Mapping How We Use Our Land

Using Participatory Action Research

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How do we collect traditional knowledge?

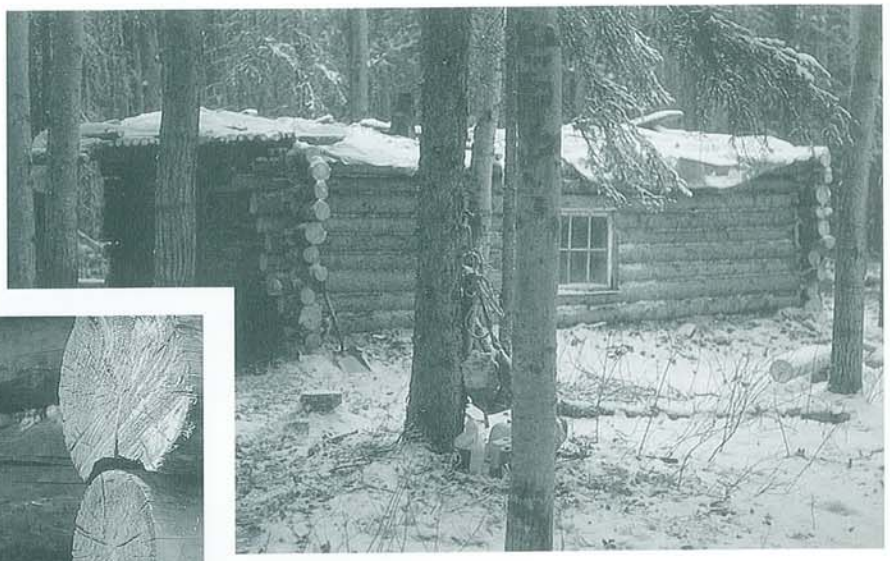
- Why do we study traditional land use and occupancy?
- Why did the Athabasca Native Development Corporation work to initiate their study?
- How do we plan for community participation in TLUOS?
- How do we collect the traditional knowledge?
- How do we organize the traditional knowledge?
- How do we co-manage the findings?
- Where do we go from here?

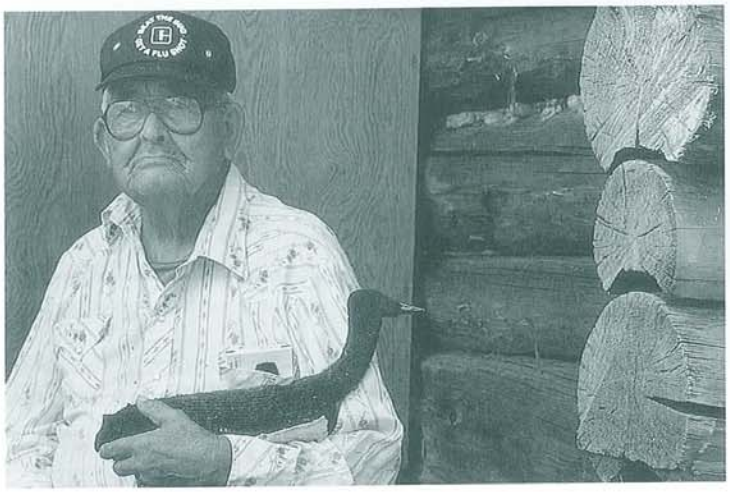
Knowledge of traditional land-use and occupancy lies for the most part in the minds of residents of the area, including not only the band elders but all the contemporary users of the resources of the region.

Very little such information exists in standard printed form, and indeed, that is one of the central reasons for carrying out a study such as is envisaged here. It is a matter of receiving shared information and making it available to all the residents of the region and to anyone else who has a legitimate claim to it. It is very important to note at this point that the fundamental issue is one of *receiving shared information* rather than *taking information*.

By way of illustration, the collected, shared information relates to recording:

1. a physical inventory, e.g., trails, food, animals, birds, fish, berries and so on;
2. an evaluation of the comparative value of bush-economy supplies, e.g., meat (a pound of moose meat in the bush as equated with a pound of quality beef in a food store), wood and so on;
3. lifestyle values, e.g., arts and crafts made from the bush resources; spiritual places; living with and off the natural environment and the natural resources of the land; and the self reliance that this gives to people who live in the bush economy.





Above: Trapline cabin of Katy Sanderson of Fort McMurray; left: Babtiste Janvier of Janvier, Alberta, with a carved duck decoy.

Before beginning a traditional land-use and occupancy study (TLUOS), it is important to search out any existing documentation before launching an intense community interview process. The material so collected then becomes part of the data base of the TLUOS.

Communities of Aboriginal people are now actively pursuing means of recording traditional land use practices with a view to overall co-management for conservation and preservation of the land, and all its cultural and environmental riches. Urgency is added to the pursuit because many bush economy communities are about twenty years away from losing — through the death of their older experienced people — the knowledge that remains of a lifestyle that sustained the communities for thousands of years.

In a typical area that might be the subject of such a study, the number of people who are able to share with the greater community their knowledge and experience is diminishing, and may now number only a few tens of people. It is these people who are crucial to the conduct of a traditional land-use study.

Traditional knowledge is oral knowledge. The process by which such knowledge is best collected is through a personal or group interview. The knowledge is obviously

Potential interview questions:
Categories of traditional land use and occupancy

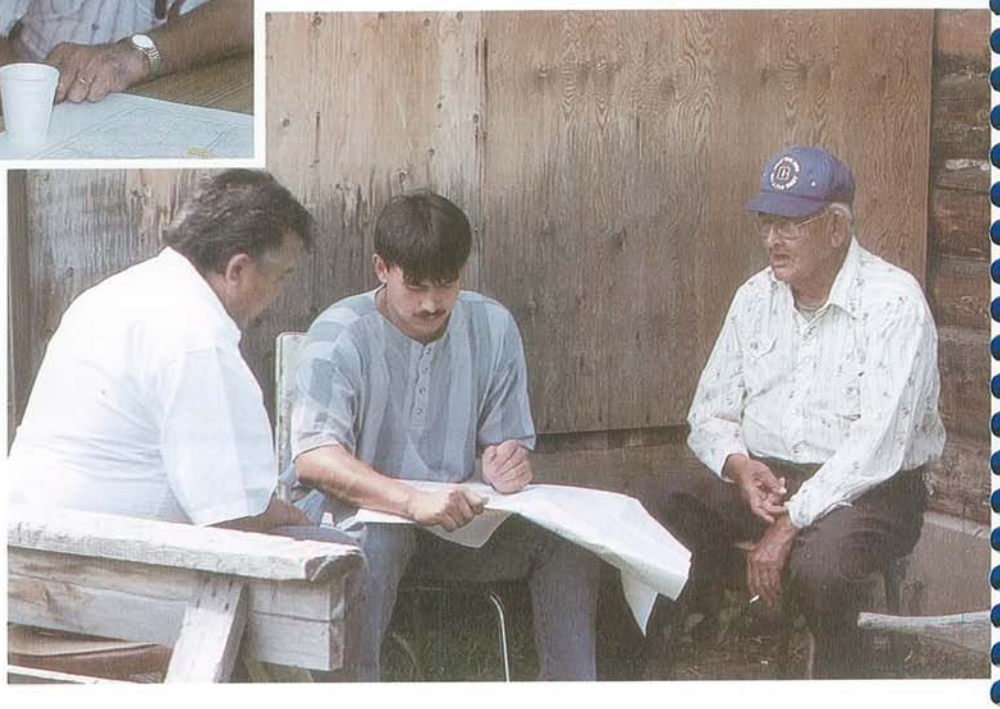
- trail systems in past or current use
- bush land burial sites, individual and multiple burials
- sites or areas of spiritual significance to community members
- cabins either currently in use or available for use (i.e., still structurally intact)
- registered trapline areas
- moose, deer, elk and caribou habitat/harvest locations
- salt licks
- berry patches (blueberries, cranberries, etc.)
- waterfowl habitat/harvest locations
- upland bird habitat/harvest locations
- fish spawning areas in creeks, rivers and lakes
- fish habitat/harvest locations
- dry fish preparation areas/camps
- fur-bearing animal habitat/harvest locations
- traditional place names
- raptor nesting sites
- rat root, sweet grass and bush medicine gathering sites
- special woman's areas (e.g., puberty retreats, spiritual renewal camps)
- carving and pipestone quarries
- oft-used waterways
- observations (e.g., past and present) of wolf behaviour
- archaeological (prehistoric and historic) sites
- farming, market gardening, and grazing areas
- hay meadows
- artesian wells/spring sites

anecdotal, but every attempt must be made to capture it as completely as possible and without loss or distortion. It is only through the courtesy of the people being interviewed and their willingness to share that *anything* becomes available.

Some of the older people are not familiar with English and are much more comfortable working in their own language. Similarly, they are more comfortable working in an interview setting that includes their own friends and neighbours. Accordingly, it makes sense to conduct interviews in the local language, and it makes sense also to involve local people as interviewers. In most cases the entire interview is conducted by local people.

Traditional land-use information is augmented in the study by contemporary land-use practice, and people who use the land today also have important information to share in a TLUOS.

At the outset, people being interviewed need to feel at home and at ease. Most people willingly share their knowledge if they are assured that their contribution to the process is valuable, and that their knowledge and experience has value for the future of their family and community. They must know that their information is needed to



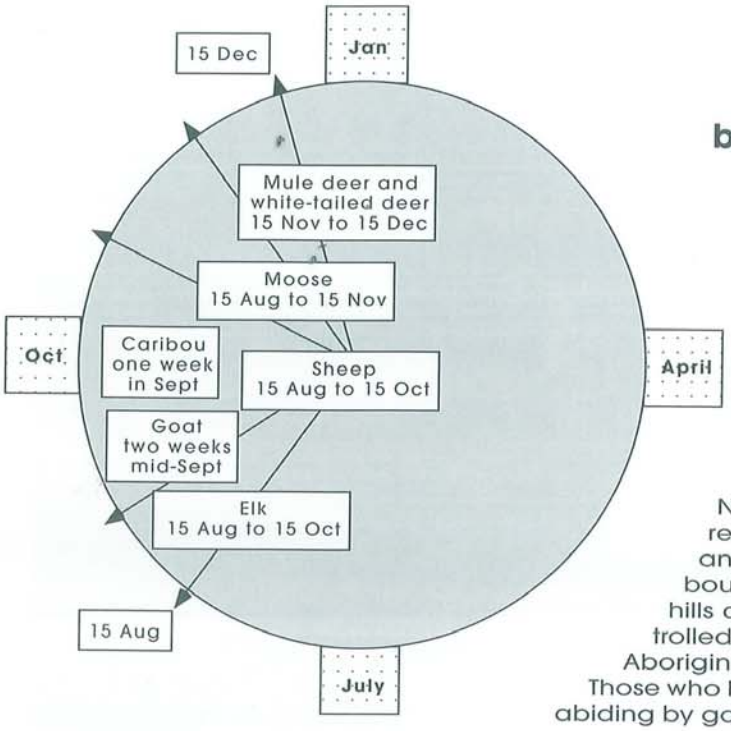
The interview process.
Above: Mary Jensen, Fort McMurray, being interviewed by Grant Golosky.
Right: Elmer Herman and Stewart Janvier, interviewers, with Babtiste Janvier, checking map locations.

preserve the integrity of their culture, and that their experience and knowledge will continue to be valuable when they are no longer able to share it. They are passing down what they know, as they always have, but this time it is being recorded. For this reason it is important that they have the opportunity to see the results of their participation.

The interview process:
The community must select interviewers who are respected and capable. The interviewers should have a practical knowledge of the bush economy and be familiar with the culture of the community. A working understanding of the local language is preferred over the use of an interpreter, but that may not always be possible.

In general practice, the local interviewers develop the interview questions and help plan an interview schedule with the assistance of the PAR consultant. In addition, they select the people to be interviewed and arrange times and places. They arrange for public space if that is required, and look after local transportation and travel costs.

Prior to beginning the interviews, the PAR consultant generally organizes a training workshop for the interview trainees. This workshop focuses on reviewing case studies



Seasonal round for bush land hunters' and trappers' big game harvest

Caribou
Moose
Elk
Goat
Sheep
Mule deer
White-tailed deer

Not all species of big game pasture throughout all regions. Some regions have moose only, or moose and deer only with small herds of woodland caribou. Most caribou and elk are located along the foothills and mountain regions. Big game hunting is controlled by permit issued by each province or territory. Aboriginal peoples have special rights to hunt for food. Those who hunt and trap for a living have a vested interest in abiding by good conservation practices.

of methodology, creating a community specific methodology for the TLUOS, preparing the interview questions, selecting an appropriate map base, and explaining the technology available for presenting traditional knowledge data.

The relationship between the gatherer of the information and the person giving it is a sensitive one. The interviewer may have a stronger belief in the quantity and quality of available knowledge than the person being interviewed. Part of an interviewer's job is to encourage the person being interviewed to be confident in giving his or her information even though it may seem to be incomplete or imprecise. Part of the process is to verify such information by comparing it with that shared by other people in same the community.

The interviewer trainees meet with the persons to be interviewed either individually or in small groups. They lead the discussion using the list of interview questions. Extensive notes are taken during the conversations, and in some cases, with permission, tape recordings are made to ensure more complete and objective collection of the information. A photographic record of the process is also a useful tool, and colour prints, slides and video footage aid in the process of map and report preparations.

Information from community interviews needs to be carefully recorded for project reports (Grant Golosky, above). Such information includes photographs of field observations such as a trapper's winter trail that can still be clearly seen in the muskeg in the summer (right).

Much of the interview process focuses on locating events and features geographically. To this end, the interviewers use a map of the area during the interview. Locations are marked on the map as the discussion progresses and notes are made of the various features. The map used is typically a base map of the whole region (at 1:250,000 scale), but in some cases a more detailed map (at 1:50,000 scale) is used when unique events or locations are involved (for example, a cabin site or a burial location). As the interviews progress, the trainees and the PAR consultant determine how they wish to organize their map data. Generally one set of 1:250,000 scale maps is maintained for each class of data, for example, trails and cabins, or fur-bearing animal harvest locations.

It is important to recognize that there are two kinds of information as illustrated by these two observations: 1. "My grandfather used to hunt moose in the fall in the meadow five miles northeast of the village of Conklin" and 2. "My grandfather died on the trail in December of 1944 and was buried on top of the low sand hill half a mile west of where the trail crosses the Beaver river southwest of the village." In the first case, the person is saying that moose ranged in and around that meadow, about forty years ago. While the hunting may have been singular events, it is more likely to

Grave sites away from communities are quickly obscured by trees and undergrowth.

Above: Morris Janvier at site of several graves near Christina Crossing northwest of Janvier, Alberta.

Right: Single grave marker near the Christina River northwest of Janvier.

have been a seasonal event for many years. The moose may continue to range in that area, but this cannot be assumed unless similar data are given by contemporary hunters.

In the first case, the observer plots a moose symbol on the map in the designated area with the meaning that moose were known to have frequented that general area in that season of the year. They may have ranged also in adjacent areas — of uncertain size and location — in other seasons. In the second case, it was a singular event that can be pinpointed precisely in location and time — with a symbol for a burial. Both are indicators of traditional land-use and occupancy, but one is a "pattern" of behaviour of wildlife, and the other a unique human event.

The principal record of the interview is the map supported by written notes. Audio tape recordings are important, as well as photographs and videos. After the interview, appropriate gifts are given, for example, tobacco — out of respect for the sharing of the information. In some instances the persons being interviewed are paid a standard fee for sharing their information. In all cases, the interviewers are paid, along with their operating expenses.

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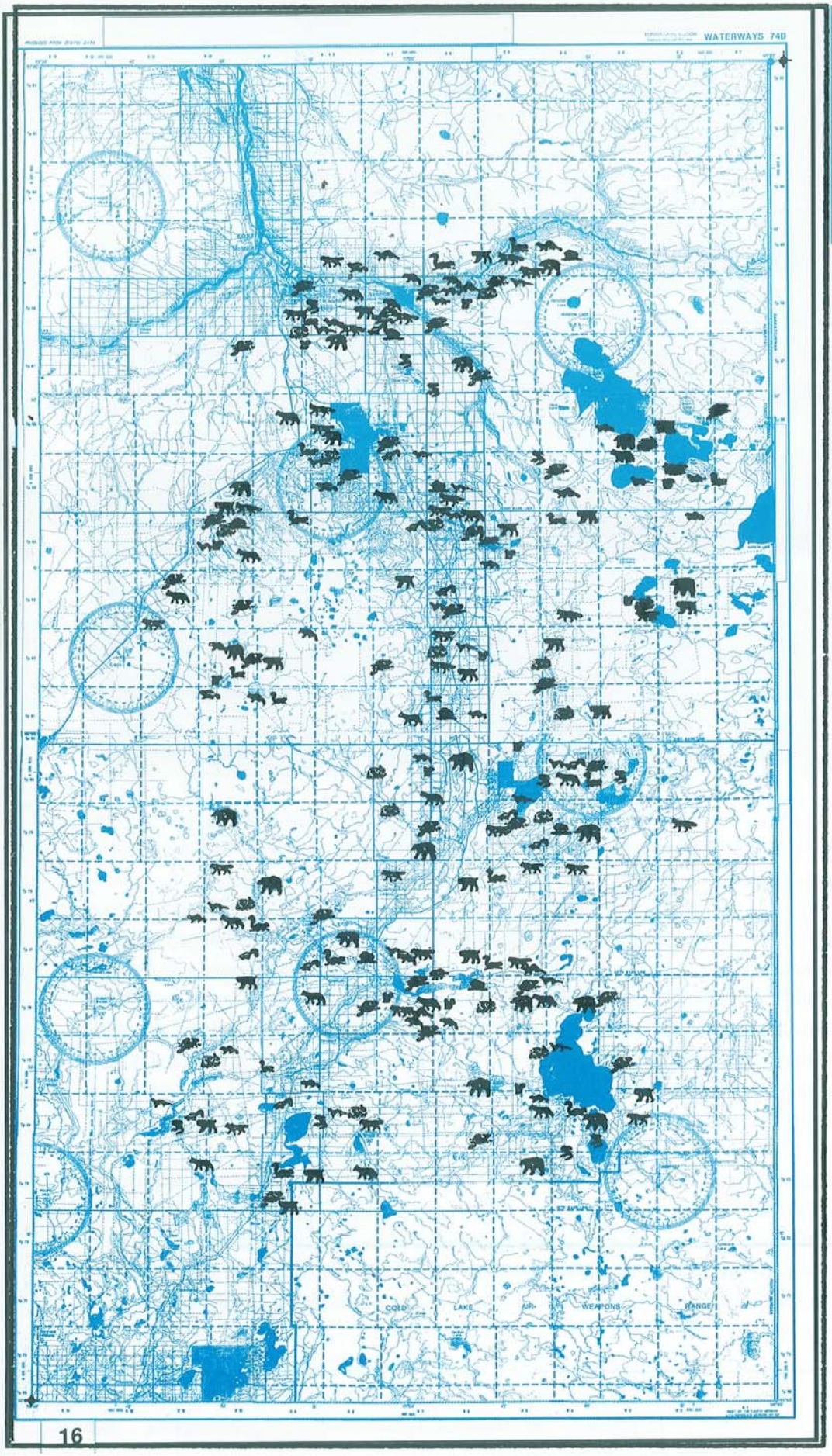


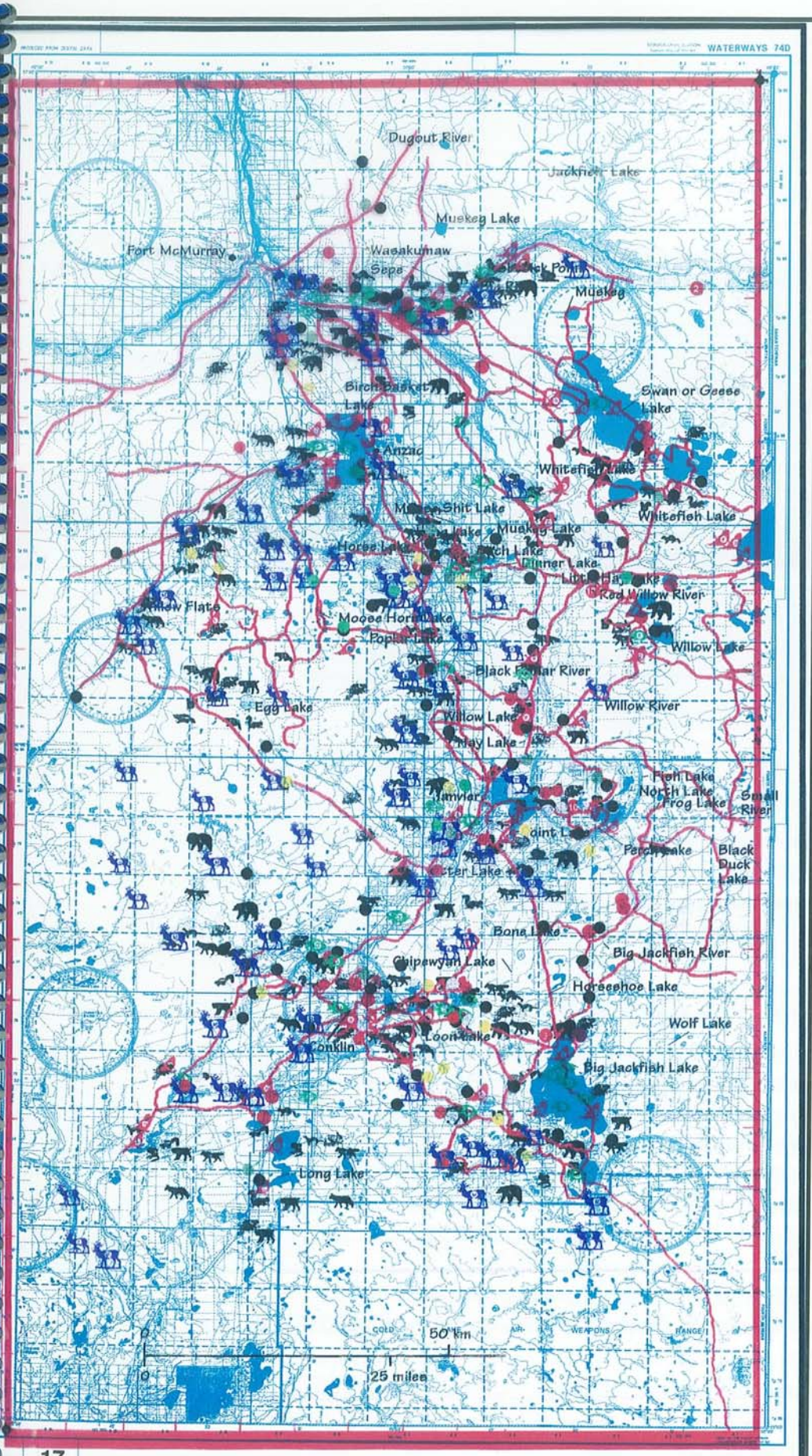
Traditional land use and occupancy study, northeastern Alberta

5. Fur-bearing animals

weasel, fox, coyote, muskrat
bear, porcupine, squirrel, beaver
wolf, marten, lynx, otter
racoon, fisher, mink, groundhog
hare, squirrel (f), skunk, wolverine

Arctic Institute of North America, 1993

for the Athabasca Native Development Corporation, Fort McMurray, Alberta



Traditional land use and occupancy study, northeastern Alberta

1. Trails and graves

- trails
- graves (excluding community cemeteries)

2. Local place names

3. Cabins

4. Birds, big game and fish wildlife habitat

ptarmigan	duck	elk	whitefish
pelican	goose	deer	sucker
heron	loon	grayling	ling cod
eagle	caribou	jackfish	brook trout
grouse	moose	pickerel	perch

dry fish camp

5. Fur-bearing animals

weasel	fox	coyote	muskrat
bear	porcupine	squirrel	beaver
wolf	marten	lynx	otter
racoon	fisher	mink	groundhog
hare	squirrel (f)	skunk	wolverine

6. Berries, medicine and minerals

blueberries	rat root	hay
cranberries	mint	salt lick

Arctic Institute of North America, 1993

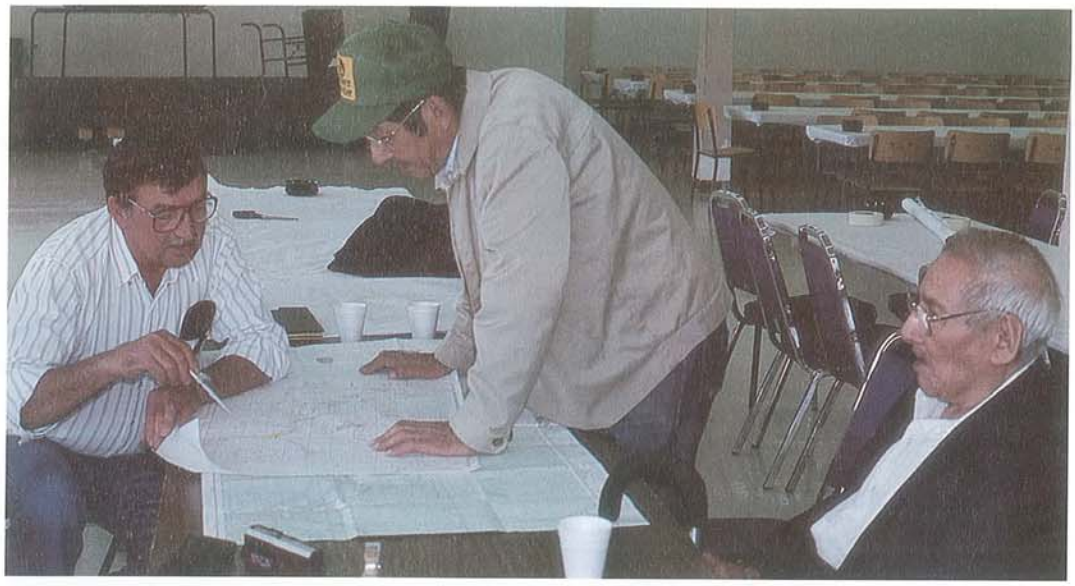
for the Athabasca Native Development Corporation, Fort McMurray, Alberta

Helicopters equipped with satellite locators are routinely used for determining precise locations in terms of latitude and longitude for detailed mapping — Stewart Janvier, interviewer with forestry personnel.

The interviewers prepare written reports of each interview, and these become primary documents along with the evolving sets of maps. Interviewers keep a written account of each interview and report in writing to a designated project manager. The interviewers are continuing participants in the project and co-author the final TLUOS report.

In many cases, the interview material is extended by trips to the field for additional information, for photography and for determination of precise locations using satellite-assisted locators routinely mounted in helicopters. The satellite locator gives latitude and longitude to within a few metres and is primarily important for locating unique subjects such as grave markers and cabins. Such instrumentation is permanently mounted in the helicopter and requires that the aircraft land virtually "on top of the site." Information gained in this way is carefully recorded in the notes by the study team and enables precise logging of data in a geographic information system.

When the interview maps are reasonably complete they are taken back to the people who shared the information in the first place to see if the recording has been faithful to the oral account. Some of the elders do not read or write, and may have difficulty checking the accuracy of the written material. In all cases, repeated checking is



It is vitally important to check and recheck the information that is being recorded in the traditional land use and occupancy studies. Above, left to right: Grant Golosky, Elmer Cree and Raphael Cree (100 years old.)

important since the underlying process is the conversion of oral anecdotal understanding to conventional written documents. This typically implies a greater precision and more rigid understanding than may be warranted under the circumstances. Checking of map data is also necessary to minimize human error on the part of the interviewer trainees.

Storage and archiving

A central principle of storage and archiving in a TLUOS project is that the traditional information is shared. It is not transferred. Ownership of the information lies with the people who provided it. The person giving information owns the information and holds undisputed rights to it, until he or she gives ownership away, or agrees to share it with others. The very best effort must be made to assure sharers of information that their recorded knowledge and experience will be respectfully stored and protected over time.

A second principle is that the information is priceless. If it is ever lost, in many cases it can never be regenerated. Accordingly, it must be archived with great care.

The primary information comprises the field notes and their interpretation, the field

Traditional hides and furs:

Left: Beaded moccasins from tanned moose hide.

Below: Katy Sanderson with beaver, fox and coyote pelts.

maps, photographs, audio tapes, video tapes and any final documentation on the TLUOS.

In a typical case, all of this "belongs" to the community and should be stored in the community. Some communities are well equipped for such archiving, others are not. In all cases great care must be taken to protect the material against loss by fire in particular, but also against loss through damage by natural causes or vandalism. Duplicate sets of all vital TLUOS records should be stored in a separate location, with an agreement for continuing access by all project partners.