

Overcoming Challenges: Indigenous Guardian Responses to Covid-19

Hosted by the Nature United Indigenous Guardians Technical Support Team (TST)

Zoom Discussion May 25th, 2020 10:30-12:00PST

Summary Notes

Introduction and Purpose of Discussion

Following the May 1st online discussion (Talking Together: Indigenous Guardian Responses to COVID-19), where a number of participants discussed challenges their communities were dealing with in response to COVID-19, there was a shared desire to talk more about the ways you are responding to and working around those challenges, and to brainstorm solutions.

Key Themes and Ideas Shared

Operations and Safety

- Trying to get things in place for safe back to work plans for office to open through Health and Safety Committee, and with that a component for working in the field
- Have policies in place for anyone doing field work; must have a COVID plan with measures for safety
 - E.g., Separate vehicles, 6 ft apart in field, can't handle same equipment
- Review what to do when encounter public
 - Call-ins with compliance issue and not sure how to respond safely – how to check nets and gear without coming in contact?
- Protocols set out by Maritime fisheries (East Coast) for physical distancing
 - Crab fishermen maintain quarantine protocols between fishing.
- Guardians going out in trucks with family partners – for health and safety
 - Families getting out to do monitoring – learning opportunities
- Challenges:
 - Encounters with people you don't know are difficult, even with safety protocols in place
 - Cost ramifications – vehicles/gear
 - Increased operating costs
 - paying family members who are not fully trained
 - cost of travelling in different vehicles

Monitoring

- Plans to get Guardians out with hydrologist to monitor hydrometric and climate stations and water sampling
 - Hydrologist has good safety protocols;
 - Guardians are excited to get back out in the field
- Monitoring: technicians doing a lot of Zoom meetings to try to support FN to do the work.
 - Can go through manuals, screen share, and refresh people who are already trained.

Training

- North: people are pivoting towards training.
 - In north – training works better if you do it out of town.
 - Still working out how to do bush camps for training.
 - How to use digital tools and literacies to let Guardians themselves further initiatives?
- Videos and digital stories to support skills transmission, show that folks are out there doing boots on the ground work.
- Community mapping of Dene place names and stories. Track where there are more extreme incidences of climate impacts, caribou impacts. Mapping really important and Guardians are important in this work
 - When GPS not working, using paper maps, oral stories of place.
 - Would love to see magnetic interference map over a caribou migration map.

Guardians Caring for Community Safety and Wellbeing

Visitors from Outside the Area

- Concern about people not wearing masks and not knowing who is passing through
- Positive example shared: Had a person request permission to camp and kayak – they had a safety plan and were given permission by Chiefs because respectful and thoughtful.
- BC Parks is restricting visitors to parks from BC only, so that is helpful

Bush Travel and Way of Life

- Up north: Many people who are leaders of Guardians are out in the bush right now. People are in camps and not coming back until ice clears. Has been a pause.
- Some communities still locked down.
 - Chief and Council are only allowing transportation in and out for medical appointments.
 - Hunting isn't allowed

Supporting Harvesting and Food Security

- Maritime food fishery (East Coast) is up in the air, province is consumed by COVID
 - Difficult to meet food harvesting and food security needs
- This year food security is hugely important and a major focus
 - Keep community fish camps going and turning them in to hunting camps after that.
 - Develop policies re how many people, who can stay the night
 - Create cards that say:
 - Don't unsafely rush home with a kill.
 - Focus on hunting animals that are abundant
 - Hunt with family members, don't go out if sick ideas on.
- Developed a food security subcommittee
 - Hard to get people committed: lots of meetings, not easy work.
- North: Everyone really focused on goose and ducks; still figuring it out
- Trying to get grant money for food security.
 - Desire to invest in a community freezer, in order to store country food.

- Helps to have a stable group of core people who are excited to make it happen.
 - Staff looking for funding to support community harvesting
 - Get \$ into pockets of harvesters, but takes a couple of coordinators from within the community
 - Can't be the Wuna (Dene for white woman); supporting people can support but not make decisions.
- Direction from First Nation Health Authority: better way is to handle meat as big pieces and take it right to homes of people, so they cut, process and package it the way they want.
 - Handle as little as possible.
 - Figure out list of people who need it the most: i.e. Elders, single parents.
- Idea to create videos to show people ways to hunt, prepare meat, so they can gain more confidence.
 - Share hunting methods, not *where* you are going but *how* to prepare, e.g. two days before going out.
 - Share knowledge about what is in season and how to prep it.
- Community garden is also part of food security
 - People working on community gardens
 - Distribute seed packs to community members to make their own personal gardens
 - People can garden in own yards with kids.

Storage Methods

- Working on storage, including a processing area with walk-in cooler to hang meat safely.
- Lots of people have own sheds to hang and cure meat before processing.
- Have arrangement to get meat from Conservation Officers.
 - Goes out to community directly and some put away for events.
- Most people have their own storage. Getting it to their house is the challenge.
 - Give Ziplocks so they can cut up and portion meat the way they want.
 - Got to prioritize who needs it the most: Elders, single parents, big families.

Ideas and Preferences for Sharing Information

- Would be good to have Toolkit site to log in and share information would be good
- Might be good to have a private group to talk about issues. Zoom meetings work well, but also like a space to share resources, post, share ideas. Find out who's working on what, who you can contact.
 - Nature United Indigenous Guardians FB group – can share – it is private, but there are 300 members. Share resources. Too big or smaller group needed?

Resources

- Digital Literacy/Media training
- FNHA harvest recommendations: document covers a lot of good information. E.g., What to have in place if going out to hunt – coolers, etc. Food deliver considerations. Getting resources and supplies to people. <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-Sharing-the-Harvest-during-the-Pandemic.pdf>