

2015 Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum

Guardian Program

We are directed by the Elders' Vision for the Chapleau Crown Game Preserve:

The Chapleau Crown Game Preserve is a leading example of First Nations and municipalities, industries and government working together to responsibly steward the land, waters, and their resources in a sustainable way that will protect values, promote biodiversity, support current and emerging economies, and provide access to the land for ceremony, teaching/learning, harvesting, and spiritual connection.

This Vision was confirmed and presented to MNRF and local and regional partners in March 2015, and it guides the activities we're undertaking. There have been discussions and a desire to have a Guardian program for a number of years, but 2015 is the first pilot year of the program. This season, we focused on getting Guardians and Elders out on the land to 'ground-truth' the 2014-2015 map analysis.

Why?

This phase provided actual opportunities for people to work on the land (proof of possibility), increased the information available for business planning, built tangible skills, created protocols for operating on tenured land (including safety, transit, timing), and affirmed the authority of the Elders in the CCGP for ecological health. The results of the work will be used to select sites to test-tap birch trees to measure the quality and quantity of sap flow – essential for determining whether a viable business in birch syrup is possible.

How?

After a week-long training in Chapleau in July, three crews were established for a small and focused Guardian's Program Phase One. A few Elders and a few Guardians were carefully selected to work with the Ecotrust Canada team in the CCGP during the summer of 2015 – groundtruthing the information sets created for the business feasibility studies. They developed the skills of working in field positions, and were charged with helping the region to understand where economic alternative activities may be able to succeed.



Photo: plant identification at training

Results

We had eight Elders & Guardians trained and working on the land, one field coordinator, and one data entry technician. This formed the core of a Guardianship Program which can subsequently be deployed to achieve the requirements for Free, Prior and Informed Consent. They worked July through September – leading to real skills, real information, and the first necessary piece of ground-truthing for the development of either/and birch syrup and remote tourism initiatives next year.

Accomplishments

- Over 300 hectares covered
- 16 distinct sites throughout the Magpie & Martel forests and over 1000 observation sweeps
- >5000 trees identified and measured
- >250 person days of data collection in the CCGP
- Sites identified with significant spiritual and cultural values

From the Guardians:

“We have the start of a really wonderful program”

“I look at the land in a completely different way now”

Key Questions

- How to create appropriate protocols for the spiritual and cultural sites identified?
- How to adequately resource and fund the program to attract, train, and retain Guardians?
- How to protect, share, and use the data collected? How does it feed into other NSRCF & community discussions?
- What other indicators should be monitored?



Photo: wildlife spotted in CCGP

Next Steps

Over the coming months we will:

- 1) complete the field assessments and analyze the data collected to select sites for test-tapping in Spring 2016. Based on these results, we'll assess the feasibility of a birch syrup enterprise.
- 2) present data and key questions to the Elders Council and NSRCF for guidance
- 3) design and select a Guardian program logo
- 4) build a data management system, held by the NSRCF, to store and use the data collected
- 5) learn from program feedback and incorporate it into next year's Guardian program – from training and field priorities to adequate resourcing and capacity. Both positive and constructive critical feedback was received.
- 6) work with program partners, including MNRF, Tembec, and NRCan to plan and build future program activities.

As the season draws to a close, and with an eye to the future, we want to keep open communications to grow the program. We welcome ideas and offers on how to support the program - whether by sharing stories, offering job-shadowing, having joint training, or providing data & financial support.



Photos on ends: birch sites in Magpie forest; middle: Elders & Guardians sharing in ceremony

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