



The vision of the Déline Knowledge Centre, as determined by the people of Déline and its partners, is a *gathering of new and old knowledges to benefit everyone and shape the future*. Its mission is to *respectfully understand, preserve, and share knowledge of the Dene environment to benefit all people past, present and future*. (Goldman 2003)

The Déline Knowledge Centre vision and mission were developed through three community focus groups during January 31-February 5, 2003 as well as a facilitated workshop and public meeting on February 18-20, 2003. This article provides a brief description of the Déline Knowledge Centre and its benefits to Déline, other northern communities, and all Canadians based on the planning and activities to date that have taken place primarily within our community of Déline.



Participants in the February workshops. Photo courtesy Karen Edwards.

Our community of Déline, “Where the River Flows,” in the Sahtu Region of the Northwest Territories, is home to approximately 650 Dene, Métis and non-Aboriginal people. It is the only human settlement on Sahtu/Great Bear Lake, the largest lake in Canada and ninth largest in the world in terms of surface area (31,326 km) and volume. Situated within the Arctic Circle, it is the largest lake in the world that is still in a relatively pristine condition, despite historical uranium mining impacts. The Sahtugot’ine have been living with the long-term impacts of the mine that operated at Port Radium on the eastern shores of Great Bear Lake. Port Radium was originally mined for ra-



Irene Betsidea Jonah Modeste and Lee Tutcho of the Deline Knowledge Centre Action Group. Photo courtesy Karen Edwards.

dium in the 1930s and later for uranium ore, all of which was utilized in the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War II. The mine site and surrounding area are now radioactive.

In 2000, Deline embarked on a major multi-disciplinary program to investigate the environmental and human impacts of the uranium mine. This research program has been the catalyst for the development of a centre that integrates Dene and scientific knowledge. While centres for research and knowledge development such as the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, Dene Cultural Institute, Avataq Cultural Institute exist in the North, the Sahtugot'ine believe that diverse knowledge systems must be applied in maintaining a healthy community and environment. Our framework for a knowledge centre builds on the holistic approach taken in the Traditional Dene Environmental Knowledge pilot project conducted by the Dene Cultural Institute in Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake (Johnson and Ruttan 1994), and more recently the Lutselk'e Community Based Monitoring Program of the West Kitikmeot/Slave Study.¹

The concept of the Deline Knowledge Centre is not new. It has been frequently recognized in the past that traditional knowledge can and should be

1. The West Kitikmeot/Slave Study. For more information see: <http://www.wkss.nt.ca/>

mobilized theoretically and practically side-by-side with social and natural sciences in Déline. This recognition is included in the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement; Déline self-government negotiations; the March 2002 Dene Nation Elders Gathering resolution on promoting community research institutions; and the research and community activities of the Déline Uranium Team (DUT). Our Knowledge Centre will incorporate the results and recommendations of the Dene Cultural Institute's Traditional Dene Environmental Knowledge pilot project, thereby providing continuity to the development of long-term Northern research. It will also encourage participatory research methods in the interest of contributing to true community development.

THE DÉLINE KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

A great deal of work has been undertaken not only to conceptualize the Knowledge Centre but also to develop a strategy for its creation. A diverse group of people have come together to develop the vision and plan for the centre. As well, many projects undertaken by the Déline Uranium Team have already been designed and implemented to encompass the Déline Knowledge Centre philosophy. This allows for a seamless transition between the two related programs. A relationship and formal partnership has developed among the Aurora Research Institute (Northwest Territories), the University of Alberta, the Canadian Circumpolar Institute, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (Northwest Territories), and the Déline Dene Band. In addition, many government, non-government, and university research organizations have formally incorporated the Déline Knowledge Centre in their program planning, recognizing the role and value of our Centre. Visiting researchers have already begun presenting their work in Déline and are providing archival materials and results to the community and Knowledge Centre.²

A feasibility study is now being conducted toward the development of a long term business plan for the Knowledge Centre. While the long term funding options are being explored, we are also pursuing project funding to support immediate priority areas of research. For example, we were awarded funding for Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council CURA (Community University Research Alliance) proposal development in

2. Some examples include: Volodya Sertun a visiting photographer and aboriginal activist from Chukotka, Russia recently began an Elders photographic project which will be linked to Chukotka in the Russian arctic; Huey Arden presented his photographic archival materials from Port Radium; and the Great Bear Lake Working Group has formally recognized and included the Déline Knowledge Centre in their Working Group Work Plan.

the spring of 2003 and a full proposal was being submitted. The University of Alberta (headed by Chris Fletcher of the Department of Anthropology)/Deline Knowledge Centre partnership has also been awarded Canadian Institute for Health Research funding for a three-year period.

Research activities will be designed to enhance community capacities in self-governance (including health, education, and land management), tradi-



Traditional tipi frame overlooking Great Bear Lake. Photo courtesy Karen Edwards

tional knowledge, Dene language, communications, and data management. Our goals include:

- the development of pools of expertise in the community within these fields;
- a layer of individuals with the capacity to lead and facilitate community participation and guide input in Knowledge Centre activities;
- a series of pilot projects to serve as a basis for the growth and development of the Centre;
- materials and activities to educate the community about pilot projects;
- a strategy for the long-term development and sustainability of the Centre;
- a physical building to serve as the infrastructure for the collections and activities of the Centre;

- a framework and integrative model which supports the development of similar community institutions across the North.

The Déline Knowledge Centre encompasses the physical (building and location) as well as the conceptual (project ideas, program planning, people and organizations involved, funding proposal development, etc). In keeping with Déline's vision for a Centre that architecturally fits within its environment, the Déline Knowledge Centre will consist of a beautiful building along the shore of Great Bear Lake with a distinctively Sahtugot'ine flavour. One of the prime functions of the Centre is the development, management and coordination of monitoring and research within the Déline District. Given that the lake is central both to the ecosystem and to the lives of the Sahtugot'ine, the Centre will be physically connected to the lake with access for boat mooring as well as an area from which community people and researchers can look out upon the lake during mutual discussions. The physically central nature of the building within the community allows for community members, partnering resource people, and visitors to work together and learn from one another.

A main concern of Déline Elders is developing methods to bridge the increasing gap between Elders' knowledge and youth education. The Knowledge



Déline Elders participating in February 2003 workshops. Photo courtesy Karen Edwards.

Centre will be a place where the knowledge of Elders and researchers can be harnessed to benefit the youth. The Deline Knowledge Centre is not a static entity or concept; in keeping with the Elders' vision of the Knowledge Centre as a catalyst for on-the-land research and education, programs will take place on the land as well as in the Centre itself.

The Deline Knowledge Centre has identified three interrelated priority areas of research: culture, health and environment. The research approach will most often be interdisciplinary, reflecting the holistic and integrative Dene knowledge system. The Deline Knowledge Centre will operate on an integrated programming and services model in which traditional knowledge and social/natural/physical sciences are used together where possible. For example, we have visualized the Centre as having laboratory space for local and visiting researchers that includes both social/cultural and environmental/ecological activities and programs. A multi-media library, which consists of all past and present Deline District research, language, and educational materials, will be accessed by interested people and organizations. While the majority of the information and knowledge about the Deline District that has been collected and developed in the past has until now been stored elsewhere, this library will become the central repository for information about Deline District lands and people. Researchers, local people, and outside interested organizations will be encouraged to contribute to the library and access the materials in a variety of formats. Because the archive will be Deline controlled, sensitive information and traditional knowledge can be stored and utilized with the understanding that its use and dissemination will be secure and community wishes about use of information will be respected. Community empowerment with respect to this information can support self-government activities but will also assist the community in dealing with social and environmental change now and in the future.

The Deline Uranium Team and Deline Dene Band have established a Protocols and Guidelines Committee to guide research projects in the community subject to community review and Band Council approval. These guidelines will ensure appropriate community participation and ownership of the research process while satisfying national and territorial research institutions' ethical research policies. The community guidelines will also clarify accountability requirements in knowledge dissemination.

The Deline Knowledge Centre, however, will not only be a repository for data and reports. The Centre will promote the cross-cultural sharing of ideas, information and knowledge, and create new ways of developing and integrating knowledges that have been historically separated into artificially

constructed disciplinary categories. The Centre will serve as a gathering place for research, cultural and learning activities; a space for multi-media displays and discussion of local and outside research results and future planning; and a quiet place for listening, translation and transcription of Dene language and oral history projects; and a place for planning traditional bush activities.

BENEFITS OF THE DÉLINE KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

The benefits of a Knowledge Centre in Déline are manifold and diverse. Within our community, organizations responsible for the management of the land and waters will be assured that their documented work is properly archived and available for use in the community as well as available to other communities and organizations outside Déline. Our students in Déline will have access to not only information but also resource people such as Elders, researchers, and visiting graduate students in the educational setting of the Knowledge Centre building as well as on the land. Research organizations including university and government partners will have a space to meet and a place from which to work. Perhaps most importantly, the people of Déline will be able to stop in to the Déline Knowledge Centre to meet new and visiting researchers, find out what is happening on the land, and become involved



Back row: Dennis Kenny, Jane Modeste, Ken Caine, Mike Salomons, Marlene Tutcho, Deborah Simmons

Front row: Walter Bayha and Karen Edwards

The Community University Expo Conference in Saskatoon, May 2003. Photo courtesy Karen Edwards.

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in research projects. Ultimately, people will feel assured that they are indeed informed and up to date in an ongoing process of true partnership and participation in research agenda development and priority setting.

Elsewhere, research and educational facilities have been established with start-up funding sources, but long-term operational costs have not been properly considered. A Deline Knowledge Centre infrastructure feasibility study is currently underway in which initial and long term operational costs and maintenance will be realistically determined as options scenarios. The Centre will include office and laboratory space for long and short term leasing/rental by research organizations working with the community relating to the land and water.³ Tourism opportunities also exist linked to the Deline Dene Band's Grey Goose Lodge Outfitting and Guiding business venture. From an economic perspective, the Deline Knowledge Centre may be able to generate a small amount of revenue, and possibly employment, for the community. Indirectly, savings to the community will be most significant by combining research-related forces and also creating a synergy between community organizations such as the Deline Dene Band, Deline Land Corporation, Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated, Sahtu Renewable Resource Board, Deline Renewable Resources Council, and co-management boards established under the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

Outside of Deline, our Knowledge Centre will benefit other aboriginal communities facing similar political and resource management issues by providing operational, ethical, and community-based methodological guidance for their own community-led initiatives. The broader research community and society in general will benefit by being shown how the fostering of partnerships with inter-related knowledge systems and community-based participatory research methodologies can contribute to good research results and applications. In a Northern context, the Deline Knowledge Centre is a natural progression from the Traditional Dene Environmental Knowledge Pilot Project conducted in the Sahtu, demonstrating that the groundwork laid and wealth of knowledge gained in Fort Good Hope and Colville Lake has not been forgotten but rather is a valuable resource in the development of the

5. These include, for example, the Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Resource Wildlife and Economic Development; Aurora Research Institute and partners; Government of Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Parks Canada; Sahtu Renewable Resources Board; University researchers; and other research organizations requiring research and operational facilities. While sharing the same research and program operations building is economical, it will also serve to develop stronger relationships between community people and those working for outside organizations.

Déline Knowledge Centre, and possibly other Knowledge Centres in Northern communities.

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REFERENCES

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2003 Deline Knowledge Centre Strategic Planning Recommendations. February 18-20. Déline, Northwest Territories.

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Editorial Note

This article will be followed in an upcoming issue with a more reflective, "How did we get from there to here?" piece. Its intent will be to provide other communities with some insight into the processes involved in community-instituted and maintained change.