SEPTEMBER 2026

# THAIDENE NËNÉ NEWSLETTER

Łútsël K'é Dene First Nation

NIHATNI DENE GUARDIANS

## HIGHLIGHTS

- LKDFN Hosts Relationship Plan Celebration
- Team Wins Spirit of Collaboration Award
- Nı Hat'nı Dene Update
- Third Biodversity Camp a Success
- Thaıdene Nëné Xá Dá Yáłtı
- Frontier Lodge

# LKDFN HOSTS RELATIONSHIP PLAN CELEBRATION

On June 10, there was a gathering in Łutsël K'é to honour the completion and approval of Thaıdene Nëné Badı Xá (Working with Thaidene Nëné), the first relationship plan for Thaıdene Nëné. LKDFN was joined by the leaders and representatives of the other signatory Indigenous governments, our Crown government partners, community members, and representatives from other organizations that have been part of this journey.

Thaıdene Nëné is a healthy landscape because of the countless generations of our people who have cared for the land and water. Thaıdene Nëné Badı Xá provides direction on how we will continue to steward Thaıdene Nëné for generations to come in collaboration with our partners.

Mársı cho to Elder Juni Gahdële and the Łutsël K'é Dene drummers for opening the celebration with a fire-feeding ceremony, to Elder and Thaıdene Nëné Xá Dá Yáłtı board member Emelie Saunders for delivering the closing prayer, Sandra Lockhart, Maria Catholique, and Saniz Catholique for providing delicious food, and Thaıdene Nëné Department staff for all of your work behind the scenes.

# TEAM WINS SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION AWARD

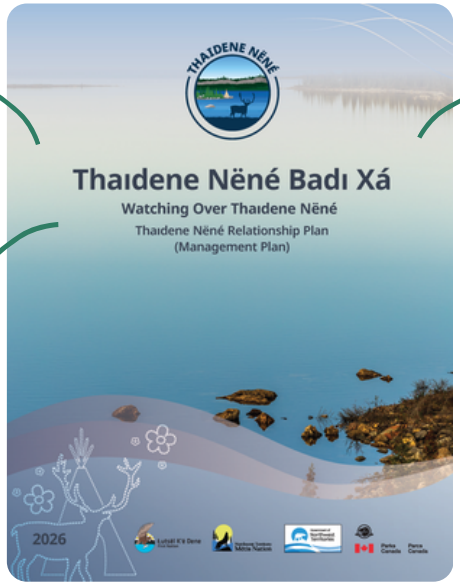
Also in June, the team that developed *Thaıdene Nëné Badı Xá*, the first relationship plan for Thaıdene Nëné, was awarded a 2026 Parks Canada CEO Award. The Spirit of Collaboration Award honours an extraordinary partnership that reflects a meaningful shift in conservation — from top down management to shared governance rooted in trust, respect, and relationship building.

Together, this team created a plan that honours Indigenous stewardship and replaces the concept of “management” with “relationship” — a powerful step forward in advancing reconciliation through conservation.

The CEO Awards of Excellence represent the highest distinction at Parks Canada, celebrating those who make the Agency more innovative, inclusive, and inspiring. This project is a shining example of what is possible when we work together.

*Thaıdene Nëné Badı Xá* is the first plan for Thaıdene Nëné.

*Thaıdene Nëné Badı Xá* is built on the foundation of nuwé ch’anıe that has protected Thaıdene Nëné for millennia.




*Thaıdene Nëné Badı Xá* provides direction on how we will continue to steward Thaıdene Nëné for generations to come.

Nuwé ch’anıe is the principle that describes Dene values and knowledge systems, including responsibilities to care for the land, water, and wildlife.

# MÁRSI CHO TO OUR AMAZING SUMMER CREW

The Thaıdene Nëné Department had a great summer because of this stellar crew. We especially enjoyed being joined on the land and in the office by four summer students: Nitanis Laboucan, Serenity Shirt-Catholique, Alex Deranger, and Xander Abel.

# SUMMER STUDENT REFLECTIONS

We asked the 2026 summer students to tell us a bit about their experience this year. Here is what they had to say:

**Serenity Shirt-Catholique**

Working along side the Thaıdene Nëné crew was a great experience. Máhsı cho for giving me that opportunity. I really loved being out on the land and learning more about where I come from. I felt more connected to my community. Some of my favourite parts this summer were camping out in Fort Reliance, the boat rides, and flying In a helicopter. I left feeling really grateful about the whole experience.

**Nitanis Laboucan**

Working with Thaıdene Nëné as a summer student was the highlight of my year. Being back home for the summer was a great learning experience, from starting in June and joining the school to help out at our annual hide camp to finishing the job in Fort Reliance in August. One of my favorite parts of the job was being on the land all the time and having the opportunity to work with some of the hardest-working people in my community. I got closer to my people. I got to hear the history of Old Fort Reliance, Plummers Lodge, and many other places from Elders. And what I think is most fascinating was being in the barrenlands for most of my summer.

**Alex Deranger**

This summer I had the chance to work with the Thaıdene Nëné Department. I was excited to learn more about the land and my culture as I have been away from home for 5 years. While working for Thaıdene Nëné, I got closer with the land and heard the stories of my last name. I also had the chance to work with a good group of guys and summer students who I would say made my summer a lot better. By far, the highlight of the summer was being out on the boats going to Desnéthchéé/Fort Reliance.

# NI HAT'NI DENE ACTIVITIES

**Summer Patrols**

Each summer, Ni Hat'ni Dene are busy travelling across the protected area, welcoming visitors and caring for Thaıdene Nëné. This year was no different. Over the course of multiple patrols this summer, the guardians and summer students cleaned up cabins, visited and cared for sacred sites, harvested meat and fish to share with community members, painted platforms, and cleared trails. The team enjoyed their time travelling and living on the land together.

**Desnéthcheé**

One of the highlights of the Thaıdene Nëné Department calendar (and also the community of Łutsël K'é) is the spiritual gathering at Desnéthcheé. This year, we assisted with site preparations, transporting freight, the development of communications materials, operating shuttles, and leading activities like the village cabin clean-up and the Pike's Portage hike. Mársı cho to Desnéthcheé coordinator Amber Jobin-Catholique and the rest of the Wellness Department for all of your hard work.

# THIRD BIODIVERSITY CAMP A SUCCESS

In early September, the Thaıdene Nëné Department co-hosted the third annual ecological monitoring camp at ʔedacho Tłaze (Timber Bay). The camp brings together Elders and knowledge holders, Thaıdene Nëné staff, and youth to gather information about the land through both Dene and Western methods and share knowledge. It is also an opportunity to harvest traditional foods to share with community members at home.

The highlight of this year's camp was the presence of students and staff from the Łutsël K'é Dene School. The students were kept busy setting and checking nets, picking berries, harvesting wood, studying fish, listening to stories, and servicing the remote cameras that gather information about the land and animals.

# THAIDENE NËNÉ XÁ DÁ YÁŁTI UPDATE

Summer is usually a quieter time for Thaıdene Nëné Xá Dá Yáłtı. This year, the board had two off-cycle meetings over the summer to review and, ultimately, approve, the Alone TV series that is currently being filmed in Thaıdene Nëné Territorial Protected Area near Talthelei Narrows.

In early September, Thaıdene Nëné Xá Dá Yáłtı was invited to Timber Bay to experience the ecological monitoring camp. The extra seats on the TDNXDY charter were opened up to the community so other members could also experience the camp for the day. Board members and senior party representatives thoroughly enjoyed travel to and time at Timber Bay. They visited with the participants and went berry picking. A rainbow appeared just as they were leaving.

The board will begin its 2026-27 meeting calendar with a meeting in Hay River in late October.

# MANAGER NAMED TO ORDER OF WILFRID LAURIER

We are delighted to announce that Iris Catholique, manager of Łutsël K’é's Thaıdene Nëné Department, will be recognized with the Order of Wilfrid Laurier University at the university convocation ceremonies in October.

In addition to overseeing conservation initiatives, supporting the Ni Hat’ni Dene guardians program, advancing cultural and food security programming, and helping ensure the land and Dënesųłiné ways of live are protected for future generations, Iris Catholique has fostered meaningful partnerships between Indigenous communities and researchers, including long-standing collaborations with Laurier faculty members and graduate students. Her leadership has strengthened community-based research, environmental monitoring, and knowledge sharing, while also ensuring benefits flow back to community members.

## FRONTIER LODGE UPDATE

The 2026 season at Frontier Lodge was another to remember. Minus a few last-minute cancellations, the lodge had a sold-out season. Clients travelled to the East Arm from all over the world, including Scotland, England, Sweden, Poland, France, Belgium, Italy, and the US.

The fishing was amazing, as always. The season's biggest fish tipped the scales at a whopping 53 pounds. With water levels getting back to normal, it was nice to see guests enjoying the Arctic grayling fishing in the Stark River again. Let's all cross our fingers low water years are behind us.

Muskox sightings were a daily occurrence, with black bear, bald eagles, wolves, and the odd moose also spotted throughout the season.

The Frontier team is delighted to announce that the lodge is already all but sold out for 2027!

**FRONTIER'S 2026 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR LKDFN STUDENTS IS CURRENTLY ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS. THE CLOSING DATE IS OCTOBER 9TH. ALL STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO APPLY!**