

# Keepers of the Water

## Hay River Basin Pollution Investigation

Interview with Dene Tha First Nation Traditional Knowledge Holders

May 11, 2016

A Traditional Knowledge Holder is a person, most likely an Elder or community leader, who knows the use of the land and holds the knowledge of the use of the land into the future. They must have their traditional language, as a lot of the knowledge is in there.

Traditional Knowledge is our way of life, who we are as being Dene people. It signifies who we are, where we are, where we come from, and what we're about. Not only going into the future, but reconnecting all the data, knowledge, the wisdom and the values that we carry on a day to day basis, with the teachings of our Elders and all those people who have passed on the knowledge to us. It's to identify ourselves going into the future and so we can be established, and also how we maintain the knowledge and that kind of information. It's a question of wanting to know who we are as Dene people. Who are we as Dene Tha and what are we about.

This is about the Hay River Basin pollution investigation. I'm thinking about this land before the white people came, , ... we used the land: the land was our store ... we used the highways of the rivers ... since the '60's, over 30,000 wells (have been drilled) in Zama and Rainbow Lake.... Each of them has things we don't know about the land. We need to look into what's happening with this pollution. I don't know what the government is doing about it but I do know that .... (it is) affecting our land and water, the animals. There is pipelines coming down from everywhere ... so we are worried about the Hay River Basin and the water.

Going back to my younger years and being out in the oil patch. I've done a lot of work in the industry. I've seen a lot of pipelines go in the ground. I've seen a lot of uncertainty in the pollution, it's not just in the air, it's in the ground of the work that's being done out there. There should be more certainty, and it should have been given to us, as the traditional land users. For my livelihood, to me it has been just torn apart. Getting back into the pollution, who knows what they are doing out there with the machinery? The oil spills, hydraulic leaks in the machinery, pollution from the burning of diesel, and things like that it's a very big concern what I've experienced out there on the land. It is very, very concerning some of the things that we've seen first-hand and what's going on, and what's being done with the landscape.

They tell us that (they) are cleaning up the old wells that are no longer going to be using and somebody in the Environment is keeping good track of these things. However, I don't feel that way. They have never come to me with their regulations to see how they go about this ... who knows what goes on behind? It's a very scary thing that I'm aware of. We used to go out on the land without any concern, we had our future on the land, but now, there are Bear gone, and moose gone from our traditional territory.

Here they come into our traditional land and just have it, with the machines they have, they just have it. It's a concern to us that people are just coming and going, bringing people from all walks of life onto our land with their machines and pollution, the kind of stuff they do out there. Plus when the moose eat the pollution, that's a concern.

One of my biggest concerns is the natural resources transfer act. It's sort of bound in conflict between that and the traditional land usage. Companies and industry have had rights to go onto the land. ... and yet we pray that we have that Traditional land. We don't want it disturbed, yet over the years we see the changes that happened, some of them not very good. This is my biggest concern ... planned agreements that really are not sound when it comes to the land.... Missed deadlines. That's one of the challenges that we face as keepers of the land ... and we learn about what's happening to the land, what's happening to the animals out there, what's happening to the vegetation. All these things we have to know ...in the last three years, now I've been working on some of these oil spills. And one of the things that I've come up with against is the information sharing between a lot of people and these companies. They've been wrecking the land. What can we do about it? I'm concerned that our hands are tied right now. There won't be anything living here. Especially when you have some (spills) close to the communities and they are actually affecting issues of the communities.

We check the pH threat, check the water, the land, how much can it count ... . We do these things ... but how do we know the abandoned well sites are very clean, how do we know that? The only way is to test the water around that. They're not giving me the opportunity to come and take part in these kind of things. They're not. It's the land versus industry at this point, they are using the land.

On the questions of our concerns ... There is a number of areas where the pipelines cross the rivers and creeks and streams and there is some outflow from there. You know that when the pipeline crosses the river, (they) requested that they bore under the water. That was the only way, the main important way of river crossing, and what if it spilled? We don't know right away. That's what I wanted to say.

I don't really think there is a lot of reclamation that's going on. A lot of times, the companies don't consult with us on stuff like that. It's part of their reclamation job, they hire contractors ... to do the regulations. There are levels of engagement, but... a lot of reclamation is being neglected. They don't really consult with us on reclamation in general.

I do oilfield monitoring for ... I come here to follow up. There hasn't really been much media attention regarding that Oil spill ... when that happened, there was a big spill, and not that much media attention focused on this. I'm still doing the monitoring there; And then I see that it is all oil there, some on the ground, and there is chemical usage. One of my biggest concerns is about the chemical use. There are

two types of chemicals they sprayed in there, I'm really concerned about that. It's a bacteria type chemical, a liquid bacteria strain. That is my biggest concern... They come in, they do a little clean up here, then they're gone ... are here we are struggling ... and still the oil is being pumped

Chateh area was the only place where the Alberta government allowed industry to drill on the lake ... Oh, yeah there is pollution all over around us Zama Lake ... Rainbow Lake ...Duck Lake ... all around us. ... and we don't know how they are going to clean it up. They have to monitor for the next hundred years. Hay Zama is the only off shore drilling in mainland Canada

To add onto what was previously said. There is the Natural Resources Council Act that was passed. It's an Act, which means it's law, if this law is not amended to bring things up to date, to the current time, right now, where there are concerns about pipeline safety, and also global warning and all of these things. The Natural Resources Council Act, if it could be revisited, if it could be amended, I think that would help slow things down in regards to climate change (as well).

What is your hope for the Hay River area and for the Hay River Basin Pollution Investigation?

I hope that the Pollution Investigation can bring these things forward, ... and work to keep people informed about pollution on the land, a terrible impact that has been created ... We basically live on top of pipelines and well sites and aging infrastructure that has been around here since the 1960's.

We need to be aware that some of these spills are chemicals; there are oil spills and salt water spills... (in one place) 150 m by 160 m by 5 metres down, and all the soil way down was all contaminated ... Since there are a lot of these plugs that we've got over the years, there are lots out there and they all want to do the same thing...

Out on the lake there, managing equipment they have to remove some old pipe from the water, which will be occurring next week. They are supposed to remove all the equipment and all of the well heads... and make sure the soil within those key zones are clean. If not, they would have to have haul dirt ... rivers and creeks that has to suffer. Somebody mentioned they cleaned up the well sites, but they don't know really how to do it .... I think that would be a good idea, to put the land back the way it was before. And I think that would clearly be an honour, clean up at this time.

After all the damage they've done to us, I hope to hell that they just leave em alone and then let us carry on our traditional way of life. Maybe there's enough for us to salvage.

I hope that the Investigation can be helpful for consultation

I wanted to hope for the new Hay River Basin Pollution Investigation; I think for me, this is really necessary. The information is the reason why I do it, so that moving forward, at some point in time, this will give us an opportunity to maintain and work for the land. We have to speak for the animals; they can't speak for themselves ...the fur bearing animals, the water, the air, the trees, everything that is out on the land that really has carried people for thousands of years. We need to maintain that, the

information, the knowledge is being provided to us, as Dene Tha, from all the ancestors; that we continue to move forward... In front of this pollution... We are being respectful. We are being mindful of some of the things that are happening out here on the land.

Thank you very much for giving the opportunity, for Keepers of the Water for asking advice at the leadership level, being a part of this Keepers of the Water and some of the conferences that were being held. I have expressed my concerns, my issues, and some of the concerns from my area, and where we're at within Northwestern part of Alberta we cover, and within the Traditional territory that we speak for. We need to stand up for what we feel is right...

(It) is our livelihood, it is our grocery store... we take only what we need to sustain ourselves, our families and our communities, as mentioned earlier, so that we can inherit this for a long time. We are not in this for a short time basis. We're in it for the long run. Because we live here; we're not going anywhere and we need to express our concerns that we have In our Traditional Territories.