

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Trapper Final Report



Prepared for: Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust

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Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in**

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- Georgette McLeod, TH Cultural Education Coordinator
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If we have missed mentioning anyone, we apologize and assure you that your contributions helped us to deliver our program in an efficient manner.

Project Purpose

Trapping fur bearers is one of the oldest economic activities in North America and many other parts of the world, although for the Dawson and TH community, it has been a declining pursuit for many. TH's goal is to enhance this once vibrant and growing occupation. Given the structural razing of our culture and customs, it is critical that we simultaneously revive old ways while crafting new ones to impart to our youth the values passed down to us. Given also the decline of trapping activities in our Traditional Territory, it is equally important that we continue to teach and educate our children on the importance of the enhancement of trapping activities. TH feels the need to provide additional opportunities for youth to learn more about conservation and stewardship. Through this project, local youth will gain the value of fur bearers and the importance of their habitat and conservation. By continuing to educate as many youth as possible, we believe we are helping to instill within them the value of

stewardship and are thereby helping to ensure the future health of our fur bearer resources. Moreover, TH is inspired to organize the First Trapper education program for all TH Youth and other youth living in Dawson City, with the expected achievement of high interest and participation for an enriching education program. Elders and Commercial trappers will be recruited to provide their expertise and traditional knowledge and biologists or wildlife field technicians will provide their knowledge of furbearers habitat within TH Traditional Territory.

First Trapper Background

In an effort to achieve objective 16.1.1.2 of the Tr'ondek Hwech'in (TH) Final Agreement - "to preserve and enhance the renewable resources economy" – TH has initiated a trapper education program known as "First Trapper" for youth to learn all about trapping in the north. TH is interested in teaching conservation and stewardship on furbearer wildlife in TH Traditional Territory to both First Nations and non-First Nations youth in Dawson.

The program was officially established in 2012/2013 fiscal year by the TH Fish and Wildlife Branch with support from other TH departments. For the 2013/2014 fiscal year, the program was organized by the Heritage Department and supported by the TH Fish and Wildlife Branch. In order for the program to have success, there is a need for assistance with finances and human resources to keep the program going. The First Trapper program relies on the financial support from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust fund and in-kind financial support from TH. The program seeks human resource support from various TH departments such as Fish and Wildlife Branch, Health and Social Department, and Heritage Department. There are particular individuals that are targeted to help with finances or to help out with the program as a teacher, supervisor, or an organizer. TH also relies on support from YG Environment Department, particularly the Regional Biologist, Wildlife Technician, and Conservation Officers for the northern area. The program puts a huge emphasis on support from local First Nation and Commercial trappers and Elders who can share their experiences, local and traditional knowledge related to trapping, living and work on the land.

There is a strong interest from the community to see this program succeed and we have had consistent involvement from youth. We still anticipate that the program is undergoing some growing pains, but we sense that the participation and interest will grow, so TH wants to continue to provide this program in the future. TH will continue to recruit individuals to provide their expertise and traditional knowledge for the program.

TH will make best efforts to do the planning and preparation for the First Trapper program starting in November of each year. Timing for the camp will need to be flexible each year based on the weather, school schedules, community events, work and/or personal commitments. When the trapping camp happens, it is held at Km 131, Dempster Highway area where TH and TH Citizens hold a number of trapping concessions from Dempster Corner to the Km 280. TH is in full support of providing education programs out on the land in order to ensure good stewardship of the land and all its resources.

TH is also working closely with the TH Education Department and YG Education Department to develop an accredited course for the First Trapper program. Development of the accredited course is underway and should be finalized by 2014/2015 fiscal year.

First Trapper Teachings

Getting out on the land to a Trapline provides significant trapping experience. The First Nation trappers, with years of experience, provide excellent teachings and knowledge of the many different kinds of situations that could be encountered when out on a Trapline. Some of those situations could possibly include circumstances such as overflow, hand parts caught in the trap or a broken down snowmobile. Additional knowledge and hands-on experience include setting the trap such as the Belisle 330 for wolf, lynx, and fox, and the Belisle 120 for marten and mink. The intent of the First Trapper program is to teach traditional knowledge and skills to the younger generation through the assistance of Elders, supervisors, and trappers. Further presentations provided in the program include topics about diseases and biological data of fur bearing animals and management of commercial and subsistence harvesting. During the program there are opportunities to include elders and knowledgeable trappers to share their life-long experiences, stories, and traditional knowledge. There is also a camp organized to provide more hands-on teachings and experiences in a camp setting. The youth get the opportunity to travel on the land with experienced trappers and elders to visit traplines.

Participants

This year the ad-hoc planning committee set the limit of 8 youth participants for the program to maintain an enriching experience for the youth. We had 8 youth register for the First Trapper program. There were 6 male and 2 female participants. All youth attended the Saturday session, but we only had 5 youth attended the Sunday session. During the Saturday session, we had 4 supervisors and 1 Elder share their knowledge of trapping and other land-based bush survival. On the Sunday session, we had 4 supervisors share their knowledge of trapping, chaperone, and also operate snowmobiles to transport youth to the trapping area.

Planning and Preparation for Activities

This is the second year the Tr'ondek Hwech'in has organized a First Trapper program. The Fish and Wildlife Branch and Heritage Department teamed up to carry out the activities associated with the First Trapper program and the Cultural Education Coordinator from the Heritage Department took up the bulk of the responsibilities to organize the First Trapper program. The departments set-up and organized an ad-hoc planning committee including individuals from the Fish and Wildlife Branch, Heritage Department, Education Department, and TH Trappers. The planning committee's role was to provide direction, guidance, assistance, and advice to the Cultural Education Coordinator. Every committee member was given tasks to complete prior to follow-up meetings and provide updates to ensure that tasks were getting completed in a timely fashion.

The first planning meeting was held on November 15th. At that meeting, it was decided that the orientation session would happen Monday, November 25th, camp would happen Friday, November 29th – Sunday, December 1st, checking traps would be Saturday, December 7th and

14th, and the skinning days would be Sunday, December 8th and 15th. However, due to other work commitments by Cultural Education Coordinator, other school field trips, and Ranger commitments for the TH Trappers, the program was postponed.

The next meeting was held on November 28th and it was decided at that meeting that everyone would commit to organizing an orientation weekend on December 14th and 15th but the camp portion would have to be postponed until January or early February and dates would be determined after Christmas.

The orientation weekend was organized by the Cultural Education Coordinator with help from Fish and Wildlife Branch staff. The orientation session was held over two days on Saturday, December 14th and Sunday, December 15th. The Saturday session was held at the TH Hall and the Sunday session was held at a TH trapper's residence in the Dome subdivision.

Tasks that needed to be complete for the Saturday session included:

- Booking the training facility (TH Hall) and ensure it is operational for session
- Providing equipment for presentations
- Preparing a powerpoint presentation with help from YG Fish and Wildlife powerpoints
- Compiling the orientation packages and worksheets
- Inviting presenters and trappers
- Ensuring the trapping equipment and furs were available and moved to the training facility.
- Setting up tables and chairs
- Booking the caterer for lunch, snacks, and beverages
- Preparing honoraria contracts for Elders and Trappers

Tasks that needed to be complete for the Sunday session included:

- Getting the trapper's yard plowed to make room for vehicles and wall tent
- Ensure a wall tent, wood stove, and other outdoor equipment is set-up at site
- arranging to have trucks, skidoos, outdoor equipment, and food available for the day
- ensuring the trapping equipment and fuel were taken to the site
- preparing snowmobile rental contracts

Activities

The orientation weekend began on Saturday, December 14th at 10 am held at the TH Hall. The agenda and details for the Saturday session as follows:

1. Welcome and Introductions – Georgette McLeod
Georgette introduced all the youth to the presenters and Elders. She provided an overview of the agenda, handed out the workbooks and worksheets, reviewed expectations of the weekend, and provided details and expectations for the Sunday session. Georgette was unable to remain at the Saturday session and handed over the agenda to Debbie Nagano for the rest of the day.

2. Trapping Videos – Debbie Nagano
There were videos shared with the group that came from YG Environment website on two Yukon trappers and their experiences with trapping.
3. Elder Talk with Peggy Kormendy
Peggy was also available to share with the youth some of her experiences on where she trapped, how long, safety examples, accident experiences, trapping management, the enjoyment of trapping and being on the land. Her children have carried on the tradition of trapping in her family.
4. Trapline/Furbearer Management – Debbie Nagano
With assistance from YG Regional Wildlife Technician, Georgette compiled a power point presentation for Debbie to present to the group on Trapline/Furbearer Management. The topics included the definition of wildlife management, who is responsible for wildlife management, how wildlife is managed for trapping, understanding of harvestable surplus, assessing populations for trapping, and keeping a journal.
5. Furbearers, Harvesting Strategies, and Diseases – Debbie Nagano
Debbie covered extensive information about the most common furbearers trapped in TH traditional territory and did a review of other furbearers found throughout the Yukon. She discussed in detail about properly handling furbearers because of the dangers of disease transmission.
6. Trapping Regulations, Commercial and Subsistence – Bruce/Peter/Debbie
The presenters shared their experiences following the commercial trapping regulations and reporting requirements for trapping. They also shared their experience under the subsistence trapping regulations as First Nation Trappers. All the youth were provided with a copy of the trapping regulations summary.
7. Lunch Break – Lunch Provided
8. Types of Traps, Snares, and Lures – Bruce/Peter/Debbie
All presenters shared their knowledge of the different types of traps, snares, and lures that are used. Bruce talked mainly about the traps he uses for his Trapline. He also shared how long he has been trapping, how he accessed his line, why he traps, safety procedures to follow, and accidents he's had using the traps and how to avoid them.
9. Break
10. Fur Handling Equipment and Trap Maintenance – Bruce/Peter/Debbie
The presenters shared what equipment that is necessary to have on the Trapline, what tools are required for skinning and stretching the furs, what kinds of knives are needed for skinning and why.

11. Trapping Demonstrations – Bruce/Peter/Debbie

For the remainder of the afternoon, the presenters show the youth how to set and safely disengage the traps. They also showed them examples of ways to get out of a trap if caught. The equipment you always need to have on hand for safety and survival.

The agenda and details for the Sunday session as follows:

1. Welcome and review agenda - Georgette

The youth met with Georgette at the TH Hall to review what the expectations are for the day and to prepare the lunches. Once all youth arrived there, everyone was transported to Pete Nagano's house on the Dome to start their outdoor portion of the orientation weekend.

2. Gear Check – Georgette/Tyler

Georgette and Tyler checked in with all the youth to make sure they were dressed appropriately to be outside for most of the day. Ricky, Youth Coordinator, was also there to assist the youth for the morning.

3. Bush Safety – Bruce/Pete

Peter talked in great detail on how to appropriately dress for the Trapline. He educated them about layers, no cotton, and how important it was to wear waterproof and warm clothing even if it's a nice winter day. He provided examples on different types of clothing and footwear to use and what to not to use and why. He explained that you must be prepared for different types of weather and snow conditions, such as overflow. Bruce showed them all the safety and emergency equipment he carries on his snowmobile and skimmer.

4. Snowmobile Safety – Pete/Bruce

Peter provided detailed information to youth about how to deal with a broken down snowmobile, how to start a snowmobile in extreme weather, and what tools you will need on hand for your snowmobile, such as extra spark plugs, and especially letting others know where you are going in case there is a problem. He discussed rules for travelling as a groups and signs to communicate in a group.

5. Continuation of trapping demonstrations – Bruce

Bruce demonstrated how to set traps for marten, lynx, and squirrel in the greenbelt. He showed the youth some tricks he uses to ensure a successful catch. He demonstrated again how to get out of the trap if your arm gets caught.

6. Snowmobile Trip to Bruce's trap line

For the remainder of the afternoon, the group went on a snowmobile trip with the youth. There was one TH snowmobile, two of Peter's snowmobiles, and Bruce's

snowmobile used for this trip. TH had to rent Peter's snowmobiles and Bruce's snowmobile in order to do this trip to the Trapline. Tyler was old enough to use one of the snowmobiles and another youth had experience with snowmobiles and they were operators along with Georgette, Bruce, and Peter.

We headed up the dome road and turned on to the second dome road, then finally descended down towards Bruce's Trapline to check the pre-set traps. There were no furbearers in the traps during the trip, but there was one trap was tripped. It was possibly tripped by a lynx that got away and further disturbed by the squirrel. Bruce re-set the trap better and then also put another trap further down the Trapline.

Once we returned to Peter's yard, we cleaned up the wall tent, supplies, and any equipment that needed to be returned to the appropriate locations. We discussed the possibility of having a camp in January or February and thanked Bruce and Peter for all their help that day.

The Cultural Education Coordinator tried to organize a camp in January and/or February but unfortunately, everyone's schedule was busy with other work commitments, vacations, and other community events, so the camp never happened along with any follow-up activities. It was difficult to get enough supervisors and trappers to be available to continue the teachings about trapping.

Recommendations

As in the previous year, we struggled to have a camp portion happen for the First Trapper program, mainly due to timing with staff and trapper availability. The youth would have been ready to go to camp any time but it was a challenge to coordinate time with staff, Elders, and trappers to ensure that we can enough people available to safely run a trapping camp and program at Km 131 on the Dempster Highway. In the future, we will better coordinate time with individuals to ensure they are available for the camp. We will aim to have the orientation sessions in November and the camp either the first or second weekend in December. We would also aim to plan times for the youth do day trips to continue to check the traps and also have an opportunity to skins any trapped furbearers. If we are able to have a camp portion of the program next year, we will make better use of the funding provided by Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust.

The Cultural Education Coordinator would also like to attend the Trappers Education program to have a better understanding of trapping, regulations, and types of traps needed in preparation for the First Trapper program.

The Cultural Education Coordinator will also continue to work with the TH Education Department and YG Education Department to create an accredited course for the First Trapper program.

Conclusion

We hope that each year the TH First Trapper program will improve and continue for the foreseeable future to benefit youth in the TH traditional territory. We want to create enriching experiences for them so they develop an appreciation for trapping and instill the value of conservation and stewardship of furbearers in the Yukon.

We appreciate the financial assistance from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust Fund and Tr'ondek Hwech'in for continuing to fund this worthwhile program.

TR'ONDEK HWECH'IN

Trapping Camp

Unaudited

	<u>Current</u>	<u>Year to</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Free</u>
	<u>Month</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Balance</u>
REVENUE:				
YFAWET		2,828.01	9,470.00	6,641.99
TOTAL		2,828.01	9,470.00	6,641.99
EXPENDITURES:				
Materials & Supplies		198.13	650.00	451.87
Contract/Honorarium		1,483.96	4,120.00	2,636.04
Travel Expenses/Rentals		1,145.92	4,700.00	3,554.08
		2,828.01	9,470.00	6,641.99
TOTAL	0.00	0,000.00	0,000.00	0,000.00
EXCESS OF REVENUE OVER EXPENDITURES	0.00	0,000.00		0,000.00