

Nation

WACHIYA *opens in* **OLD MONTREAL**



Training Cree Midwives

Female Firefighting Camp

Filming Land Defenders

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Canada Post Publication No. 40015005

Free in Eeyou Istchee

Serving Eeyou Istchee since 1993

CONTENTS



10

Showcasing Cree Art

Wachiya store opens in Montreal



Arts

16 | Sovereign Filmmaking

Photo by Michael Toledano



22 | A bright star



20 | Flame Tamers

EDITORIAL

50 years 4

NEWS

Defending ancestral land 5

Home births 6

FEATURES

Showcasing Cree art 10

Sovereign filmmaking 16

Flame tamers 20

A bright star 22

REZ NOTES

Cruising on the highway of life 25

T&B

Broken treaties 26

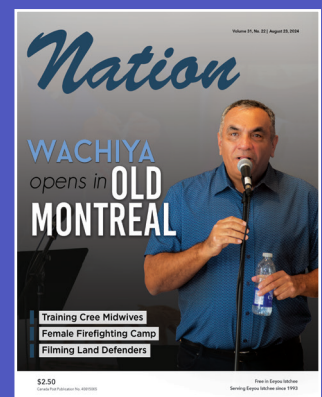


Photo of Gaston Cooper at launch of Wachiya

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50 years

by Will Nicholls



Those two actions, if nothing else, established the Cree as a force to be reckoned with

Some Cree may not realize that it has been 50 years since the Grand Council of the Crees was created to speak for all Eeyou Istchee when the first hydroelectric dams in the territory were being planned and constructed by Hydro-Québec.

A Cree organization that represented all the Eastern James Bay Cree was needed to negotiate on their behalf. Stories abound of those negotiations, both good and bad. If you haven't heard them, ask your Elders. They probably won't white-wash how it was.

In those days there were very few Cree with the level of education that is prevalent today. The bush was a great part of the Cree economy. Most communities were not accessible by roads and what roads existed were usually gravel at best. Phones were few and far between. Band offices were small, unlike the imposing structures we now take for granted. The Grand Council offices back then were in a Val-d'Or mall.

Nevertheless, the Grand Council and their lawyers and consultants managed to negotiate the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), which will have its 50th anniversary next year. It was touted as the first modern treaty. One, which we suspect, the federal and provincial governments wouldn't have signed if they understood all its implications and associated costs.

Many actions taken throughout the ensuing years involved court cases trying to get the federal and provincial governments to live up to their obligations under the JBNQA. Then there were additional agreements, some of which were hotly debated within the Cree world.

Two things stood out for me that the Grand Council undertook. The first being the fight to save the Great Whale River. Insiders said the decision wasn't taken lightly but, in the end, they decided to go ahead. It was this battle that brought the Cree onto the international stage. The fight was on many fronts – court cases in Quebec, papers presented to the United Nations and an appeal to the citizens of New England.

The battle moved to the US because the Grand Council felt that they would have a better chance addressing the people Hydro-Québec was planning to sell the power that the Great Whale Hydroelectric Project would generate.

At times, the US campaign was chaotic as Americans organized or banded together to assist us. Some looked at environment, cultural and other consequences in a scientific manner, other just wanted to protest and others to lobby their political leaders. Some days saw the Cree acting as moderators between the factions more than speaking. In the end, the Great Whale project was shelved, at least for the foreseeable future.

Another moment came in 1995 when Quebec's separatist government was looking to secede from Canada. They planned on taking the Cree and their territory with them. Apparently, the Québécois

had a right to self-determination, but the Indigenous population did not. A referendum was planned by Quebec. The Grand Council decided that if Quebec could hold a referendum, then the Cree could do the same.

In Val-d'Or, a local resident asked what I thought of separation. He was surprised to hear me say I was for separation. Then I explained that I was talking about the Cree separating from Quebec. I assured him that non-Cree communities would become reserves for him and his people, they wouldn't have to pay taxes as we would nationalize the dams much the same way that Quebec did when they created Hydro-Québec.

Alas, the Grand Council didn't add that option to the Cree referendum ballot. Besides the polling station in each community and various towns and cities with a Cree population, helicopters for three days traveled to bush camps with advance ballots so Cree hunters and trappers could have their say. When it was all over 96% of the Cree voted "No" against being separated without their consent from Canada.

We might not have always agreed with everything the Grand Council has done but those two actions, if nothing else, established the Cree as a force to be reckoned with. Congratulations on their 50 years of existence and all the work they have done.

Defending ancestral land

by Joshua Janke

Wet'suwet'en chief declared Canada's **first prisoner of conscience**

In an "unprecedented decision," Amnesty International has designated Wet'suwet'en Chief Dsta'hyl (aka Adam Gagnon) as Canada's first-ever prisoner of conscience (POC).

This designation reflects the growing concern over human rights violations against Wet'suwet'en land defenders, which have been documented by the organization since 2020. Chief Dsta'hyl, Likhts'amisyu Clan Wing Chief of the Wet'suwet'en Nation in British Columbia, is the first of four Indigenous land defenders to be sentenced for criminal contempt after violating an injunction that many see as unjust.

The injunction prohibits land defenders from acting against the Coastal GasLink (CGL) liquefied natural gas pipeline, even when these actions are protected under international human rights standards, including rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. This injunction has been a focal point in the conflict between Wet'suwet'en land defenders and the Canadian government, which continues to permit resource projects on unceded Wet'suwet'en territory without the consent of hereditary chiefs.

Amnesty International defines a POC as someone imprisoned or physically restricted because of their beliefs, ethnic origin, gender identity, or other personal attributes, without advocating or engaging in violence. When Amnesty declares an individual a POC, it demands their immediate and unconditional release.

"The Canadian state has unjustly criminalized and confined Chief Dsta'hyl for defending the land and rights of the Wet'suwet'en people," stated Ana Piquer, Americas Director at Amnesty International. "As a result, Canada joins the shameful list of countries where prisoners of conscience remain under house arrest or behind bars."

Piquer underlined the global significance of Chief Dsta'hyl's work. "With the utmost respect for Chief Dsta'hyl's critical work to protect Wet'suwet'en land, rights and the environment we all depend on, Amnesty International demands his immediate and unconditional release and

urges Canada to stop the criminalization of Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous defenders during a global climate emergency."

The Wet'suwet'en Nation has governed its territories in northern BC for thousands of years, without ever signing treaties or ceding land to Canada. In 1997, the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan hereditary chiefs won a landmark case in the Supreme Court of Canada, known as Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa, which recognized that they had never surrendered title to 22,000 square kilometres of land.

Despite this ruling, the Canadian and BC governments continue to assert jurisdiction over Wet'suwet'en territory, granting permits for projects like the CGL pipeline without obtaining the hereditary chiefs' consent. This ongoing conflict has led to the repeated arrests of Wet'suwet'en people who uphold their traditional laws by occupying and controlling access to their lands.

Speaking from his home, where he is under house arrest, Chief Dsta'hyl emphasized that his struggle is part of a much larger resistance that has been ongoing for centuries. "This fight has been going on for 240 years," he said. "We have been incarcerated on the reserves where they have turned us into 'Status Indians.' Now, we are all 'prisoners of conscience' because of what the colonizers have done to us."

Chief Dsta'hyl believes that protecting the land is a duty inherent to his role as a leader. "I've been convicted for protecting my own land, my ancestors' land, while our Wet'suwet'en laws have been sidelined and our demands ignored," he remarked.

In July 2024, Chief Dsta'hyl was sentenced to 60 days of house arrest after the BC Supreme Court granted an injunction to CGL, aimed at preventing land defenders from protecting Wet'suwet'en territory. The court heard that the 68-year-old Chief Dsta'hyl has been diagnosed with Stage 4 lymphoma. He will serve his sentence at home in Witset, with allowances to leave for swimming, which helps alleviate his cancer symptoms.

During the trial, Chief Dsta'hyl testified that his actions against the pipeline were in accordance with traditional Wet'suwet'en law, which mandates the protection of land, water, burial sites and historic trails.

His lawyer, Rebecca McConchie, argued that the criminal contempt charge punished the chief "for upholding Indigenous law because doing so breached a colonial court order." She demanded that the chief's actions be understood in the context of "the oppression of Wet'suwet'en people in colonial history and the ongoing issues with unceded land."

Justice Michael Tammen recognized that the underlying issues of Indigenous land rights and the consultation process for industrial projects remain unresolved. "These protests require a political solution," he stated. The judge added that in his entire career, he had never seen as "impressive a collection" of reference letters. He said the people described Chief Dsta'hyl as a "bridge-builder" whose actions "embodied the principles of reconciliation and revitalized his culture."

Amnesty International's declaration of Chief Dsta'hyl as a POC comes at a time of heightened global awareness about climate change, with devastating wildfires raging in places from Alberta to California, and record-breaking global temperatures.

Gabrielle Pauzé, Director of Operations for Amnistie internationale Canada francophone, reinforced the urgency of Chief Dsta'hyl's case, stating, "Taking peaceful action to defend unceded ancestral land should not be treated as a crime. Chief Dsta'hyl has been convicted for peacefully protecting Wet'suwet'en territory against the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline."

"According to Amnesty International, he should not have been prosecuted in the first place. It is important to remember that Indigenous People are defending natural ecosystems that lessen the impacts of climate change. It is certainly not productive to prosecute them for protecting those ecosystems."

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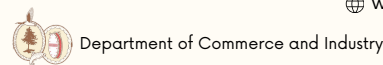
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Home births

by Patrick Quinn, *Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

Cree Health Board delivers midwifery program

The Cree Health Board has launched its groundbreaking midwifery training program – Eeyou Istchee Pimâtîsuwin Chiskutumâchuwin (EIPC). An emotional gathering July 26 brought together people who have worked for decades to return childbirth to the territory.

“Since time immemorial, Cree women have given birth on the land,” stated CHB chairperson Bertie Wapachee. “For decades, Cree women have expressed a desire to reclaim this traditional practice. This program enables our trainees to follow in the footsteps of their grandmothers and ancestors.”

This unique collaboration with the Ordre des sages-femmes du Québec (OSFQ) will train Cree midwives to provide comprehensive care throughout low-risk pregnancy, labour, birth and postpartum stages. While the first four chiskutumwaakanch (learners) selected from over 30 applicants recently began in Chisasibi, the program will expand to Waskaganish in January, followed eventually by Mistissini.

Lamenting that too many Cree women have experienced obstetrical violence giving birth outside their communities, Wapachee said traditional birthing practices promote holistic health, belonging and unity. In her opening prayer, Irene Bearskin House spoke of the ancient gift that is the Cree welcoming song for newborns.

An advisory group of community representatives oversees the program content and selection process. As Quebec’s Midwives Act enables Indigenous programs to provide provincial licenses without education prerequisites, admission criteria prioritized personal qualities like patience, compassion and commitment.

“It was clear from the beginning of community consultations that the program had to be accessible and sustainable,” said Jasmine Chatelain, a registered midwife and EIPC’s planning, programming and research officer. “We focused on people who are really invested in supporting the reclamation of traditional midwifery skills and cultural teachings.”

To support aspiring midwives financially during their on-the-job training, the chiskutumwaakanch receive compensation, complete with benefits and holidays. Gaining both modern medical skills and traditional knowledge, trainees working alongside experienced midwives are expected to complete 60 births to qualify as certified professionals.

While traditional midwives delivered babies on the land until being outlawed in the 1970s, a birth re-enactment in 2016 demonstrated how Cree knowledge could complement modern practices. Services with non-Indigenous midwives soon followed in 2017, resulting in the first mitchuap (teepee) birth in over 50 years occurring in Chisasibi in 2022.



“There’s nothing different from a hospital than a teepee in terms of medical equipment and medication,” asserted Chatelain. “The difference is access to more hands if you have an emergency. Midwives are by far the experts in managing labour and birth here.”

From a slow trickle, pandemic restrictions swiftly accelerated births in Eeyou Istchee to the point where 85% of pregnant women in Chisasibi are currently cared for by midwives. Chisasibi now hosts about 35 to 40 births annually from mothers across the region, a number that has been increasing in recent months as midwives have begun prenatal and postnatal care in Whapmagoostui, Wemindji, Eastmain and Nemaska.

While birth homes are planned for construction in Waskaganish, Mistissini and Chisasibi, an interim birthing home in Chisasibi welcomed its first baby in November 2021. The vision is to restore utinaausuwin (midwifery) “from root to branch” with an Eeyou-Eenou kaa utinaausut (midwife) for every family.

Midwives provide abundant information to help mothers make informed choices, supporting their decisions to give birth in hospital or any dwelling on the land. The EIPC curriculum includes making various traditional dwellings, following the appropriate protocols and ceremonies.

Although research shows that out-of-hospital birth is just as safe, even in remote areas, that’s based on thorough screening that continues throughout labour. Midwives would recommend moving closer to hospitals or medevac if a “pink flag” signals higher risk. While

they’re trained for unpredictable emergencies, nurses are increasingly being trained to be safety backups for birth.

The chiskutumwaakanch will eventually be sent off-territory to Puvirnituk and later Val-d’Or and Gatineau to achieve the necessary birth volume, develop clinical skills in diverse environments and build working relationships with obstetricians. Nunavik’s trailblazing maternity department in Puvirnituk was created in 1986 and now hosts about 250 births annually.

“I’d say our program is an adapted version of their program,” explained Chatelain. “They started midwifery services and their education program before it was legal. Inuit women just said we’re not going south anymore so you better figure it out.”

Provincially recognized since 2008, Inuulitsivik’s internationally acclaimed programs have led to over 90% of deliveries being done in Nunavik. Hired as consultants two years ago, Inuulitsivik has generously shared knowledge and materials instrumental to EIPC’s curriculum.

Legendary midwife Akinisie Qumaluk, whose 746 births included her great-grandchildren, joked at the launch about getting normal sleep now that she’s retired. Visiting Eeyou Istchee for the first time last spring, Qumaluk was excited to meet dozens of relatives of her ancestor Agnes Snowboy.

As training stems from traditional knowledge, Cree Elders are as integral to the program as the non-Indigenous midwives mentoring the students. There’s a policy, procedure and budget to have

an Elder in every single visit with clients, students and births.

“We’re the first department to ever have Elders in clinic,” Chatelain shared. “When I was figuring out how to compensate them no one knew what to do because it had never been done.”

Cultural resource officer Paula Napash has been a vital bridge between students, Elders and midwives, maintaining cultural safety and serving as “a true mentor” to the students. While Cree midwives won’t have every skill or resource, they will be expected to link families with knowledge keepers, traditional healers and community organizations beyond the CHB when necessary.

Students will soon be working with Elders and midwives to lead open workshops for families focused on cultural teachings around nutrition, for example. As “leaders in reproductive justice,” Cree midwives will become valued educators for all stages of women’s sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Chatelain suggested midwives could help compensate the chronic nursing shortage, such as in Wemindji where there’s currently no Awash nurse. While a few students from EIPC’s long waiting list will begin in January, she hopes to also add students in Whapmagoostui, sharing services and mentoring with Inuulitsivik.

“My dream is we have students in every community whether or not there are births happening because where there are services there is education,” affirmed Chatelain. “I am very proud this program has been created from the ground up – we all carry a piece of the puzzle.”

NOTICE OF ELECTION FOR CHAIRPERSON OF THE CREE SCHOOL BOARD

ELECTION DAY:
Wednesday, October 9, 2024

NOMINATION INFORMATION:

Opens August 14 and closes September 9, 2024. Candidates must meet eligibility criteria and be nominated by ten eligible voters using specified forms.

FORMS AND DEADLINE:

Nomination forms are available from the Regional Returning Officer or can be downloaded from the Cree School Board website. Completed forms must reach the Regional Returning Officer by September 9, 2024, 11:59 p.m.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

For any inquiries regarding the chairperson elections, kindly contact Regional Returning Officer, John Henry Wapachee at 514-601-4607 or regionalreturningofficer@cscree.ca

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Innu Nimaku draws
record crowds

The Festival Innu Nimaku in Mani-utenam celebrated its 40th edition July 30 to August 4 with record attendance of over 30,000 people during six days of festivities. More than 60 shows featured Indigenous primarily artists, as well as international stars like Bryan Adams, Flo Rida, Aqua and Samantha Fox.

"The artists were impressed by the vibrancy of the crowds and left waving to the fans who welcomed them with passion," said event coordinator Normand Jr. Thirnish Pilot.

Organizers collaborated with a company offering all-inclusive tent rentals to accommodate the unprecedented crowds. Along with the two stages on the main site, a third was established on the Innu Nikamuniss site less than a kilometre away, a free family celebration venue located in the centre of the community.

This Mixbus stage presented a variety of free performances, traditional activities, lectures, tastings and other ways of experiencing Innu culture. "Children are a big part of the festival," explained Thirnish Pilot. "We want to see them laugh, sing and dance

freely, to give them hope for a better future."

High school graduates from the nine Innu communities were honoured in the company of chiefs and dignitaries, who witnessed the traditional launching of mortars carried by the graduates. This academic achievement, celebrated each year as part of the festivities, is always a moment of collective pride.

The 1,300 members of the Mani-utenam community decorated their homes, and some even offered visitors access to the territory, lodging, refreshments or objects from their culture.

Located 15 kilometres east of Sept-Îles, the alcohol-free festival takes place on the grounds of a former residential school. Launched in 1985 by a community group that included musician Florent Vollant, it was fitting that his duo Kashtin offered a powerful performance on opening night.

The second night featured Inuk singer-songwriter Elisapie. Weekend shows were highlighted by a pyromusical show and luminous drones lighting up the skies. Before Flo Rida's electrifying performance, Cree-Naskapi rapper Kong delivered an impressive set including friends DJ Blaster, Will E. Skandalz Digital Fire and Violent Ground.

Playing his greatest hits for the closing show, Bryan Adams drew a historic crowd of all generations.

Oji-Wan **Kinobe**

An Ojibway-language version of Star Wars: A New Hope earned rave reviews at its world premiere in Winnipeg August 8. The project was a collaboration between the Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council, the University of Manitoba, Disney/Lucasfilm and APTN.

Dubbed over 10 days in Winnipeg, the final mix was completed at Skywalker Sound in California. After a limited release in select markets, it is slated to debut on Disney+ and APTN.

"The biggest joy out of the whole thing is for my community to see the movie and hear our language in such an epic scale," said Dennis Chartrand, a member of Minegoziibe Anishinabe in Manitoba, who voiced the dialogue of infamous villain Darth Vader.

Chartrand observed parallels between the fictional evil empire and the experiences of Indigenous people in North America, suggesting "The Force" has always been with him. Originally released in 1977 to become one of the most

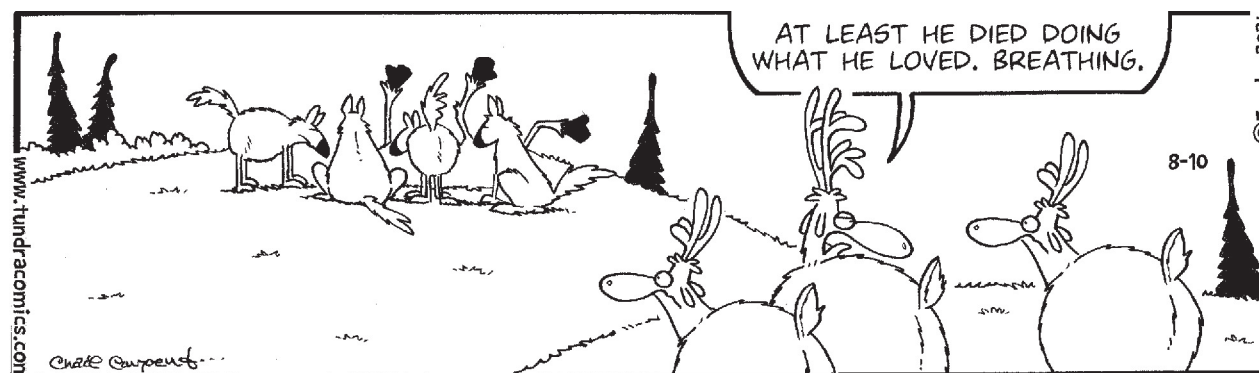
popular films of all-time, Star Wars was previously dubbed in Navajo in 2013.

"For Lucasfilms to take on such a project with us provides us with a new hope that our language can be supported and flourish and have opportunities," said Chartrand.

Ajuawak Kapashesit, who was born in Moose Factory and voiced Han Solo, recalled seeing the original film more than a dozen times and playing the character "every day in the backyard." He called the experience a dream come true.

Theresa Eischen, a member of Little Grand Rapids First Nation who played Princess Leia, was emotional as she spoke about the film's importance in revitalizing and preserving her language and culture. She currently teaches grades 1 to 4 at the school in Little Grand Rapids and hopes her performance will inspire her students.

"A new hope, it's a whole meaning there," said Eischen. "The hope that people will continue to speak our languages. I'm thinking about my community right now because they're all my teachers - this is a full-circle moment."





Showcasing Cree Art

Wachiya store opens
in Montreal
by Will Nicholls



It was a beautiful sunny day August 6 when Wachiya officially opened its doors in Old Montreal. Cree Grand Chief Mandy Gull was proud to be there for this special event. "I know our Cree artists are going to have a place where they can showcase their work," she said.

Being able to support Cree artists regardless of age or where they come from is something that Gull felt was important not only for them, but for the culture and the Cree People as a whole. She said that this had to happen in venues both inside and outside of Eeyou Istchee.

Gull not only supports the idea of Cree being a part of Watchiya, but that other First Nations in Quebec are welcome to have their artists showcased in the store located at 79 St-Paul E., a popular tourist destination.

Gull said Watchiya and its support of Cree artists are part of creating a sustainable economy for Eeyou Istchee. It is the Cree traditional knowledge that informs the products the artists create and while they are valued and used within Eeyou Istchee, it is time that they become part of the outside world.

"We have [Indigenous Affairs] Minister Ian Lafrenière here to open those doors to ensure that we are visible on the international stage as well to show the beauty of Indigenous people from Quebec," Gull said.

Gull ended by giving a shout-out to John Henry Gull, noting his company was a partner in assisting to make the Wachiya store a reality and saying the store was just the first step.

Also in attendance was Deputy Grand Chief Norman Wapachee, who said he remembered the first Watchiya store that opened in Val-d'Or. Ouje-Bougamau Chief Gaston Cooper said that the original Wachiya had given all their unsold stock to the Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association (CNACA) when they closed shop. This allowed them to open a Watchiya online store (wachiya.com) that exists to this day.

"I see the story of the Cree and where we come from," Wapachee said when he looked around the store. "When I look at the snowshoes, I remember my dad wearing them. When I look at the moccasins, I remember my mom making them. My mom would make moccasins for my dad and me to go out hunting. We didn't consider it art like they do today. It was a way of life.

"I killed my first moose wearing the moccasins my mother made and the snowshoes my brother Philip made for me. I can only pray and hope that my children and grandchildren and their descendants are Dab Eeyou who can live on the land and know their traditions and why they lived that way."

Chief Cooper said they are trying to combine their way of life with what is happening around them. He says a working relationship, education and more will benefit both the Cree and Quebec people. "This can be a house for different nations and the house that we can build will be something that we can all be proud of," said Cooper.

Cooper added that Indigenous Peoples not only need to show what they can do in this country but worldwide. He felt that the Cree Nation could inspire as well as make a mark that other First Nations could follow.

Lafrenière said the store in Old Montreal was the perfect place to showcase Cree work and its beauty. He responded to Gull's request for assistance in the international market saying that he would do what he could.

CNACA executive director Dale Cooper said there were so many people who made this store happen and that is true of the many things the Cree do.





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SOVEREIGN FILMMAKING

Yintah documents Wet'suwet'en resistance on the frontline

by Joshua Janke

Photos by Amber Bracken

Yintah is not just a documentary; it's a powerful statement on Indigenous struggles for sovereignty over unceded territories.

The film centres on the Wet'suwet'en Nation's fight against colonial encroachment, illustrating a fierce resistance against a Canadian government intent on seizing land for fossil fuel development.



WEDZIN KWA
CHECKPOINT
UNISTOTEN
TERRITORY

NO ACCESS
WITHOUT
CONSENT



The 22,000 square kilometres of Wet'suwet'en land has never been surrendered, sold or legally placed under Canadian authority.

In 1997, Canada's highest court confirmed the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs' (Dinī ze' and Tsakē ze') ownership of their territory. Despite this landmark ruling, the Canadian government has continued to authorize pipeline construction through Wet'suwet'en yintah (land), sparking a decade-long clash between Wet'suwet'en land defenders and Canadian police.

Yintah documents this ongoing struggle, highlighting key figures like Freda Huson, Molly Wickham and the hereditary chiefs.

As the traditional leaders of the Wet'suwet'en community, the hereditary chiefs are elected officials, as they are only chosen by Elders and other clan members after years of training and observation. Their authority comes from their deep knowledge of Wet'suwet'en laws, traditions and responsibilities, which they exercise by consulting matriarchs and other family and clan members to make decisions by consensus.

This system contrasts sharply with the elected band councils, a creation of the Indian Act imposed by the Canadian government. While there is often overlap between these two systems, their roles are distinct. Hereditary chiefs represent the territories as a whole, upholding Wet'suwet'en sovereignty and traditional governance, while elected chiefs manage and enforce reserve rules that remain from the Indian Act.

Tsakē ze' Howilhkāt Freda Huson is a wing chief of the Unist'ot'en people from the Wet'suwet'en C'ilhts'əkhyu clan. Her journey as a leader in the Indigenous sovereignty movement

began in 2011 when she made a pivotal decision to reoccupy her family's ancestral territory.

Leaving behind a comfortable life, Huson chose to live directly in the path of a proposed pipeline corridor, making a powerful statement against the exploitation of Indigenous lands. Her leadership inspired other Wet'suwet'en families to follow suit, reclaiming their lands and asserting their rights. With the support of numerous allies, she established a healing centre on the land, providing a space for Wet'suwet'en people to heal from the deep-seated traumas of colonialism.

Tsakē ze' Sleydo' Molly Wickham, a wing chief of the Cas Yikh people from the Wet'suwet'en Gidimt'en clan, is another formidable force. For a decade, she has lived on unceded Cas Yikh territory in a cabin strategically positioned to protect a pristine lake from the threat of mining. Wickham is also spokesperson for the Gidimt'en Checkpoint, a critical site in the struggle against pipeline construction. As her clan reclaimed control of their traditional lands, Wickham found herself confronting police forces on her doorstep.

Directors Jennifer Wickham, Brenda Michell and Michael Toledano drew from more than a decade of frontline footage, following two Wet'suwet'en leaders as they reoccupy and protect their homelands in the face of state violence. This approach allows Yintah to mirror the scope of the Wet'suwet'en fight, offering what Wickham describes as "a remarkably cohesive account of a story that police worked hard to suppress."

The film brings the viewer into the heart of the resistance, making the Wet'suwet'en people's fight for sovereignty a shared experience. As director Wickham notes, the filmmakers them-



selves were not immune to the repression. "Throughout the years, our camera operators were held at gunpoint, repeatedly arrested and detained, subject to illegal police exclusion zones, surveillance, harassment and even incarceration," she recounted.

Despite these challenges, Yintah stands as a testament to the power of media to challenge state narratives and support Indigenous sovereignty. The film's creation was also an act of resistance, with every consequential moment captured on camera, offering an unfiltered look at a struggle that is deeply rooted in Wet'suwet'en history and legal traditions. Yintah shines a light on these contradictions between Canadian law and Wet'suwet'en sovereignty.

The 2011 *Canfor v. Sam* ruling by British Columbia's Supreme Court acknowledged that Wet'suwet'en hereditary decision-making processes are integral to their society. Despite these legal recognitions, the Canadian and BC governments continue to assert jurisdiction over Wet'suwet'en territory, issuing permits for resource projects without the consent of the hereditary chiefs.

Toledano, also the film's cinematographer, emphasizes the significance of documenting this struggle. "Wet'suwet'en people upholding decisions made in accordance with Wet'suwet'en law have been criminalized by the Canadian state," he stated.

Arrests have been made for simply occupying and controlling access to traditional territories. As Toledano put it, "Colonial forces conspired to criminalize Wet'suwet'en jurisdiction, we as filmmakers worked to uphold it."

Highlighting the collaborative nature of the filmmaking process, Michell notes that the film was developed with intensive participation from Wet'suwet'en leaders and co-directed by the immediate family members of the film's protagonists.

"Adopting a decision-making structure which mirrors the practices of Wet'suwet'en self-governance, the film relied on collaboration and consensus-building to share this vital history," Michell explained.

Yintah is a project deeply rooted in Wet'suwet'en governance, embodying the principles of 'anuc niwh'it'ën (Wet'suwet'en law) throughout its creation. Wickham explains that each Wet'suwet'en family depicted in the film held decision-making power over their own representation.

"In Wet'suwet'en law, each house or family group is the sole decision-making authority on their house territories," she said. "So, in Yintah, each house group was given creative authority over the representation of events on their house territories."

This resulted in a process where the Dinī ze' and Tsakē ze' (male and female chiefs) and Skiy ze' (children of chiefs) of the Wet'suwet'en "effectively guided and authorized the depiction of this vital chapter of Wet'suwet'en history."

By adhering to Wet'suwet'en law, Yintah challenges the conventional power dynamics of filmmaking, where often the subjects of a documentary have little control over their portrayal. Instead, this film represents a decolonized approach to storytelling, where the Wet'suwet'en people have full control over how their history and struggles are depicted. As a result, the film is both an expression of Indigenous sovereignty and an attempt to decolonize history.

Flame Tamers

Camp Molly prepares young women to be future firefighters

Photos & article by Ramelle Mair

Be prepared to be challenged.
Be prepared to be empowered.
Be prepared to change the way you see yourself!

That's the Camp Molly motto and it measured up as they executed their first firefighting camp in Chisasibi July 24-27.

Kingston Fire Chief Monique Belair founded Camp Molly in 2019 to expose girls to all aspects of working in the fire service. Camp Molly Chisasibi was the first camp with only Indigenous participants to be held in an Indigenous community.

It was also Belair's first time visiting an Indigenous community and she was surprised. "I had some preconceived notions," she said. "I was thinking I'm going to have this really remote area that doesn't have modern necessities, and I was shocked to see that the fire department is so well equipped. And to learn that the make-up of the Chisasibi Fire Department is now 50% female. You never see that in municipal fire services. Ever!

"It just shows that they're ahead of us in that aspect of diversity in the fire service.

That they're accepting of women."

The free, three-day camp gave girls a chance to don firefighting bunker gear and then operate the "jaws of life" to tear apart cars, handle water-charged hoses to put out fires and climb a 75-foot aerial ladder.

"Some of my staff can't go that high. They're afraid of heights," laughed Chisasibi Fire Chief Maurice Napash.



But 15-year-old April Shanush of Wemidji accepted the challenge. "I was climbing the ladder, and I wanted to turn back, but I kept going and I made it to the top. I'm most proud of getting to the top rung," beamed Shanush.

"I can't tell you how many firefighters I know won't climb a 75-foot ladder," remarked Belair.

There were 11 campers from four different communities – five from Wemindji, two from Eastmain, one from Whapmagoostui and three from Chisasibi. The camp also received applications from three adults and the organizers invited Allanna Gilpin, Carly Diamond and Mary Gillies from Waskaganish to be platoon captains.

"It was a life-changing experience," said Gillies. "I loved connecting with the other girls and I have confidence to complete my studies and pursue firefighting."

Thirteen-year-old Mercedes Bearskin was a camper in Gillies' platoon. "I made new friends especially with Mary when we were making our fire awareness video. We talked a lot about supporting each other," said Bearskin.

Each platoon was charged with creating a social media PSA on an aspect of fire prevention and safety. Overall, Indigenous people are five times more likely to die from a fire than the general public. That's one of the reasons the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council supports Camp Molly as a way to provide life safety training and fire prevention education that participants can share with members of their community.

"Everything they did was impressive. We have female firefighters, but we need more," said Napash. "Hopefully, we'll see one girl from Camp Molly join a fire department in the future."

Deputy Fire Chief Eliza Moses of Eastmain drove up with two participants and volunteered her services. "It's my first time seeing Camp Molly. Hopefully next year they bring it back to our community," said Moses.

Juliette Ottereyes was the main coordinator with the Chisasibi Fire Department and credits her team and the support of the Chisasibi Cree Nation and Council for making the camp a success.

"I mostly work in the office, so it was fun [and exhausting] to get back into my bunker gear," remarked Ottereyes. "And it was really special to do the fire exercises with my daughter Mercedes."

The Chisasibi Fire Department didn't just help to execute the fire activities, firefighter Henry Cookish also has a side hustle as a caterer and provided snacks and meals for the campers and volunteers.

Typically, Belair has 60-90 volunteers to assist her run a four-day camp with urban firefighting halls. In Chisasibi, Belair had a handful of volunteers including her own Deputy Chief, Don Carter and his wife Natasha, who drove 17 hours from Kingston with a U-Haul filled with bunker gear, firefighting equipment, a 40lb propane tank, medical gear and SCBA packs.

Firefighting students Mackenzie Henry and Corrie Pearson flew in from Ontario to assist with leading the evolutions. They quickly became the most popular amongst the girl campers. An unexpected volunteer was firefighter Marc-Andre Roy from Wemindji. Roy drove the three Wemindji participants to Chisasibi, and was quickly recruited.

"I would hire Marc-Andre on Kingston Fire and Rescue – that's what I think of him," said Belair. "For somebody who was just driving a few campers and who happened to have his bunker gear, to offer help and volunteer and stayed for the whole camp... He worked!"

"I knew little of Camp Molly," admitted Roy. "I didn't not know how far they would push things or how much they would show, or how much they would let the girls do hands-on tasks

themselves. Auto-extrication was for me, one of the highlights. I've rarely seen so much hands-on work done by such young and inexperienced people in that field. They took multiple cars apart entirely. It was excellent practice for me just to watch them operate. That was fun."

The final day ended in a relay race and water-ball competition with Team Yellow capturing gold medals in the relay. "Paris has the Olympics, Chisasibi has Camp Molly and we're handing out medals to our girls," Napash proudly stated.

It was an emotional graduation ceremony as families drove in from various communities to see their daughters receive certificates and medals. Firefighting instructor and volunteer Pearson addressed the audience in her

Mohawk language and gifted Fire Chief Napash with sweetgrass, white sage, tobacco and seeds from her community of Tyendinaga.

"Corrie got up and introduced herself in the Mohawk language. And brought gifts from the Mohawk community and gifted to Maurice. And Maurice is a very quiet man, but you could clearly see that he was touched by the gifts. You could even see, a shift in all the parents. Those are things I don't see at most camps," Belair remarked.

Belair already has plans to have another all-Indigenous camp at Sioux Lookout First Nation in northwestern Ontario next summer and is hoping to come back to Eeyou Istchee to inspire other young Cree girls to join their local fire brigades.



A Bright Star

Whapmagoostui's Jade Mukash shines at first Miss Indigenous Canada pageant

by Sakib Hossain

Jade Mukash, a 25-year-old artist and youth advocate from Whapmagoostui, has made her community proud by winning the Traditional Knowledge Award at the first-ever Miss Indigenous Canada pageant.

Held July 27 in the Haudenosaunee territory of Six Nations of the Grand River in southwestern Ontario, the event is designed to empower young Indigenous women by promoting culture, community and leadership.

Mukash was one of 26 contestants selected from over 700 applicants nationwide. Representing Quebec alongside Kahentisa's Alfred from Kahnawake, she brought her deep connection to her culture and community to the forefront throughout the three-day event, which included workshops, cultural presentations and personal essays.

"It's not a beauty pageant," Mukash explained, emphasizing the pageant's focus. "It's more about learning ambassadorship qualities, creating connections and understanding more about ourselves and our heritage."

Mukash's dedication to preserving and promoting traditional knowledge in her community was a significant factor in her recognition. As a Youth Representative for the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEI), she has been an advocate for the positive impact of traditional and ceremonial



lifestyles. Her efforts to raise awareness about the importance of these traditions have made her a respected figure in Eeyou Istchee.

In addition to her work with CWEI, Mukash is a strong advocate for proper healthcare in remote communities. Working part-time in healthcare administration, she contributes directly to improving the mental health and well-being of Indigenous youth.

"I want to show them that there's always an option to go back to our roots, to our ceremonies," she said.

Her passion for the arts is another aspect of her identity that Mukash shared at the pageant. With professional experience in acrylic painting, drawing, graphic design and performing arts,

she uses art as a means of expression and cultural preservation.

The Miss Indigenous Canada pageant's mission is to empower young Indigenous women to develop leadership skills, give back to their communities, and connect with their cultures. By winning the Traditional Knowledge Award, Mukash has not only highlighted the importance of her cultural heritage but also set an inspiring example for others to follow.

Reflecting on the experience, Mukash expressed her gratitude and excitement for what lies ahead. "This experience has been about more than just a title," she said. "It's been about connecting with other Indigenous women, sharing our stories, and finding strength in our shared experiences."

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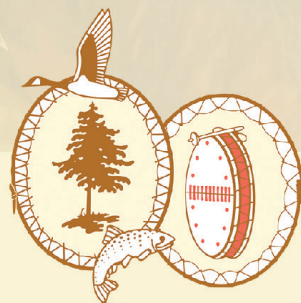
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Cree Indigenous Early Learning Childcare Fund

Contact Person

Ann Marie Matoush,
Special Programs Officer for the IELCC Fund.



Have a question? we are here to help.

418-923-4020 ext: 3228
ann-marie.matoush@cngov.ca



Overview of the Fund

The Cree Indigenous Early Learning Child Care community fund is designed to fund community-driven projects that foster education, Cree culture and language, as well as the health and wellbeing of children 0 to 5 year old's and their families. All projects must also ensure that no children are left behind: activities must be accessible to all children, no matter their level of ability or special need.



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Cruising on the highway of life

by Sonny Orr

My heart starts pumping a little faster. In my life, that means something. Normally, I'm cool and collected and whatever the highway of life throws at me, I generally deal with it.

Sometimes, cruise control is a little dangerous when left unheeded – like forgetting that you set your speed at 140 instead of the recommended 100. The next thing you know, there are indications that can't be ignored. Like slow down, bumps ahead, work in progress or the occasional stop light, which is a strong reminder that you must stop completely.

Meanwhile, your life has stopped, for what? What is going on up ahead? Then the anger sets in and you can't handle it. The urge to light up a cigarette to calm down wins and you take a long drag off the cancer stick. Next thing you know, you're addicted, and you continue this habit for every stop in your life.

After the realization that you must continue no matter what, you get back in the driver's seat and resume your journey. After several stops and delays that day, you just accept it as something that needs to get done to restructure your way towards your destination.

As a human being, it's necessary to eat to stay alive and on this journey,

eating good home-made cooking isn't on the menu. Family meals, comfort foods, or traditional feast foods are not even considered. Today, it's all about eating on the go, greasy fast foods at drive-throughs, with disposable utensils.

Pretending you're always lucky no matter what you do, there is such a thing as bad luck and throwing the dice all the time doesn't mean that you'll always win. No, there will be a time when you lose, such is chance and its follies. The best practice is to pretend that you're always averaging and therefore lengthening the time it takes for bad luck to kick in. So, take breaks and eat something healthy, get rid of some toxic waste, don't be in a rush to reach your destination as it's still a long way to go.

I like to think that life today can go on. But there will be a time when bad luck kicks in and you got to have that angle covered. I know that I've been a good boy– well, most of the time. I don't take chances with life and any penance due is paid in full – call it insurance. It's good to have that covered. Today, another slow down and full stop is happening and I've learnt a lot in this life's journey and refrain from the urge of addictions and toxic waste dumping.

As the voyage nears its end, you think back about the journey's slowdowns and near panic attacks and the lousy choices we made to sustain ourselves. Yet in the end, life is beautiful, even knowing that when the last rays of the sun set, darkness will come.

Our destination looms up ahead, and we rejoice! Yes, we've prepaid everything and now we can reap those benefits in the heavenly room, shower and savour the clean sheets at the newly constructed hotel.

Today, life was good as we obeyed the Highway Code. We stopped at every red light and ate non-fat foods and stayed away from those heart-stopping energy drinks. Today our life's journey took us through 1,000 kilometres of northern wilderness with a several stops to distract our thoughts from meandering off into the wonders of the universe and solving problems.

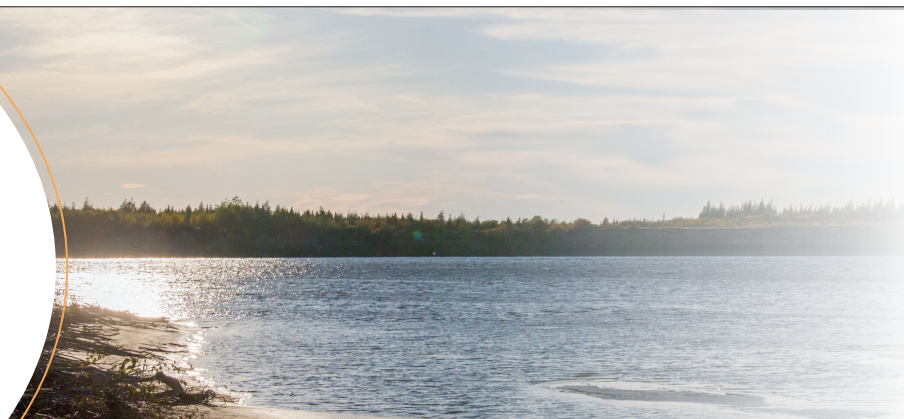
Yep, I'm talking about driving north on the Billy Diamond Highway which it is undergoing an upgrade and has way too many red lights with long waiting periods, enough time to have a cigarette! Yes, life today was good, but occasionally interrupted so we couldn't reach our destination earlier. It felt like an eternity and an endless journey. Such is life today.



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These past few months, provinces have been taking big losses in Supreme Court against Indigenous people and I'm so here for it. The latest ruling on the Robinson treaties could create an interesting precedent for nations still under archaic treaties.

In July, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Crown breached the Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior treaties by not increasing annuity payments since 1875, despite substantial economic gains from resource extraction and land development around the Great Lakes.

The 1850 treaties required the Crown to increase payments over time, but they remained at \$4 per person. The Supreme Court emphasized the severe impact on the Anishinaabe communities, who have been facing poverty and inadequate living conditions. We've always known that the Crown is in constant violation of its treaties, but to have the Supreme Court recognize it is huge.

The decision orders the Crown to negotiate settlements with the affected nations. The Robinson-Huron Treaty

beneficiaries have settled for \$10 billion, with ongoing talks for future payments. The Robinson-Superior Treaty beneficiaries must reach a settlement within six months, or the Crown will set the payment amount, subject to court challenges. The ruling stresses the Crown's obligation to honour its treaty and constitutional responsibilities and seeks to address longstanding injustices faced by the Anishinaabe people.

The Robinson treaties were the blueprint for the 11 Numbered Treaties the Crown signed with other Indigenous nations in western Canada between 1871 and 1921, as the Dominion addressed land claims from Indigenous peoples following its creation.

To this day, members from these nations still line up on Treaty Day in front of an RCMP officer to receive their annual \$5 compensation. Canada is a G7 country, largely because of the resources it extracts in these territories, making the \$5 annuity a deep insult.

The latest Supreme Court ruling could create a precedent for First Nations out west seeking the revision and redefinition

of outdated treaty clauses and terms, just like Treaty 6 that recently renegotiated the "cows and ploughs" section of their agreement which originally promised agricultural benefits to signatories.

Not only did these nations never receive said cows and ploughs, but the Canadian government confined them to small reservations and systematically prevented them from generating wealth from their resources while giving portions of land for settlers to farm.

Coercion aside, these treaties don't reflect the intent in which they were signed, and they do not reflect the economic aspirations of Indigenous people as contemporary human beings. The signatory chiefs only agreed to share the land and let settlers use the top portion of the soil, no more than the "depth of a plough" – which Canada has been breaching to this day.

I hope to see more nations demand their rightful and constitutional dues in courts soon and challenge the legitimacy of the Crown's heritage.

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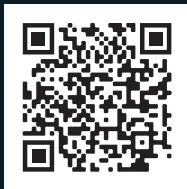
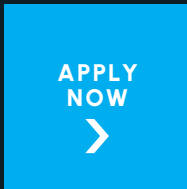
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