

## **Towards an Elders' Teaching Lodge**

### **Northern ICE**

**"One Mind Connected in Spirit with Nature"**

Updated: 16 November 2010

#### **Background**

Northern Integrated Cultures with the Environment (Northern ICE) is a non-profit organization established in 2010 by Sahtu Dene Elder Be'sha Blondin to give a voice to the Elders<sup>1</sup>, particularly those who are the keepers of the environmental and spiritual knowledge.

Northern ICE initiatives are unique as they aim towards the integration of the spirit of the environment into the current ways society approaches the stewardship of Mother Earth.

Northern ICE emerged from a vision passed on to Sahtu Dene Elder Be'sha Blondin by her parents, Eliza and Edward Blondin. Dene Elder Ehtseo Ayha (1858-1940) foresaw the environmental changes Mother Earth would undergo and that only a few people would communicate with Elders in the future. Ayha's vision for Elders was that they gather together in a special place to teach by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They would have to focus on the changes of Mother Earth and take responsibility by helping her to heal.

The development of a school (building and other facilities) is a long term project, Northern ICE aims at establishing solid grounds beforehand. Empowering elders to become teachers and developing educational programs with them will be done in the early stages of this initiative.

#### **Vision**

Help Elders pass on the First Nations Sacred Way of Life to the youth to become strong Elders for generations to come and together build strong, vibrant and prosperous communities grounded in ancestral teachings with a healthy environment.

#### **Mission**

Northern ICE "One Mind Connected in Spirit with Nature" works to empower the Elders to heal and teach people to understand and live in harmony with nature "as long as the sun shines, the river flows and the grass grows" by:

- ▶ Helping Elders develop the means and the infrastructure to do their teachings to bridge the past into the future;
- ▶ Assisting Elders and western scientist to integrate their knowledge to develop enhanced understanding and solutions to address environmental concerns;

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<sup>1</sup> *In this proposal, we refer to traditional Elders who are not defined by age, but by the status in their community. They are recognized in their traditional territories as keepers of culture, language, spirituality and wisdom, and as role models for healthy behavior.*

- ▶ Assisting organizations, industries and governments in developing First Nations awareness programs;
- ▶ Linking the Elders and the youth with people around the world who are reviving their teachings;
- ▶ Living the values and beliefs of the “Keepers of Mother Earth.”

### **Partners**

This project will benefit many groups in the NWT. Northern ICE is currently meeting with various organizations to discuss the project idea. During the meetings, the links between Northern ICE initiatives and the organizations’ current and future projects were explored. Northern ICE initiatives will consider the needs of those groups while developing projects. Public servants from the federal and territorial governments are also consulted during the elaboration of this initiative as these governments offer awareness and cultural training workshops to their employees and would benefit from the availability of Elders’ teachings. The teachings could play a role in strengthening the GNWT Traditional Environmental Knowledge Policy and offer services to industries that must consider the First Nations’ Sacred Way of Life in their environmental impact assessments. The Mackenzie Valley Review Board has produced the Guidelines for Incorporating Traditional Knowledge into the Environmental Impact Assessment Process pursuant to section 120 of the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act (MVRMA) for industries to use. However, industry leaders reach out to appropriate Aboriginal agencies and communities on their own initiatives. Keepers of the First Nation’s Sacred Way of Life may have ideas to put forth on this process and Northern ICE could support them in doing so.

Appendix 1 lists the potential partners and supporters and highlights the ones that have already recognized their support for this project.

### **Goals**

1. Recognize the Elders Sacred Way of life by awakening their spirit.
2. Support and empower the Elders in developing their way of passing on the First Nation Sacred Way of Life to the youth to become strong Elders for generations to come to live with and protect the environment.

### **Objectives**

Northern ICE intent is not to duplicate what has been done but to build on the previous and present recommendations and resolutions that have been passed and projects that were completed with the input of the Elders, the help of First Nations organizations and communities, and the federal and territorial governments. In addition, Northern ICE will build on the work done by the Dene Cultural Institute (DCI). In January 2006, DCI published “Learning from our Elders: Dene Health and Healing Practices. A summary of the Dene Elders Restoring Balance Project.” The DCI project was done in three phases and this document continues with phases 4 and 5.

*Objective 1* (Phase 4, 2011-2012): Gap analysis, community’s needs assessment and search for funding – Assess what has been done, what is being done and what needs to be done to act on past Elders’ recommendations, resolutions and projects. Assess where the communities are at with respect to

Elders' activities and what needs they have identified. Secure funding for the continuation of the Northern ICE initiatives.

*Objective 2* (Phase 5, 2011-2013): Based on the results of objective 1 and with Elders and youth from one community in each region, develop a vision and an action plan for an Elder's lodge.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Phase 4 - Gap analysis and community needs assessment (end 2010 - March 2012)**

##### *Objective:*

- a) Develop a portrait of Elders' past wishes and of what has been done, what is being done and what needs to be done for Elders to become teachers.
- b) Assess where the communities are at and what needs have been identified to bring the teachings forward.
- c) Secure funding for the next 3-5 years.

##### *Outcome:*

1. Detailed database of past projects, recommendations and resolutions pertaining to Elders from each NWT First Nations' community and organizations, and from territorial and governments if possible.
2. Detailed database for the needs, wants and assets of the communities Northern ICE can build upon.
3. A preliminary list of teachers and people that could be hired to work from the communities.
4. A status report for each region summarizing the past successes, the gaps, the lessons to build on and the paths that needs to be walked. The report will include a summary per community.
5. A summary report with a territorial vision.

##### *Proposed Method:*

1. Inventory organizations that could have information;
2. Develop a questionnaire to gather the various types of information needed;
3. Contact the organizations identified from #1 and inventory all Elders projects, recommendations and resolutions that were passed on in the NWT during various meetings by various organizations in Dene communities. Document the successes and lessons learnt when possible;
4. Conduct conference calls with the communities to portrait their current situation, the needs that have already been recognized, develop a preliminary list of teachers and of people that could be hired in the communities to support the project, identify the next steps to bring the ideas forward;
5. Analyze the information gathered;
6. Develop a status report format and a summary report format
7. Produce a status report for each region and a summary report for the NWT.

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<sup>2</sup> *The results of phase 5 will be presented to other communities in phase 6 of the project.*

## **Phase 5: A common vision for an Elders lodge**

### *Objective:*

Based on the information gathered in Objective 1 and with Elders and youth from five communities (1 per region), develop a vision and an action plan for an Elders' teaching lodge at the community level. Explore the idea of the lodge at the regional and territorial levels.

### *Outcome:*

1. A vision and an action plan for a community teaching lodge project
2. An educational toolbox presenting the process the community engaged, the vision and the action plan. The toolbox will be used to present the results to funding agencies and supporters and at the regional level in phase 6.
3. Proposals to engage the communities in their next steps.

### *Method proposed:*

Northern ICE proposes a 8 day visit in one community in each region to work with Elders and youth.

Findings from the gap analysis may modify the proposed method:

1. Present the results of the gap analysis and the Elders teaching lodge idea and vision;
2. Define teaching lodge with the participants;
3. Develop a vision at the local level. Explore the idea at a regional and territorial levels;
4. Develop an action plan for the community;
5. Develop a list of teachers – Assess knowledge, interests and needs of Elders to become teachers;
6. Develop the learning programs ideas;
7. Develop a list of subjects for environmental and cross-cultural workshops/settings that would help bridge the gaps between elder and youth, tradition and science;
8. Develop a list of ideas to facilitate a connection to the environment for youth, adults and organizations;
9. Discuss ways to build connections between the scientific approach and Elders teachings;
10. Assess the needs of the community to identify the best location for the lodge based on the greatest need and other important factors (cultural, logistical, geographic, etc).
11. Assess assets: identify what the community already has at their disposal, and what can be built upon.
12. Summarize the results and develop appropriate educational material;
13. Develop proposals with the communities to engage into the next steps.

## **Communities chosen**

<u>Region</u>	<u>Community</u>	<u>Reason why chosen</u>
Gwich'in	Fort McPherson	Many Elders were involved in a lot of Elders projects
Sahtu	Deline	Isolation and presence of strong Elders and spiritual leaders
Dehcho	Kakisa	Very culture bounded and close to the 7 teachings

Tlicho  
Akaitcho

Whati  
Lutsel K'e

Proactive culturally  
Elders need guidance to get their culture out of themselves.  
Most sacred places on their land

### **Northern ICE Team**

#### **Be'sha Blondin – Elder**



Founder of ICE and NICE, Be'sha Blondin is a recognized medicine woman from the NWT. From an early age, she learned about the Dene Way of life and developed her gifts through the teachings of the Elders and her parents on the east arm of Great Bear Lake. She became an environmentalist of the land, water, air and animals. As a medicine woman, she worked in the health, social and justice systems. Be'sha has helped people experience growth by changing people's attitude about themselves and the world around them by offering seminars, presentations, workshops, counselling and training in the NWT, Yukon, across Canada and around the world.

**Alfred Catholique – Elder** - Already involved in his community with the youth

#### **Dean Green**



science.

Dean graduated in 2003 from the University of Victoria with a Bachelor of Science degree in Geography. His studies included courses in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), hydrology, climatology, disaster planning, health and environment, and medical geography. Dean worked in the field of promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy in the Northwest Territories over five years. Translating the technical concepts of energy efficiency and renewable energy into plain language so that all sectors of society are knowledgeable of what they can do to be more environmentally friendly is his main interest. Dean continues to expand his knowledge of the spiritual side of nature and how it can unify with western

#### **Caroline Lafontaine**



Caroline graduated in Environmental Biology at McGill University in 1992. Her field experience, her research and monitoring program management skills in plant science, aquatic contamination and education, combined to her experience with government agencies, researchers, consultants and remote communities allows NICE to develop and deliver efficient programs. Active volunteer for environmental and artistic initiatives, she currently works as the educational coordinator of Yellowknife Community Garden Collective. On her healing journey, she has assisted medicine people in their work, participated to various spiritual gathering and fasted.

### **Kelsey Chegus**



Kelsey is passionate about being involved with initiatives that build connections between people, promote global citizenship, and honour the environment. Since completing her B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Alberta, she has focused on supporting the growth of sustainable energy systems; working with the World Alliance for Decentralized Energy Canada and more recently with the Arctic Energy Alliance as a Community Energy Planning Coordinator in the Northwest Territories. Kelsey has facilitated countless presentations, workshops, and training sessions on her work with international and local community development for almost 10 years. Her experience has taught her that our collective community development is directly tied to our personal development, which is all directly linked with the health of our environment and the Earth.

### **Karen Hall**



Karen is Dene woman, born and raised in Yellowknife, NT. She is currently a graduate student at the University of Victoria studying Policies and Practice in Health and Social Services. She focuses her academic studies on Aboriginal health, particularly in the North. She is a strong advocate of preserving cultural teachings and creating positive learning environments. She is a recent recipient of a Jane Glassco Arctic Fellowship from the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation and a Kloshe Tillicum Master's Health Research Fellowship from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research- Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health.

### **Della Green**



A Kwakwa'ka'wakw from Namgis First Nation in British Columbia, Della has worked with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation as a Program Coordinator. She designed and developed cultural and healing workshops for residential school survivors and their families. Della spent 14 years in the retail business, selling First Nations art after spending four years working at the Royal British Columbia Museum as a tour guide. She used her knowledge of different First Nations to help her introduce the artists and styles to the public. Della has been living a spiritual life for over 20 years and has known Be'sha for five years and considers Be'sha as her mentor.

### **Ruth Mercredi -**

#### Associated Networks

- ICE (Indigenous Cooperative on the Environment) <http://www.ice-network.ca/>
- FWII (Four Worlds International Institute) <http://www.fwii.net/>
- HOSW (Healing Our Spirits Worldwide) <http://www.hosw.com/>

## Appendix 1: List potential and confirmed supporters

Organization	Representative	Areas of interest expressed during the discussion	Actions (date met or letter sent)	Commitment
<b>Communities</b>				
Kakisa	Chief Lloyd Chicot, Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation	Discussions in progress	August 2010; October 2010	
Lutsel K'e	Chief Antoine Michel, Lutsel K'e Dene Band.	Discussions in progress	August 2010; October 2010	
Deline	Chief Raymond Tutcho, Deline First Nation	Discussions in progress	August 2010; October 2010	
Fort McPherson	Chief William Koe, Tetlit Gwich'in Council	Discussions in progress	August 2010; October 2010	
Wha Ti	Chief Alphonse Nitsiza, Whati First Nation	Discussions in progress	October 2010	
<b>Governmental organizations</b>				
GNWT	Robert Hawkins, MLA	Support to communities and revival of the culture	October 2010	Facilitate discussion with other ministers
GNWT	Sandy Lee, Health Minister	Discussions in progress	November 2010	
GNWT - Environment and natural resources, Field support unit	Bea Lepine, Coordinator Traditional Knowledge	Interested by the contribution Northern ICE initiatives could bring to their awareness programs.	November 2010	Committed to a letter
INAC, Contaminants and Remediation Directorate	George Lafferty, Community consultation officer and Rebecca Vanderspiegel, Project officer (Colomac)  Manuel Lim, Project specialist (Giant Mine)	Mine related issues. Availability of teachers.	August 2010	
INAC, Renewable Resources and Environment, Water Resources	Paul Green, Regulatory and science advisor	Establishment of guidelines; Assessment of traditional uses.	August 2010	
INAC - Indian and Inuit Services Directorate	George Cleary, Director	Will help find funding sources for Northern ICE initiatives.	October 2010	-
Indian and Northern Affairs - Leadership and Learning	Luna Ramkhalawansingh, Head, and Karen Wright-Fraser, Leadership and Learning Coordinator	Availability of teachers.	October 2010	Committed to a letter of support
INAC - Consultation Support Unit	Julie Jackson, Manager	Follow-up under way.	August 2010	
INAC, Renewable Resources and Environment, RRE Directorate	Teresa Joudrie, Director	Follow-up under way.	August 2010	
First Nations Organizations				

Denendeh National Office AFN Regional Office	Bill Erasmus, Dene National chief	Meeting is being organized	August, October 2010	
Denendeh Development Corporation	Margaret Gorman, Chief Operating Officer	-	September 2010	Letter of support and in-kind contributions
Native Women Association				Letter of support and in-kind contributions
The Sacred Circle Project	Lila Erasmus	Elders will be required for the Princess Pageant and Warrior Pageant which is planned to expand at the regional and territorial level.	July 2010	Letter of support
Northern Aboriginal Business Association	Jeanne Morrison		October 2010	In-kind support for the development of the projects
<b>Educational and research organizations</b>				
Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning	Kyla Kakfwi Scott, Program Manager	Follow-up under way	August 2010	
University of Alberta, Native Studies		To be initiated		
Institute of Circumpolar Health Research (ICHR)	Susan Chatwood, Executive director	Partnerships on specific projects	November 2010	Letter of support
Aurora College		To be initiated		
<b>Cross-cultural organizations</b>				
Fédération Franco-ténoise	Francis Lemieux, directeur general	Cross-cultural project in various areas (elders, youth, health...)	-	Letter received
Association franco-culturelle de Yellowknife	Marie Coderre, directrice générale	Cross-cultural project in various areas (elders, youth, health...)	October 2010	Funding under way for a cross-cultural workshop
Collège des Territoires du Nord-Ouest,	Jean-Pierre Joly, directeur general	Availability of teachers for their native studies programs.	September 2010	/support expressed in FFT letter
Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (CDETNO)	Doug Craig, EDO	Availability of teachers for their clients		Support to develop projects and in-kind contributions
<b>Other organizations</b>				
Canadian Centres for Teaching Peace	Robert Stewart, founder	Partnership in the delivery of workshops	November 2010	