



Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association



ANNUAL REPORT
2010 - 2011

Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association

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Sherman Herodier
President

Once again I welcome the privilege as President of COTA to thank all of the staff and members of our Association for their untiring effort to make 2010 yet another year of achievement in the building of a robust, forward looking and sustainable Cree driven tourism industry throughout all of Eeyou Istchee. Reflecting on the past year we have continued to expand Cree initiatives in all of the tourism sectors and to both encourage and support Cree tourism through capacity building activities, involvement in the annual tourism trade shows and by bringing Cree together during our Annual General Meeting and Tourism Conference (AGM) to exchange tourism focused ideas and future plans. Once again this year our AGM had a very good turnout. The theme of this year's Tourism Conference workshops were Building a Profitable Tourism Business Your Way and we were pleased with the level of participation. Every year we work hard to plan workshops that offer practical tools and knowhow and that respond to the stated needs of our members. We also had the privilege of welcoming our good friend and board member Anna Bosum and her husband David who own and operate Nuuchimi Wiinuu Cultural Tours, as this year's honoured guest speakers. We would also like to thank Eddie Pash of Nouchimi Outfitters for participating in the conference. Unfortunately, Mr. Pash's presentation had to be cancelled due to the sudden passing of Dr. Billy Diamond.

Looking ahead to the future, I am pleased to share my thoughts on what I believe is an important shift in COTA's marketing and operational planning. In 2010 we introduced a revitalized strategic plan that is designed to be more effective in helping our members meet the ever changing realities of the local and international tourism market. The revised strategic plan which is described in more detail in the Project Section of the Annual Report will set short, medium, and long term goals over a 5 year cycle. Some of the key aspects of the plan include linking traditions with technology, creating more opportunities for local Cree owned tourism businesses, an emphasis on training and human resource development and protection of environment, heritage and culture. It will place an emphasis on doing things the 'Cree Way' as a theme that runs throughout the plan for promoting the unique cultural and natural tourism resources of Eeyou Istchee that will be made available through our local Cree operators.

In closing I want to offer, on behalf of the entire COTA family, a very special note of lasting gratitude to the late Dr. Billy Diamond. Although the passing of Billy has left a deep sorrow in our hearts, his legacy will live on in the confidence and pride that he inspired in us as the Cree of Eeyou Istchee and our place in the world.

Sherman Herodier
President



Robin McGinley
Executive Director

In the past year we have focused our attention on projects that are intended to address both the needs of our members and the advancement of the regional tourism industry. Some of our recent efforts include the development of the Entrepreneur Coaching Program (ECP) and the release of our new Organizational Operating Plan. We are also working closely with regional partner Tourism Baie James (TBJ) to develop joint marketing initiatives aimed at creating a sustainable and vibrant tourism industry.

An important project designed to meet the needs of our members is the Entrepreneur Coaching Program completed in March 2011. The ECP provided Cree entrepreneurs with an opportunity to enhance their business knowledge and skill sets. The program offered on site coaching on business development and implementation with a focus on individual needs. In this initial phase of the program David and Anna Bosum of Nuuchimi Wiinuu, Sherman Herodier from the Chisasibi Mandow Agency, Early Danyluk Sr and Earl Danyluk Jr. from Natagam Boreal Adventures and Roy Weistche of Waskaganish Adventure were chosen to participate. Although the program is now complete, participants will continue to receive support. As with every new initiative, the ECP was not without its challenges but overall it proved beneficial to those involved and participants expressed their appreciation for the program and the guidance provided to them.

Since the inception of Eeyou Istchee Tourism in 2007 we have worked successfully with TBJ on the development of the regional tourism guide and the grand prix du tourism regional gala. By working together we not only maximize our resources but create a more unified vision for promoting the region to potential visitors. With the recent completion of our joint marketing plan (plan du commercialisation) we are confident we are in a better position to create an even stronger and more viable regional tourism industry. Yes, cultural tourism continues to grow and Cree culture is without question a strong draw, but we must also acknowledge that the Cree and the Jamesians offer similar attractions and share many of the same challenges and opportunities. By developing a joint marketing approach therefore, one which includes a system by which the two ATR's can better share resources and strategic information, we are creating a mutually beneficial approach to promoting the region – one that takes into account the shared activities while still recognizing the unique tourism potential of each culture.

This year I am particularly pleased to announce the launch of *Eeyou Istchee, Land of the Cree* a 250 page coffee table book commissioned by COTA. *Eeyou Istchee, Land of the Cree* has been described as a beautiful celebration of the history and culture of the James Bay Crees. The book was officially launched on November 30, 2010 at the McCord Museum in downtown Montreal. Despite being a cold and rainy evening more than 200 people attended the event. We were very honoured to share the evening with our two distinguished guest speakers Dr. Philip Awashish and Grand Chief Dr. Matthew Coon Come. *Eeyou Istchee, Land of the Cree* provides a wonderful backdrop from which potential visitors to the region can better understand Cree culture as well as learn just how much our present day life reflects the traditions of our past.

In closing I would like to thank our staff, members, board of directors and industry partners for their continued efforts and support. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the late Dr. Billy Diamond.

Robin McGinley
Executive Director

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COTA was incorporated on December 7, 2000 as a non-profit corporation under Part II of the Canadian Corporations Act. The actual process that eventually led to the creation of COTA, however, began over 30 years ago during the negotiations for the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement.

COTA's mission is to develop and implement a collective vision for a world-class sustainable tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee in harmony with Cree culture and values and involving partnership among Cree communities, institutions and businesses.

History

The negotiations leading to the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) provided the platform for gaining control over tourism development. With the signing of the Final Agreement in November 1975, the legal framework for this control became a reality and paved the way for the creation of COTA as a treaty obligation under sections 28.4 and 28.6 of the JBNQA.

28.4 Cree Associations

28.4.1 Subject to the positive conclusions of the necessary feasibility studies involving the Crees to the greatest extent possible and to the availability of funds, Canada and/or Québec will assist the Crees with funding and technical advice in establishing, as soon as possible, as described herein:

- a) a Cree Trappers' Association;
- b) a Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association;
- c) a Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association.

28.6 Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association

28.6.1 As soon as possible following the execution of the Agreement and subject to the results of the feasibility studies referred to in paragraph 28.4.1 there shall be established a Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association which shall inter alia:

- a) provide marketing, booking and promotion services for Cree outfitting operations;
- b) provide business, management, accounting and professional services for Cree outfitters;
- c) conduct feasibility studies related to establishment or siting of individual outfitting facilities or a network of outfitting facilities.

28.6.2 Subject to the results of the feasibility studies and in the event that a Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association is established, Canada, Québec and the Cree Regional Authority, in proportion to be mutually agreed upon shall assist the Association in its operation and objects.

Objectives

Implement Section 28.6 of the JBNQA

- Provide marketing, booking, and promotion services, where necessary, for Cree outfitting and tourism operations.
- Provide business, management, accounting and professional services, where necessary, for Cree outfitters and tourism businesses.
- Conduct feasibility studies related to the establishment of individual outfitting or tourism facilities or a network of outfitting or tourism facilities.

Community Awareness and Capacity

Building

- Place a priority on increasing awareness of tourism as a sustainable economic development opportunity.
- Increase the capacity of local and regional institutions to provide services by improving access to information.
- Support and undertake training and skill development initiatives that recognize Cree skills and industry standards.
- Support and encourage human resource development related to tourism.

Communications

- Ensure effective communications with Cree stakeholders including Tallymen, governments, communities, and industry.
- Promote COTA's vision, objectives, activities, and accomplishments.
- Promote a positive image of the membership.
- Develop alliances and coordinate with other tourism and indigenous organizations to work toward common goals.
- Serve as a liaison between Cree tourism and outfitting operators, the tourism industry, and the markets they serve.

- Incorporate current technology to increase the ease and efficiency of communications and reduce the associated costs.

Industry Development

- Promote partnerships among Cree businesses, communities, and institutions.
- Represent the interests of COTA members at meetings with governments, commissions, other organizations, and non-native developers.
- Support the development of Cree tourism products that exceed market standards by creating quality standards and by recognizing success with awards.
- Ensure the participation of the Cree Nation in the development and promotion of tourism and outfitting activities.

Marketing

- Increase market share by researching the feasibility of regional projects that promote the communities.
- Conduct product development and market research that include visitor statistics and product inventories.

Financial Development

- Actively seek funding and other resources from governments, the private sector, and other sources.
- Develop, where appropriate, revenue-generating activities.

Board of Directors and Staff

Board of Directors

The COTA Board of Directors is comprised of ten members. One Board member is appointed by the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)/Cree Regional Authority. The remaining nine are elected by the COTA membership. Board members are elected for a three-year term.

COTA policy stipulates that there must be at least one member from each of the nine Cree communities of Eeyou Istchee. Each member must be a Cree Beneficiary and closely affiliated with his or her community.

The primary role of the Board is to guide the activities of the association and make decisions that help further the development of the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee in accordance with the needs and objectives of our members.

Executive Members

Sherman Herodier, President - Chisasibi
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Norman Gull - Cree Regional Authority

COTA Staff

COTA remains committed to ensuring we have the staff and resources necessary to address the evolving needs of our members while offering services that will help promote and grow the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee. Following is a list of COTA staff.

Executive Director
Robin McGinley

Assistant to the Executive Director
Sophie H. Bosum

Administrative Assistant
Rosie B. Rabbitskin

Administrative Assistant/Bookkeeper
Naomi Bosum

Marketing and Promotional Agent
Yves Degagné

Webmaster/Member Services
Angel Mianscum

Projects

AGM

Operating Plan

Entrepreneur Coaching

Projet ACCORD

Coffee Table Book

GeoPortal ROI

Tourism Working Group

Website Update

As a member-driven association, COTA develops and promotes projects that are designed to meet the needs of our members. We are committed to maximizing the tourism potential of Eeyou Istchee through attentive listening and effective action. We favour a flexible approach to tourism development so as to keep pace with our members' evolving needs and address the specific challenges they face.

With continued support from our members, the communities and other organizations involved in Cree tourism, we have made real progress toward establishing Eeyou Istchee as a uniquely attractive destination and viable tourism location.

Following is a summary of the projects and initiatives that were undertaken and/or launched in the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

1. Tourism Conference and Annual General Meeting

From September 28th to 30th 2010, COTA held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Tourism Conference. This year the event was held in Waskaganish, Québec. The annual event brought together approximately 50 participants from Eeyou Istchee representing businesses, organizations, and communities involved or interested in tourism.

Sadly, the Tourism Conference was cut short due to the sudden passing of former Grand Chief Dr. Billy Diamond. On behalf of our members, board of directors and staff, we would like to extend our sincere condolences to the family and friends of the late Dr. Billy Diamond.

1.1 Tourism Conference

This year the theme of the 2010 Tourism Conference was “Building a Profitable Tourism Business your Way.” Two workshops were planned to address this theme: *the Recreational Customer* and *Taking Care of Business*. Due to a family emergency, however, Kevin Eshkawkogan, who was scheduled to facilitate the *Taking Care of Business* workshop, was unable to attend requiring a last minute change in the program. Instead, participants had an opportunity to participate in the First Host Training Workshop.

1.1.2 Invited Speakers

Anna and David Bosum were this year's honoured guest speakers. Anna and David own and operate Nuuchimi Wiinuu Cultural Tours in Oujé-Bougoumou. From the outset, David and Anna were confident that there was a market for what they could offer – an opportunity to give visitors a glimpse into the Cree Way of Life – but

they also knew that starting a business wasn't going to be easy. By sharing their insight and personal experiences, Anna and David were able to help our members better understand that starting a new business is hard work and requires a great deal of commitment and time. However, with the support of the community, a willingness to seek advice and a lot of perseverance David and Anna were able to turn their dream into a reality. Each year Nuuchimi Wiinuu hosts a number of visitors from around the world who come to the camp for an opportunity to learn about Cree culture and to participate in traditional activities such as snowshoeing, making bannock, and storytelling. Visitors also enjoy Anna's delicious Cree traditional cooking. Nuuchimi Wiinuu serves as a great example of a successful Cree owned

and operated tourism business and on behalf of COTA's members, staff and board of directors we would like to thank Anna and David for their honest and inspiring presentation.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Eddie Pash from Nouchimi Outfitters whose scheduled presentation was cancelled due to the passing of Dr. Billy Diamond.

1.1.3 Workshops

Two workshops were offered at this year's Tourism Conference.

The Recreational Customer: Locating, servicing and maintaining a client base for wilderness adventures

Facilitator: Carroll Ware, Fins & Furs Adventures

Fins and Furs Adventures has been in operation for 25 years providing outdoor enthusiasts an opportunity to travel to outfitting camps in Canada, the United States and overseas. In addition to planning and hosting group tours to selected outfitting camps, Carroll, who with his wife Lila, owns and operates the company, offers Maine Guide training programs to the general public. He also offers specific programs for the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot nations in Maine. The training programs evolved as a result of his passion for the outdoors and appreciation for people working at all levels of the outdoor industry.

Ware's training workshop emphasized two important elements of running a successful tourism business: marketing and hospitality. It also focused on helping participants better understand and develop some basic skills in: market research, attracting a client base and advertising. Emphasis was placed on group discussions and role-playing providing participants with an opportunity to develop the knowledge and necessary skills to handle some of the more common customer service issues that are encountered when running a



business. Ware also stressed the importance of appearance, punctuality, attention to detail and the necessity of client care.

Overall, the workshop was very well received and participants really appreciated Ware's emphasis on the importance of sharing Cree values and teaching traditional cultural skills to clients. Ware stressed that in so doing it will not only educate but also promote what he refers to as "a reason to come and then to come back" philosophy.



First Host Training Workshop

Facilitators: Robin McGinley and Karen St-Cyr, COTA.

First Host is a one-day tourism workshop during which participants learn about the hospitality business and the importance of the host, guest, and place relationship. It is designed to develop excellence in customer service skills and to give participants a broader understanding of the tourism industry with particular focus on cultural tourism. In 2004, COTA staff members were trained on how to conduct the

workshop and have since facilitated the workshop on several occasions. The workshop is conducted as four "learning circles."

Learning Circle 1 looked at the four important components of hospitality: the host, the guest, the place and love as an integrating force.

Learning Circle 2 looked at the role of the host and the concept of flawless service. Circle members explored their service values such as skills of greeting the guest and professional telephone manners.

Learning Circle 3 looked at the role of the guest and gave a list of guest ethics and also covered customer service tips for dealing with guests and their concerns.

Learning Circle 4 covered First Nations role in the tourism industry, First Host resources and looked at Cultural tourism including how to incorporate cultural values into a tourism business.

To accommodate all participants, 2 day-long sessions were scheduled. Twenty-three participants took the course on the first day and all successfully completed the program. Eight participants were registered for the workshop on the second day but due to the sudden passing of Dr. Billy Diamond, the training session was cancelled. Those who completed the training on the first day were registered with the First Host Program at the Native Education Centre in Vancouver for certification.

1.2 Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the members of COTA and EIT took place on September 28, 2010 with approximately twenty-three members in attendance. Also present were COTA staff Robin McGinley, Executive Director, Sophie H. Bosum, Assistant to the Executive Director; Karen St-Cyr, Treasurer and Naomi Bosum, Bookkeeper.

The opening prayer was given by elder Jimmy Trapper from Waskaganish and, on behalf of the community of Waskaganish, acting Chief Marty Cowboy gave the welcoming address.

COTA president Sherman Herodier chaired the meeting and Denis Blanchette served as the Corporate Secretary. This year Sophie Bosum presented the 2009-2010 Annual Report and Isabelle Ouellette of Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton and COTA's Treasurer Karen St-Cyr presented the audited financial statements for the year ending March 31, 2010. Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton auditors were selected to conduct the audit for COTA and EIT for the financial year ending March 31, 2011.

Two presentations were also given. The first was by Donald MacLeod of the Justice and Correctional Services Department of the Cree Regional Authority titled "Jobs, Not Jails" which is a program designed to help reintegrate Cree offenders back into the communities. The second was a presentation about COTA's current Organizational Operating Plan given by Jason White of Canadian Ecotourism Services. Mr. White described the overall objectives of the plan which are based on the results of a two-day planning session held in September 2010 at David and Anna Bosum's camp in Oujé-Bougoumou. The planning session included members of the Board of Directors, COTA staff, tourism officers and economic development officers. Mr. White also explained the methodology used to develop the plan which he described as a "flexible and dynamic five year plan that can change and be adapted to meet the evolving needs of the communities and entrepreneurs." Additional information on the plan is available on page 12 of this report.



1.2.1 Time and Location of next Annual General Meeting

The next AGM and Tourism Conference will be held in the community of Wemindji on August 30, 31, and September 1, 2011. The elections of a new Board of Directors will take place at that time.

1.3 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the sponsors of this year's Tourism Conference and Annual General Meeting including: Air Creebec, Hydro-Québec and the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones. We would also like to thank the people of Waskaganish for hosting this year's event with special thanks to Raymond Blackned, Waskaganish's local Tourism Coordinator, for his assistance and for organizing a much appreciated fish fry. Additional thanks to Mary Katapatuk and Mary Diamond for providing catering services. Musical performers at the event included: Anthony Moses, Cecil Morrison, Christina Jonah, Julie Jolly, Kari McLeod and Darryl S. Hester.

2. Organizational Operating Plan

COTA's new Organizational Operating Plan breaks away from traditional planning methodology and offers some distinct long-term advantages. First, it is based on an inclusive, holistic planning approach designed to address each critical element of community sustainability. From this sustainability, tourism will begin to grow as a natural outcome, with the support framework necessary for long-term success.

The plan encourages open, frequent communication and collaboration within COTA/EIT and between the two associations and the communities. Each initiative recommended includes a work plan and corresponding budget to assist with the smooth implementation from plan to reality.

Doing things the "Cree Way" is a theme that runs throughout the Plan. This approach provides greater support for the initiatives to succeed alongside the

leadership and commitment of COTA's Executive and staff.

The plan is designed to be a working document that is reviewed and updated regularly, setting short, medium, and long term goals over a 5-year cycle. This plan differs from COTA's previous multi-year strategic plans in that it is not rigidly time-bound; instead it is designed to be flexible and to allow for adaptations to changing circumstances.

And lastly, because the plan is continually reviewed and updated, there is less need to develop a comprehensive (and costly) new plan every 5 years. At any time, funders can be provided with a snapshot of the plan, showing 3 to 5 years of initiatives with corresponding work plans and budgets.



The direction and initiatives proposed in the Organizational Operating plan are driven by the COTA Board of Directors, staff, and members.

3. Entrepreneur Coaching Program

This year marked the completion of the Entrepreneur Coaching Program. The primary goal of this initiative was to provide an opportunity for Cree entrepreneurs to enhance their business knowledge and skill sets. The program guided Cree entrepreneurs through business development and implementation with focus on their individual needs. The program included support in such areas as: reviews of existing business plans, assessments of marketing strategies, site visits, and the completion of sections of the *Tourism Ownership: My Business Builder Toolkit*.

Through the Entrepreneur Coaching Program COTA provided four entrepreneurs with one-on-one support and guidance for their business. The program was designed to ensure that participants remained actively engaged and responsible for developing and understanding their specific business model.

Participants of this program included David and Anna Bosum of Nuuchimi Wiinuu, Sherman Herodier from the Chisasibi Mandow Agency, Earl Danyluk Sr. and Earl Danyluk Jr. from Natagam Boreal Adventures and Roy Weistche of Waskaganish Adventure.

As part of the program, the coaches conducted two on-site visits with each entrepreneur. Although an approach and strategy were developed in advance of each coaching session, the program is designed to be flexible so as to better meet the specific and immediate needs of each entrepreneur.

The first on-site session utilized the recently developed *Tourism Ownership: My Business Builder Toolkit*. This resource provides a comprehensive overview of tourism business development and, once completed by the participant, enables the coaches to better understand the businesses' strengths as well as pinpoint "problem" areas where additional assistance and support may be required. The Entrepreneur

Coaching Program also supported the development of guidelines, new product ideas, and marketing materials to help the businesses grow.

Based on the specifications of the program, each entrepreneur received the equivalent of 10 days (60 hours) of on-site coaching and 20 days (120 hours) of off-site assistance.

4. Projet ACCORD

Projet ACCORD is an economic development strategy developed by the Ministère du Développement Économique Innovation et Exportation. It focuses on developing niches of excellence in Québec's regional economies to make those economies competitive on an international basis.

Over the last year, COTA has participated in the development of a Projet ACCORD Tourism Action Plan and Strategy for Eeyou Istchee/James Bay along with other stakeholders in the region's tourism industry including Tourisme Baie James, the Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association, the Cree Trappers Association, the Société de Développement de Baie James, the Ministère du Tourisme and a number of representatives from the tourism industry.

The final Eeyou Istchee/James Bay Projet ACCORD Tourism Niche Strategy and Action Plan is slated for delivery in Fall 2011.