Our community of Deline/Where the River Flows, in the Sahtu region of the Northwest Territories, is home to approximately 650 Dene, Metis and non-aboriginal people. It is the only human settlement on Sahtu/Great Bear Lake, the largest lake in Canada and ninth largest in the world in terms of surface area (31,326 km) and volume. Situated within the Arctic Circle, it is the largest lake in the world to exist in a relatively pristine condition despite historical uranium mining impacts. The Sahtugot’ine/Great Bear Lake people have been living with the chronic environmental, health, economic, and social impacts of the mine that operated at Port Radium on the eastern shores of Great Bear Lake. Originally mined for radium in the 1930s and later for uranium ore, all of which was shipped and utilized in the atomic bomb on Hiroshima during World War II, the mine site and surrounding area is now radioactive.

The Sahtugot’ine are proactively developing a Deline Knowledge Centre (DKC) that integrates Traditional and Western-based knowledge and sciences.

The vision of the DKC, as determined by the people of Deline and its partners, is a gathering of new and old knowledge to benefit everyone and shape the future.

Its mission is to respectfully understand, preserve, and share knowledge of the Dene environment to benefit all people past, present and future.

The Deline Knowledge Centre will focus on inter-related activities of self-governance, traditional knowledge, communications, data management, Dene language, and research on the lands and waters of the Deline District. Our objectives include the development of pools of expertise in the community within these fields; the creation of a layer of individuals with the capacity to lead and facilitate community participation and guiding input in Knowledge Centre activi-
ties; a series of pilot projects to serve as a basis for the growth and
development of the Centre; materials and activities to educate the
community about pilot projects; a strategy for the long-term deve-
lopment and sustainability of the Centre; the acquisition of a physi-
cal building to serve as the infrastructure for the collections and activ-
ities. Ultimately the Centre will establish an integrative knowl-
dge model that supports the development of similar community insti-
tutions across the North.

Our Centre will promote the cross-cultural sharing of ideas, inform-
ination and knowledge, and create new ways of developing and in-
tegrating knowledges that have been historically and artificially se-
parated into traditional, cultural/social, and environmental catego-
ries. The DKC will be a gathering place for cultural research activi-
ties; a space for multi-media displays and discussion of local and
outside research results and future planning; and a quiet place for lis-
tening, translation and transcription of Dene language and oral his-
tory projects. One of the prime functions of the Centre is the deve-
lopment, management and coordination of monitoring and research
within the Déline District. The physically central nature of the DKC
within Déline allows for Sahtugot’ine, partnering resource people,
and visitors to work together and learn from one another. A prime
concern of Déline Elders is a way to bridge the increasing gap
between Elders’ knowledge and youth education. The Centre will
provide a physical space where the knowledge of Elders and re-
searchers can be shared with youth. In keeping with Déline elders’
belief that the DKC is a catalyst for on-the-land research and edu-
cation programs, the knowledge centre will exist in a variety of
forms and programs both within Déline and on the land. The Cent-
re has been visualized as having laboratory space for local and visi-
ting researchers that includes both social/cultural and environmen-
tal/ecological activities and programs relating to Great Bear Lake. A
multi-media library consisting of past and present Déline District re-
search, language, and educational materials will be accessed by in-
terested people and organizations.

Funding is being pursued for the development of the Knowledge
Centre and research projects that will further its conception. For
example, we submitted a proposal to the SSHRC Community Uni-
versity Research Alliance (CURA) program in June, 2003. Prior to this a relationship and formal partnership was established between the Aurora Research Institute, the University of Alberta, the Canadian Circumpolar Institute, and the Déné Dene Band. Furthermore, many government, non-governmental, and research organizations have formally included the DKC in their program planning, recognizing its role and value. Currently, a business and infrastructure feasibility study is being undertaken. Visiting researchers and Great Bear Lake northern and academic archivists have already begun presenting their work and providing archival materials and results to the community and Déné Knowledge Centre library.

The Déné Knowledge Centre will benefit other communities facing similar political and resource management issues by providing operational and ethical guidance as well as community-based methodological practices for their own community led initiatives. The broader research community and society in general will benefit by being shown how the fostering of equal partnerships with inter-related knowledge systems and community-based collaborative research methodologies can contribute to good research processes, results and applications.

For more information, please contact:

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