

‘This sacred land is our home. Respectful visitors welcome’

An Indigenized code of conduct for visitors to the traditional
lands of the Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation



Lutsel K’e, NWT

Report on Master’s thesis research associated with the project *Picturing the Thelon River: Restor(y)ing Denesoline relations en route to the headwaters*

Project Overview

This report highlights the outcomes of Ally Holmes’ Master’s thesis research study. The study was carried out by researchers from the University of Waterloo in Ontario and in collaboration with the Lutsel K’e Wildlife, Lands, and Environment Committee (WLEC). It was completed between 2014 and 2015 as part of a broader project entitled ‘Picturing the Thelon River: Restor(y)ing Denesoline relations en route to the headwaters’.

The Lutsel K’e Denesoline are committed to managing and protecting the entirety of their homeland. This includes the community itself, the Thelon River basin, and Thaidene Nene, places that attract different kinds of visitors such as government and mining officials, adventure tourists, researchers, and other Indigenous peoples. The behaviours of visitors travelling in Lutsel K’e territory can sometimes conflict with Dene expectations and values. In order to address this conflict, participating community members were asked to share stories about their experiences with visitors and their expectations for visitor behaviour in Denesoline territory. From these stories, a code of conduct for visitors was developed that outlines expected behavior and also the reasons and meanings behind those expectations.



Pictures of Great Slave Lake starting to thaw – May 2014

This study developed during a research-planning workshop in December 2013. Dr. Bryan Grimwood, and Waterloo graduates student Lauren King and Ally Holmes, worked with the WLEC to outline objectives and expectations for participatory research. Ally and local research coordinator, Terri Enzoe, collected 'data' (i.e., stories) for this reported project component during a five-week span in April and May of 2014. Research involved interviews with twelve Lutsel K'e representatives (e.g., land managers, land users, elders, youth). All participants were asked to share stories about their experiences of and expectations for visitor behaviour, whether within the community of Lutsel K'e or in the broader Denesoline territory. These interviews were followed by a community workshop with members of the WLEC to collaboratively analyze the information shared during participant interviews. The research process was guided by three objectives: (1) to document the range of negative and positive experiences that the participants (i.e. youth, adults, elders in Lutsel K'e; land users, land managers) have had with visitors to their traditional lands; (2) to explore how the Lutsel K'e Denesoline expect visitors to behave on their land, and why those expectations exist; and (3) to develop a tangible code of conduct for visitors to the area, which can function as a mechanism for land governance and management.

Developing the code of conduct – A community narrative

The stories that were shared during participant interviews and the community workshop were combined to create a 'community narrative' of respect, shared from the researcher's perspective as a non-Indigenous researcher. Based on the key themes and ideas shared in the individual narratives, the community narrative highlighted multiple dimensions of respect, such as showing respect for the environment and Denesoline place in their traditional territory, as well as the relationship between respectful behaviour, safety on the land, and the potential for tourism and economic development. In an attempt to engage with Denesoline voices and perspectives as much as possible, direct quotes from participant stories were frequently used.



Sunset over Great Slave Lake – December 2013

The narrative in its entirety can be found in Ally's Master's thesis, a copy of which will be available to the community in the Traditional Knowledge Archives. In short, the narrative consists of the following sections:

- 1) Setting the stage: 'It's so beautiful here' – an overview of the types of visitors to Lutsel K'e and Denesoline territory and why they visit
- 2) Exploring the conflict – a look at examples of disrespectful visitors, colonialism and its impacts, and the ongoing struggle for Denesoline self-determination and land governance
- 3) The resolution – expectations for respectful visitor behaviour, how to communicate those expectations, and why that is important
 - a. Respecting us (Denesoline), our home, our land
 - b. Respectful visitors *are* welcome to visit – exploring the potential for tourism and community development that celebrates Denesoline knowledge, culture, and ownership of territory

From this community narrative, a code of conduct was developed which summarizes the broader narrative in a way that is easily accessible for users, providing instruction for expected behaviour and reasons for that instruction. It is through interpretation, or the education and sharing of ideas and reasoning for expectations of behaviour, that a code of conduct can be more effective, especially given that it is a voluntary guideline. The table shown on the next page presents the code of conduct for visitors to Denesoline territory, and is shared with the community as a tool that can be distributed to visitors either electronically (e.g. Thaidene Nene website) or in hardcopy (e.g. brochures in Air Tindi Airport, Thaidene Nene visitor centres). An initial draft of this code was shared with WLEC members during Bryan Grimwood's research reporting visit to Lutsel K'e from May 3-8, 2015. At this time, WLEC shared their feedback, comments, and suggestions for the code of conduct, all of which was integrated into this final draft.



A Code of Conduct for Visitors

‘This sacred land is our home. Respectful visitors welcome’

A code of conduct for visitors to the ancestral territory of the Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation

Welcome to the territory of the Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation! Our land is beautiful and our water is clean – and we are committed to keeping it that way. This set of guidelines has been developed to educate visitors about our expectations for respectful travel within our ancestral territory. Please – come visit and enjoy, and do so in a way that honours our land, water, animals, and community members. Here’s how:

When travelling in our territory, come visit us in Lutsel K’e!

Many elders and land users live in our community and have rich stories to share about Denesoline traditions and how to travel safely within our vast territory. We want to share this knowledge with visitors. It’s an excellent cross-cultural learning opportunity for us and for you. We would like to benefit in some capacity from people visiting our territory. Having visitors come to our community will help us to grow our economy through the provision of tourism goods and services that complement our cultural practices and way of life.

Remember that our land is our home. Please ‘knock’ before entering, and we will welcome you.

Our ancestral territory – our home – is like other homes that people love, grow up in, and feel connected to. Wherever visitors go within our traditional territory, they will be within our home. Please ‘knock’ before entering. Contact our Band Office or Wildlife Department in advance of visiting, and please ask permission, as you would expect of any visitor to your own home. This will show respect for Lutsel K’e Denesoline, and will help us support your safety. Being aware of the presence of visitors enables us to better plan, monitor, manage, and make decisions about our territory.

We are the stewards of our land. We expect visitors to respect and share in the protection of the land, water, and animals.

The land, water, and animals have provided the necessities for survival and sustenance for generations of Denesoline. Places like the Lady of the Falls have great healing power, promoting our well-being and curing disease and illness. Please honour the sacred and spiritual nature of our territory. We want to protect our land, water, and animals for our younger generations.

Respect the land, or the land will not respect you.

Be mindful of your behaviour, your attitude, and what you say while on the land. Taking the weather for granted, or outwardly commenting on beautiful weather, can trigger a sudden and drastic change. Travel with humility and respect to ensure safety and prevent getting wind bound or weathered in. Remember: water is a spirit; fish are a spirit; as is any element of the earth. They are all interwoven components of life and warrant our respect.

Pay respect to the land and water with tobacco or other offerings of gratitude.

Paying with spruce boughs, tea, rifle shells, or sugar – something valuable – is also appropriate. It is a tangible display of respect to the land and water, founded not on superstition, but a way of life. Our ancestors gave thanks in this way, and we were raised to do the same. Tobacco is from the earth and from the Creator, and we pay it back to them, and to our ancestors who were on the land before us. Showing respect in this way honours our culture and will help ensure good weather and safe travels on water and on land.

Respect our community's vision for health and well-being.

We welcome visitors that respect our First Nation, our place in history and our territory, as well as our contemporary cultural values, rules, and regulations. We promote health and well-being by making Lutsel K'e a dry community. Visitors can help us maintain an alcohol-free community for the health and well-being of our children and future generations.

Take out what you bring in – please keep the land clean.

Keeping the land clean helps protect the environment. Leaving behind garbage or waste is a sign of disrespect to the land, water, animals, and our livelihoods. Although our territory is vast, it is still our home and we want to keep it clean. It is important that the land is free of litter in order to protect that space for animals and for future generations of Denesoline. Please be sure to safely dispose of or remove anything brought into our territory.

Hunting and trapping on our territory must respect our traditional knowledge, customs, and livelihoods.

Denesoline hunters and trappers are mindful of their harvesting practices, and understand that animals provide sustenance for survival. We show respect by learning and enjoying the knowledge and skills passed down to us by our elders and ancestors. Wasting meat, or leaving it behind, is avoided as it shows disrespect for the animals and for our land. Visitors are expected to respect our hunting and trapping culture and to remember that everything in our environment has a spirit and life behind it. All visitors who choose to hunt should do so only in the presence of a Lutsel K'e guide or monitor.

Take the opportunity to learn from Denesoline guides.

Denesoline traditional knowledge is essential for survival on our territory. Lutsel K'e guides know the land and how the weather changes, and are willing to share this information to assist visitors. Visitors are encouraged to hire an experienced guide from Lutsel K'e to help ensure a safe journey and a meaningful learning experience rooted in our traditional knowledge and livelihood activities. By hiring a Lutsel K'e guide, visitors also support our local economy.

Share your experiences with others to help us protect our land!

Visitors are asked to respect our privacy by requesting the permission of community members before taking their photograph. We do encourage visitors to take stories and pictures from their experiences on our land and share these with friends and family. We want to protect our territory – our home – from harmful industries and practices so that we can preserve our way of life. Visitors can help by sharing experiences with others and raising awareness. Please visit the website www.landoftheancestors.ca to learn more about protecting our land.

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Interview Participants:

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Herman Catholique	Pete Enzoe	Jerry Lockhart
Joseph Catholique	Terri Enzoe	Brandon Michele
Stephen Ellis	Two participants who wish to remain anonymous	

WLEC Workshop Participants:

Sam Boucher	Terri Enzoe	Mike Tollis
Joseph Catholique	Ron Fatt	

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