

Hutchi Lakes Bison and Fish Project – FINAL REPORT

Submitted by Jane Vincent, September 5, 2014

Project Activities

The project consisted of planning and completing an 11 day journey to Hutchi Lakes with 17 youth from Champagne Aishihik First Nation. In the planning process with CAFN we realized it would be best to do one longer trip rather than two shorter trips as described in the proposal.

Planning: Throughout May and June I met and emailed with CAFN staff who were working on the logistics of this camp. My role was to secure the funding for a canoe based fish and wildlife youth camp; this in turn got the camp approved by CAFN and they dedicated staff and budget from three departments (Lands, Education and Social). I had full responsibility for the canoe logistics, partnered in the discussions of the activities and resource people involved as well as the gear, transportation and camp location logistics. In June I spent 3 days transporting the two remaining canoes to the northernmost point of the lakes, so that 4 canoes awaited the group. I researched and purchased lifejackets and paddles as well as a wheeled cart to transport canoes overland (receipts enclosed).

Trip Summary

Monday July 21: Group gathers in Champagne. Russel Osborne came to do a bear talk and bison question and answer

Tuesday July 22: Group begins hike. First camp at sand dunes about 10km. ATV support drivers Lawrence Joe and Roy

Wednesday July 23: Hike all day to small lake north of main lakes.

Thursday July 24: Hike 3 km to canoes. Group divides in 2 so half can paddle and half hike; we arrange a meeting spot at the north end of the middle lake to switch. Bison observations. Arrive Hutchi village site (50km journey from the highway)

Friday July 25: Float plane arrives at Hutchi with elders Paul and Kathy Birckel, regional biologist Shawn Taylor, and Paula Banks cafn. I take a group to canoe Hutchi R with Shawn and we noted signs of bear, bison, moose and beaver along river

Saturday July 26: Three activities: Canoeing (Jane), Setting Fish net and learning about fish (Paul and Shawn) and culture with Kathy (who spent time at Hutchi as a child) and Paula.

Sunday July 27: Shawn did biology talks and activities with tracks and skulls

Monday July 28 – 30: Hike and canoe out, using the same campsites as the journey in. Dinner and overnight at Champagne

Thursday July 31: Clean up gear and travel home.

Participants: Age range was from 9 to 17 for the participants: Bobbi-Rae, Theryn, Jordan, Dylan, Destiny, Franky, Kassius, Michael, Bam, Memphis, Alea, Alexis, Denise, Rayden, Kenneth and Graham.

Youth Leaders: aged 14 to 17: Nantsana, Jonah, Christine

Adults: Camp leaders that did the whole trip: Luke Campbell, Jennifer Chambers, Laurel

Lawrence Joe did an amazing job driving our gear in and was very supportive of the project. Kyra Chambers, the Alsek RRC summer student, joined us for the hike in and was a great support to the group; Brian MacDonald also joined the group for the hike in. These three flew out on the 25th from Hutchi.

Flying in for three days from the 25th to the 27th were elders Paul and Kathy Birckel, regional biologist Shawn Taylor and CAFN cultural staff Paula Banks. These 4 spent 3 days at Hutchi and offered the group a great variety of activities and perspectives. They flew out on the Sunday. The flight was cost shared between CAFN and YG Environment.

On Sunday night Graham Boyde arrived to be our ATV support driver for the return hike.



"This is an ambitious and worthwhile project" Quote from Shawn Taylor shown here talking with kids at Hutchi about animals

How our activities contributed to the protection and enhancement of Fish and Wildlife and their habitat

The youth experienced a 10 day journey in their traditional territory and experienced first hand the habitat it provides for key wildlife species. Bison hairs on almost every tree, bison and wolf droppings side by side, a close range encounter with bison, close enough to smell the animal, a lot of informal learning happened as a kid would see something and ask, or be amazed by the volume of bison patties at Hutchi, as well as learning from Shawn about biology and collaring work.

Setting a fish net and catching 12 whitefish and one pike that were cleaned and cooked. Handling the fish and learning about whitefish and about netting. We saw evidence of fish feeding other species observing where a bird of prey had consumed a fish on a ridge and enjoying the presence of loons.



Bam holds a whitefish; kids above clean fish and Paul who set the net on ATV

By having 17 youth immersed and engaged with the habitat of the Hutchi Lakes region, a contribution has been made to the enhancement of fish and wildlife and their habitat as these young people now have firsthand knowledge of the land, the bison and fish that live there, and will be more likely to be engaged in future projects and have interest in this area and its resident species in the future.

Variances from the proposal and what we would do differently:

As mentioned the camp was for a larger group and for a longer time than originally proposed.

Kids kept journals and did some artwork in their journals, however I do not have any of that work to share with the Enhancement Trust as hoped, as they are the kids' personal journals. We came up with a couple of ideas such as a group map with all sightings and camps on it, after the fact. We had some challenges with weather and logistics that consumed the time and energy that may have gone to such a project. However we were able to bring all the kids that wanted to come; seventeen youth was a bigger group than I anticipated and that in itself speaks to the success of this project.

Legacy for the Future There are now four canoes, paddles and lifejackets with whistles, painters, bailers and throwbags, at Hutchi lakes (for now there are two at the north end and two at the village; the two at the village can easily be moved back to the north end by snowmachine, ready for a group to use next summer) The lifejackets and paddles purchased are all labelled CAFN. Half have been stored with the canoes and half came out with the group and are stored with me for future projects or to return to Hutchi next year once the cabin is complete and they can be securely stored.



Communications – As soon as I received approval for this project to go ahead I notified Champagne Aishihik and we had an initial meeting with 5 CAFN staff (including the directors of Lands and Education) to discuss funding, timing and preliminary delegation of tasks. CAFN is appreciative of the funding that got this project off the ground and of the fact that the canoes and gear at Hutchi now belong to CAFN and can contribute to future appreciation of the area.

The project was explained to YG Environment/ Tom Jung and he supported the project by flying some supplies to Hutchi in conjunction with a bison survey that was happening the week before.

Many great photos speak a thousand words and are attached to this report. An idea would be to get some stickers and crests made up with the Enhancement Trust logo on them, that I could put on the lifejackets and paddles. This could still be done next summer.

The Alsek RRC supported the project by sending summer student Kyra Chambers for the first four days. She documented the project for the RRC website.

Thanks to the Enhancement Trust for supporting the Hutchi Lakes Bison and Fish project, getting youth on the land, in the traditional means of walking and canoeing; I was honoured to be a facilitator of this successful project.

Jane Vincent



Dragging a canoe between Northern and Middle of the Hutchi lakes. Note on names: we were able to learn Tutchone names for the three lakes, the tributary creeks and connecting river, and many other features along the way, from a copy of a cultural inventory that was done in the 90's that Lawrence and Brian brought along.

Note on spelling: Hutchi is the preferred spelling not Hutshi as written in the initial proposal