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement)
Ndek'àowo	Government
Tłı̨chǫ	Dogrib
Wekweètì	Snare Lake
Whatì	Lac la Martre
Gamètì	Rae Lakes
Wek'èezhìi	Boundary from the Tłı̨chǫ Agreement
Ezôdzìtì	sacred site

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MODERN TREATY
IMPLEMENTATION
RESEARCH PROJECT

Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo
Tłı̨chǫ Government