

COASTAL HABITAT RESEARCH PROGRAM

STEERING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE 19TH MEETING

HELD BY CONFERENCE CALL ON MARCH 15, 2019

PRESENT: William Blackned – Cree Nation of Wemindji
Marc Dunn – Niskamoon Corporation
Carine Durocher – Hydro-Québec
Jean-Philippe Gilbert – Hydro-Québec
John Lameboy – Cree Nation of Chisasibi
Roderick Pachano – Cree Nation of Chisasibi
Ernie Rabbitskin – Niskamoon Corporation
Jean Rodrigue – Canadian Wildlife Service
Nadia Saganash – Cree Nation Government
Robbie Tapiatic – Cree Nation of Chisasibi
Alain Tremblay – Hydro-Québec.

ABSENT: James Bobbish – Cree Nation of Chisasibi
Norman Cheezo – Cree Nation of Eastmain
Réal Courcelles – Hydro-Québec
Louie Kanatewat – Cree Nation of Chisasibi
Ernest Moses – Waskaganish First Nation
Emily Sinave – Cree Nation Government

GUESTS: Mhaly Bois-Charlebois – Hydro-Québec

19TH MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE – REVISION OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EELGRASS MANDATE

CHAIR AND SECRETARY

Marc Dunn chaired the meeting.

Mhaly Bois-Charlebois acted as Secretary. The meeting began at 2:12 p.m. on Friday, March 15, 2019.

REVISION OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EELGRASS PROJECT

Mr. Dunn said he would read the terms of reference point by point given that people may not have had time to read the document or they may have read it very quickly (a copy of the terms of reference is appended to the minutes).

Everyone agreed.

Mr. Dunn asked if everyone had the document in hand.

The participants said that they did.

Mr. Dunn read page 1. He said that it described the same things as previous terms of reference sent by the Steering Committee (SC). He said that the study period had been modified to include the extension that the SC requested from the agreement signatories. He read the research objectives. He added that the paragraph after point 5 addresses the peer-review process as well as Cree traditional knowledge and how it relates to the project. Mr. Dunn said that the paragraph ends with information regarding the eelgrass mandate.

Carine Durocher suggested that Mr. Dunn add two subtitles for the objectives section: one for the Comprehensive Research Program and the other for the objectives of this specific mandate.

Mr. Dunn agreed. He said that he would put the Comprehensive Research Program objectives at the bottom of page 1 and the objectives of this specific mandate on page 2.

Everyone agreed.

Roderick Pachano said that since he had not attended the last meeting, he wondered if somebody could tell him what had happened and explain the context of the terms of reference.

Mr. Dunn said that, essentially, after Melanie-Louise Leblanc presented her work to the SC and outlined how she would participate in the program, the SC informed her that they would develop the terms of reference. He added that the objective of this conference call was to review the terms of reference before sending them to Ms. Leblanc so that her team could prepare a proposal and present it at the next SC meeting.

Mr. Pachano asked if the research period had been extended.

Mr. Dunn answered that the request for an extension was presented to the Cree Nation Government, the Niskamoon Corporation and Hydro-Québec, and that, based on the unofficial answer he received, he believes that the request has been granted.

Mr. Pachano read the first paragraph of page 1, "Eelgrass beds are known to be important marine ecosystems providing both habitat and food for many species (fish, birds) and they are present in littoral zone along the coast of James Bay (Dignard et al., 1991)." He then commented that, in addition to fish or birds, mammals such as seals are also affected and the entire food chain is involved.

Mr. Dunn agreed and said he would modify the sentence.

Nadia Saganash said that she had a brief comment regarding the research objectives section. She said that under point 5, the waterfowl project, Mr. Dunn simply indicates that it is under the responsibility of Jean-François Giroux whereas for the other projects, he lists more objectives. She suggested that Mr. Dunn add the objectives of this project too.

Mr. Dunn asked Jean-Philippe Gilbert if he could help him with that.

Mr. Gilbert said he would.

Mr. Pachano asked what the main objective is.

Mr. Dunn replied that he would add the information but reminded everyone to keep in mind that the document was modified very quickly.

Mr. Pachano read, "However, since a massive decline in eelgrass beds observed in the 1990's, eelgrass has not recovered..." on page 1. He then asked who observed this in the 1990s because the Crees had observed this situation prior to that time.

Mr. Dunn asked Mr. Pachano for clarification.

Mr. Pachano replied that it was a valid question given that Cree observations have been ignored in the past. He added that some of the studies confirmed the decline occurred in the mid-1990s, but that it was, in fact, declining before then.

Ms. Durocher asked if it would be accurate to write that it was documented in the 1990s as a reference to the studies. She said that unless Mr. Pachano had a specific timing of when the Crees observed the decline, they did not know when it happened, so maybe they should keep the 1990s as a reference.

Mr. Pachano said that he guessed it would be okay. He then read the following excerpt: "Cree communities are concerned that some environmental factors may negatively influence plant recovery." He asked why the word "may" was used when they already know that environmental factors have a negative impact.

Mr. Dunn suggested the following change: "Cree communities are concerned that some factors are negatively influencing plant recovery."

Mr. Pachano asked what would be changed concerning his first comment.

Ms. Durocher said that they agreed to write that the decline had been "documented" at the end of the 1990s instead of "observed."

Mr. Pachano asked which compensation funds were being referred to in the second paragraph of page 1.

Mr. Dunn replied that he was referring to the funds attached to the agreement and added that Mr. Pachano was right to say that they are not compensation funds.

Alain Tremblay said that the paragraphs in this document are the same as the ones used in the previous terms of reference.

Mr. Dunn said that the SC made a mistake in not removing this part and that he would change it.

Mr. Pachano said to just refer to the new relationship agreement. He read the following from page 1: "Niskamoon has created a Steering Committee to oversee a large-scale research project aiming to characterize eelgrass beds and related habitats along the eastern coast of James Bay. The aim is for these studies to be conducted within a 3-year time frame (2019–2021) and to inform Cree Communities of the results." He said that Hydro-Québec and the Cree Nation appointed the SC but that it sounded as though Niskamoon did all the work.

Mr. Dunn replied that it was a valid suggestion and that he would change it.

Mr. Pachano asked which studies were being referred to in this paragraph, whether it was the previous studies or only the current study.

Mr. Dunn replied that the paragraph was referring to everything about the research project. He said that the schedule is until 2021, but that it is understood that the peer-review document will take longer than that. He said that by January 2021, the SC will be in a position to present the final results to the community in a manner that the community expects. He added that a symposium will be held in January 2021 and a presentation will be made to the communities.

Mr. Pachano asked what would happen after the presentation.

Mr. Dunn replied that the expectation is that the researchers will have a couple of months to finalize their mandates, but that they will not conduct additional studies.

Mr. Pachano asked if the symposium will be like the previous one in that there will be no consultation. He said that at the last symposium, the community was basically being told something but was not given the chance to participate.

Mr. Dunn answered that, hopefully, the community will be able to participate, but that that part is under the control of the researchers and is not up to the SC.

Mr. Pachano said that he did not see any reference to consultations with local residents in the document. He said that the same thing will happen again, namely that there will be no collaboration with Chisasibi and people will simply be informed of the results.

Mr. Dunn read the paragraph at the bottom of page 2: "The outcome and results of these five projects will have to be integrated in order to get an overall portrait of the situation for the Eelgrass of the East coast of James Bay. The success of this venture depends on an integrated and collaborative approach as well as a constant understanding of the objectives pursued. Needless to say, the Steering Committee is expecting collaboration between researchers to guarantee efficiency and optimization. Furthermore, all research projects are expected to combine

innovative peer-reviewed science with Cree Traditional Knowledge at all steps. As such, the four coastal communities, and especially coastal land users, are essential collaborators.”

Mr. Pachano said that it should be based on a “meaningful consultation.”

Mr. Dunn asked if Mr. Pachano wanted him to add that to page 2.

Mr. Pachano replied that he did.

Mr. Dunn said he would change it.

Mr. Pachano read the following sentence: “It is widely accepted that the growth of eelgrass is affected by many environmental parameters such as turbidity, salinity, nutrients and water temperature.” He then stated that the word “parameters” should be replaced by “factors,” given that “parameters” refers to something you only measure.

Mr. Dunn said he would change it.

Mr. Pachano then read the following sentence on page 1: “In James Bay, water circulates from South (Rivière Harricana) to North (Cape Jones) along the east coast.” He said that it sounded like all the water comes from the coast.

Mr. Dunn suggested a change and the participants agreed.

Mr. Pachano then read the following sentence on page 1: “Hence, we expect water characteristics will change in that same direction from South to North, as rivers’ discharges are feeding the James Bay coastal circulation.” He stated that when Hydro-Québec diverted the rivers, those characteristics changed.

Mr. Tremblay said that that was not the meaning of the sentence and that any changes in the rivers will change something as the water moves north. He added that spending a lot of time on a text that had been used in the other terms of reference was not the purpose of the conference call. He said they should focus more on the eelgrass aspect of the text.

Mr. Pachano said that he would not participate in the meeting if people did not want to hear what he had to say.

Mr. Dunn said that he did not have a problem hearing what Mr. Pachano had to say. He suggested some changes to the text.

Mr. Pachano read the following sentence at the bottom of page 1: “Therefore, studying Eelgrass should not be restricted to understanding the ecology of Eelgrass beds themselves” and asked for clarification regarding the meaning.

Mr. Dunn said that it means the study needs to be related to the environment in which they grow.

Mr. Pachano said that Mr. Dunn should write “must” instead of “should” because otherwise, it suggests it is something you can choose whether to do or not.

Mr. Dunn agreed.

Mr. Pachano said that people want to know the causes of the decline.

Mr. Tremblay said that the purpose of the study is not to determine what affected the eelgrass in the past. He said that it is to identify the eelgrass areas and their characteristics. He added that they cannot go back in time.

Mr. Pachano said that the problem is that the researchers do not accept Cree knowledge.

Mr. Tremblay said that the point of the research is not to judge what the Crees or the others accept and that they do not want to find the causes of the decrease.

Mr. Pachano replied that in that case, he would not be a part of it.

Mr. Tremblay said that this document is based on the same principles that have been in place for 3 years.

Mr. Pachano said that as far he was concerned, what people want to know is what caused the decline of the eelgrass, and that the SC was changing that. He added that this was not acceptable.

Mr. Gilbert said that the purpose of the study is to show what affects the eelgrass, but also to integrate Cree knowledge and information so that it could perhaps be determined what happened in the past. He said that it is currently difficult because they do not have the data to find that information.

Mr. Pachano said that the researchers may not have the data, but that the fish, seals, and eelgrass were there before and are no longer there, even if Hydro-Québec or other researchers say that the situation has not changed.

Mr. Dunn said that given that this document will be sent to the researchers so they can prepare a proposal, it is important to be specific regarding what the SC wants them to do. He said that perhaps they could wait until the meeting on April 11, and then people can share their different perspectives, which can then be sent to the researchers. He added that what is important is that the researchers carry out their research. He suggested that these discussions be saved for later, because it will make more sense later than it does right now. He added that they hire people because they are confident they will listen to people. He said that they are chosen for this ability and that it is what is expected of them.

Mr. Pachano suggested that Mr. Dunn add this to the terms of reference.

Mr. Dunn replied that he would.

Mr. Pachano added that he would like the fact that people want to know the cause of the decline to be added to the terms of reference.

Mr. Tremblay said that they should discuss this later, because it was never the purpose of the study and they could spend the day on this topic.

Mr. Pachano replied that this is what people want to know.

Mr. Tremblay said that it is not that he does not agree with Mr. Pachano, but that the SC cannot go back in time. He said that he knows the Crees want to know what happened, but the researchers just cannot answer that.

Mr. Pachano said that Western science cannot determine what happened, but that he does not like some of the interpretations some of them come up with.

Mr. Gilbert said that this document is the same terms of reference that was sent to Fred Short two years ago. He said that, basically, they just changed the objectives for this part. He added that two years ago, when the contracts were signed, it was fairly clear that the objective was to study what is going on right now. Mr. Gilbert said that they did not change what was said before. He added that he understands people's concerns, but that he was surprised to hear that they now have to add this to the terms of reference because it was never the purpose of the study. He added that he did not understand why a change in researchers should result in a change of objective.

Mr. Pachano said that he was wasting his time explaining this because people do not want to listen. He added that finding out why eelgrass declined was always a clear objective.

Mr. Dunn said that what the Hydro-Québec people were trying to say is that in terms of science, not in terms of traditional knowledge, they would be lying if they said they knew what happened to eelgrass in the past. He said that what they can do is integrate Cree knowledge and try to reconstruct what happened. He added that it will certainly be part of the program, but that they cannot commit to saying what happened, because it cannot be done.

Mr. Pachano said that it is important to specify in the document that both systems of knowledge will complement each other.

Mr. Dunn said that he does not have a problem adding that, and that the more they add, the better it is. He said that they can write that land users have a very clear idea of what happened and that it needs to be looked at. He added that everybody can probably agree on this point.

Mr. Pachano said that what is important is what people have seen or observed and that the researchers take note of this. He said that otherwise, he wondered how they could collaborate on this matter. He said that when one group says something and the other says something else, they are confusing people. For instance, one group says nutrients cause problems and the other group says something else.

Mr. Tremblay said that this is exactly why they say they have to work together to provide the best interpretation as a group. He added that it is part of the work that Zou Zou Kuzyk has to carry out by 2021. He said that it is one of the SC's concerns and that it is part of the researchers' mandate to get together and include Cree knowledge.

Mr. Pachano asked if the research will go back in time.

Mr. Dunn answered that they made that clear at the meeting with Ms. Leblanc and welcomed Mr. Pachano to bring it up again with her at the next meeting. He said that Ms. Leblanc said herself that using the actual data that can be used will be the best way to conduct the study so he does not think they will go back in time. He said that they are all doing the best research program they can under the circumstances. Mr. Dunn said that everybody agrees that the Crees are an important part of this project. He added that this document is more of an administrative point they need to go through, because they were in a situation before where Dr. Short did not have terms of reference and this resulted in problems. He said that if something has to be changed, it is the relationship with the researchers.

Ms. Saganash suggested expanding the objective to include identifying the factors influencing the eelgrass. She said this could address the concerns about trying to determine what happened and finding the causes of the decline. She said that this would perhaps lead to some indication whether those factors had caused the decline in the past. She added that the concern is they do not need to know what happened in the past, but that they want to know what affects the eelgrass. She said that they need to identify some of the factors that could have contributed to the influence and a part of what have caused the decline.

Ms. Durocher said she agreed with Ms. Saganash, unless Mr. Tremblay or Mr. Gilbert said otherwise. She said that it is part of the mandate to know what is currently affecting the eelgrass and that it is the best they can do for now.

Mr. Dunn said that he would add another point in the specific objectives regarding the different causes related to the current state of the eelgrass.

Mr. Gilbert said that the question will be answered once all the research has been integrated. He said that they may be able to go back in time but asked if they want to add this objective for the eelgrass team.

Ms. Saganash answered that they have to be able to identify potential causes, even if they are hypothetical. She said that this could lead to future research.

Mr. Dunn said that Mr. Gilbert's question was more about whether this should be an objective for all the researchers or just for the eelgrass team.

Mr. Pachano said that by combining both systems of knowledge, people will receive the answers they are looking for.

Mr. Dunn said that he would modify the document regarding this point. Mr. Dunn asked if the participants were expecting him to send the document to everybody and if so, how much time they would need to send their comments, because the researchers are waiting for the proposal.

Ms. Saganash said that it would be a good idea, for verification purposes, to send it to Mr. Pachano and Mr. Tremblay, and perhaps they could discuss it by telephone.

Mr. Gilbert said that he wrote it with Mr. Tremblay and that Mr. Tremblay added some things, so he would be fine with whatever the participants wanted to add.

Mr. Dunn asked if they could just go over the 4 main points, because it is important that they all agree on those. Mr. Dunn read the first point. He said that New Hampshire already carried out some mapping work and that they do not know to what extent it is good, but that the new team has have to look at it. He said that the second thing is the biomass. He said that if the researchers do not use it, they have to suggest other methods.

Mr. Pachano asked if they had another term for biomass.

Mr. Dunn answered he was using "productivity," but he heard it is not the right word. He continued reading the third point.

Ms. Durocher said that the researchers would need more information about the third point. She said that Dr. Short was using the underwater camera and asked Mr. Dunn if it was what he expected them to do.

Mr. Dunn replied that it was not.

Ms. Durocher said that the researchers will probably have questions about it.

Mr. Dunn said that since they are familiar with what Dr. Short's team was doing, they have to come up with their own proposal.

Mr. Pachano said it should be clear what the researchers will have to do. He asked if they will have to install instruments, because before, even if the researchers were told not to put instruments in a specific location, they just did it anyway. He said that he did not know how many they lost, but they never asked the land users how it should be done. He added that the researchers will need to agree to much closer collaboration with the local people for the fieldwork.

Mr. Dunn said he would write this in the document. He said that he would make the changes before 5 p.m. and send the document to all the participants. He requested that they look at it quickly over the weekend so it could be sent to the researchers as soon as possible.

Everyone agreed.

Mr. Dunn said that he wanted to take this opportunity to tell the SC what happened with Dr. Short in New Hampshire the previous week. He said that he had driven to New Hampshire with Robbie Tapiatic and John Paul Murdoch to announce to Dr. Short that the SC had decided not to renew the contract for the coming year. He said that Dr. Short told them that he would be retiring at the end of June for personal reasons. He said that they were not expecting this news, but that it would ease the transition to a new research team. He added that Dr. Short knows what the SC's decision was and that he asked if the SC would be willing to continue working with Dante Torio, Nick Anderson and Alyssa Novac. Mr. Dunn said that the response was that they are not, mainly because of the cost of working with an American university. He said that he spoke to Ms. Novac and that she seemed fine with the decision. He added that as for Dr. Torio, he did not talk to him, but that he was present at the meeting. He said that they asked him if he would be willing to stay

on board. They told him that his work with the communities was good, but that he would have to move to Canada due to the cost. Mr. Dunn said that he does not know how Dr. Torio will react to that. He said that most of the project researchers are willing to take him as a post-doctoral student, so they have to see what Dr. Torio will say.

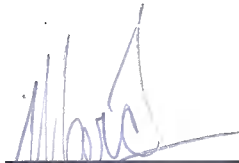
Mr. Pachano asked if his report will be finished at the end of June 2019.

Mr. Dunn said he asked Dr. Short to make the report a priority and asked him if he could send it earlier. He said that Dr. Short agreed and that the majority of the report would be ready before the end of June. He added that his final pay is related to this. Mr. Dunn said that he would be sending a letter to remind him of the SC's expectations in this regard.

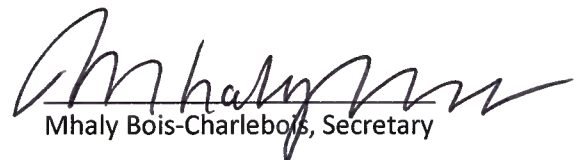
NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for April 11 and 12, 2019, in Montréal.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.



Marc Dunn, Chair of the meeting



Mhaly Bois-Charlebois, Secretary