



## Keepers of the Athabasca

### Interviews with Traditional Knowledge Holders

July 14, 2017: member from Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

Well I'm 65 years old and industry is not 65 years old, so I saw the changes from the start. Especially living on the Athabasca river and going boating in any direction, travelling around at any time of the year. And a lifestyle where everybody trapped, everybody was well off. Not in the sense of material goods like today, motors and tools, but everybody was well off. Boats were made, everyone had a dog team, we went with the season, what Mother Nature had for us in her pantry and we didn't over harvest or over do it.

In the late 60's when the Bennett dam was built, my uncle was the chief and he questioned what that would do to the delta and he was told there would be no effect. We started seeing the effects immediately: the water levels were dropping. Then my dad noticed a decline in the black water beetles, the ones that skim across. Also the frogs were on the decline. Then the lakes started getting shallower, Egg Lake, Freezy Lake, and Flower Bay. When we went to trap, in area 201 of the reserve, this was the main trapping area for my dad, Flower Bay was for people from the old fort reserve. There were so many muskrats, now they are gone.

When we think back, we never thought there could be such a drastic change. Then we had an oil spill ... industry was starting up. I was 14 years old the first time I went to Fort McMurray and they were clearing, I remember they were cutting down, clearing these big beautiful white spruce and that was a shock.

We don't go out to Jackfish lake anymore. We don't have water; the grasses lay the foundation for the willows, the lake gets smaller and smaller, the Mabel river, the Richardson river, king creek ... we can't even get up very far any more.

We don't eat the fish; who would want to eat the fish with lesions and crooked backs. What do you do with it? We don't even feel right feeding it to the bears. So we don't pick berries anymore because we can't get out there by boat. There are a lot of other berry spots, but because Jackfish had everything that we needed, and there are so many of us, we were living at Jackfish when we wanted to harvest. When the whitefish was really good, we used to move to the lake and live in a tent and just make dry fish. It was a good life. It was the best. My dad would go hunting in the evening. We had a big garden at Jackfish where we grew potatoes, carrots, turnips, cabbage, cucumber pickles, corn, and sunflowers.

When Suncor had that spill under the ice, my brother and my son went out to set a net under the ice. They were teaching him how to set a net under the ice. We had a good catch, and when we catch whitefish, that's the best ... they made a fire and cooked a couple right then. The grease dripping from the fish was just black, and the fish tasted terrible. The fishery was shut down for 2 years that time, and Suncor got a \$20,000 fine, just a slap on the wrist, really showed you who the government prefers ... this was the late 1970's. It was about that time that industry was starting to pick up. The fish looked good, there's nothing better; people depended on that, a few good catches could make your salary for a year. Then they saw the black dripping fat.

Then the muskrat disappeared, and trapping became obsolete. Greenpeace going after trappers too ... that really put an end to it. All those trappers moved into matchbox houses built by Indian affairs and had idle hands. That's when alcohol took off ... I was a social worker, and my home was a safe haven for kids. I feel sorry for them. This one guy, he was the best, a sharpshooter. He just sold everything for alcohol and walked away. We had a plebiscite to stop the sale of alcohol. They had a lounge, but they couldn't sell liquor. People tried to break into the trailer (points with chin to a hill near her house) where the liquor store is, they did everything, even ran into it with a truck. It's 'Fort Chipewyan lookout', where the liquor store is. Sad.

When the water levels were high, where the fish plant is was a whole bay and that was our swimming area, and in the fall when it froze, that's where we skated; it was like a sheet of glass.

In those days, industry didn't come to us for anything, they just went ahead. I don't think the FN's were ready for the onslaught, the destruction. Jackfish, the bank was about 2 feet high. The last two summers we had an 8 foot bank. The industry out-take stations are bigger than many houses here. I went on one tour at Albion, and they are just pumping and pumping water out of the river. Starting at Hinton in the pulp mills, and all the way down the river ... and they all deny they are having any effect.

Just look at our cemetery and you can see the effects. Cancers, lupus on the rise, diabetes, we never had these before. I love living here, it's like my little piece of kingdom. But I don't let my grandchildren swim the lake. Now the whole fisheries is shut down. Nobody is going to buy toxic fish. When we travel, we haul all our own water, even for washing dishes. My husband brushed his teeth with river water and got treated for dysentery. Then he fell down the 8 foot bank and broke his wrist, who do you sue? They all deny it. We tell them, come with us, we will show you, but they never come.

Next month I'm going to bury my husband and my son at the Jackfish cemetery. It's going to be tough to get there, but it's worth it.

At our last meeting with Syncrude, they were talking about the Jackpine mine. Someone asked them, what about the people who are affected by their operations? They said that anyone affected is compensated. I asked them, what about us? We are affected directly. They started off with a movie about all the good things Syncrude can do for students out of high school. They can become a biologist, for example, and we do have a biologist they put through university, but now she has to work for Syncrude. They don't pay for students to become doctors or lawyers or judges.

Now we have crack in town, and it's so obvious who sells it. You have to have evidence to go to the RCMP to back up your story. So I just have to talk to my grandkids and warn them of the dangers.

Industry talks about 'development', I say, 'don't use that word, what you are doing is a disaster, not development'. If we bring up reclamation, they tell us, well, we have 42 more years of operations, then we will do the reclamation. Do you think that they will take out that pipeline they put under the river? We asked them, and they didn't even know what to say. I don't think they think about those things. Once they have made their money, they will pack up and go ... infrastructure will fall to pieces, the tailings will keep leaking into the river. This is not good development for us at all.

You see the kids in Fort McKay with lesions on their body. Every home has water delivered to them, they can't use the reservoir. I have a shower there when I visit family there, but I'm not there all the time. The people who shower there get skin troubles. I just don't see why money is that important. And my son works there, I just don't understand and I tell him, you can go back to school and get into something else, you are still young. But they all work, and they like the money, the trucks, they toys ... it's a really hard debate. What are you going to do? What is out there now that is untouched, especially around Fort McKay? They all say 'we have to work to feed our families'. My son Keith that just passed, he was a power engineer. The money is good, he started off at \$80,000/year. My brother worked for Suncor for 15 years, then he said 'I gotta get out of here' and he just walked. Now he works in heavy equipment up north. My other friend that works for Suncor needs a hip replacement, his sense of smell is gone.

My husband was offered a job and he asked me what did I think. I told him he could go, I'm not going. We got into tourism, we had international visitors and canoers that would stop at our place. You don't see canoers any more. David Suzuki and David Schindler came down the river; we met them on the river, Jon and I.

It seems like even though we have had celebrities like Neil Young, Leonardo Decaprio and Jane Fonda, they get so much grief around here. The radio station wanted people to boycott them. I called the radio station and just told them I was going to shut down their station and not listening to them anymore.

It's the bottom of the barrel here, the toilet bowl of the world, and when it overflows, everyone will be affected. The winter road opened up our territory to

the quadders, and they even rename our lakes to their liking ... they are marketing the sand dunes now. The top soil, a quad goes over it once, it starts to drift. There is no maintenance, no fish and wildlife officers out there, so those quads just do whatever they want. They bring the beer in but they leave the cans. It's just a joy ride into 'new territory' to them. I just don't agree with any of that, but it seems like nobody cares, especially the government.

Dr. John O'Connor has been such a support person, our doctor. Then they took his license away for working on our story. He was our doctor here for seven years, and when I organized the water conference, we wanted a keynote speaker. There was an Inuit woman who wrote 'It's ok to be cold', but her fee was too much. For some gatherings the companies just pump in money. I asked \$40k from each company and raised \$900k. We invited industry but nobody came. Dr. O'Connor asked 'where is my invite'? His fee was airfare, accommodation, and \$1, and I still haven't paid him.

One example: Louis Ladouceur; he was diagnosed in Edmonton, he died in Edmonton. We need a health study ... but how do we establish the people who died in Edmonton that were from here? 20% of our town are diabetics, we see kids consuming that processed food, they will bypass the moosemeat and the ducks, and go straight for those hamburgers and poutine. The health workers asked us, why can't you make a healthy vegetable soup? We took them to the Northern Store and tallied up the cost of all the fresh vegetables ... people just can't afford that.

We get the message out, but it falls on deaf ears. Mainly the government, and why do they have the final say? We never gave up our land. That dirty oil came from things that were alive at one time. Now you are using it to make money, and it only causes death. What's wrong with solar panels and the wind? I'm so happy I am a Dene woman. I never celebrated 150 years of genocide in the making. My husband was white and I hate the word Indian. Damn Columbus got lost. My husband said, well that's what you're called, and I said no, that's what you are calling me. It's a good thing Columbus didn't think he was going to Turkey or we would be called Turkey's.

What are your concerns for the future?

I worked at the school as a Dene language instructor. I regained my language and I am promoting to preserve it. I would tell the kids, there is a whole other world out there. You probably won't make as much money, but your health will be good. Don't go for industry, because you will be destroying the planet. But my cousin Jamie, he said, from a young age, 'I just want a lot of stuff', and now he has a lot of stuff.

I just can't make young minds understand, they say 'I need a new i-pad, I want the new iphone 7'. They ask their dad and the dad goes to get it. Kids are not respectful now, they expect you to do everything, even laundry when it's only pushing a few button. We used to have to haul water to wash clothes by hand. When we got a washing machine, we were the richest people in Jackfish. We said to everybody; bring your laundry, we will do it! We worked as a family, we ate as a family, we got up at 7 am, picked up our blankets, then got to it. We had the best meals, I miss that life. My grandson is a gamer, that's all he does is play games. He doesn't know how to do laundry and he's 15 years old.

The future looks bleak, dead. I don't see anything good happening out of industry at all. I wish we had remained part of ID #18 instead of joining the Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

It's getting worse, we have rain this year because there was rain in the mountains, but ... even the planes go a different way so they don't fly over all the plants. Most people here are just overwhelmed by all of this. When the ducks died and Suncor did their presentation, they couldn't even finish because they were bombarded with questions. People were in a panic, mothers didn't want to bathe their babies in the tap water.

When I go to Jackfish, I close my eyes and see all the people who used to be there. Now, on peoples' days off, it's party mode, no respect for the land. And industry is so wrong to promote it, like they are doing good. They are not. And they are keeping going. I have wished so many times that the river was flowing the other way. Would they do the same thing if this river was flowing past Edmonton? I don't think so. They do whatever they want and they have the government on their side: Canada, the province, and the municipality. What are you going to do? There is only a limited amount of work in this community. I worry about my

grandchildren. I told my grandchildren that I was going to bury my husband at Jackfish and they said 'why' and I said so you can go see him, and go be on the land. Today, if the kids even go, they want to take their x box, then they say 'I'm bored', to them it's not fun. We used to make little bows and arrows with willow and have plenty of fun just playing around wherever we were... my granddaughter does like it, she had a frog and her brother was crying for it, so I said, let's cut it in half' and they both cried 'no! no!'

Today, instead of helping our neighbors with the work, it's always party time. Life is too fast. We have a bleak future ahead of us. It's going to be a waste land, with global warming on the increase, and the effects we feel already. A hundred years from now, I don't think there will be much of a planet. The way my dad talked about the land, and what we have always said is that the land does not belong to us. It was loaned to us to pass on to our children, so they have a place where they can feel comfortable. I want my grandchildren to know that I planted this tree. I'm happy I didn't have any more children, because I think they are really going to suffer. I talk to young children about the weather and the stronger storms. The polar ice caps are going, the sea water is up, the inland water is down. This year the geese didn't even fly over – they used to fly over for weeks! First the ducks, then the geese ... this year, my relations up north said 'this year we didn't have to wait for you to send up ducks because we got some'. They got the migration up north where they never used to get it. My heart just breaks for my family ... my cousin got evicted because he was selling crack cocaine, he is disabled now, he can't work. And now we have fentanyl here .... We are treated like third rate citizens, and a lot of those street people in Fort Mac, I know them. One of them is my niece and they are just lost souls. If you bring it up to industry, they just say 'that was a choice that they made'. If they don't have an answer, they just say 'give me your number and we will get back to you'.

In the 70's I went up to the Syncrude guy, he had a banner that said 'one billion barrels', and I asked him, how much water did it take to make that much oil, and he said 'none'. And I said your nose is growing. He just went red. We just roll over and let it happen. If one of those big tailing ponds lets go, what are we going to do? We will be refugees in our own land. They say you shouldn't eat the inside of the duck, you shouldn't eat the eggs, you shouldn't eat the moose liver, or too much kidneys. We have been studied to death and really, I mean some have paid

the ultimate price. A strong healthy man we buried in January of soft tissue cancer. There is supposed to be one in 100,000 and we have had 3 or 4 here in a community of 12,000. I tell my grandchildren, what are you going to do when you grow up, please don't go to the industry. What's scary for me is my grandson the gamer, I don't think he could distinguish reality from his games. He doesn't notice things. I could have 2 bags of garbage sitting by the front door and he won't take it out unless I ask him. I pray. I pray hard. I smudge the house and when I offer it to my grandchildren, they say 'no'. I lost a sister not two years ago from alcoholism. She couldn't deal with the issues from residential schools; we were all there.

When we go to an industry meeting, they ask us to sign the book and I never want to sign. It's my opinion that they want to say they had 'consultation' with us and that is not the case. They said the names are for door prizes, but I don't agree. Once when my husband and I went to one of those meetings and they asked our name, I said 'Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Harper'. Reclamation is always a big question on my mind. I always ask. Look at Fort McMurray the way it is. It's going to be a miserable place when all the oil is gone.

March 14, 2017 member from Fort McMurray First Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

I've done a lot of work on the environmental side, and I've flown over this land countless times. Every time I fly over, there is more and more land disappearing ... There are more and more projects popping up, and they are all SAGD operations in this area, but to the north of here, they are all open pit.

There is no such thing as reclamation anymore. They call it land capability because they can't reclaim the land to the way it was. They have admitted they can't do it. Long after everybody is gone, this junk they use to extract everything with is still going to be sitting here. There are so many projects over this world that have been abandoned, I expect that they are going to do the same thing up here.

I have been over some beautiful land, and it has disappeared. There are projects approved on paper up here that are not even going to start for another 20 years. That's when our bitumen extraction will be the very least they can pull out of the ground around here. They will go after it, even though it is less valuable.

I've been doing this for a very long time, with several companies. There are places that we have got report about rare plants, and by the time we get there, the cats have taken that area out. So what they do is destroy the plants before the environmental technologists get there, so they can put their pipeline in.

Some of our sites have become archeological sites as well as environmental sites now. Say you have a house that's 40 years old, yet beside it, there is one that has caved in. That means more than one generation of family has lived there, and they have left artifacts. I have actually dug around these places. Even if you find a weird electrical hook-up, it's something that's not made any more and that changes a lot of things. One cabin I went to, they had every fur he had caught during the winter of 1993 written on his door with a marker. There were a lot of other old buildings nearby, which automatically makes it into a historical/archaeological site.

Our water is shipped from Fort McMurray. Our treatment plant was so contaminated that they had Tyvex three feet tall. We can't use the water around here any more.

What are your concerns for the future?

We worry about surface water, yet nobody thinks about our aquifer water. The fact that the caprock that is protecting it, but it has so many holes from where we extracted oil. The caprock will eventually break, and the bitumount mines will contaminate this underground water. I believe that we are creating gaps under the ground, the caprock will break into these. Caprock is made out of limestone. This happened already in Cold Lake, Encana, and Jackfish as well.

Down by the Cold Lake area, there were towns that were collecting their tap water from the aquifer, now they are using surface water for their tap water. They were doing this for many years before the oil extraction started, now they are all switched onto surface water.

That worries me all the way around here, that we are going to start experiencing sink holes. Every one of these operations has a secret formula that they are putting under the ground, and they don't want to release the formula because then everyone will know their secrets, so we don't actually know what they are putting under ground.

We have the second biggest aquifer in North America, the last one was in Montana, and it's being destroyed at a rapid rate.

Anywhere up there north of the Firebag, you know that there are archeological sites. It would be a good idea to keep searching there. Environmental Impact Study is not good enough. After the baseline study, there needs to be a study with everyone's opinion, especially the people who lived on the land. The terms of reference need to be really thorough, because most of the land up in that area is mineral soil, which could be a good place for people to live.

Already on the other side, we have a site that is 8,500 years old, that is in danger already. A thorough search instead of just a normal baseline study should be implemented on this project, considering that was the largest community in this part of the world for a long time. So things would have been left all over the place.

I used to be on a group included in the CEMA process. I caught them out lying big time. There have been so many groups, so much repetition ... now they have a questionnaire with the same questions everyone else asks, so you don't get to actually say what you think, you have to answer these off base questions.

The major thing that worries me up here is the wetlands. It seems like every time we have a spill it's in a wetland. I've already been on two. The last one, the Enbridge site, we worked on for two years ... as far as I'm concerned, we could work on it another two and it would still not be finished.

The Nexen site was worse; in a wetland, with pipe that 'could not break', the oil was two feet deep in places. What a mess

I also think that most of these pipelines, the companies that put them in should not be allowed to run their own lines. They should all be together, even if they are side by side. The destruction of the land could decrease big time. Instead of destroying

20 km of land, they can take a 'side by side' approach, as they are all going in the same direction. Or run it into one big pipeline would be easier to monitor.

The way some of these companies are operating, basically cutting a groove on each side of their pipeline, the land in the centre becomes an island, not getting the same things as it used to, and eventually eroding away.

Another one that really concerns me too is the top soil removal to create these plants. They remove all the organics and place them into huge piles, like big hills, and the organics die and basically turn into mud. They are not mixing it properly with woody debris, if they piled it with woody debris, it would stand a chance. Just dig into a topsoil pile and you will figure it out ... after the organics die, it is never topsoil again, all you are doing is spreading mud around. They should pile with woody debris for the air pockets and extra organics.

If this is an open pit mine, we are still draining from the Athabasca River. If you start out in Fort McMurray, you cannot see the bottom of the river. After all the mines north of Fort McMurray, you can see the bottom of the river, it is so shallow, because of all the water they are taking out for industrial use. The last time I was up there, they were installing another huge pump. Add one more open pit mine, with 3 barrels of water for each barrel of oil, this goes into a tailings pond, which is never returned to the streams. Those are the ones that you can see in the open, the open pit mines. The insitue projects are very very dangerous with our underground water supply. It sounds to me like this particular new project will have to drill another new pipeline underneath the Athabasca river. It's hard to say how many are under there right now. I have seen them go underneath the Athabasca River, and the North Saskatchewan. The projects I was on stretch from north of Syncrude all the way to the North Saskatchewan river. They do a 10 metre drill to make sure that the pipeline is 10 metres under the stream.

When all these pipelines are done, they will just leave them in the ground and our arsenic levels will go crazy around here. The heated pipelines are raising minerals to the surface that aren't ordinarily there. The animals are not getting the minerals they should when they go to their licks. In one place I was at by Wandering River, we found about 10 licks that people thought were natural, yet all of these licks were near risers, and that's the only place I noticed them was by these heated lines.

It's not possible to have that many natural licks, normally animals will have to go for miles and miles. When the animals lick at these new licks, barium, mercury, arsenic, and other chemicals are more present, because they rise at a higher speed with the warmth of the project underground. I have watched this happen.

When environmental scientists do not see this, it's really weird to me. They get so excited that there is a 'natural' lick, and animals are coming, but not seeing the potential that there are other elements that are not naturally present. They are looking for animal tracks and they are finding them. When I bring this up, it's a shock to them. I'm only on short term, and I go out with liaison people for oil companies. They ask really dumb questions. They put a pipeline through wetlands just because people will never live there. That's their reason for putting a pipeline through, because they have a thousand people signature that they would never live there. We actually don't have enough wetlands in the province to support our environment.

Now they are starting to use aquifer water for their operations. Athabasca oilsands is one of them. We have twelve holes drilled around here. I think I can see their steam on cold days. That's the first thing we notice with a new plant, the steam.

We are surrounded by provinces 3 feet deep in snow, but we have none. We're in a drought again, and a fire hazard. Encana was one of the best places for reducing fire risk. They cut the limbs pretty far up the trees, chipped them, and spread the chips around the base of the trees.

All of these areas they are clearing will produce more and more wind. The trees were stopping the trees and now they are gone. I believe with climate change, tornadoes will be something to watch for around here.

Creeburn lake is a site where there has always been people. Maybe a billion flint napping stones from them making their tools. This area is just to the South of where this proposed Teck mine is, very close. There were lots of people up there. Before they are allowed to do anything, they should definitely be doing a lot of digging. I believe they may have already wiped out a bunch of stuff there without even thinking. Most people are paid to be quiet. Keep your mouth shut and keep your job. It's hard to believe that environmental scientists do this, but they have to have a life to. The government ignores it. They let them go ahead.

Lots of times we would be flying along, and another helicopter with us. Our main helicopter was from Viet Nam and was refurbished. We do water sampling, soil, insects ... those cheat sheets should be handed out in schools. Every kid should know how to tell if their environment is ok. We also need courses that include parents. Some parents may be against this because they work for the oilfields. Later on in the future, that's what we are looking for: future stewards.

We had a lock down on our water awhile back. They had stocked up enough for a week or so. It was a spill from up above, one of those giant mills, right beside the Athabasca. They don't really allow environmental inspections there.

I know my mosses, I can name all the trees in latin. I trained with Ben Gass, Beth Harichuck, I would have got my 'environmental tech' degree if it weren't for chemistry. That blew me away; 4 tutors with different styles left me so drained I could barely think. Some of the professionals and experts I have worked with were so disgusted by the whole scheme, they never came back. All of the meetings we had were repetitious, there were already people who had formed these project years ago, and we were just there to repeat their plans. CEMA was spending money in an unwise way, just to keep getting funding. Grant Semanchuck, the biggest liar of them all. Those employees that were there from the beginning never had a problem, but in the end, the place just collapsed. Too many lies, they were just hired by the oilsands companies. They tried to lie to me about the amount of the water in the river during the winter. They tried to say they didn't know. They have instruments to measure all the time. It was for nothing.

All of this downtime has been good for the environment, it can start to reclaim itself. Now it's slowed down a bit, and that gives the environment a chance.

March 14, 2017 member from Fort McMurray First Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

With all of the new SAGD around and other mine development, it has really changed a lot. There are trees cut down, more areas cleared. There is more development and everything that comes with that; services, gas stations, all these things that go along with increasing development. There are new buildings, land

cleared to set up camps. There are really a lot of camps set up off the highway and further in. There is so much more traffic on the highway. They have added more and more tanks to the tank farm. There have been other changes, including a lot more spills. Whenever they are getting oil out, there will be spills. Accidents happen, maybe it isn't looked after very well, safeguards may not have been in place.

We have unpredictable weather patterns now. There is also a general lack of knowledge about muskeg, and how the ground moves. When they build underground pipelines, this will affect them. They don't understand how this works, the freeze thaw cycle, and how this affects movement on the land.

There is more pollution, more smells, more noise, more population. You can see that in ATVs using the land, more boats on the lake, in general more traffic. Lots of other changes are happening because there is more access. The high way has been improved, and some changes go along with that.

Other changes are the type of birds. We see a lot of magpies than there ever used to be. Not as many whiskey jacks, which used to be more common than magpies. The birch trees seem to be dying. There are hardly any alive any more.

Some of the muskeg is starting to dry up. People say that the fish is a bit soft, not the way it used to taste, and there are not as many fish as before. Because of all the development, there are not too many animals to hunt, so people have to go really way further to find the animals that they need to eat for food.

There are not as many frogs. I know that's not right, because frogs are really important; they were a really big part of Spring. I used to hear them all the time, but now it's not as much, we don't hear the frogs.

The water seems to be getting lower. Some of it has to do with more building along the highway. They actually drained one pond that had a beaver house on it, so they pretty much got rid of the beaver.

There is less access for berry picking because our old places where people used to go, you can't get in there now because it's blocked off. They have roads there on the leases. I never thought about not listening to those signs, because it's still our land, and we should be able to use it.

Just noticing the Clearwater River that runs into the Athabasca; that river is definitely lower. People can't even take a boat there because they will get stuck, that never used to be like that. We did a ceremony over there. It was nice, even though the water levels were down.

Of course the wildfires. It spread so quickly because it was so very dry, and the ground was too dry to stop it. Then it became very windy, and it's to do with the weather. Even the emissions from the plants and all those hydrocarbons in the air, it gets blown around and it's going to fall somewhere. That fire will be unstoppable.

The trap-lines are pretty much gone. Because of all the industrial activity that's going on around them, they aren't really able to keep animals around to trap; they are not able to go there undisturbed. I don't see rabbits around. I think there are still some, but you really have to search. There used to be lots of rabbits around, everyone had snares, and ate rabbits. There are probably still a few people doing this, but I don't know who.

The other changes I've seen are in health. I've seen way more people around who have cancer. It's not only in Fort Chipewyan, but also in Fort McKay and here. I'm sure it has to do with all of the oil industry projects. If people eat the wild foods, it is going to have an impact.

I notice weird weather. Weather patterns have actually changed. Winters have been much warmer than 10, 20, or 30 years ago. It used to be cold all winter, but now we can have -30 and zero the next day. We've had that cold weather in November and December, then it will warm up to above zero for awhile! It's not a Chinook, I know they get those further south. That is a big change, we have never seen that. We do get a lot of rain in the Spring. I don't know what it will be like this year ... last year we had rain but it was too late.

What are your concerns for the future?

I'm worried about that water. There is so much water being withdrawn from the Athabasca, it's going to make it really tough. Industry is just increasing, it's not

stopping, and water withdrawals are going up. There shouldn't be more water continuing to be taken out, but less.

The stuff going into the water is another concern. There have been toxic spills, the tailings ponds are in close proximity to the Athabasca River and can leak. In Ontario, they had mercury and lead leaking into their water for decades, and it seems the same here.

Using aquifers for withdrawals should not be allowed. They have to go through the good water to reach their saline water, and I'm very concerned that there is no monitoring of our aquifers. Close monitoring of every company that withdraws from rivers, lakes, and the aquifer. We hear that even though they are not supposed to, companies are still doing these withdrawals. The AER is not doing enough to make sure.

Is this water getting less and less? Is it being poisoned? Even though there are even more people all the time, it's the companies who are using the water.

More development is a concern. Companies have been issued permits to go ahead and expand on their existing projects. Why do we still need new ones? It will just cause even more negative impacts on the environment in general.

I'm concerned about the health of the animals who live around here, on land and in the water. I'm very concerned about the fish. I would like to see our future generations be able to fish from the lake and trap rabbits, and that they won't have to worry about eating toxic substances.

My other concern is continued dependence on fossil fuels. I think we should be looking at other ways of getting energy and not depend on fossil fuels so much anymore. I'd really like to see that changed.

I'm worried about our culture not being kept intact. I do not want to see our languages and our cultural ways going into the modern ways. Because we have a very important culture and language is so important and it defines us. Everything there is to know about the land is in the language. So I'd like to see that being preserved.

Native people should be compensated for loss of land, language, culture, and should receive compensation until the end of a project. As well, we need training, and we need to be a part of helping to rebuild and reclaim the land. I don't want to use this as a general term, but to actually have a part in keeping our land safe.

We have to really make sure our medicine gathering places are kept safe. It's a concern that we don't lose those places. There are only certain places where we can get rat root, Labrador tea or sweetgrass. There are very few places we can get these things, and we need them protected. I'm afraid that the medicines that grow in wet areas are at risk. Because of the drying out of wetlands, and the weather changes, these medicines are in danger.

I'm also concerned that not enough TK is being passed on to the Youth. Our band council is so involved with economic development and that end of things. We need more resources for education, and Elders and Youth gatherings, things like that.

July 15, 2017 member from Mikisew Cree Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

I notice a big big change, from the good to the bad. The reason I say that is we used to drink the water out of the Athabasca, and any creek and any stream. Then in Fort McMurray they found the bitumen that the natives always used for repairing their canoes and other stuff. Also when they built the Bennett dam the water level dropped about 12 feet, because you look at the rocks along the lakeshore and you can see where the water dropped from way back then. And they are still making other dams.

Very destructive people, I don't believe they think about us. The billionaires that go on vacation in Hawaii while they are making money off the land with the oil, where the lower people work, and in the process they are polluting the air, the land, but it doesn't really touch them because their head is above that pollution

The government will spend money if they can make money. The reason I say that is because when they find diamonds or oil, they spend a lot of money to put in the

road, but around here, if there is nothing there, they would never put in a road. It's all about politics.

The changes that I seen growing up; my father was a hunter, trapper, and gatherer. I used to live in the bush with my late parents. Within that time to today, the water has changed the land. Where there was a lake, now there is a meadow. Where there was a prairie, now there's bush. It makes it hard for a person going to their cabin to travel on a lake or a river. It wears out your motor, always hitting sand. Sometimes you have to pull out your motor just to get by that sand, then you can put it down again after you are through that part. With that in mind, at the present day, I'm still doing what I was doing when I was growing up, that is living off the land. Even though the water level is low, and the animals are, let's say, 'sick'. The animals drink the water that we can't drink. I still eat the fish, the ducks ... those ducks fly from the south, and you know, they land on those lakes that the oil companies made, and get oil in their feathers and they can't fly. They died.

Right until the present day, people are still building cabins in the bush. People love the land and I see a lot of cabins being built. Even though the land is slowly being destroyed by the oil companies. How I know there is contamination, in the snow ... snow is pure, snow is white, and sometimes you see dark little objects in the snow. You don't really notice until the wind blows it and it makes a circular motion with the snow, and you can see the dark stuff circling. Can you imagine how much pollution is dropping from the air over the years?

I want to be compensated for the loss of the animals ... there is much less animals that there should be. That way the billionaires, those people up there flying in Lear jets with their money in Swiss bank accounts could be millionaires instead of billionaires, and the people who are suffering, at least they could have money and be compensated. They rape the land, they destroy the land, and they call us savages. They don't live where they destroy the land. They go where there is hardly any pollution. These companies pay the middle man to go to the meetings and say that everything is good. They have their studies and they say everything is good. So a few times, we brought water from the Athabasca and asked them to drink it, they won't. Money talks ... if you don't have it, what you say goes in one ear, and it comes out the other one.

History has a tendency to let future generations understand what happened in the past. When Columbus came here, they claimed that the Indigenous peoples of Canada were Indians, but we are the Aboriginal peoples. They say we were here 20,000 years. You didn't see any big pile of pollution where the people lived, we lived in harmony with the land. What the natives did to prove for ourselves that we are not savages, we don't destroy and pollute the land, and we live in harmony. But the European people that came here from overseas, within a few hundred years, they destroyed the land, they destroyed the rivers, and they call themselves civilized.

In the olden days, growing up, someone would get a moose and they would share with the whole community. Today, we still do share, but not as much as we used to way back when. They put us in residential school, they destroyed our culture, the Catholics said, 'you are working for the devil', and this when we had our own good way for thousands of years.

I made history, I moved here in Alison Bay reserve in 1996. I have lived here 21 years and counting. My mother was pregnant 19 times, now there are 7 of us left. We just buried my brother Johnny, he was 65 years old.

What are your concerns for the future?

My concern is for my grandkids and my great great grandkids. You want the best for your siblings. I want them to know about their culture. It's good they know about the school, but obviously, their language, their culture, their history. I wish the best for my kids, that they get a good education, get a good job, but never forget their culture. My kids speak Cree, they know their language. I would sing to them when they were still babies. The doctors call my one song the 'miracle baby', he had to struggle ... he had a torn umbilical cord and a heart condition, double pneumonia and a g tube, but now he is a health boy, he has a strong will to live. I am a single parent. My ex is lost in the pill popping, the crack, that's her lifestyle now, so I can't be involved in that. I'm raising my two boys by myself.

I have a cabin about 60 miles away ... I'm a fixer upper. One man's garbage is another man's treasure. There is stuff I can get at the dump that I make use of. I

teach my boys when they finish eating to clean up, then when they go outside to keep things clean and bring their toys back inside, sometimes it's a losing battle, but that's important, the teaching that counts, keep teaching them. I always speak to them in Cree and Dene as well. I have the best of both worlds, I live here where it's good, fresh air, no traffic, because if you live in a city, it's good in a way because everything's there. But let's say the power quit, it's like being in the middle of the ocean crying for help and nobody hears. But me in Fort Chip, I can take care of that, I have a wood stove, I will get a rabbit or a moose, but the people in the city, they will be killing each other for a little crumb of bread. And especially the millionaires, they will be burning their money to get a little bit of heat. I have the best of both worlds because I have the knowledge, sure I have the technology, but I can survive, I can live a little longer. That's what I want to pass on to my kids; the value of life, the knowledge, the wisdom, of how to survive. The farmers will be all right too, they will have their cows and pigs, they will have their bacon and eggs; in the city they will kill each other for bacon and eggs.

I made an Eskimo sleigh 'kamatok' to haul my wood. I have to replace a beam in my cabin. I took my nephew and my boys with me to get those ants that are in the beam ... we knocked them out and their eggs fell on my head. We vacuumed them up and did our 'dance' to kill them all ... so now in the winter, I will use my sled to haul out that new beam. I am constantly teaching them.

The future has a tendency to repeat itself, but hopefully it's for the good. Not to repeat itself for the bad, we can leave that behind, but let's repeat the good, the things we know are good.

March 16, 2017 member from Fort McMurray First Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

I've lived here all my life. When I was a kid, there was very few people, now the city nearby and the community has grown. As far as the population, we've grown from a small town, to a big city. We went on the train to the doctor, that's when I've always seen Fort McMurray.

The Athabasca River was huge, with big boats coming up the Clearwater River. Now you can't get a boat in there, it's so shallow. It's because of all the water used, the industry uses up the water from the river. When I was a child, there were big boats, and these boats were going until the early 1970's. I've seen barges, I worked at Suncor and filled barges with fuel oil. The fuel oil was taken to Saskatchewan (Uranium City) by barge, this was 1973 or 1974. It seemed to happen gradually, the loss of the water ... the river went down gradually to where it is today. Not only the Athabasca River, especially the surrounding rivers like the Christina River, which was bigger and faster flowing. Now it's very small; you can walk across it in the summer.

I've noticed a change in the water, the loss of water in this area, it's gone down considerably everywhere. There has been less and less snowfall; the land is getting dryer every year. The muskegs are drying up; the land is not receiving. I was a trapper, and where I went, where I couldn't go, I can go now, because the muskegs are drying up. When we were young, we didn't have far to go to hunt. We killed moose nearby. There was lots of animals, muskrats, lots of beavers, lots of rabbits. Now there are no more muskrats, maybe the odd one, but no moose in this area. The caribou are all gone; we used to have lots of caribou. We don't have rabbits anymore. We don't have porcupines anymore or skunks. So I've noticed a lot of animals that left. The animals were over hunted, the moose population, because of the city of Fort McMurray; too many hunters. Then of course the fire chased everything away. With such a big population, there are no moose left in this area, and no caribou. Because the oil sands developers make cutlines and pipelines, they make leases, they make roads for hunters to go, and for the wolves to follow, which I believe killed all the caribou. Yes, I've seen the loss of wildlife because of the roads where we couldn't go before.

The wolves have taken over and decimated the caribou. They have roads to follow. And all this logging, this clearcut logging. When I was a boy, there wasn't all this clearcut. They make roads a long way into the bush. They take away the caribou habitat and provide a road for the wolves to travel. Other animals, foxes, and coyotes, but wolves are the most damaging.

So that's a lot of changes I've seen; a small community to a city, lots of animals to no animals, lots of water to a little water. When I was young, they did not have

oilsands plants here, or in Fort McMurray. Now it's full of oil sands plants everywhere. Although we are not close, they are coming closer. They are building 2 plants, one to the west and one to the east. They are SAGD plants, they will be using water.

What are your concerns for the future?

My concern is about the pollution. When they have to release gases into the air, it can cause pollution. Major explosions cause pollution. Look what happened at Fort McKay yesterday, they have to keep their windows closed, and their doors closed. It was in the paper (explosion at Syncrude plant)

I am aware that those oilsands plants cause lots of pollution to the migratory birds due to their tailings ponds. Everyone knows that there was a lot of, many many ducks that landed in there. Fifty blue herons died in those tailings ponds. That's the only ones we find out about. I wasn't aware of the size of these tailings ponds until I flew over the lease. All I could see was oil on top of the water; an oily lake. I wasn't aware of how awful, how bad it was until I seen it. If everyone seen it, they would realize it's not good for the environment or the wildlife. Tailings ponds leak into the groundwater. These oilsands plants they deprive the people in the area their cultural ties to the land, where the water is polluted, the fish are not good, the animals are not good, even the berries are not good. That is directly due to the oilsands plants in the Fort McKay area. We're adding more plants, that's only adding more problems. Those tailings ponds that are next to the river, you know they leak into the river. It's not good for the environment. We don't have frogs anymore.

I've got friends in Fort McKay, they can't even pick berries. It seems like there is a fog here all the time. It's like steam in winter, because there are so many plants in that area. There seems to be steam everywhere. You can smell the plants over there. They can't practice hunting, or their cultural activities.

July 14, 2017 member from Fort McMurray Métis Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

since I was young, there has been a lot of changes. All of a sudden in the late 1950's the first homes were built in Fort Chip, and then after that there were more planes, more roads, and plus the airport. I'm always on the land; Big Point where the Metis originally settled a hundred years or more. My greatgrandfather Joseph Weequapan Cardinal: they tried to help Big Bear but they were attacked, their families.

Big Point is where I trap, the wife and I commercial fished together, at the mouth of the Athabasca River. That's where I was born in 1942. I love the land, and I'm happy to be there because it's so quiet. In town here, there's always vehicles running, people yelling, drinking ... I might have done a bit of that in my younger days .... I know where to set nets, I know this whole lake, where the best places are. Now our livelihood is gone, the commercial fishing is gone three years ago because the fish are so damaged from pollution they stopped the commercial fishery across the whole province of Alberta. And we're fighting that, we want compensation.

We used to have a lot of fun in Fort Chipewyan, especially Christmas and New Years. My dad was a great fiddler, it used to be beautiful. I miss fiddling now, it's sad, we only have one Dene fiddler here now. The old man was a self taught fiddler but he was good, played all the old Métis tunes, French tunes ... a lot of people miss him, everyone knew him. The Red River jig is like the national anthem for the Métis, both of my grandfathers were good dancers. I loved that; my wife danced the Red River Jig, and she's good at it too! Andy Desjarlais plays it the old way, the good way to play it. Now they have a different way to play it. People would gather around and dance. There used to be quite a few dog teams going across to Big Point when they were having a dance, or to the Dene reserve. Now nobody goes around because there is no fiddling. There used to be parties ...

The trappers used to get up early, five o'clock in the morning you would have to get up, start a fire, feed the dogs, and be gone before everyone gets up.

There used to be thousands of muskrats in our area. When they put the Bennett Dam, the water went way down, the muskrat disappeared. We used to make a good living out of that, we sell the skin, eat the meat. I believe there are off gasses

from the river that kills the muskrat, as well as they drown in their house when they let the Bennett dam go. I drink from an underground stream, where I'm at, that's the water I use. We cover a lot of land, all the way to Saskatchewan. My dog team, years back .... My biggest mistake was buying skidoos. If you run them lots, they only last 5 years. Dogs will take you anywhere, and they don't get stuck and overflow. And dogs are like your children. My old man said; A skidoo won't follow you if you leave it behind. Since I changed to skidoos, I've walked many a mile.

Diabetes is new, it runs in my family now. My dad died from diabetes, and so many people have it. Also cancers, so many people are dying of cancer. Out of every 10 people who are dead there, 8 of them will be dead of cancer. My cousin, in his late 60's, the doctor told him he had cancer. He had a birthday party, then six weeks later he died.

A lot of changes, all right. The water we used to drink, we can't even use it for bathing. We have treated water, but to go and have a bath in the river, you don't know what your going to catch.

We are losing bugs in the water, we are losing minnows, fish, even seagulls, some don't come any more. There used to be thousands, millions of them here, they are all gone, mudhens are gone, hardly any ducks in our area. As a trapper, I live amongst the animals, I take what I need to take .... To start losing animals, it's sad. Now in the delta, you would never track a moose, never find a moose, it's gone. There has been moose killed around here with real bad livers, it's terrible. We got a lot of deformed fish in the Athabasca, where I fished virtually all my life since I was a boy – deformed, bad backs, sores, big heads, skinny bodies.

What are your concerns for the future?

There is going to be more fires, more floods, more winds. I don't know what we are doing to the earth. The lake is polluted.

This was a healthy lake at one time. If we keep on polluting, we are going to destroy ourselves. We are not going to leave anything for our grandchildren.

It's going to be like the cities, you won't get food. You see that overseas; starvation. We are told in our country too, it's going to be a terrible time.

Native spirituality is very powerful. I even heard my own grandfather in the sweatlodge, by the name of Eli Cardinal, my mom's dad. My mom was crying when we heard that. I was 15 years old when he died. He was 68; TB is what killed him. TB is coming back too. He said 'you got to live good to get to a good place when you die'. He said you leave your body on this earth, but when you die, your spirit is gone. He said 'live right on this earth, you can't take much from this earth'

At one time here, this guy named George Wanderingspirit, his grandfather predicted that hard times will come to Fort Chipewyan with many sicknesses. A bug with many legs will come, and that's what they now call cancer. Maybe 200 years ago this was predicted. We better wake up here and start doing something. Instead of spending in the oil fields, we better start spending on the farmers fields to feed the world. A lot of countries around the world depend on Canada for their food.

How do they figure they are going to live when the oil is gone? I asked them and one guy from an oil company put that idea to them; They should give us a dollar a barrel in Fort Chipewyan to start our own self government and businesses. He lost his job for saying that, what I had asked him.

We are going to be starving within the next ten years. I might be gone by then, but I'm thinking about the other ones, they other generations. My grandkids come all the time to Big Point, they love the land.

We better smarten up here, in many ways. They way they are spending money in the world – quit spending money where you shouldn't be spending. I'm not against all the people coming to Canada, but they need to investigate them before they come. Watch your money, help the ones that really need the money. The oil companies are controlling the government – they are putting a lot of money in that.

To the oil companies – hey, slow down here. You can't keep putting that stuff in the water. We need our water, not just Canada, The whole world needs water,

what are we going to drink? You can't drink money. Sometimes I think that money is god in our world today, that's the way people look at it.

I hope many good changes come to this world. Quit fighting amongst ourselves, whether Muslim or Catholic, Anglican, or Native spirituality – help each other survive in this world. Sure we need that oil, but can we take it out of the ground without destroying everything? We are 200 miles from Fort McMurray, when the smokestacks let loose, we can smell it here. It goes further north too; the trappers a hundred miles further north they smell it too. When we destroy our air, what are we going to breathe? We can drink the dirty water but we won't survive long on it.

I've been after the oil companies about the water and the air. I hope people realize where we are heading now, and help us out. What we have to protect is our water, for our ancestors and the next generations .... And the animals, slow down, start listening to the native people, what they are telling the government. the land was only loaned to the white man to keep it clean and look after one another.

July 13, 2017 member from Mikisew Cree Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

I find that the environment has changes. One of them is more green algae along the river. About 10 years ago, I first noticed this and it's gradually getting worse.

I find there is less abundance of animals, fish, and wildlife: that can be development or overharvesting. There isn't much harvest any more; it's hard work, you got to be out there, buy equipment. Moose has seriously, seriously gone down, I tell people 'please don't shoot cows' because that means you kill 7 moose. Several years ago I saw 28 moose in one summer, two years ago I saw seven, last year I saw 3, so these are serious numbers. Parks Canada used to do enforcement at one time, but they don't do that anymore. They can't use sidearms, so they figured they were endangering their lives by doing enforcement so there is no deterrent.

Another change is we have more black bears hanging around the community now. Maybe there is not enough berries for them or not enough food out there ... they

are becoming nuisance bears and unfortunately have to be put down. Used to be the bears would come and pass through, but now they are hanging around, and they have to put them down. In past years, maybe one or two would have to be harvested, but this year there have been six so far that just wouldn't leave town so they were harvested by fish and game. I put in a request for the meat so it won't go to waste; I hate to see anything go to waste.

Also, we have tent caterpillars now. You see that brown spot on the landscape over there (across the bay to Wood Buffalo National Park)? That's what the tent caterpillars did – they eat the green leaves off the poplar trees. We never used to have this, and I'm not sure why they are here now.

The quality of water: I still take water and make tea out of the bush. You have to boil it 10 minutes to get rid of the beaver fever. I check nets regularly, I see a lot of fish, and sometimes they are deformed ... it's just normal, it's genetics, just like a cow farm. Tourism is part of my business, I take people out fishing and sight seeing, and I have a dog team. I really encourage guests or visitors to come and check fish with me, you can see the healthy ones.

One thing I always tell people, when you speak to someone in Fort Chipewyan, think to yourself, 'what is this person trying to tell me, what do they want me to believe'. You hear lots, a lot of people believe the water is bad and you will die if you stick your finger in it and drink it. Industry isn't there because they want us to drive cars, they are here to make money, as quickly and efficiently as possible. Don't let anyone tell you different. There are more and more people who are ok with the destruction of the environment. They want that new Ford pick-up, they want 3 skidoos not just one. My wife and I don't work every day, our children are gone now, we budget and don't need those things.

What would be really advantageous to the community would be to pick one day a month and walk. Then if it flies over good, do two days a month. That would mean a lot, but the community needs to pull together. We have four groups living together in this community, and sometimes it's challenging to really get together and work on one thing.

Videos: 'When is Enough Enough' Waqua (Chief Archie)'s movie Mikisew Cree FN documentary re: hearing

‘Footprints in the Delta’ – one factor is that deltas move sediment and the bottom of the basins are filling up because of sediment. There was a glacier long ago, and now we are having alluvial (glacial) rebound. Lake Athabasca’s base comes up about a centimetre per year. Not only Bennett Dam is to blame for our water levels.

‘Water, Water, but not enough to drink’ – some kids found a goldeye fish during this conference, and it was like the second coming of Christ – ‘Robert, you gotta come see this’. They didn’t want to hear what I had to tell them. The fish was decomposing and the tongue was swollen and sticking through the bottom of the mouth. People are nervous, this ‘two mouth fish’ caused a lot of alarm; I’m surprised that no one got sued over all that excitement.

‘Death of a Delta’ – is deceiving because the delta was only dry while the weir for the Bennett Dam was filling up. BC Hydro did a study and they proved that the water levels came back to normal afterward. Everyone has their own agenda. Some things may not be conducive to putting coin in my pocket, and those things have a harder time getting acceptance these days. There is so much research and opinions, and you will never get a clear view until you go through most of it.

I used to be part of the Athabasca Tribal Council, it was great. We were ‘that close’ to success. I collected information like deformed fish, had them tested and gave the results straight to the person who gave it to me. A lot of times it was festering sores from boat propellers. But the bands didn’t support it because the money didn’t flow directly to them. People are still bringing me stuff to get tested, but I don’t do that anymore. I think the GIR is supposed to do that now, but I don’t know because nobody told me. I won’t participate with them because they are not serious. They are just there for a paycheck.

I would like to see that money go toward a good research program. How can they find something against the person who is paying you? Where does that money come from, it’s from industry. What are they going to oppose? That’s their employer! That’s another reason I can’t work for them.

One time I went to Edmonton and spoke there with David Schindler. Then I pulled back because I just don’t know enough about the agenda.

What are your concerns for the future?

We need to do a proper health study, starting with DNA. We have to find out who is who, and the community has to want to be involved, right from the beginning and the whole way. I spent 7 years in the mission residential school here in town. I think I may have been the only child who got kicked out, because I came from a really dysfunctional family; my stepfather kicked me around. Maybe the mission food is what's killing me. Maybe the ones who were at the mission are the healthy ones, we don't know because we will never get this information. We need to find out who's who ... maybe people are sick because their maybe their uncle fooled around with their mom. Maybe the people living along the Athabasca river are the ones that are getting sick, maybe it's the people along the delta, we just don't know. In the meantime, we are going to keep assuming – I'm sick because of the oil sands.

What my concerns for the future are; the future generation is going to rely more and more on industry money. By relying on this money, we are going to disregard the environment . I see a trend; taking that money makes people say 'that's ok if that tree dies' because we don't have to have fish, we can buy fish in the store. We're not dependent on the land, on the trees, on the animals. I think there is only about 4 trappers in our community left. The few that are practicing their lifestyle, I hope that they continue to pass that knowledge on to the Youth.

'Little Trapper' 1997 is about our son. He was the only Youth doing traditional life style at that time at the time. There are a lot of expectations and aspirations toward wealth – more and faster skidoos ... it's interesting.

'Man who chooses the bush' documentary about Frank Ladoucer, about him coming home for Christmas.

'One river, many relations' is a documentary that I am in. Dr. Timoney presents his findings and the whole community is included. I have to be careful what I say, because it's not conducive to the mainstream. Sometimes people don't want to really hear what I have to say.

If we start worrying about the environment, or about the water, or if we just get a faster skidoo ... o my god, the beautiful boats in this town. By taking the industry money, it takes our focus off the land. We could lose our ability to understand if things are getting more contaminated. The most important thing is to be honest, don't be led by a motivator. Tell the truth and don't jump off the roof just because everyone else is. Sometimes it's challenging living in a small community with different views, because everyone knows everyone.

March 16, 2017 member from Mikisew Cree Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

In my lifetime, the quality of water, the water level is low, the animals are totally changing their routines from what I was used to. The geese are coming in earlier, the moose are getting ticks earlier. Our hunting has changed big time, because of the pollution in this area and the water levels.

We are finding more sick animals. A lot of the moose have these white jelly things inside the meat when you cut them open. It almost looks like a clear fish egg when you cut into their meat, like a clear yolk sac with a white ball inside of it. I grew up in the bush, I grew up eating moose meat and I never even heard of this until roughly the last 15 years. I just cut the piece off and just continue, I'm not going to throw a whole moose away. I never saw that before, but now it's in every moose we get. Between myself and my sons, we usually get two moose a year, and we always see this now. So we have been starting to hunt further south. The moose I got in Athabasca this year wasn't like that. Some people get their fish from Saskatchewan.

We have only a certain amount of fish we can eat each week. We are not allowed to consume what we used to. We go fish in Gregoire Lake and got a morai (forgot English word). There were black lesions all over it's back, looked like pepper, I had never seen that before. I just threw it back.

My sons used to go get rabbits. Say they snared 5 rabbits, we are only going to keep 3 because two are sick. This is typical. My sons get quite discouraged. They get to do this on their own, and they get pretty upset. They have their own little

snares. Say one of my sons get 3 rabbits, and only one is good; they don't get the full enjoyment of what I had growing up. There are these white little blisters on the inside, when you take the guts out, they have them, looking like canker sores all up inside, underneath the guts and all along the spine. They are white, flat sores inside them.

The worst part is being limited on our food that we grew up with and enjoy eating. We are limited on our intake of wildlife.

The areas where I grew up was my classroom. Because the water level has gone down so much, my teachers are having a more difficult time getting out to these areas. I don't like seeing my Elders getting discouraged about this, and it means my classroom is not accessible to my children anymore.

Another thing I've noticed around here is the birch trees. The tops are all gone. All of the tops are gone. The birch trees aren't big. When the voyageurs made their canoes out of birch, they must have been huge. There was 40 men plus all their gear fit in a canoe made of birch. The slabs of birch they used to take off a birch tree for these canoes were huge. I've been all over the bush, and I've never seen a birch tree that I couldn't wrap one arm around.

Because the animals change their routines, even though we are so different today from my ancestors .... January is supposed to be the cold month, our ancestors' calendar is actually changed. When the goose moon comes, the goose have already been here for a month. It's all upside down.

What are your concerns for the future?

My main concern is not being able to teach my children and my grandchildren the way I grew up. From catching a rabbit to catching a moose without worry, is this animal going to be sick, are we going to be able to use it? This place where we are going today, will it be there for us tomorrow? Because my yesterday is gone for me.

The quality of water and the water level is a concern. We are never supposed to run out of water, but we are running out of water. I just can't wrap my mind

around that. Even at the trap line, we can't drink the water. We have to lug around bottled water. Now there are chemicals in the water. When we were building our cabin, we even still drank the water, that's about 12 or 13 years ago.

My children are more limited with my teachings than I was with my grandpa's teaching. We can't access the same areas as before.

I'm concerned about the muskeg all at the bottom of the Birch mountains. The muskeg is cleaning all the crappy water coming from the south, it's acting like a filter. What has me concerned is if they build that new plant, that muskeg will be gone, and it will lessen the quality of water that is flowing north. Loosing muskeg will contribute to lower water levels. The muskeg is there for a reason. That reason is the way the land was made.

I'm concerned about the 'easy clean up' of mulching everything. I've seen this too often, mulching the contamination in with the trees, and anything in their path. It's quite deceiving because they will mulch it in the wintertime. It looks like it's a nice flat area, if you go on your quad, you will fall through the mulch into the bog. It's a fast cheap way of 'cleaning up' but it doesn't let anything grow through.

Of course I'm really worried about our own little buffalos there too. This is the only free roaming herd ... they said 'a couple of buffalo might die' at a meeting I went to. I'm concerned about the snakes in that area too.

This new plant would go right over my cousin's trap line.

March 14, 2017 member from Fort McMurray First Nation

What changes have you noticed in your lifetime?

I was born just about a mile down the road here 89 years ago, I just had a birthday. I've noticed lots of change ... the biggest part is not being able to go to the creek and get a pail of water. Everything is so contaminated we can't drink water like we used to. My dad used to take us camping, every place we went, to the camp, to the place we went hunting, to the lake we fished.

Why do they tell us we can eat fish three times a week if they are that bad? I often wonder how we can eat these fish. If we over do it, we can poison ourselves.

It really bothers me that when we go for a drive, we have to take out own water with us. When we go places, sometimes the kids can't swim, because we just don't know. Sometimes there is a sign that says 'no drinking'

It's a terrible think to bring children into this world, then tell them they can't use the natural resources. My son was a good swimmer, but now, all the kids just can't swim anyplace.

This creek we have running through the reserve was our water. That's why all of us live along here, along the Amoco Road. That's why we put our houses here, because we are close to the water, to the creek and the lake. Then Amoco dug up the hill from the people, and the place was contaminated because of something they dug out of the ground, it had lead in it. They shut down the well ... but the creek keeps running. They dug the dirt and let people use it in their garden. Then they had to go back and take back all that dirt so peoples' vegetables wouldn't be contaminated.

It was scary, and some people won't grow vegetables now. I don't know what my dad and my mother would say if they were alive. My mother died 50 years ago, she was young, she lived right here where we are at now, and she died here. We had all our water here. This was a field where there was hay, it was stooped into a pile, and that's where we fed our animals.

My grandfather had a trapline up past Amoco, he had a cabin and a natural field. He used to hay with a scythe. They had three daughters and no sons. I was a year younger than his youngest daughter, and I used to go along with them. Us kids would go along with rakes, hand made out of willows and stack his hay. They he would come along with his wagon and load it on there for his animals. In the winter time he would go stay out there and do his trapping. There was no one around with a cat to come and knock it down.

My Aunt Rose went there 15 years ago, and she said it was still there. He must have worked hard that old man, even though he had rheumatism. They used big logs about 6 inches thick, and then laid a floor with blocks of wood that he cut.

They had everything they needed there. My grandmother used to stay there too, they would come back in for Christmas. You could hear the team of horses coming for a long way because of the bells on the harness. We used to love waiting for my grandpa. He would pray, and we would be sitting there hungry, and he would be praying and praying while we were waiting.

It was a hard life, but it was free. My sister didn't have any of that, because she was raised at residential school. A different hard life.

Changes: It's the power more than anything ... the power didn't come here, it came to Fort McMurray. My aunt married someone in Fort McMurray and we all wanted to go visit her so we could switch the lights off and on. At that time it was new, and they didn't use it for much. Everybody that had power, it was really something at that time.

I went to school when I was 7 years old. Grandma Cheechum was a midwife, and she was living in Fort McMurray because her daughter was going to have a baby. I got the measles, a white man's sickness, I was scratching, it was horrible. Someone wrote to my dad, and he used his dog team to come and bring me home. We always used a dog team in the winter and horses in the summer. I never went to school again until I went to residential school in Fort Chipewyan. I went there by boat, a boat called the Athabasca. It was three floors tall, and they pushed a barge ahead of them with the winter groceries. They didn't use gas, they used steam. We would stop about two or three times along the way to load up wood along the river that they had bought ahead of time for the steam engine. We never had such a nice ride, like a hotel with our own rooms. We ate with a white table cloth, we never had that at home. They fed us prunes in the morning ... none of us know what to do with the pits so we swallowed them, and nobody choked! This trip took three nights. They did stop at night, to pick up wood.

They managed without power. My dad got a job on the railroad to lay rails and ties. We would see this train coming, and the wood was stacked so high ... there was a big water tank for train to come along and use it for steam. The train was long, it must have been a strong engine; it went up hill by Fort McMurray. All the young people would go meet the train ... walking to Anzac to see who was coming or who was getting on the train. That's all we had to do on a Friday night. We

would walk all the way to Anzac, and try and get a ride back with a team of horses to our farm. This farm is still in the middle of our reserve. It is for sale now. Last time it was for sale, it was \$6M ... they thought they would get an oil company. Now it's probably cheaper, because it is in the middle of the reserve and they can't drill there. That land has been owned by lots of people since 1915, when my folks were forced to sell it. It has been sold many times. Sometimes it has even been in my family sometimes. I don't think there were many people here before that ... there were people further north already. They came down the Athabasca River on barges, with horses dragging them down the river. They used this before the railroad. They stopped at Fort Smith because of the rapids. They had such a hard time getting there, their produce and dry goods ...

In the old days, we used to hang our meat and fish from a tree to dry. We didn't need a machine for every little thing

Now the Athabasca River is so bad, you can't even hardly cross around by Fort McKay ... it smells so bad you have to wear a mask. That's from the pollution of all the oil wells that drains into the water. You can't imagine all of the pollution that goes into the water.

I've seen so many changes ... all our wood was hauled by horses. People just used cross cut or Swede saw, there were no power saws, and we didn't need them.

What are your concerns for the future?

I don't know that our land will last another 50 years unless we have some real big changes. They have polluted it so bad, it's hard for even animals to survive. If there is any possible way, I would like to move away from here. This is the biggest hole there is for oil and gas.

In the last 50 years, if they can make it so you can't drink water, you can't eat the animals, that's an awful lot of change, a very big change. If they keep doing that for the other 50 years, I don't know how people are going to survive.

I often wonder what we are going to eat. Look at all the people starving to death in Africa and all the other countries out there.

It seems like it doesn't matter how many people fight the government, they always win. All the reserves, all these people are fighting them, just for the right to live. We had everything, all we had to do was work to improve things. This land would have supported more people than it does now if they had left it (without oil extraction).