

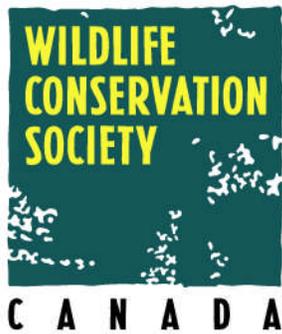
CAMPS ON THE LAND

Considerations and Opportunities in the Yukon and northern British Columbia

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SUMMARY

Camps on the land are a strong force for community development, bringing youth and elders together in a non-urban environment where traditional knowledge and skills can be passed on among generations through direct experience. This report summarizes the key considerations in developing camps on the land, based on the experiences of First Nations in the Yukon and northern British Columbia. These include the sharing of a vision, the development and realization of an organization, guidelines for participation, and thoughts on productive sites and timing. Finally, the document summarizes key governmental and non-governmental resources that First Nations can use to develop and fund camps on the land.

INTRODUCTION

For cultures evolved in an intimacy with land and nature, continued experience of the land is necessary for cultural integrity and meaning. First Nations cultures in Canada evolved in such an intimacy, but various forces have dislocated people from the land in the last century or so. Attachment to the land has not been lost from collective experience nor will. The desire to foster traditional cultural meaning through intimacy with and understanding of nature still persists. This short document outlines some examples of how that desire has been realized by First Nations in the Yukon and northern British Columbia, through the organization of “camps on the land”. Examples include: Tr’ondek Hwech’in First Fish and First Hunt camps, Vuntut Gwichin summer hunting and fishing camps, Champagne-Aishihik Culture and Science Camps, Kaska Dena Youth Environment Camp (see Figure 1 for Traditional Territories).

In this document I attempt to distill some central issues or considerations that have emerged from these recent efforts, and provide a listing of potential sources of information along with funding and logistic support for such camps. The report has been prepared for use by the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, with funding support from the Wilburforce Foundation. It may be of value to other First Nations in western Canada.

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WHY CAMPS ON THE LAND?

Proponents of camps on the land list the following key motivations for their development:

- Transfer and experience of traditional resource harvesting and processing skills and techniques, especially between elders and youth.
- Transfer and experience of traditional cultural activities, - including language, crafts, and story-telling - especially between elders and youth.
- Interpersonal, inter-familial, and community bonding and healing through shared activities, and rediscovery of cultural and environmental values.
- Development of responsibility and leadership within the youth.
- Teaching and transfer of technical resource management knowledge and skills in an experiential learning environment.

Figure 1: Map of Yukon First Nations Territories including those mentioned in this Report.
(Source: <http://www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/geomatics/maps/FNTT.pdf>)



Although individual First Nations place different emphases on each of these motivations, there is a persistent theme of bringing youth and elders together in a non-urban environment where traditional knowledge and skills can be passed on among generations through direct experience. Such camps have proven to be a strong focus for community development, and they are often annual events which mean a great deal for each First Nation. Through these camps, the knowledge of the last generation of community members to have been born on the land can be heard and seen clearly, and find a new home with younger generations.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

This report does not provide details on how each First Nation organizes, runs, and funds their camps on the land. Instead I have tried to distill some of the key attributes that help such a program be successful. I have organized these details under the following headings:

Vision and Stimulus

The vision for a camp on the land ideally originates within the First Nation community and from people with leadership influence. There is often substantial and widespread community interest in the idea of a camp, and a strong desire latent in the community to pursue many of the general goals for such camps. However, the key is for someone with governmental leadership and organizational ability to find the time to get the process started.

Quite often the leadership to act on this initial vision may pass from those individuals with the vision to a delegated person or group to implement the vision. For example, responsibility will often pass on to a FN government staff person, or a hired coordinator, relatively early in the process. Also, other organizations and individuals who share the vision, frequently participate early in the process. Renewable Resource Councils (established within each Yukon FN traditional territory after signing of a land claims agreement), the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board's Community Steward staff, and Ducks Unlimited Canada, have proven to be important allies to the FN governments in getting camps started in the Yukon. Overall, the stimulus for starting a camp will benefit from substantial networking by one key person among a group of potentially interested organizations and individuals.

Organization

All camps are put together by a group of individuals, often representing different organizations, some of whom are paid and some volunteer. To be successful, one or two individuals within the group generally take a more prominent "coordinator" role, either by default or because they are formally assigned to do so. This coordinator role includes: putting together organizational meetings and teams; developing camp curriculum; recruiting and hiring camp staff and resource people; fund raising; organizing logistics. These individuals work with "steering committees" of other organizers (some from the FN community, and some from other organizations), and tasks may be delegated to other steering committee members to varying degrees.

Some camps have a formal coordinator whose job is to organize the camp on an annual basis. For example, spring camps for youth in Old Crow are organized by the Community Education Liaison Coordinator, a Vuntut Gwichin FN government-funded position. In Dawson, the Youth Enhancement Coordinator, a staff position of the Tr'ondek Hwech'in FN government's Health Department, organizes the First Fish summer camps. The Champagne-Aishihik Heritage, Lands and Resources Department generally contracts a coordinator for each camp, and have found that professional teachers who share the educational vision of the camps make excellent coordinators. The fact that there is one salaried person in a leadership role appears necessary for a successful program.

Other key job functions at most camps include: camp site manager; resource staff or teachers; cook. The site manager (generally paid, and who may be the same individual as the overall coordinator) runs the day to day activities of the camp, including assigning tasks to various

individuals or groups of youth, and organizing logistic issues. The camp cook (and sometimes a cook's helper) is a paid position, providing meals for the entire camp community. Resource staff and teachers include a diversity of people from elders, to younger adults responsible for chaperoning youth or leading field trips, to technical staff and scientists (from the FN government or outside organizations). All act as teachers or field leaders, presenting information and leading field events on cultural or natural resource management topics. In many camps elders are the most prominent resource people, with many events being based on their teaching. Most resource staff and teachers are paid for their efforts, though salaries of some may be covered by their own organization when it is a partner on the camp. In some camps, outside resource people are given a gift if they are not paid for their time. The key point here is that a number of positions are paid, and therefore organizers have to raise funds to run the camp.

A long term goal of many camps is to reduce costs so that the camps become less dependent on outside funding. Food costs can be reduced by greater use of foods directly harvested from the land during the camp (e.g., fish, game, and berries). The coordinator's role can be streamlined by keeping an updated reference document ("manual" or "binder") outlining the tasks, timelines, equipment, and people required to build a camp. First Nations government departments, or local schools, can maintain a central store of camp equipment available on loan to various camps. Costs can be reduced by more people donating their time, and sometimes equipment (e.g., boat, net), to the camp, and by repeatedly holding camps at the same location where buildings and infrastructure are already in place. Some of the most popular camps have a relatively high volunteer commitment. Although many traditional camps on the land would have operated without cash subsidy from the "market" economy, the current economic reality is that most individuals live in a wage economy and in a settled community with at least partial reliance on imported foods and energy. A camp on the land cannot attract participants without a funding subsidy. To achieve long-term sustainability for camps, FN governments and related governmental institutions (e.g., Renewable Resource Councils, and the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board) may have to take more responsibility for funding and organization.

Site and Timing

The site and timing for a camp clearly depends on the camp's purpose and on logistic considerations. Many camps are built around a particular traditional resource harvesting activity, such as salmon fishing, big game hunting, or berry picking. Certain sites have been used for decades if not centuries, and the timing fits with the resource availability. Repeated use of the same site has advantages. Planning and organizing becomes more routine and predictable. Camp buildings and infrastructure are in place and do not have to be moved and relocated each time. The disadvantage is that the suite of activities for camp participants is limited at any one place and time, so the broader experience of the traditional territory and cultural activities must depend on other experiences at other times. Participants may not be as enthusiastic and keen on repeated experiences at the same location and time.

The Champagne-Aishihik FN has developed an interesting mix. Their spring-break Culture Camps are repeatedly held at the same location, but many of their other camps revolve among a diverse number of other sites, many with some permanent structures. This way, they can provide camp participants with a variety of experiences over the years, and kindle the interest and enthusiasm of camp organizers with novel opportunities. It takes a number of years of organizing and planning within the FN community to develop the resources and infrastructure for this diversity of opportunities.

Most camps are purposefully designed to take participants away from their home community and put them in completely new environments without all the urban amenities. They are therefore attended 24 hours a day. They generally last about a week.

Participation

Camps almost always have an educational component, even if this is mostly experiential, and not always formally structured. Accordingly, camp participants can be divided into those who are primarily learning (students), and those who are primarily teaching (including the camp staff). All are taking part in activities together. When camps are using a new site and time, or when

participants are only teenagers and adults, the distinctions between student and teacher may be more blurred, and the entire camp may become more of a community exploration of past traditions and local opportunities.

With most camps the target audience is youth. Various First Nations have found that there are strong reasons for dividing youth into separate age groups. Generally, children less than 12 years old require parental supervision, and can only attend a camp when at least one adult family member is also at the camp. Children 12 to 16 years old are sufficiently independent to be away from home without their parents, and able to live together in groups without too many conflicts. They are the target group for the majority of youth camps. These younger teenagers may also be organized into groups of 5 to 10, each with a group chaperone who is an adult or an old teenager taking a leadership role as part of a youth leadership program. Chaperones may be paid or volunteer positions. Youth older than 15 or 16 do not generally take part in the same camps as the 12-15 or 16 year-old age group. Separate camps are sometimes organized for these older teenagers because they need different kinds of activities and supervision to keep them occupied and involved.

Organizers try to include all participants who wish to attend. Even so, they do have to establish a formal application process to make sure all the necessary family contact, age, and medical history information is available. Most camps are also advertised to some extent in the community. In some camps participation is exclusively for First Nations members, though not necessarily from only the FN on whose territory the camp is located. Some camps are open to youth from other ethnic groups, especially those also living in the same communities as the First Nation organizing the camp.

Camp teachers and staff include a minimum of: camp coordinator (site manager); camp cook; adult resource people (often elders). In addition, most camps include other adults to lead groups of children in field activities. These could be chaperones and/or leaders (as well as elders) for particular field activities such as catching fish (boat operator), cleaning fish, or drying fish. Many camps require a cook's helper.

Many camps include outside resource people as teachers along with the First Nations adults and elders. Often these are scientists from academic institutions or other governments. They may attend just for a short period. Organizers often arrange outsiders' participation (lecture or field trip) to be held in conjunction with teaching by a First Nations member on the same topic, so that comparisons can be made among different knowledge traditions.

Costs and Funding

Most camps cost from \$5,000 to \$12,000 to run. These figures do not include the often substantial volunteer time, nor the in-kind salary time provided by First Nations government staff. The camp coordinator, with assistance from government staff or staff of supporting organizations, has to raise the money to run the camp. Camp costs fall into 3 main categories: salaries for staff; equipment and travel; food.

The following table outlines a number of potential sources of funding and logistical support that are available to First Nations in Yukon and northern British Columbia.

AGENCY & DETAIL	REGION	CONTACT
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT		
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada		
First Nations and Inuit Science and Technology Program – FN driven Western science and traditional Knowledge development programs.	YT & BC	http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/ys/yth2_e.html
First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy	YT & BC	http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/ys/index_e.html
Community and Economic Development -capital funds	YT & BC	http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/gol-ged/ced-01_e.html
Fisheries and Oceans Canada		
Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy – FN without settled land claim	YT & BC	http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/tapd/ab_fishg_e.htm

Aboriginal Aquatic Resources and Oceans Management	YT & BC	http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/tapd/aarom_e.htm
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation		
Canadian Television Fund	YT & BC	http://www.canadiantelevisionfund.ca/
TransCanada Fund	YT & BC	http://www.cbc.ca/north/features/transcanada/
Human Resources and Social Development Canada		
Summer Career Placements	YT & BC	http://www.sdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=/en/epb/yi/yep/programs/scpp.shtml&hs=yze
Community Development Handbook	YT & BC	http://www.sdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/epb/sid/cia/comm_deve/handbook.shtml&hs=cyd
Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy – Agreement Holders	YT & BC	http://www17.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/AHRDSInternet/agreementsAhrda/Agreements_e.asp
Heritage Canada		
Parks Canada – Healing Broken Connections Bilateral agreements between FN and National Parks regarding renewed access to Park resources	YT	Contact Champagne-Aishihik FN regarding a pilot project with Kluane National Park
Canada/Yukon Cooperation & Final Agreement On Development and Enhancement of Aboriginal Languages	YT	http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pa-app/progs/acctla-ctcaal/index_e.cfm
Aboriginal Women’s Program	YT & BC	http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pa-app/progs/ppfa-awp/index_e.cfm
Northern Native Broadcast Access Program	YT & BC	http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pa-app/progs/paanr-nnbap/index_e.cfm
Aboriginal Languages Initiative	YT & BC	http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pa-app/progs/ila-ali/index_e.cfm
Justice Canada		
National Crime Prevention Centre	YT & BC	http://www.justice.gc.ca/en/news/nr/1998/newsbckg.html
YUKON GOVERNMENT		
Yukon River Panel – Restoration and Enhancement Fund	YT	http://www.yukonriverpanel.com/R&Efund.htm
Yukon Film and Sound Commission	YT	http://www.reelyukon.com/about/
Yukon Department of Education		
Student Training and Employment Program	YT	http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/advanceded/employment/stepprogram.html
Community Training Funds	YT	http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/advanceded/ctf/details.html
Yukon Department of Environment		
Yukon Youth Conservation Corps (Y2C2)	YT	http://www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/cons/y2c2.html
Yukon College		
Yukon Native Language Centre	YT	http://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/ynlc/
Yukon Department of Economic Development		
Yukon Community Development Fund	YT	http://www.economicdevelopment.gov.yk.ca/general/cdfindex.html
Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board		
Community Stewards Program	YT	http://www.yfwmb.yk.ca/steward/steward.htm
Enhancement Trust	YT	http://www.yfwmb.yk.ca/trust/trust.htm
Renewable Resource Councils	YT	http://www.yfwmb.yk.ca/comanagement/contacts.html
BRITISH COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT		
British Columbia Film	BC	http://www.bcfilm.bc.ca/
BC Dept of Education		
Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements	BC	http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/
BC Dept of Advanced Education		
Aboriginal Coordinators’ Handbook	BC	http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/aboriginal/bcfnhb/welcome.htm
Aboriginal Special Projects Fund	BC	http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/aboriginal/project_funding.htm
BC Dept Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation		
Guide to Aboriginal Services and Organizations in BC	BC	http://www.gov.bc.ca/bvprd/bc/channel.do?action=ministry&channelID=-536896053&navId=NAV_ID_province
First Citizens Fund	BC	http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/prgs/fcfund/fcfund.htm

BC Dept of Justice		
Community Accountability Program Grants	BC	http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/community_programs/funding/index.htm
Habitat Conservation Trust Fund		http://www.hctf.ca/hctf.htm
Public Conservation Assistance Fund	BC	http://www.hctf.ca/pubcon/index.html
NON-GOVERNMENT		
Rediscovery International Foundation	YT & BC	http://www.rediscovery.org/
First Nations Education Steering Committee	BC	http://www.fnesc.ca/
Ducks Unlimited Canada	YT & BC	http://www.ducks.ca/
Sierra Club of BC – Sustainable Communities Program	BC	http://www.sierraclub.ca/bc/programs/communities/index.shtml

Sustaining Camps and a Land Ethic

Each camp on the land may have significant benefits to participants. However, fostering cultural connections and an ethic of caring for the land probably requires repeated visits to camps, as well as a variety of related community activities at other times of the year.

How can camps be sustained as a community activity? Probably the single most influential way is to make the job of camp coordinator a perennial position, either as part of the job functions of an established member of the First Nation government, or as an annual budget item that will be contracted out by the First Nation government. A formal, annual protocol (through a job description and work plan) forces someone to get the process started, and makes the lines of responsibility clear. This requires a certain amount of funding commitment by the First Nation government, mostly in terms of someone's salaried time.

In addition, camps will gradually become more self-sustaining with repetition. Certain individuals, who relate well to the experience as staff or students, will return if given the opportunity. Some will move from student to chaperone to staff over a period of time. The likelihood that participants will voluntarily donate time or equipment to the camp will likely increase as the history of a camp becomes longer and more firmly entrenched in the collective memory of the community. The process of organizing camps will become more routine, and therefore less time consuming and costly, with repetition.

It is probably best to aim for camps to be annual events right from the start so that an expectation, and some momentum, are started right from the beginning. However, the effort required to get a camp started from scratch is high, and there is a risk of tiring out certain individuals and making them reticent to try again. In the first year or so it may be wise to temper ambition, and attempt only what can almost surely be accomplished.

Repetition is highly desirable, but perhaps not always at the same place and time. Some First Nations have benefited from having a variety of locations each of which gets used every few years. Also they may be able to host more than one seasonal camp during the year, or move the timing of an annual camp among seasons. These are probably considerations that can wait until the community has successfully completed a number of camps at the same place and time.

How do camps relate to the ongoing fostering of a land ethic? It is the collective experience of most organizers that camps on the land can be among the most effective ways of sustaining cultural connections to the land. However, they last a relatively short time, and the behaviours taught and demonstrated need other avenues for exposure and reinforcement. Youth can obtain behavioural reinforcement through the family, other government-sponsored activities, and their formal schooling. Schooling has the greatest potential, because there is the opportunity to incorporate many of the same activities, experientially or through narrative, in the curriculum. Ideally respected adult members of the First Nation community will act as teachers, or resource people, in the established school system. Similar opportunities to learn about and live through culture and tradition can be fostered by First Nations government programs including commercial resource harvesting, artist workshops and concerts, language instruction, etc. The family environment, and role model of parents, is very influential in this process. However, because it can not always be relied on, the development of collective opportunities and experiences (through schools and government cultural programs) will be crucial to progress.