

Sahtu youth keep culture alive

New projects include documenting a historical site for climate change research



photo courtesy of Jean Polfus

Thomas Manuel of Fort Good Hope addresses delegates from the Sahtu Youth Network: Jaryd McDonald, left, Sidney Tutcho, Gilbert Turo, Mary Masuzumi and Kristen Kodakin-Yakeleya. George Barnaby, right, and Joseph Judas, back right, were also among those who attended a caribou workshop held in Deline in late January.

by **Miranda Scotland**
Northern News Services
Sahtu

Fort Good Hope youth are documenting a campsite once owned by a fondly remembered spiritual leader to determine if climate change has affected the area.

Charlie Tobac, who died in July 2010, and his wife Laura use to run an on the land healing program for inmates and counseled others on grief and healthy relationships at the site.

The camp, which is located 64 km from town, is no longer used for this purpose but its significance still remains.

Now, a group of young adults - Gilbert Turo, Billy Shae, Mary Masuzumi and Cody McNeely - plan to film and photograph the area and speak to elders about the land.

"What we're hoping to see is remarks on the direct changes that elders are able to talk about looking at these images and videos and using their own memories," explained Eugene Boulanger, co-ordinator for the Sahtu Youth Network.

The Fort Good Hope initiative is one piece of a regional project the Sahtu Youth Network has embarked upon. Members in Colville Lake, Deline, Tulita and Norman Wells are also carrying out similar research at camps and cabins near their communities.

The group plans to use the data they collect to create a study in health adaptation and climate change reporting.

The Sahtu Renewable Resource Board will assist the youth with their research and Health Canada is funding the project.

The group was established last year after residents in the region expressed the need for a youth-focused and youth-driven group within the Sahtu.

To date, about 15 youth aged 18 to 30 years old have become involved.

Shae, Tobac's nephew, said he wanted to join the network after hearing about it from Kristen Kodakin-Yakeleya.

"What really got me interested is preserving our culture and our traditions. They talked about interviewing elders and that's something I wanted to do for the past four years or so on how our land has changed," said the 28-year-old, adding he already has a few elders in mind to speak to for the project.

Turo, Masuzumi and McNeely echoed Shae's reasons for wanting to join the Sahtu Youth Network.

"I love being a part of this," said Masuzumi. "It keeps my mind busy and it makes me want to do a lot more than just talk about it. Because all I did was just talk about it and how I want to do all this and that but I never did the actions.

"I want to keep our culture alive more than it has been in the past decade."

Her main motivation for continuing with the network, the 21-year-old said, is so she can learn about her culture and pass it on to her two-year-old son when he gets older.

She is also concerned about preserving the environment and wildlife. Masuzumi, along with some of the other network members, travelled to Deline last month to participate in a caribou workshop run by the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board, where the discussions centred

on the Bluenose-East caribou herd and what can be done to protect the animals.

Masuzumi said it made her worry about the fate of the Bluenose-West caribou and what her community would do without the herd.

"I want to learn all about this and how to prevent the decline from happening with us also," she said.

During the workshop, youth network members introduced themselves and their work to attendees. It felt good, said Masuzumi, to hear everyone say they're proud.

Boulanger, 27, said he too is impressed with the response from youth in the region.

"It's inspiring to see so many young people from the Sahtu want to participate in research going on in their communities with such an interest for the future of the Sahtu region."

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