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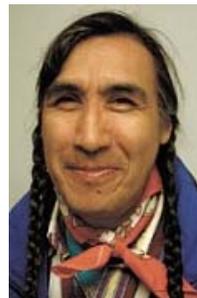
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Sahtu resources board giving people a voice

Antoine Mountain

Monday, April 14, 2014

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Friends, it is good to see that our Sahtu Renewable Resources Board has been busy over the last while, both in organizing for public information sessions to do with fracking and in seeing to a group of eager students who took part in learning how to find out about the conditions and health of our regional lands.

There is no doubt that some of this has been the subject of some recent and heated local concern, too, given the nature of the fracking practice itself.

Yet again, we will have to deal with any problems to do with what happens on our lands. Industry is always more concerned about the profit margins and little else.

Places like Deline and Kabami Tue, Colville Lake, are removed physically from where these oil industry events are now taking place across the river from Norman Wells, along the Canol Trail, but we are all related and so we should at the very least be aware of the dangers and perils we face.

One thing I do know is, given the tough position it has in caring for the public, the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board has indeed taken its job seriously.

While studying for my Masters of Environmental Studies degree, the resources board was indeed more than generous in making sure I had the resources to continue with my schooling in faraway Toronto. I will always be grateful.

For this one Sahtu environmental project some 12 students were picked from applicants and were taken out to Drum Lake.

This sacred place is at the very heart of the Dene Nation, with the more famous and nearby Bear Rock Mountain, prominently displayed on our Dene National logo, in its very center.

What the elders have also passed down to us is that as long as we remember the teachings of our cultural hero twins of Yamoria and Yamoga we would continue into the future.

For their part, Tulita's Fabian and Judith Wright-Bird, the twin towers of local action, must have surely enjoyed the company of this troupe of avid pupils of the land, along with the instructors from afar.

And these kind of activities are indeed about "empowerment," as Deborah Simmons of the resources board says.

This one information session was also matched up with some community workshops about fracking from delegates of the First Nations of Nelson, B.C.

In fact, one of the main features of those talks had to do with how we are lucky in the Sahtu to have had our own land settlements to rely on.

I am personally pleased to see that almost half of the group of students who took part in these teachings are from the Radelih Koe/Kabami Tue, Fort Good Hope/Colville Lake region.

We have our share of mysterious illnesses among close relatives over the last few years and need to at least find out why our people are passing away from cancer so quickly.

Thus this kind of monitoring has to include some serious testing of the waters, especially as a result of fracking.

Either way, the route is to allow our communities to have a direct say in these matters.

A good idea, of course, is for these kinds of community information sessions and teaching our youth to continue, and with the continued help of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment and Aurora College.

Our future depends on it.

Mahsi, thank you.

■ **Antoine Mountain is a Dene artist and writer originally from Radilih Koe'/Fort Good Hope. He can be reached through his website at www.amountainarts.com**