

February 28, 2019

RE: Ganahghootr'onatan 'We are Learning': a Teetl'it Gwich'in Land Based Learning Project

Drin Gwiinzii. Good Day. We are writing to inform all Gwich'in community organizations, community and regional governments on the status of *Ganahghootr'onatan: 'We are Learning': a Teetl'it Gwich'in Land Based Project*. We want to ensure individuals, organizations and leadership are well informed about the progress of this community-led project

How It Began

The project began with a discussion of community members who met with our Staff and the Dean of the Faculty of Native Studies in September 2016 during the National Reconciliation Forum hosted at the University of Alberta. This meeting was an invitation put out by the Faculty of Native Studies for Gwich'in participants attending the Reconciliation forum in Edmonton. We met with Chief Wanda Pascal of Fort McPherson, and Sarah Jerome from Inuvik. From this discussion there were several ideas about building partnerships to bridge academic learning and youth engagement through land-based opportunities. This idea led us to build a research project in Teetl'it Zheh that focused on a land camp to develop opportunities for youth and community members to re-learn skills and build relationships with elders that centered Gwich'in knowledge. It as well focuses to create critical and engaging educational programming for High School Students on Gwich'in traditional governance, political history, and issues related to land-based learning. Our programming blends traditional knowledge and academic learning that strongly focuses on Intergenerational healing, leadership development, and providing ways to bridge youth success and preparedness for higher learning.

From this meeting, ongoing communication led to a partnership project between the Tetlit Gwich'in Band Council and the Faculty of Native Studies. There was an opportunity for the research team members to apply for an internal research grant supported by the University of Alberta at the end of Fall 2016. The project was a recipient of the Kule Institute for Advanced Study (KIAS) for a total of \$94,000 over a three year period to create and foster communication and to help build this research idea with community members in Teetl'it Zheh. This funding is currently in its third year for the project, and Chief Julius School in Fort McPherson has become our newest community partner on the project.

The Project

The *Ganahghootr'onatan: 'We are Learning': a Teetl'it Gwich'in Land Based Project* will establish a youth-focused community bush camp as a site for Gwich'in land-based practice. This bush camp school will provide a critical land-based education for Gwich'in youth. Immersing them in a transformative experience, guided by elders in a camp whose decision-making process,

curriculum, and activities will be structured by traditional Gwich'in governance processes.

Youth will be given the opportunity to learn summer-based bush skills like fishing and moose hide tanning, along with the running of a camp—set-up, cooking, eating, cleaning, camp management, etc.—in ways that differ from life in town. While a significant part of the bush camp experience is elder-centered practical education, youth will also be exposed to critical Indigenous studies scholarship, Gwich'in history and governance, and decolonial pedagogy.

Through this immersive process, students will be able to renew Gwich'in governance practices, build land-based knowledge and skills, and situate this within a larger narrative of colonization and resistance.

5 Goals of the project:

1. Develop resources for future Gwich'in land-based learning camps based on the knowledge shared at the camp & by the elders who attend;
2. Develop a “How-To” guide for Indigenous communities looking to establish their own community bush camps available as a free download;
3. Publish on the themes, experiences, and challenges that emerged from the camp
4. Host a “land-based learning” conference at the University of Alberta;
5. Develop a fifth outcome with Gwich'in youth participants that will emerge from the project. For this goal to be met, we will support the leadership of youth to envision & carry out this project outcome.

Our Teet'it Zheh community team members possess immense land-based knowledge and have worked with young people on the land for many years. This project represents a coming together of experience that will allow us to increase the scale and reach of on-the-land learning in the North and across Canada. The Faculty of Native Studies is an emerging national leader in community engaged Indigenous research and is in the process of developing several on-the-land learning projects.

Stages of Work

Over the course of three years, the project has held two planning meetings in Edmonton for our team members (April 2017 and August 2018), and University research team members had made three community visits to Teet'it Zheh (April 2017, July 2017, October 2017). The Edmonton planning sessions brought people together from the community, as well as researchers from an array of academic disciplines at the University of Alberta interested in supporting with the project. We have members from the University with research experience in areas of Indigenous Governance, Native/Indigenous Studies, Environmental History, and Political Science. The first visit to the community included a meeting with the Renewable Resource Council in Teet'it Zheh, and the Tetlit Gwich'in Band Council for follow up meetings. The later research team visits to the community were to inform the broader community membership and local

organizations about the project, including conducting Elder interviews and consultation for the project. This visit also assisted to identifying what the community, elders, and youth wanted to see at a land camp. Travel dates were selected based on community consultation on when best to attend and visit the region. We held community meetings that brought in interested individuals, both young and old, as well as members from other Gwich'in organizations located in Inuvik (Inuvik Indian Band and Gwich'in Tribal Council).

We have received considerable input and support from Elders and youth in the community, who wish to see the program bridge young and old, and to foster positive relationships to ensure education success. In regards to the project, we received a name--*Ganahghootr'onatan, Teaching Us*--and as well as the best location for a camp up Teetl'it Gwinjik at Dèedhoo Gòonlii Njù' (Mary Effie's Island). The pilot program run will take place in summer of 2019 within a traditional Gwich'in fish camp set up and will run over a 10 day period in early July.

Our community meetings were well advertised within the community and regionally, including announcing over the local radio station, CBQM, and project status interviews with CBC Radio in Inuvik. During our community visits, the project received generous in-kind support in the community by the Hamlet of Fort McPherson, Chief Julius School, the District Education Authority in Fort McPherson, and the Tetlit Band Council.

Where the Project Is Currently

To create community and resource capacity, we have created a Community Project Coordinator position within the community of Teetl'it Zheh for an individual to assist us with communicating project outcomes within members in the community. This position assists with outreach and various initiatives with community members as active participants ongoing in the project. Over a two year time frame we have hired two individuals for the position. Our current Community Project Coordinator is Shayla Snowshoe, who is a University of Alberta student and currently resides in Teetl'it Zheh. If anyone wishes to reach out to Shayla to speak to her on her current job duties related to the project, she can be reached at snowshoe@ualberta.ca.

We have assisted the project to seek external funds to help contribute support for our pilot run in July 2019. The project recently received a 5 year funding commitment from the Office of the Provost at the University of Alberta, demonstrating support for this partnership. We will continue to work to seek supports to ensure that the project is successful. The first week of the pilot program will be offering high school credit course adapting the Land Based Component from the Gwich'in curriculum.

At the University of Alberta, we have developed a curriculum for the second course we will be offering at the camp, *Teetl'it Gwich'in Land Based Governance*. We are at the stage where we will begin planning logistics for the camp set up with our community team members.

Ways to Keep Informed

We have created a contact sheet and received contact information from community members who wish to stay involved with the project. This including phone numbers and email contact information, which information was shared with such individuals over email or phone. Over the course of the project, we have created community newsletters for people to stay to date on the

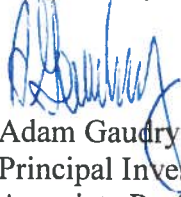
progress and stages that we are working for a successful project. We have shared this newsletter with our community contact list, including various local organizations to share them with their offices. The project has created a Facebook page as a means to share information on behalf of the project and related issues on Land Based Learning with the broader public. You can find the project page under the name *Ganahghootronatan*.

If you would like to be added to our community contact list, please contact Shalya at snowshoe@ualberta.ca

Moving Forward

We plan to continue working closely with our community partners and helping to build more programming for future projects. By providing this project update we hope that it brings awareness to all local and regional governments on the project. If you have any questions or comments relating to the project, you can reach out to us or Shayla, our Community Project Coordinator. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,



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Gwich'in Tribal Council
Designated Government Organizations (Fort McPherson, Aklavik, Inuvik, Tsiigehtchic)
Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board
Community Renewable Resource Councils
Hamlet Municipal Governments (Fort McPherson, Aklavik, Tsiigehtchic)
Chief Julius School
District Education Authority (Fort McPherson, Aklavik, Inuvik, Tsiigehtchic)
Tetlit Gwich'in Band Chief and Council, Tetlit Band Elders Council