

Summer sunrise in the Mackenzie Mountains, K'á Tə Area (Plains of Abraham), Northwest Territories, Canada. © Tracey Williams

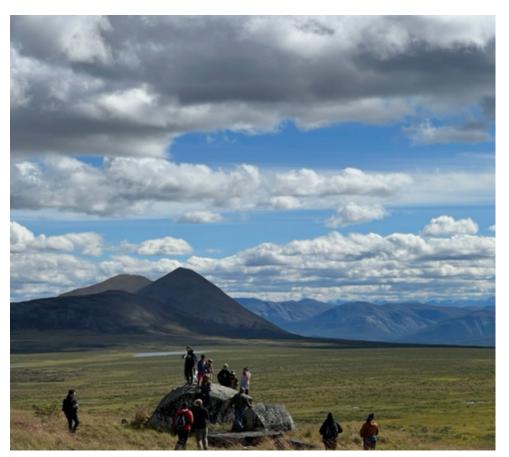
"We are re-building our relationship with wildlife. The wildlife is fine. The water is fine. The land is fine. It always goes back to us as a people. What kind of relationship do you want to have with lands, water and wildlife, it always comes back to us. Look at the history of the world, Canada, we can't talk about caribou, we have to talk about us, our relationship to it."

BACKGROUND

The Sahtú region of Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT) is Dene (K'áhsho Got'įnę, Dehlá Got'įne, Shúhtaot'įnę, K'áálǫ Got'įnę, and Sahtúot'įnę) and Métis homeland. Stretching from the Mackenzie Mountains in the west to the tundra in the east, the Sahtú region is a place where spiritual relationships with Dene nę́nę́ (the land) and animals are maintained, and náowerá (knowledge) of the land is shared across generations through language, song, and stories —Dene and Métis náowerá support wise land stewardship.

In 1993, Sahtú Dene and Métis signed a modern treaty with the governments of Canada and the NWT. The land claim envisions a conservation system rooted in Sahtú Dene and Métis ways of life and practices. It supports their meaningful participation in planning and decision-making about landscape and wildlife.

?ehdzo Got'įnę Gots'ę Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board – SRRB) is the co-management body responsible for wildlife, habitat, and harvesting in the Sahtú Settlement Area. The land claim directs ?ehdzo Got'įnę Gots'ę Nákedı and the five ?ehdzo got'įnę (renewable resources councils), one for each Sahtú community, to work together to maintain Dene and Métis harvesting traditions and keep the land and animals healthy for future generations.



Youth & Elders hike in the traditional area of K'á Tə enjoying a summer afternoon during a Nıó Nę P'ęnę́ Plan gathering. © Tracey Williams

PROCESS

Caribou occupy a central place in the livelihoods and identities of Sahtú Dene and Métis. However, caribou have not been available as they once were. Furthermore, Sahtú communities feel that the government's conservation approach is ineffective and harmful to caribou and people's relationship with caribou. In April 2015, the five Sahtú communities gathered in Colville Lake to discuss these issues. At that meeting, they passed joint resolutions supporting traditional Dene 2020 (law) on relationships with caribou and a Sahtú-developed caribou management plan.

Since that time, the ?ehdzo Got'¡ne Gots'é Nákedı also referred to as the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (SRRB), has been developing the concept, process, and content for a community-led conservation planning approach in the Sahtú region. This approach utilizes and borrows from the Australian adaptation of Open Standards, the Conservation Planning Process, and Healthy Country Planning to help inform their own process. Hıdó Gogha Sénégots'írá, the term the SRRB formally adopted for their approach in 2020, is a Dene phrase that translates as 'Planning for the future.' Today, Hıdó Gogha Sénégots'írá is recognized as the Sahtú-specific adaptation of

Healthy Country Planning and other science-based planning processes, that acknowledge Sahtú values and priorities for managing the landscape are not just valuable contributions for the community conservation plans but for improving co-management decision-making in line with Indigenous knowledge of the lands and waters of the Sahtú. Other NWT planning processes have also informed it, including the Taking Care of Caribou Plan (2014). Most importantly, though, hĮdó Gogha Sénégots'í rá has evolved with guidance from the Sahtú communities and with contributions to longstanding and ongoing Dene and Métis practices in stewardship.

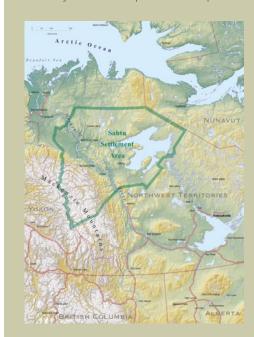
HĮdó Gogha Sénégots'ízá, developed in tandem with a five-part series of public listening sessions that looked to answer the question: "What are the most effective ways to conserve caribou?" Community planning and readiness workshops preceded each public listening session, not only have the public listening sessions facilitated community discussions about wildlife planning for the future, but the series has also provided a mechanism for developing a regional approach to community-led conservation planning.

Nío Nę P'ęnę́ Begháré Shúhta Gozepę́ Narehzá

Trails of the Mountain Caribou plan is unique because it was jointly developed by the Tulít'a and Norman Wells ?ehdzo Got'įnę (NWT) and Tu Łidlini (Ross River) Dena Council (Yukon). Known as an area that encompasses all of nature and holds everything together, Nío Nę P'ęnę́—the Shúhtaot'įnę (Mountain Dene) name for the backbone of the Mackenzie Mountains—has been a gathering place for people and caribou for thousands of years.

Guided by the principles of Healthy Country Planning and building on the SRRB's learnings from community conservation planning, work on a plan for Nío Nę P'ęnę́ was drafted in the mountains in 2017, and refined in 2019. Nío Nę P'ęnę́ Begháré Shúhta Gozepę́ Narehzá prioritizes the knowledge, values and goals of Shúhtaot'įnę and Kaska Dena. It includes a research, monitoring, and land protection method that will keep Dene/Dena language, law, ways of life, and relations to caribou strong.

The planning process helped to anchor ongoing research with many partners & prioritize the Nations, with a shared territory bisected by a colonial border, to establish common ground for realizing their co-management responsibilities to caribou and landscape and build capacity for stewardship and monitoring. It has also created space for collaboration with other Indigenous communities and organizations, scientists, outfitters, researchers, and multiple levels of government in ways that recognize and strengthen Shúhtaot'Įnę and Kaska Dena authority and leadership in stewardship.



The green-bordered outline defines the Sahtú regional area of the Northwest Territories, Canada. The co-management authority responsible for wildlife has been working with the Indigenous Sahtú communities to develop their own community conservation planning process called "Hjdó Gogha Sénégots'írá" (Planning for the Future – PFF).



?ehdzo Got'įnę Gots'ę Nákedı- Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (SRRB), in partnership with Sahttu leaders from Tulit à and Norman Wells ?ehdzo Got'įnę - Renewable Resources Councils, & Tu Łidlini leaders (Ross River Dena, Yukon) collaborated to create the Nio Nę P'ęnę Shúhta Gozepé Narehzá (Trails of the Mountain Caribou Plan). Participants in the formative planning event in 2017 are pictured here. © SRRB

OUTCOME

The SRRB believes that hĮdó Gogha Sénégots'í rá, which is community-led and prioritizes Dene and Métis náoweráand practices, is not only a more rights-compliant approach to conservation, but it also provides a way to achieve the objectives of the land claim better. HĮdó Gogha Sénégots'í rá involves cross-cultural, on the land, and youth-centered approaches; builds on and strengthens community governance; and supports training, leadership development, and economic opportunities for Sahtú participants. Furthermore, decision-makers (including the SRRB) must work closely with harvesters, community leadership organizations, community members and youth to ensure better conservation outcomes and more effective co-management decisions.

HJdó Gogha Sénégots'í a is guided by three interdependent principles:

- 1. Planning and decisions should account for asíj godí hé dene ts'jl, hé (All living things and Dene ways of being).
- 2. In Dene ?e?a people and wildlife are called upon to respect each other's autonomy through ?edets'é k'áots'erewe (self-regulation).
- 3. Dene and Métis participation in conservation efforts with government depends on godi kehtsį (Fair consideration or coming together of diverse perspectives or ethical space).

To date, Sahtú communities have developed three conservation-focused plans for the future:

- Déljne's Belare Wí le Gots'é ?ekwé Caribou for All Time Plan (2016);
- Colville Lake's Dehlá Got'ıne ?ədə Plan and Ts'ıduweh ?ədə ?erá (2020); and
- Nío Nę P'ęnę́ Begháré Shúhta Go?epę́ Nareh?á Trails of the Mountain Caribou Plan

The SRRB invited feedback on the formal H_{\(\text{l}\)}dó Gogha S\(\xi\)n\(\xi\)gots'\(\text{i}\)a (Planning for the Future) policy as part of the D\(\xi\)line public listening session on refets'ew\(\xi\)hkwe godı (living with wildlife) – predators and competitors in April 2022. Currently, the board and its partners are working on a toolkit that will provide communities engaging in h_{\(\xi\)}dó Gogha S\(\xi\)n\(\xi\)gogha S\(\xi\)gogha S\(\xi\)

Caribou has been the focal point of planning so far, still, these plans may become broader and more holistic, as HĮdó Gogha Sénégots'írá is connected to food security planning, the stewardship of other wildlife and wildlife landscapes, cultural expression, and many other aspects of Sahtú Dene/Métis ts'įlį (ways of life).