

Introduction: Traditional Stories and Their Importance

Hän, Gwëch'in, and Northern Tutchone stories have been passed down through generations of Yukon First Nations over thousands of years. They speak of right actions, relationships to others, the importance of community, and the deeply interdependent nature of our people and the land.

It was Tsà' Wëzhè, the Traveller, who first made agreements with the land and with the other animals of the world. These agreements would allow our people, the animals, and the land to thrive, and sustain and support us and our children into the future. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in have experienced extreme challenges in the face of the Klondike Gold Rush and the imposition of a colonial power in our Traditional Territory. We now have agreements with the newcomers of this land and still the agreements made between Tsà' Wëzhè and the land are as important as ever.

The world in which the stories arose was very different from the one today. However, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in retain our values, beliefs, and stories that are the basis for our way of life, or Tr'ëhudè. The lives of our ancestors were very different than today, but the same principles continue to guide us. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in see these stories and principles as guides in our personal lives and aspire to their teachings in all aspects of our government operations, such as informing the land use planning process.

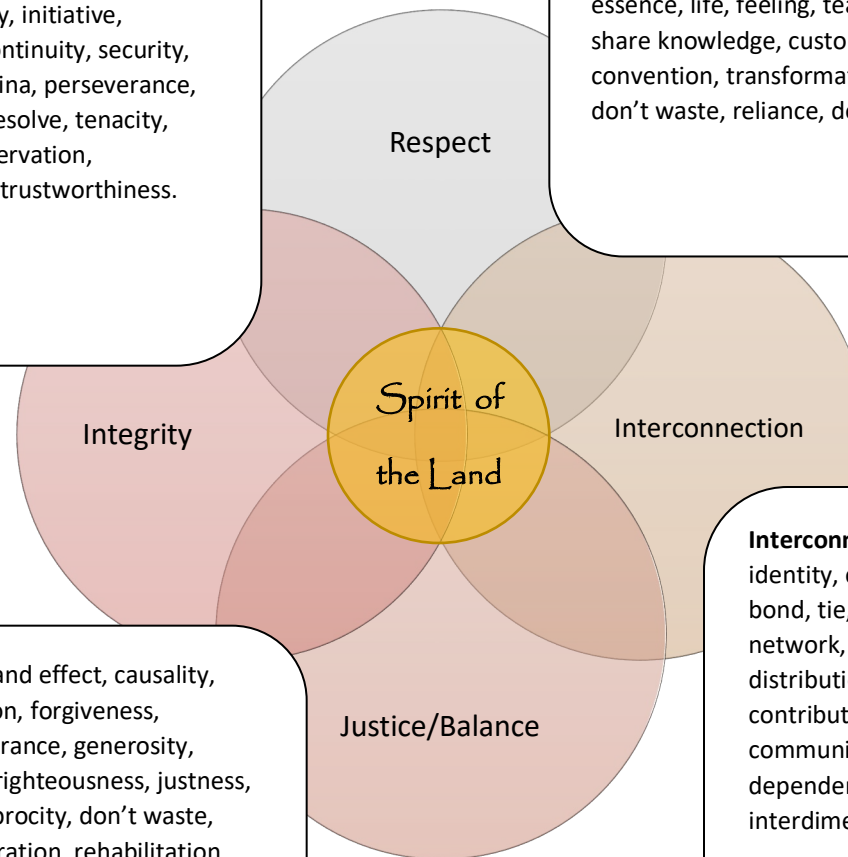
By exploring our traditional stories and bringing forward relevant highlights, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in looks forward to how our stories may guide an inform regional land use planning.

Below is an excerpt from the *Draft* Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Land Vision, a high-level values document that our people are developing. We listened to stories and discussed stories and from those discussions our worldview and relationship to the land shone through...the result is the *Draft* Land Vision. Once we are satisfied with the *Draft*, we will ask our Government to start a process of transforming the way our Government operates to reflect the values and principals outlined in the Land Vision. While the Land Vision is not yet complete, it is clear that our cultural expectations of how the land should be engaged with differ from the ways of western planning. The land to us is not an object to be managed, it is a part of our very being. When the land is healthy, we are healthy.

We hope that the Dawson Regional Land Use Planning Commission makes efforts to engage with our stories and our values. We hope that we see ourselves reflected in the Recommended Plan. This is our land you are making recommendations on. We wish to see our land represented in the way that we understand it.

Integrity: Focus, attentiveness, thoughtfulness, consideration, alertness, politeness, gratitude, fairness, honesty, reliability, authenticity, sincerity, ingenuity, resourcefulness, imagination, creativity, initiative, cunning, skill, patience, endurance, continuity, security, persistence, tolerance, fortitude, stamina, perseverance, determination, resolution, diligence, resolve, tenacity, dedication, grit, strength, insight, preservation, wholeness, honour, ethical, solidarity, trustworthiness.

Respect: Reciprocity, balance, admiration, accommodation, deference, reverence, value, venerate, appreciate, recognize, pay attention to, acknowledge, follow, obey, dutiful, acceptance, show consideration for, regard, esteem, soul, essence, life, feeling, teach, communicate, instil, demonstrate, share knowledge, custom, tradition, practice, gratitude, convention, transformation, transfiguration, trust, confidence, don't waste, reliance, dependence, belief, patience, honour.



Justice/Balance: Dä'òle', Cause and effect, causality, karma, causation, interconnection, forgiveness, compassion, understanding, tolerance, generosity, gratitude, fairness, impartiality, righteousness, justness, honesty, integrity, justness, reciprocity, don't waste, moderation, conservation, restoration, rehabilitation, remedy, recovery, help, healing, return, repair, rebuild, harmony, accountability, stability.

Interconnection: Community, collective, unity, identity, cooperation, spirit, relationship, relation, bond, tie, linkage, kin, assemblage, collaboration, network, teamwork, support, gratitude, sharing, distribution, harmony, involvement, membership, contribution, fellowship, cooperation, communication, solidarity, coordination, reliance, dependence, transformation, transfiguration, interdimensionality, creation, cosmos.

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Land Vision

At the heart of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture is the Spirit of the Land. The land thrives through interconnectivity and cooperation. The land is honest, it prospers with integrity. The land pays attention. The land provides, but it can also take away; it is neither good nor bad, it is a delicate balance of complex forces. Balance is the essence of the land's justice. The land teaches us, and we have a responsibility to apply those teachings and to pass them on. To respect the Spirit of the Land and to conduct ourselves as it teaches us, is to honour our place in the world as Dënezhu.

This is the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Land Vision.

Introduction

The traditional stories of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in people and our relatives, those stories which arose from the land along the Yukon River and the north, are the blueprint for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture. Told for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, the foundation stories of Crow, Raven, Tsà' Wëzhè, Bear, Otter Woman, Mink Woman, Moose, Mouse, Moon, Sun, and other beings, transmitted orally, shared the values and principles that were expected to be upheld in order to live Tr'ëhudè, in a good way.

Due to the acute impacts of the Gold Rush of 1898, colonialism, residential schools, and other traumas inflicted upon us, many of us have become unfamiliar with the stories of the land. Few of us have spent days sitting by the fire, listening to stories, thinking about stories, and using stories to guide our way in the world. But that is going to change. We are reclaiming our stories. We yearn for our stories as our stories yearn for us. The development of a Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Land Vision is an important step in that reclamation.

In small groups over the winter of 2020/21, we listened to our stories, considered our stories, and asked questions about our stories. This process of exploration demonstrated to us an important truth: our culture is in the stories, and our culture remains deep within our bodies, minds, and spirits. We *knew* the messages of the stories, even if we had never before heard the stories themselves.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Land Vision is based entirely upon our voices, our voices from those small story sessions. It is not a document that speaks to the past, but rather it reflects what the stories are telling us *today*. We cannot know how our ancestors interpreted the stories, we cannot know how our grandchildren will interpret the stories. The stories are alive and changeable and their messages will fluctuate. Therefore, the Land Vision is a living document. It must be revisited, reconsidered, re-written. The Land Vision is our own story. Our story of revitalization, of knitting our community back together, just as Tsà' Wëzhè put the pieces of Raven back together in order that Raven might heal and come back to life.

At the core of the Land Vision is the Spirit of the Land. Our culture mirrors the rhythms of the land, its complexity and balance. Out of the Spirit of the Land come four foundational values: integrity, respect,

interconnection and justice. From these foundational values stem other values and principles that our people recognized in the stories. These other principles and values include alertness, ingenuity, reciprocity, rehabilitation, generosity, cooperation, relationship, balance, and interdimensionality. Below are summaries of the central four values and their essence. In the body of the full Land Vision you will hear more about the values and the stories, through the voices of our Citizens. At all times, we must all remember that the Land Vision captures a snapshot in time. It is not “right” or “wrong”; like the stories, the Land Vision is up for interpretation and consideration.

The Traveler

Tsà' Wèzhè
Beaver Man
Smart Man
Tsà' Wèzhaa
Tsäk-ge-jëk
Tacho Kai
K'etetaalkkaanee
Yamoría
Yobaghu-Talyonunh
Cha'kwa za
Gey dee ye dee
Esuya' in

Throughout the stories, and the Land Vision, you will hear of Smart Man, Beaver Man, and Tsà' Wèzhè. This is the Traveller, known by many names up and down the Yukon River and across the north. Tsà' Wèzhè went into the world and made it safe for us, the Dënezhu. He made agreements with the land and animals that ensured our survival: the land and animals would provide for us for as long as we lived by those agreements, for as long as we lived Tr'ëhudè. The stories of Tsà' Wèzhè, Beaver Man, Smart Man, the Traveller, teach us that Tr'ëhudè means to live in integrity, justice/balance, interdependence, and respect, and we must adhere to these values if we want the land, our culture, and our community, to survive.

Integrity

Our instincts and intuitions are tied to the land. One of our responsibilities is to trust ourselves, to stay alert, to be authentic. If Tsà' Wèzhè hadn't been honest with himself about what he was sensing and feeling, he would have failed in his mission to make the world safe for us. We must be brave when we sense that others are trying to mislead us, we must outsmart them. We must do this without anger or malice, but rather out of care for the land, our community, and ourselves. Integrity means seeing truth, paying attention, being fair, persevering. Integrity means conducting ourselves with dignity while acknowledging that we are all capable of making mistakes, and thus we must be willing to forgive others for their mistakes, just as others and the land forgive us for ours. In this way, integrity leads to justice.

Justice/Balance

When we act in accordance with the land, we contribute to the land's spirit of maintaining balance. When we do not respect what the land tells us, the land will force balance. If we take more than we need, the land will withhold. If we hurt other beings and the land, there will be consequences and we must rehabilitate the relationship to undo the harm. The land is just. If we make amends for our wrongdoings, we will return to balance. Tsà' Wèzhè made mistakes along his journey. When he did so, often his mistakes hurt not only himself, but also his community. We must remember this. When we as individuals live in spirit with the land, this helps our community thrive; we must remember this. Our actions have effects not only on ourselves, but on our community and the land. This is because we are all connected.

Interconnection

We cannot survive without the land. This includes other animals, the plant world, the water, wind, earth, and fire. We also cannot survive without the Spirit of the Land. This includes the beings who walk between worlds, the spirits of our ancestors, and the creatures who can shapeshift between forms. All is interconnected across space and time. We are dependent on all aspects of the land, so we must be grateful for them. If we take, we must give back. If we have more than we need, we must share with others. This is what it means to live in a community that lives in accordance with the Spirit of the Land. Tsà' Wèzhè was helped along his route by the land and other spirit and physical beings. He could not have made it on his own. Recognizing our interconnection to the land and other beings supports fellowship, cooperation, and collaboration. It also compels respect.

Respect

Integrity tells us we must align with the Spirit of the Land, allow it to guide us; we must be willing to see truth, to trust. Justice assures us that, if we don't live Tr'èhudè, in a good way, there will be consequences. We must make reparations to restore balance. Interconnection reminds us that the balance the Spirit of the Land seeks lies between ourselves, the land, and other beings. All aspects of the cosmos are connected to each other, all aspects of the cosmos are dependent on each other to survive, and everything and everyone plays a role. We must, therefore, respect all aspects of the cosmos, from the little mouse who saved Tsà' Wèzhè on many occasions, to the Moon who disguised himself as a man and tried to trick him. All are aspects of Creation, all are interconnected, and all must be respected. To live respectfully is to acknowledge our place in the world. It is to live Tr'èhudè.