

NOVEMBER 2021

THAIDENE NĒNÉ NEWSLETTER



HIGHLIGHTS

- Biodiversity Study
- Archaeology Assessment
- Summer Students
- Xá Dá Yáłtı
- Frontier Lodge

**THAIDENE
NENE**
Land of the Ancestors

THE NEVER-ENDING PANDEMIC

It's hard to believe that it's been more than a year-and-a-half since the NWT first went into lockdown as a result of COVID-19. August to October of 2021 has been one of the more difficult stretches of the pandemic for the territory. For part of this time, the NWT had the highest per capita rates of infection in the country.

Łutsël K'é, like other small communities in the NWT, has been affected by the rapid increase in case counts caused by the delta variant of COVID-19. Our community has had to close its doors multiple times over the last three months to stop the spread of the virus. As a result, we were not able to accomplish all that we had hoped this fall/summer.

All the more reason then to celebrate what we did do since our last newsletter in June.

THAIDENE NĒNÉ BIODIVERSITY STUDY



The Thaidene Nënë Department, in collaboration with Environment and Natural Resources, the Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada, and the University of British Columbia, launched a multi-year biodiversity monitoring program this summer.

The study uses trail cameras and audio recording units to gather information about the movement and sounds of wildlife in the Land of Ancestors. This will provide important baseline information about biodiversity in Thaidene Nënë.

Between July and September, Ni Hat'ni Dene guardians and field crews that included UBC Master's student Laura Stewart and staff from ENR, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and Parks Canada used boats, float planes, and helicopters to install 304 trail cameras, 302 sound recording units, and 16 bat recording units throughout the Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area.

The units will be retrieved in August 2022. In the interim, check out the of the muskox photo from one of the units the guardians deployed in July!

PIKE'S PORTAGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

From July 12-15, two GNWT archaeologists accompanied by Parks Canada staff conducted testing for archaeological artifacts at the proposed location for the Ni Hat'ni Dene patrol cabin at Pike's Portage. The project was part of the Parks Canada impact assessment process, which is required because archaeological resources were previously documented at the site.



A single stone flake was found, which indicates the likelihood of pre-contact tool production. Further testing in the proposed location proved negative for cultural resources. A report is being produced and will be shared with Thaidene Nënë Xá Dá Yáltı and the Thaidene Nënë Department when it is completed.

The assessment team would like to thank: the Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation for hosting them at the portage and taking them to various cultural sites in this very important area; the students of Łutsël K'é's Thaidene Nënë Department for assisting them with the archaeological work; and Albert and Sarah Boucher for sharing their knowledge and passion for the land with everyone on site.

SUMMER STUDENT PROGRAM

Each summer, the Thaidene Nënë Department hires summer students to join the Ni Hat'ni Dene crews. As they spend time on the land and water, the students learn in the Dene way about their homeland, including place names and stories, but also about navigation, harvesting, reading the weather, language, and safety.

This year, six summer students were involved in all aspects of Ni Hat'ni Dene work. They participated in the water monitoring and trail cam training in June. Throughout the summer, they welcomed visitors to Thaidene Nënë and conducted engagement surveys while out on patrol with the guardians. They also supported ecological monitoring activities. In July, they travelled to Pike's Portage to assist with the archaeological survey, and in August, they helped with site preparation for the spiritual gathering at Kaché.



The following students were hired to work alongside the Ni Hat'ni Dene guardians as youth guardians from June to August 2021: Gerome Basil, Keegan Boucher, Dennay Catholique, Valedée Lockhart, Tyson Marlowe, and Sierra Waugh.

WELCOME NEW NI HAT'NI DENE COORDINATOR



"What I like about my job is being able to take care of the guys because they are our guardians. I'd like to make sure they are well-equipped for every season. I also like being able to work with the young people, show them the way of life, and share bush skills and knowledge."

-Bernice Marlowe

THAIDENE NĒNÉ XÁ DÁ YÁŁTI UPDATE



Thaidene Nēné Xá Dá Yáłti, the operational management board for Thaidene Nēné, has had a number of meetings since our last newsletter both in-person and online. The board continues to work on developing board governance and operating procedures, including policies related to meeting agreements, COVID-19, conflict, information and data management, work planning, budgeting, and communications.



Photo: Shannon Ward

The board has also made several operational decisions, including approving: the Pike's Portage Archaeological Assessment, the business licence for work to remove invasive species at the former Reliance Weather Station, and the proposed approach to re-commemorating the Fort Reliance National Historic Site. They also provided input on the locations for water and biodiversity monitoring.

A highlight of 2021 for members of Thaidene Nēné Xá Dá Yáłti was the board retreat, which took place at Frontier Lodge in July. This gathering included a goal setting session for management planning, a cultural event hosted by LKDFN, and two "field trips." Board members spent an afternoon on Tu Nedhé (Great Slave Lake) with the Ni Hat'ni Dene guardians. They also did an aerial tour of Thaidene Nēné Indigenous Protected Area so they could get to know the land they are taking care of. The tour included stops at the Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation's cabin at Pedacho Kúe (Artillery Lake), as well as Thait'ěth Kíłʔa Tué (Douglas Lake) and Tł'ombáli Tué (Tent Lake).



Photo: Shannon Ward

FRONTIER LODGE

The second season of renovations at Frontier Lodge have been completed. These include: the installation of new decks and locally milled trim boards on all guest cabins, upgraded fuel storage and electrical service, and locally embroidered pillow cases on all guest beds.

All of the Lodge's guest cabins are now themed for a significant place within Thaidene Nënë. Chosen by the Lodge board following Elders meetings last winter, the seven place themes are:

ʔedacho Kué – Artillery Lake

HuKaʔáze - Old Łutsel K'e

ʔedhe Yé Ts'ële - Great Slave Lake

Katche – Fort Reliance

Nitł'ër Nu Na Tłazı - Wildbread Bay

Ttharı – Snowdrift River

Hazúghe – Barrenlands

Each cabin will include bilingual signage, an Elder's story about the significance of the place, archival photography, and local artwork.

While border restrictions made a regular season impossible, the Lodge was able to operate a limited staycation season for NWT residents in late July and early August. The Lodge was honoured to host Thaidene Nënë Xá Dá Yáłtı (photo below) as the first group of guests since LKDFN purchased Frontier Lodge!



Photo: Pat Kane



Photo: Pat Kane

The Lodge staff are all very much looking forward to 2022 when they can hopefully resume “normal” operations.



Photo: Pat Kane