

T̓ich'ád̓i hé Gots'ed̓i – Living with Wildlife
Caribou Predators and Competitors

Responses to Round 1 Information Requests



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ʔekwé hé Łue hé Working Group
Délıne Got'ıne Government and Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne (Renewable Resources Council)
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Overview

This document was developed during a workshop of the ʔekwé hé Łue hé (Caribou and Fish) Working Group of the Délıne Got'ıne Government and Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne on January 5-7, 2021. The document includes responses to Round 1 Information Requests related to the Délıne 2021 Public Listening Session, and an Information Request for Round 2.

The ʔekwé Working Group

The ʔekwé hé Łue hé Working Group is coordinated by the Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne, and includes delegates of the Délıne Got'ıne Government, Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne, and ʔohdakə K'áowə Kə (Elders Council). Delegates to the January 5-7 workshop are listed below.

Workshop Participants

Alfred Taniton
Alphonse Takazo
Dave Taniton
Dolphus Tutcho

Ed Reeves (coordinator)
Frederick Kenny
Leon Modeste
Michael Neyelle (coordinator)

Roseanne Taneton
Walter Bezha (facilitator)

Déljné Got'jné Gokədə - Glossary

Dene	English
ʔehdaɬla	Caribou Point
ʔehdaɬla ʔekwé	Caribou Point caribou, known to scientists as Bluenose East caribou
ʔehdzo Got'jné	Trap People (Déljné name for Renewable Resources Council)
ʔehtsá	Grandfather
ʔəjire	muskox
ʔəjirekwé (meat)	muskox meat
ʔekwé	barren-ground caribou
ʔekwé hé Łue hé Working Group	Caribou and Fish Working Group
ʔekwé njza	the thundering sound when caribou return
ʔeza	law
ʔik'q	mystical power
ʔohdakə	elders
ʔohdakə gogha máhsı gha	We have to keep ʔohdakə happy
<i>Belare Wile Gots'é ʔekwé</i>	<i>Caribou for All Time</i> (title of Déljné's ʔekwé plan.
bets'erjchá	respect
dechjta nezq gots'udı	living well on the land; being safe
Déljné	community name; where the waters flow
Déljné Got'jné	people of Déljné
Dene béré	Dene food; country food
Dene ts'ııı	Dene identity; Dene way of life
dıga	wolf
dıgaya	wolf pups
Nę K'ádı Ke	Keepers of the Land (Guardians)
Neregha	North Shore
nógha	wolverine
sahcho	grizzly bear
tjch'ádıı	wildlife
tıı	dog
tqdzı	woodland caribou
Ts'qđane gha mı k'ána gúza gha gqzq	Leadership is needed for young people in our culture
ts'qđaneke	young people

Information Request 1.1: Tjch'ádıı hé Gots'edı – Caribou, Predators and Competitors

A. The Conservation Picture: Caribou, People and Planning

1. How are the caribou doing? Have you noticed any changes over the past year?

- ʔehdaɬla ʔekwé are not around any more. Most hunters have accepted that ʔekwé are not available in our area.

- We will really celebrate and sing when the caribou come back. There is a word for the thundering sound that ʔekwé make when they come back: ʔekwé nɪʔa.
- There has been an increased harvest of ʔɔdzɪ and ɬue.
- There are more ʔɔjɪre sightings in our area.

2. *How are the people doing? Have you noticed any changes over the past year?*

- We have concerns that over the long term the knowledge, laws, spiritual relationships, and language are in decline. Ts'ódanekə gha mɪ k'ána gúʔa gha góʔɔ - leadership is needed for young people in our culture. They are learning in another world, and don't have access to Dene ts'ɪɬɪ on the land. Harvesting has become a sport activity instead of a way of life.
- We are making our own Délɪnɛ Got'ɪnɛ Government strong, and relearning our traditions in strong leadership. Ts'ódanekə are starting to see this and starting to be more positive in their thinking. We need to rebuild relationships, support each other even when the going is tough and mistakes are being made.
- We have established a new Youth Council Coordinator position (held by Roseanne Taneton to create a Youth Council. This is a responsibility of the Culture, Language and Spirituality Department that will support youth to develop their own programs for learning and becoming leaders, encouraging laughter and happiness.
- We have to get our people out on the land, and make plans to revisit all the areas of the lake. That's how to make both people and land healthy again. If we have to pay people to do it, we will; for the ts'ódanekə, there has to be some kind of incentive. We are making progress, but it's very slow. We have to be patient, learn from our experience and the experience of others, not give up, and let nature teach the ts'ódanekə. ʔɔhdakə have to be there for safety (dechɪta nezɔ gots'udɪ).
- An indicator of success will be that ts'ódanekə will be sharing food that they've harvested with ʔɔhdakə and community. When this happens, ʔɔhdakə will start to be a lot more positive, encouraging and supportive with ts'ódanekə, seeing the value of what they have to contribute to the future of Dene ts'ɪɬɪ. ʔɔhdakə gogha máhsɪ gha - we have to keep ʔɔhdakə happy!
- Our plan is a huge step in the direction of reconciliation with our land and within our communities. It affects everything about the Dene people. Many of our people have given up, succumbing to addictions and despair. And we're shining a little light of hope for them.

3. *How is the community conservation planning approach progressing?*

- The ʔekwé hé Łue hé Working Group has resumed work to develop and oversee implementation of the *Belare Wile Gots'é ʔekwé – Caribou for All Time* plan, and prepare submissions to the upcoming Public Listening Sessions.
- There has been a shift away from a focus on rights and treaty relationships, toward more thinking about how we can maintain Dene ts'ɪɬɪ in a changing environment. Support for Dene ts'ɪɬɪ is in itself a strategy for conservation. It's important to recognize and celebrate the individual and family practices in Dene ts'ɪɬɪ spirituality, harvesting, and sharing that are fundamental for success in implementing our plan.

- The Working Group has expanded our scope to include planning about lue as a central for Dene béré (country food) security. We are harvesting what the land provides for us, which is a huge step in reclaiming our Dene traditions in conservation.
- We are making plans for rebuilding our relationships with the land, wildlife and ancestors, including on the land programs for youth, identifying, opening up and promoting use of traditional trails, identifying and harvesting fish lakes, and mapping/maintaining burial sites. And we are promoting a thankful spirit in undertaking these initiatives.
- The Délıne Got'ıne Government is building a new Ne K'adı Ke (Keepers of the Land) program.
- We have been learning a lot from the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year. It has taught us to see that we need to be prepared to maintain our food security. The earth is fragile, and we need to practice Dene conservation. Our Dene ts'ıı skills will continue to be needed in the future to help us survive and thrive tough times.

B. Predators

1. *What stories or knowledge would you like to share about the past and present relationships between caribou, díga (wolf) and Dene/Métis?*

- The *Belare Wile Gots'ı Pekwé* plan includes a short version of the story of the meeting between díga (wolf) and ɤekwé as told by William Sewi and Alfred Taniton. The full story has a lot more meaning, and Délıne intends to provide this along with relevant terminology before the Public Listening Session, based on review of audio recordings. For the present we are providing the short version again here: “When the earth was created, díga and ɤekwé held a big meeting around the Aklavik area. Díga said to ɤekwé, ‘ɤekwé should not be on earth any longer.’ ɤekwé responded, ‘As long as we've been here, we've been good and we've eaten well. We've done nothing to you. We have not destroyed your food. You have lived well off us. So what's wrong with us?’ Díga said, ‘That's right. There's nothing wrong with ɤekwé. They don't get in anybody's way. So we shouldn't tell them what to do. Let them graze, and feed, and wander around. Let's not destroy them completely, because in the future we will need them.’”
- We don't fully understand the ecological role of díga, but we do know from the story of the meeting between ɤekwé and díga that tıch'adıı manage their own relationships among each other.
- We see díga as an indicator of a healthy ecosystem. Where there are lots of healthy díga, there are also lots of other tıch'adıı.
- Before government started imposing wildlife management measures, Dene understood díga to be a powerful spiritual animal. They were considered to contribute to the good health of caribou populations, harvesting the weak or sick animals.
- According to ɤehtsá (Grandfather) Bezha (as interpreted by his grandson Walter Bezha), Délıne Got'ıne let díga be. We have a lot of respect for them because like us, they harvest ungulates for food. There are no stories about people eating díga, not even during periods of famine. And we rarely harvest them for their pelts. Dene people understand that díga carry parasites and disease so they take extra measures to keep food safe from díga, and if díga to get into a food cache, people won't eat the meat.
- There are strong memories of the colonial experience in díga management in the area of Sahtú (Great Bear Lake). People witnessed díga poisoning around 1955-1960. When it started, people didn't protest because it was new to them. But they soon saw that the damage

caused to other wildlife was extreme. We know the story of David Chocolate's father who was out hunting, found the bait and without know it was poison fed it to his t̄ı (dogs), and was roasting the meat for himself when he realized the t̄ı were dying. This story is often repeated as a lesson about consequences of disrespecting díga.

- There are stories of Délıne Got'ıne ancestors that would raise dígaya (pups) for their dogteams. Those díga would have been dangerous since they weren't domesticated. Dene have rigorous protocols for safety around t̄ı teams for this reason. People understand that díga and t̄ı are related, and similar protocols apply to both. This is why we have community bylaws about t̄ı, and it is considered by elders to be prohibited for t̄ı to come into the house.
- In the days of dogteams, every family would have lots of t̄ı for transportation. So if díga were to stray into town they would be quickly demolished by t̄ı protecting their territory and master. In this sense as well, díga and t̄ı share the same instincts.
- This being said, the words for díga and t̄ı are totally different, so it's clear that Dene consider the domesticated animal to be distinct from the wild animal. We might learn something about the history of this terminology from T̄ıch̄ı relatives.
- In the past, Dene people didn't have dumps, and there was no food waste so there was nothing to attract díga. Now we have díga that use dumps as a food source. The elders don't like this at all. T̄ıch'ádıı should not be dependent on people's waste for their food.
- We notice that we're able to harvest more of everything when ʔekwé are around, including díga and nógha (wolverine).

2. Should people play a role in controlling díga populations to help caribou now? If so, what should this look like?

We already have practices to manage our relationship with díga. For example, we put our meat on stages to protect it from wolf. We don't talk about it, but we are aware that there is lots of ʔık'q (mystical power) related to díga, so people shy away from dealing with them. We don't want to create problems by meddling with them. Instead we are trying to strengthen our spiritual relationships with t̄ıch'ádıı through prayer and renewing our traditional practices.

3. Are there any concerns that you have about other predators and their impacts on caribou?

- Dene believe that we are harvesters just like other t̄ıch'ádıı predators. As with díga, we assume that the other predators have an agreement with ʔekwé so that they can live in balance. Díga don't take more than they need. Dene and díga also need to co-exist and maintain a respectful sharing relationship. We know we can't compete with díga because they're a more efficient hunter than we are. They can sleep for up to ten days without food in blizzard conditions, waiting for better hunting weather. People could use alternate strategies to get close to their prey, for example, using blizzard conditions (so the prey can't see, hear or smell us). And nowadays we are super-efficient with all our new technologies – guns, skidoos, and airplanes. We don't even have to be physically fit to hunt them.
- The other predators like sahcho (grizzly bear) and nógha primarily hunt ʔekwé at the calving grounds, but we don't see what happens because it's prohibited for Dene to go there.

C. Competitors

1. *What stories or knowledge would you like to share about the relationships between caribou, ʔejire (muskoxen) and Dene/Métis?*

- People used to harvest ʔejire before the demand by the Hudson's Bay Company for commercial harvesting led to a population collapse and the harvest was shut down in 1917. Dene would seek out ʔejire at Neregha and ʔehdaɪla just for a change of diet or when caribou were not available.
- The commercial harvest created demands on Dene people to practice a new approach to harvesting that was not in tune with ʔejire ecology, in that people were encouraged to “mine” them for sale, without regard to the impact. As a result, our people lost bets'erichá (respect) for them. This very different from the precontact approach that you only harvest what's available and needed for local family or community needs.
- The enforcement of harvest restrictions was all new to Indigenous people. The imposition of the harvest ban greatly affected people's relationship with ʔejire, to the point where people lost the skills, knowledge and even the taste for ʔejirekwé (meat).
- The history of colonial ʔejire and díga management teaches an important lesson: Once outsiders disrupt Dene ts'ı́ı (Dene practices or ways of life), it takes a huge and prolonged effort to reestablish it. This is one of the big reasons that it is so important for Dene people to maintain our environmental stewardship role, including Dene ʔeʔa (law), Dene governance systems, and knowledge transmission to new generations.
- Some people have expressed concern that ʔejire seem to push away ʔekwé, but there are mixed views on this. One thing we do agree on is that sahcho will not tangle with ʔejire, because their sharp horns are so dangerous and it's hard to penetrate their defensive circle. There are lots of stories about that from our grandfathers. These stories remind hunters to be careful around ʔejire. You can't see their eyes under their hair, so you can't tell what they're going to do.

2. *Should there be more encouragement to harvest ʔejire for food security and commercial harvest, and to help caribou? If so, what should this look like?*

- We need to increase our harvest of ʔejire as an alternative food when ʔekwé are not available. We'd like to renew the tradition of enjoying the taste of ʔejire as part of our regular diet.
- We do not agree with commercial sale of our Dene béré, including ʔejire.
- Our elders are not comfortable with sport hunting and fishing because it conflicts with our conservation system. However, Délıne understands that sport hunting can benefit the community both financially and by promoting Dene ts'ı́ı knowledge and skills among younger people. If there is an abundance of ʔejire and there is no conservation concern, Délıne supports an expanded number of tags for the community to use in a local outfitting business.
- Expanded sport hunting should be accompanied by training for community members in guiding for a muskox hunt, including teachings by our elders in Dene ts'ı́ı practices which promote bets'erichá and safety – especially given how dangerous ʔejire are.

3. *Are there any other concerns that you have about other competitors and their impacts on caribou?*

Dene are not just predators of ʔekwé – we are also competitors, occupying and impacting their landscape. We look forward to more discussions in the 2022-2024 Public Listening Sessions about how we can maintain landscapes that support healthy ʔekwé populations.

Information Request 1.2: Sahtú Ragóʔa (Hunting Law) and Approaches to Wildlife Harvesting

1. *The SRRB made five recommendations related to barren-ground caribou hunting areas in the Sahtú region (Recommendations 7.1-7.5). Further evidence is needed to address area boundaries appropriately with respect to community jurisdictions. How should the Sahtú region define jurisdictions for barren-ground caribou harvest regulation?*

- We have to go back to the families and renew our traditional harvesting areas and systems for harvesting all different kinds of wildlife.
- The harvest areas should be defined by agreed-upon community jurisdictions, which are established through the District boundaries defined as a result of the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement. The determining factor should be the harvesting practices of the people, not the biologist-defined herd system.
- It will be important to have agreements with our neighbours regarding permissions to harvest within the Délı̨ne District.

2. *Oral submissions to the Colville 2020 Public Listening Session indicate that Wildlife Act residency provisions and hunter education remain a “hot topic” within the Sahtú region. The SRRB wishes to consider this topic at the 2021 Public Listening Session. What roles do residency requirements and hunter education play in fostering or inhibiting respect for Dene harvesting protocols?*

- Dene people are very concerned that resident harvest can impinge upon the access and therefore the rights of Sahtú beneficiaries to maintain our country food security.
- The land claims have taught people about their rights, but we do have long traditions in sharing as well.
- The most important thing is for visitors to learn what it takes to hunt like Dene do, with respect.
- Délı̨ne wants to see all visiting hunters within the Délı̨ne District required to hunt accompanied by local Nę K’ódi Ke (Keepers of the Land).
- Délı̨ne requests resources to develop our own hunter education materials similar to those prepared by Ross River.
- We aim to develop our own harvest regulation plan for visitors as well, to be submitted as part of the 2021 Public Listening Proceeding.