

Talking Together: Indigenous Guardians Responses to COVID-19

**Online Discussion – Hosted by Nature United Indigenous Guardians Technical Support Team (TST)
Friday, May 1st, 2020**

Notes

*Individual names have been deleted to respect the privacy of participants.

Introductions

- Acknowledgement and welcome to participants
- Introductions
- Purpose and Structure of Discussion
 - o Space for thoughtful, respectful sharing; goal is to be supportive and useful
 - o Purpose: to provide opportunity for Indigenous colleagues (community members, Guardians, staff) to share experiences of dealing with COVID-19, including challenges, needs, and ideas about how you are finding workarounds, solutions.
 - o Structure: brief intro; Jimmy Morgan shares about Gitanyow; breakout groups; summarize key themes in large group; and resume discussion in small groups; large group wrap up.

Reflections by Jimmy Morgan on Gitanyow Guardians and Community Experience

- Shifting Guardian work depending on individual health concerns
- Helping to set up checkpoints with community members – 24 hrs - 8 hour shifts.
 - o Emergency Operations Committee (EOC) able to pay \$100/day to those working checkpoint.
- Moved from rented trailer to a permanent structure being built at the entrance.
- Doing well –community members care about themselves and others.
- Currently focused on food security and how to get guardians back out monitoring
 - o one guardian going out monitoring with partner, as they are a family unit
- Overall Guardian presence – very important on territory and land; emergency services and food security. Needs a business plan to support it
- Some issues include:
 - o need support from govt; funding
 - o How to get data without Guardians going out?
 - o Harvesters and land users will be going out – can we create a form that they can use to monitor?
 - o Capacity – prior to COVID was already an issue.
 - o Family groups going out becomes expensive after a while.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Is your Guardian program still active? If yes, what does it look like now and how have things changed with COVID-19?**
2. **What are the biggest challenges? What workarounds or solutions are you implementing?**
3. **What are your community's and Guardians' needs, to respond to COVID?**

Summary of Main Themes

Challenges

Guardian Operations During COVID-19

- Now trying to figure out what can happen
 - Difficult to make decisions about what we had planned and what is safe
 - Not running physical patrols; don't want to mix family groups on boats
 - Hard to keep small teams safe
 - Capacity: smaller due to COVID-19 physical distancing
- Some programs still have their Guardians but they are working from home and office bound
- How to engage and get back to work?
 - Uncertainty of how to plan for coming months
 - Education needed for community members and Guardians re dangers of COVID and how to manage them
 - What does COVID mean for operations the rest of the year?
 - Need to figure out how to get organized before moving forward
 - Don't have all the tools needed.
- Indigenous Guardians are expected to turn rules (by leadership) into practice (by community)
 - Instructions are sometimes vague

Monitoring and Research

- ENR shut down water monitoring for summer
- How to meet Guardian program monitoring commitments?
- Indigenous Guardians' research shut down
 - Partnerships with universities are stalled because researchers can't come to community
- Challenges of support people not being able to come to community
 - collaborate with social distance
 - Long term, stable funding
- Concern with mixing between communities
- Hard to get Guardians out in the field because of restrictions

Food Security

- With COVID – food security is a priority
 - Concerned with food security, as transport and supply lines in and out of communities are limited with lock-downs

Funding

- Guardian program funding often relies on data collection, but it is unclear how to keep funding if Guardians can't collect data
- Loss of some funding agreements with change in work and shifting funding

Movement and Transportation

- Challenge of transportation – remote, fly-in communities
- Travel restrictions - – Lockdown with COVID - no one is allowed into many of these communities now
- Compliance with leadership policies might be an issue

Community Connections and Safety

- How to conduct planned activities – gathering community together for meetings;
- Safety of getting people out on the land – can't go out alone, family units expensive way to do field work
- How to do programs that engage Elders and knowledge holders?
- Communications is challenging – remote/road access cut; staff have been re-deployed, so hard to know who we are communicating with; communities have shifted their priorities at the moment

Training

- How to get training when people can't come to community?
- How to switch training to online

Needs**Food Security**

- Stockpiled supplies
- Need storage – especially cold storage for perishable foods, even if grown in community
- Hunter honoraria to harvest and deliver food
- Community Gardens

Youth Programming

- Youth programs: how to run these and how to reassure youth?
- Sharing ideas around youth programming that can be done virtually, including apps

Materials

- Hand-outs, notes, information for checkpoints
 - Want to inform community members but don't have written notes – people don't know what hard rules are

Funding

- Guardians are important for so many roles right now; funding needed to help them switch activities to respond to COVID-19
 - Government needs to recognize that Guardians provide necessary service.
- Steady, reliable, long term funding.
 - Funding is often relatively short term – need to secure bigger picture, longer term funding.
- Dedicated source of funding for Guardian programs.
- Support from government: funding
 - Funding relies on data, which are difficult to collect if Guardians can't go out during COVID restrictions

Training, Information, and Support

- Expertise in how providing guidance on keeping people safe for monitoring work
- Getting info out re: training options for online delivery (e.g., bear safety, GIS tutorials or interactive courses, etc.)
- Research protocols to be taught in an online environment so that Guardians can conduct field work and sampling even without researchers in the community
- Apps – for putting stories (audio/video) up to share Elders teachings and language revitalization
- Apps – for youth engagement – sharing stories, on the land activities, networking, sharing ideas for lessons/cultural teachings
- How to host a virtual bush camp/youth camp – what activities can be taught online – bear safety, community mapping activities (e.g., bear attractants)

Workarounds, Solutions, and Opportunities**Food Security**

- Guardian programs in many regions are prioritizing community food security
 - Working in community gardens
 - Doing some land-based camps, resource harvesting
 - Helping to get and deliver groceries
 - Handling food storage and distribution.

Working in Family Groups

- Family groups working together – finding ways to work together in safe groupings
- Family groups go out on the land, and family camps
- Guardian programs hiring spouses and families to go out monitoring and on the land together for safety

Presence on the Land/Water, and Monitoring

- Develop a business plan to support Indigenous Guardians and their role in these types of situations
- Monitoring commitments – looking at developing procedures for safety – develop guidelines and best practices for field work
- Possible work-around: make a form for harvesters/land-users to fill out recording their observations
- Government to government agreement with Crown Government – to enable Guardians
- Crown Government doesn't have the capacity to patrol the land and waters
- During natural disasters, flooding, fire, and emergencies, Guardian programs can be a central point of contact.
 - For example, when the fires were happening in BC, people from all over the world were coming in to help fight the fires. They knew how to fight fires, but didn't know the territory. Guardians and staff can relay that information to them
 - First Nations are out on the land, and familiar with it.

Flexible Response and Roles

- Guardians responding to situation on daily basis while community on lockdown
- Indigenous Guardians helping to keep community members informed with changing rules/regulations
- Indigenous Guardians become medium between government and community members
- Focus on skills development and wellness camps – have funding but don't know what it's going to look like
- Much more tight communications throughout different levels (e.g. check ins)
- Training – looking at what is available online to replace; looking at virtual delivery by trainers

Community Connections

- Engagement with Elders – looking at using webinars, outreach materials, social media
- Check points around community to check and see who is coming in and who's is going out. Have a record of who has entered and who hasn't

Youth Programming

- Running programs through social media to keep youth engaged (e.g. Sahu Youth Network "show me your COVID")
- school program – on the land learnings (not in schools)
- summer programs look at what can be developed and/or modified and delivered virtually

Research and Partnerships

- University researchers who can't come to communities – working out citizen science that can be done by community harvesters and members (e.g. observations on the land/water)
- BC Coast – BC Parks and Indigenous Guardians have a good relationship, continue to work

collaboratively.

- Hope to be working on the water with Guardians – Have collaborated with joint patrols in the past
- E.g. pilot project where Kitsoo/Xai'xais and Nuxalk guardians will be receiving full authority under the Parks Act.
- Will have authority to be full park rangers when they are out on the water

Funding

- There could be value in sharing funding ideas and resources through this group and with others.
- (BC Coast) Coast Funds offers funding, training, partnerships to coastal communities
- Land needs guardians is an initiative to garner national support for Guardian Programs
 - Indigenous Leadership Initiative → purpose is to raise awareness and lobby federal government for long-term funding.