
MINUTES OF THE MEETING STEERING COMMITTEE (SC)

Meeting No^o 69
Wednesday, December 4, 2024
 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM
 Videoconference – TEAMS

Present:	Felix Boulanger	Hydro-Québec
	Marc Dunn	Niskamoon Corporation
	Luc Duquette	Hydro-Québec
	Jean-Philippe Gilbert	Hydro-Québec
	Mélanie Leblanc	Niskamoon Corporation
	Josée Lefebvre	Canadian Wildlife Service
	Geraldine Mark	Cree Nation of Wemindji
	Graeme Morin	Cree nation Government
	Ernest Moses	Cree Nation of Waskaganish
	Mimie Neacappo	Niskamoon Corporation
	Mila Oser (Secretary)	Hydro-Québec
	John Lameboy	Cree Nation of Chisasibi
	Manon Sorais	Eeyou marine region wildlife board
	Cassandra Weapenicappo	Cree Nation of Eastmain
Guest:	Murray Humphries	McGill University
	Zou Zou Kuzyk	University of Manitoba
	Mary O'Connor	University of British Columbia
Absent:	Daniel Brosseau	Hydro-Québec
	Louie Kanatewat	Cree Nation of Chisasibi
	John Lameboy	Cree nation of Chisasibi
	Marie-Eve Lemieux	Hydro-Québec
	Roderick Pachano	Cree Nation of Chisasibi
	Ernie Rabbitskin	Niskamoon Corporation
	Robbie Tapiatic	Cree Nation of Chisasibi

MEETING CHAIR AND SECRETARY

Melanie Leblanc chaired the meeting, and Mila Oser acted as the meeting secretary.

PROPOSED AGENDA

1. Approval of the Agenda
2. Approval of the minutes from the previous meeting – October 3, 2024 - #68
3. Finalize/discuss the Cree Knowledge Team final report
4. CHCRP Phase I Summary Video Update
5. Feedback CHCRP Phase I Synthesis manuscript
6. Presentation of McGill final report for 2022-2024 research activities and update on Wildlife Monitoring Alliance project
7. Miscellaneous
8. Summary and Next Steps
9. Next Meeting

1. Approval of the Agenda

The Chair reviewed the agenda, and no additional points were proposed. Thus, the agenda was approved as presented.

2. Approval of the minutes from the previous meetings

- October 3, 2024, meeting # 68

The committee reviewed and approved the minutes following minor adjustments.

3. Finalize/discuss the Cree Knowledge Team final report

Mary O'Connor (**Mrs. O'Connor**) mentioned that the report was almost final as just the data portion was still being worked on by Julián Idrobo.

Mrs. O'Connor said that Mr. Idrobo learned new methods for properly archiving traditional knowledge, and he spent quite a bit of time taking the data in and formatting the report so it would be in a proper formal format.

Mrs. LeBlanc mentioned that Julián will provide a copy of all interviews by December 15 and provide copies of audios by January 2025.

Mrs. Leblanc mentioned that in January, the information compiled by Mr. Idrobo (Cree Knowledge team) will be shared with CNG. Mr. Dunn said that this data will be held at CNG. The support of Julián will be available should the CNG need more information and details on the interviews.

4. CHCRP Phase I Summary Video Update

Mrs. Leblanc spoke of the video that was prepared this year with the support of Zou Zou Kuzyk (**Mrs. Kuzyk**). The video, which was designed for the general public, provides a short summary of the CHCRP research findings. The video was presented to the steering committee and to the Chief and Council of Chisasibi. After their feedback, some changes were made accordingly. Mrs. Kuzyk went through the current script of the video– a written draft version and the link to the video was sent to all SC members prior to the meeting- and asked all if they had comments or additions.

Mrs. Leblanc mentioned that the Council of Chisasibi thought the video was too focused on climate change. Mrs. Leblanc said that this point was taken into consideration; however, it was necessary to speak of it in the video as it was an important part of what was happening, alongside hydroelectric development.

Mrs. Leblanc wanted to know if the video was easy to understand, or if it was too technical, and if the community would be able to grasp the message behind the video.

The video will be narrated by a member of the community to ensure proper pronunciation. There will be an English and a Cree version of it.

Mrs. Kuzyk joined the meeting at this point and mentioned again how reviewing the script was timely in order to finalize it and be able to record the English and Cree versions of the video. The name of Lucy Salt was brought forward as a narrator, to be confirmed.

Mrs. Kuzyk said this script was the third version. The first page of the script describes the project and its scope. The second page addressed the environmental factors that potentially influenced how eelgrass grows. Mrs. Kuzyk mentioned that they were trying to simplify the wording and the amount of information. Mrs. Kuzyk read through the script and waited for the members of the SC to make comments.

In the first section where Crees emphasized the importance of healthy eelgrass in shaping the stop over sites of migratory waterfowl, especially geese”, Mr. Dunn suggested mentioning its many other ecological functions; Mrs. Leblanc marked that comment down.

The next section of the script addresses the decline of eelgrass in James Bay. Mrs. Kuzyk read through the relative importance of salinity and excess sediment releases as one of the factors and wondered if some words in this section could be cut out. Mr. Dunn suggested that the issue of climate change was a bit vague and abstract and that more specific climatic events that happened, like heatwaves and droughts, should be added. This is easier to understand than mentioning a more general term, like “climate change”.

Luc Duquette (**Mr. Duquette**) said he was comfortable with the writing as it was and that being clear and specific about what climate changes had affected the eelgrass was important. Other members of the SC committee agreed that the writing was clear and that section was well written.

The next part of the script spoke of the current state of the eelgrass and what it meant for the geese. A discussion ensued between members of the SC and clarified that all geese had changed their migratory habits everywhere and not just in James Bay, and this could be added.

Mrs. Kuzyk then spoke of the past 20 years and how the eelgrass had not re-established itself in the James Bay area. This ongoing eelgrass research is the first to seek a comprehensive understanding of the environmental changes and the impacts. Unanswered questions remain about the feasibility of the eelgrass restoration in any location and if enhancing goose habitat on the land would improve it.

Mr. Dunn added that many areas along the east of James Bay still have eelgrass and provide fish habitat.

In conclusion, Mrs. Kuzyk said that after these remarks and reviews were included to the script, the final recording for the narration of the video would happen in both languages. It was also emphasized that a good professional studio needed to be hired for a proper recording. The Chisasibi radio station was suggested as a possible setup. Mrs. Leblanc will investigate with the suggested narrator if this is a suitable option.

Mrs. Leblanc mentioned that the final video would be shared on different social media platforms. It could be shared on the Facebook page of the project, and currently a new website is being developed, and it could also be shared there. Niskamoon could also put it on their website and on their Facebook page as well.

Mrs. O' Connor and Mrs. Kuzyk could also share it on their social media platform.

5. Feedback CHCRP Phase I Synthesis manuscript

Mrs. Leblanc asked the members of the SC if they had any comment on the document that was already shared at the previous meeting in Tabusintac and distributed via email since for comments.

Mrs. Kuzyk said she had received some comments, and she extended an invitation to Jean Philippe Gilbert (**Mr. Gilbert**) to be a co author. Mrs. Kuzyk mentioned that Mr. Gilbert had been an essential part of this document and derived a co-authorship. Mrs. Leblanc agreed.

Mr. Gilbert appreciated the invitation and said he was going to think about it and get back to her.

Mrs. Sorais and Mrs. Lefebvre mentioned that they had not yet read the manuscript. It was decided to wait a bit longer to send their final remarks. Mrs. Kuzyk was hoping to send the manuscript for submission by the end of December. Mrs. Kuzyk will send the manuscript to Mrs. Sorais, Mrs. Lefebvre, and Mr. Boulanger for final comments before doing so.

6. Presentation of McGill final report for 2022-2024 research activities and update on Wildlife Monitoring Alliance project

Murray Humphries (**Mr. Humphries**) made a presentation titled “*McGill final report for 2022-2024 research activities and update on Wildlife Monitoring Alliance project*” and a copy is amended to these minutes.

Mr. Humphries started by introducing himself. He is a professor of wildlife biology at McGill University and at the McDonald campus in Saint Anne de Bellevue. Mr. Humphries’s lab work on a variety of wildlife species is especially interested in community-based monitoring approaches around species that are important to local food systems, and they work in the Cree region on other projects, including moose and some of the internal interior communities and some polar bear monitoring work in the James Bay region as well.

Mr. Humphries spoke of the various contributors to this project, starting with Allyson Menzies, a professor at the University of Calgary and Fred LeTourneau, a McGill postdoctoral student. Manuelle Landry-Cuerrier, who had the opportunity to do work in the region this summer with Melanie Leblanc and has been a research coordinator with me for some time, as well as Mimi Neacappo from Niskamoon who will help with some of the knowledge and social sciences components of the project.

Mr. Humphries mentioned that they were seeking to recruit additional graduate students and postdocs for the next phase of the work and asked the SC members if they knew of any interested parties or candidates, especially from the region, to please let them know.

Mr. Humphries said that this was an overall timeline of how this component of the CHCRP has developed and come to progress, and really today's presentation will focus on a summary of our NSERC Alliance proposal and the 2024 fieldwork activities that took place.

For this component of the project, the main goal is to develop monitoring tools and approaches aligned with Cree ways of living and knowing in support of Cree-led conservation and decision-making about their territories and ensuring traditions into the future. This would be accomplished through the collaborative work of four graduate students and two PhD students, as well as three postdocs, around four interconnected themes, and the team would be based both at McGill and the University of Calgary.

The theme two consists of defining the Cree way of monitoring. This theme focuses on monitoring biodiversity collectively along the coast and the connections among the different species.

Theme three focuses on geese and geese habitats. Theme 4 will pull the other components together into a sustainable Cree way bio-culture monitoring framework.

One of the key activities within this would be annual knowledge-sharing visits and regional community symposiums with partners and land users. Mr. Humphries mentioned that informal result sharing and feedback between researchers and land users was really an important point of engagement and a great way of working. These future sharing visits were seen as very collaborative.

Mr. Humphries mentioned that he felt these themes as informing the co-development of the overall approach and framework and guiding the social-ecological framework and its implementation.

A variety of equipment, from drones to acoustic recording units, to trail cameras to apps with land users inputting observations, land-based observations into the app, to conduct systematic monitoring of bird, mammal, and goose activity.

Mr. Humphries said that this would not be limited to geese, but inclusive of geese and waterfowl engaging land users and monitoring biodiversity, land use and harvest.

Mr. Humphries said that they saw this as a kind of co developing the tools and the approaches to a community-based monitoring of collective coastal biodiversity.

The theme three has more focus on geese ecology and goose Cree relationships, combining scientific knowledge to understand drivers of goose distribution, habitat selection, and stopover behavior.

The potential use of drone surveys as a less invasive way to survey waterfowl populations in a manner that would get up high visual observations and potential counts and assessments without disturbing the geese. Mr. Humphries said this is the component of the project that would look at goose habitat enhancement measures and the effectiveness of those enhancement measures in creating better goose harvest and hunting opportunities. These are innovative methods and sampling strategies that focus on Cree knowledge and relationships that will advance understanding of goose behavior and habitat use in natural and modified coastal habitats.

Theme four seeks to bring those different strands together and kind of think about what this could look like going forward.

This transition from university-led to community-led monitoring and how it can build a pathway for connecting crew way, monitoring indicators, and outcomes to federal provincial conservation mandates and co-management initiatives, making sure that there's a connection between observations on the land and the kinds of information that are called for it.

Mr. Humphries said that this was something that's holistic, community-led connected, but still delivering specific information.

Mr. Humphries said that the opportunity to co-develop with the various partners around the steering committee was really appreciated.

Mr. Humphries ended on a summary of the 2024 field work that was done in the region had a big part helping to revise and develop the approach that the application he just described incorporates.

Mr. Humphries said that back in the spring, Frédéric LeTourneau was able to accompany land users and be around families, focusing on conducting observations of goose hunting techniques. This gave a sense of what that spring season could look like in terms of collaboration on the land monitoring activities.

They worked in consultation with tallymen and land users, knowledge holders; they installed some sound recorders to get some preliminary data on geese and other birds on 7 traplines. This is just an example of some of the information that would be gathered during map-based and field-based consultations with land users, and the scoping exercises have been and will continue to be useful and informing and implementing the next step.

Mr. Humphries said that Mrs. Leblanc also accompanied some of these field visits and shared their summer experience. It had all been summarized in a report that's been shared with the SC members.

Mr. Humphries said that they were going to take on a couple of students to officially start in September and begin fieldwork this summer.

Mrs. Leblanc thanked Mr. Humphries for the presentation and said that if members of the SC had any comment or remarks they could send them to the Secretary - Mila Oser- who will forward them to Mrs. Leblanc.

Mr. Boulanger mentioned that there were 22 recorders set up, mostly on the islands, and some of them were on the coast. He suggested avoiding duplication and maybe collaborating on the data collection, trying to make the most of what is being done. Mr. Humphries agreed, and Mrs. Leblanc mentioned that the Marine Region Wildlife Board was a partner on the project, so of course further discussion and collaboration would happen.

Mr. Dunn had a comment mentioning that one of the issues that has come up quite a bit from the coastal residents is this idea of habitat shifting, especially on the coast, and that seems to be obviously the primary driver is isostatic rebound. Mr. Dunn said that often the land users speak of the speed at which these shifts have been happening and how it has increased in the last few years suggesting a climate change element there. He suggested to keep this in mind because this concern was brought up on several occasions, and it would be good to shed more light on that issue to help the land users understand better what's happening on that front.

Manon Sorais (**Mrs. Sorais**) said that a discussion needed to happen about where the focus would be, on the coast or expand on the island as it would be very interesting to include the islands, not just for geese but also other specie of waterfowls.

Mr. Humphries said that the social science component of this project, the importance of engaging land users and their participation in the work was very important. Mr. Humphries sees this co-production approach with an emphasis on biodiversity and natural sciences as a good thing, the inclusion of Cree monitoring knowledge, participation, youth engagement, and so on. He concluded by saying that we should focus on workshops and annual visits with land users and not as much on a formal social sciences methodology.

7. Miscellaneous

Mrs. Leblanc mentioned that she prepared a report that summarized the Tabusintac cultural exchange event and that she shared it with the SC members.

Mrs. Leblanc also said that Niskamoon was approached by the CNG to participate in a climate change report. Environment Canada is working on a climate change report, and they want to include indigenous perspectives on climate change in the report. They wanted to know if some of the information gathered from the first phase of the coastal habitat project could be included in that report. Mrs. Leblanc mentioned that they already had a few meetings, and that Mimi Neacappo (**Mrs. Neacappo**) and Mrs. Kuzyk were part of it.

Mr. Morin mentioned that the CNG could not give their comments to Environment Canada right away as they were focused on other relatively large-scale projects right now. There is however financing to produce what will amount to a 500 words submission to include in the Environment Canada report.

Mrs. Leblanc said that this would start in January and that Environment Canada would also be open to having a video; it could be an elder talking about how it was in the past and how it is now.

Mr. Boulanger took the opportunity to introduce Mrs. Sorais who is working as a second biologist out of Montreal and started this past Monday. Mrs. Sorais used to work on the CHCRP project for a couple of years. She also worked as a research assistant at the Université du Québec à Montréal and took over Stephanie Varty's position at the Marine Region Wildlife Board.

Mrs. Sorais spoke of the Long Island project she is involved with. It is a little extension of the CHCRP. The idea was to go to Long Island, which is an island that's in the joint Cree and Inuit zone north of Chisasibi. It was hoped that this island was still hosting a significant breeding population of Canada geese that could be studied and eventually tagged with GPS trackers. Unfortunately, after a first visit in June 2023, it was not very conclusive. Mrs. Sarois said there were not many active nests on the island and it opens many questions about the island itself.

8. Summary and Next Steps

- Meeting minutes # 68 are approved
- The video script and narration: review comments and work on narration in January
- Mrs. Kuzyk will provide the synthesis paper in December – pending comments
- Mr. Dunn added that accounting is going to close the books on phase one so the video and finalizing the data from now on should be phase two

9. Next Meeting

Following the exchange on the availability of each, it was agreed that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 29, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM, via Teams.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING

The meeting secretary,

Mila Oser

Mila Oser

The meeting Chair

Mélanie Leblanc

Melanie Leblanc

Saisissez du texte ici