



Eeyou Istchee Tourism

# Annual Report 2014-2015



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## A note from our President

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Raymond Blackned

As my fourth year as the President of Eeyou Istchee Tourism (EIT) comes to a close, I am pleased to see how much we have accomplished in the past eight years. Since our inception in 2007, we have worked closely with Tourisme Baie-James (TBJ). Our increasingly collaborative relationship has proven to be highly beneficial both for developing stronger regional marketing campaigns and streamlining human resource requirements. Together, we have hosted many successful, fun, and informative events, such as tourism galas and symposiums. In 2014, we launched our new brand image and implemented a number of key initiatives, including the International and Cooperative Marketing Programs and the Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement.

Our objective now is realize our vision of positioning Eeyou Istchee Baie-James as a northern destination known for its unique, high-quality, and safe adventure tourism offer, its unspoiled natural surroundings, and its access to Cree culture.

To meet this objective, we have developed the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan for the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Tourism Region. The Plan —built around a collaborative model for tourism development — provides clear direction and distinct objectives. What's more, it supports the tourism strategies contained in the tourism component of Quebec's *Plan Nord*. The Strategic Plan identifies 62 key measures in 11 sectors of tourism activity. Each measure will be carried out in accordance with its own distinct action plan.

I look forward to the next eight years and many more successes, accomplishments, and milestones achieved. No doubt, we will continue to encounter challenges, but thanks to the dedication of our staff and continued support from our members, I am confident we will overcome all challenges and reach our full potential.

In closing, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Jean Chartier who is stepping down as Director General of Tourisme Baie-James. His contribution over the past eight years has not only benefited our association but has helped to create a much stronger and unified tourism industry.





## About EIT History

*Eeyou Istchee Tourism is the 22nd Regional Tourism Association (RTA) to come into being in Québec and the 3rd to share the administrative region of Northern Québec. EIT is designated to represent the Cree communities of the Eeyou Istchee tourism region.*

On August 15 2007, the Government of Québec granted RTA status to the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA).

Given the considerable difference between the RTA and COTA in terms of roles and responsibilities, a decision was made to create a separate organization, namely Eeyou Istchee Tourism to provide for proper fulfilment of the RTA's mandate.

As set out in the formal agreement between EIT and the Government of Québec, the role of the RTA is to promote tourism and regional operators, support the development of new products, make information more readily available to tourists, and cooperate with other RTAs in creating a Québec-wide tourism policy.

Objectives of EIT:

- Position and promote Eeyou Istchee as a key destination for First Nations tourism, outdoor and adventure tourism, and outfitter services.
- Support the development of marketable tourism products and the upgrading of existing products with a view to contributing to regional economic growth and development of the tourism industry.

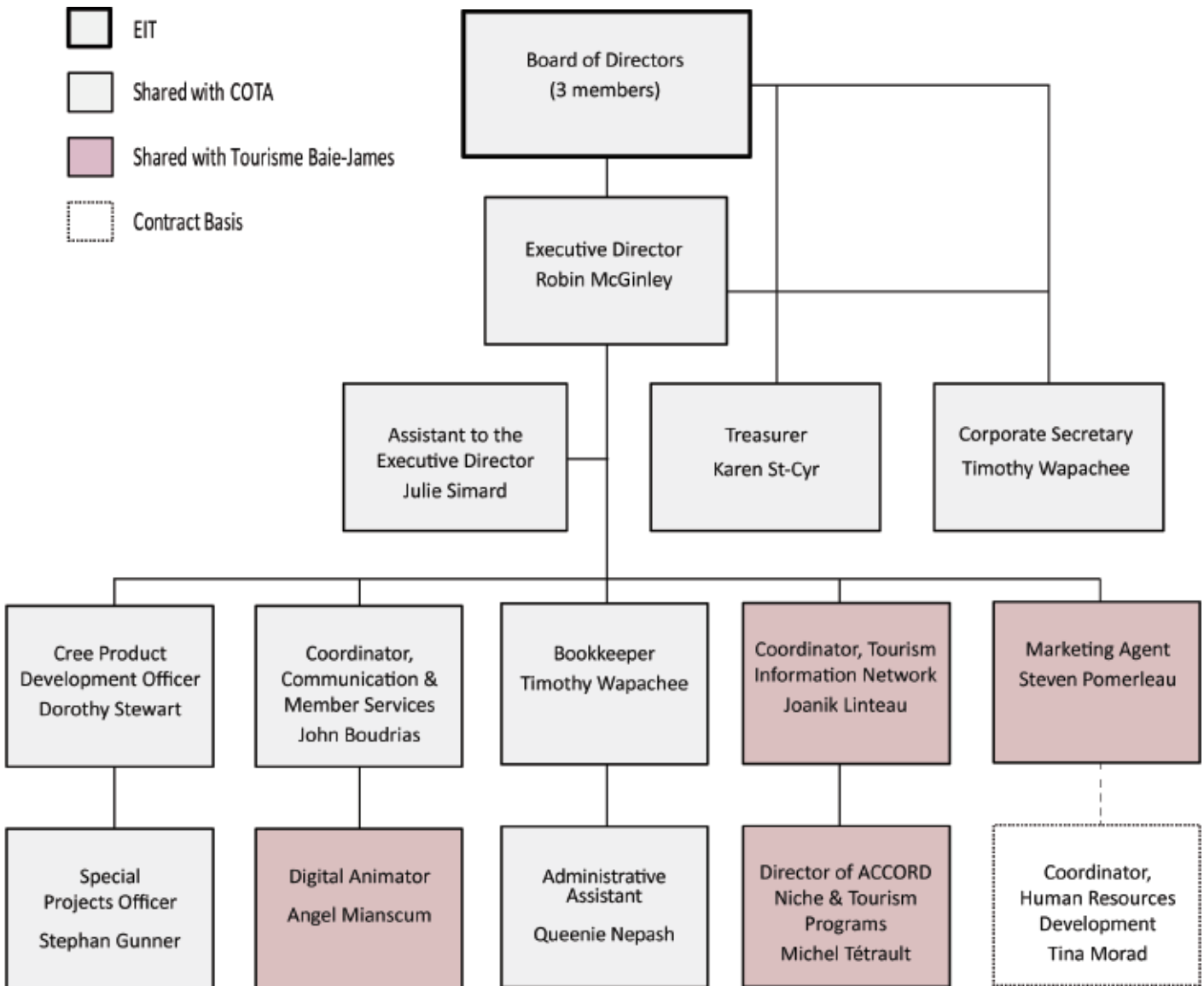
- Enhance regional tourism infrastructure by facilitating access to information relating to tourism products and services.
- Develop a tourism industry based on the principles of sustainable development and designed to have a positive impact on youth, elders and cultural life in the region.

Dues-paying COTA members are automatically members of EIT. Some of the additional benefits for our members include a listing in the Baie-James Eeyou Istchee Tourism Guide, access to targeted funding, eligibility for the international and cooperative marketing programs and the opportunity to have their tourism business included on the provincial blue road panels.

EIT is responsible for the planning and delivery of projects, initiatives and events such as the Grands Prix du Tourisme gala, the development of the Regional Tourism Guide and the Tourism Symposium.

# Organizational Chart

The chart below illustrates EIT's organizational structure to April 1, 2015





## 2014-2015 Project Summaries

*Following are brief summaries of the projects and initiatives that were undertaken and/or launched in the 2014-2015 fiscal year.*

### 1. 2015-2020 Strategic Plan for the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Tourism Region

Working in partnership with TBJ and COTA, we have studied the evolving northern tourism sector, analyzed our strengths, and identified challenges in an effort to define our strategic orientation for the next five years. An important objective of our Strategic Plan is to improve our positioning in the international market. Accordingly, we have identified a total of 62 measures in 11 sectors of activity that will be implemented to achieve this objective.

The 11 sectors of activity are:

- Knowledge and research
- Human resources
- Access and transportation
- Development of the offer
- Quality and sustainability
- Promotion and marketing
- Sales and packages
- Reception, signage and tourism information
- Communications with Cree and Baie-James communities and member relations
- Regional, inter-regional, and provincial cooperation, governance, and public relations
- Collaborative model for the three organizations (COTA, EIT and TBJ)

Measures within each of these sectors will be assigned its own action plan that will include a timetable for completion and required human, financial, and material resources.

The Plan, which is in line with the Quebec government's Plan Nord initiative, is a comprehensive initiative that promotes collaboration and serves as a guiding vision for tourism development.

### 2. Addressing Human Resources Development

In 2011, COTA/EIT conducted a membership study that was designed, in part, to identify and clarify major issues facing Cree tourism providers. Many of the study's participants pointed to the lack of human resources as a hindrance to their ability to operate a successful tourism business that delivers the level of quality travellers expect.

To address this issue, EIT and TBJ created a new position: Coordinator, Human Resources Development (HRD). The Coordinator, HRD plays a key role in enhancing the quality of human resources to a level commensurate with a world-class tourism industry.

The responsibilities of the Coordinator, HRD are to:

- Oversee the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Tourism Industry Human Resources Committee
- Develop a HRD plan for the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James tourism industry

- Evaluate the potential of establishing a human resources cooperative for the regional tourism industry
- Develop recruitment and retention strategies for tourism industry personnel
- Devise training strategies that favour diverse ways of learning in response to tourism-related needs
- Collaborate with regional and provincial teaching and training organizations to develop accredited programs in the tourism sector
- Develop, and implement strategies to make career opportunities in tourism more appealing

Of significance this year is the completion of the Human Resources Development Plan: 2015-2020 (HRDP). The plan derives from the collective input of industry stakeholders from the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James region and provides the guiding vision for the overall planning and development process to achieve a sustainable, economically sound, and competitive tourism industry.

Overall the plan establishes a strategy to:

- Increase the supply of new workers for the tourism industry
- Increase the rate of retention for specific types and levels of tourism-related occupations
- Expand education, training, recruitment and work incentive programs for the tourism industry
- Improve information and outreach programs on employment options and opportunities for the tourism industry

We would like to thank our funder, Grand Table Interordre, Tourisme Eeyou Istchee, Tourisme Baie-James and Emploi-Québec.

### 3. Tax on Lodging in Eeyou Istchee

Last year EIT reviewed the feasibility, financial implications and benefits of implementing a tax on lodging. To ensure a complete understanding of the implications of implementing this tax, Par Consulting was mandated to conduct a thorough review and submit their findings in the form of a fact sheet. The fact sheet covered issues such as collection and remittance requirements, applying the tax from an operator's perspective and rules regarding the use of these tax revenues by RTAs (including revenue scenarios for EIT specifically) and an analysis of how other comparable RTAs, including TBJ allocated the revenue collected from the lodging tax in the year 2012.

Following the submission and subsequent review of the fact sheet the EIT board of directors agreed to begin to take the necessary steps to implement the lodging tax. The first step was to send a letter to Tourisme Québec. The second step was to conduct community consultations with Cree individuals involved in the lodging sector (hotels, outfitting camps etc). The third and final step was to hold a vote in which EIT members eligible to collect the tax could participate.

In the fall of 2014 EIT conducted the community consultations which were designed to provide hotel owners/operators and owners of outfitting camps throughout Eeyou Istchee with the critical information needed to assess the potential benefits and fully understand the implications of implementing this tax. Topics covered included:

- Who collects the lodging tax
- A scenario of the potential revenues generated
- Proposed distribution of the revenues generated
- Benefits

At the time of these consultations, the intention was to hold a vote in January 2015. However, prior to the vote, the Québec government announced a restructuring of the tourism business model which will also impact the lodging tax. Given this new information, a decision was made to put this initiative on hold pending release of the new model.



#### 4. Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement

The Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement (RTPA) is a 3-year initiative that reflects a shared willingness by Tourisme Québec, EIT, Cree Nation Government (formerly Cree Regional Authority), and Société de Développement de la Baie-James to work together with other local partners and businesses to optimize tourism investment in Eeyou Istchee Baie-James in accordance with regional priorities.

The RTPA is overseen by a committee made up of one representative from each of the participating partner organizations. The program ended on March 31, 2015.

Each partner provided financial support. Annual contributions are shown below:

- EIT: \$150,000
- Tourisme Québec: \$150,000
- Cree Nation Government: \$150,000
- Société de Développement de la Baie-James: \$25,000

To date this program has funded a total of 13 tourism related projects.

#### 5. Recommendations and Next Steps for Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Reception

TBJ and EIT in partnership with Tourisme Québec are working together to establish strategic priorities and specific actions for tourism development that reflect regional characteristics and government orientations.

As part of our overall strategy we are looking at ways to improve tourism reception and information services throughout Eeyou Istchee Baie-James. Some of our key recommendations include:

- The creation of a permanent regional tourism office at the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Regional Government (at km 6, James Bay highway)
- The creation of seasonal offices in designated locations

- Evaluation and possible restructuring of existing information kiosks that currently do not meet the Department of Tourism accreditation criteria

The importance of a well informed, well trained, accommodating and friendly staff at all information kiosks and reception centers should not be underestimated. Beyond the function of providing practical information to visitors, employees serve as ambassadors for the tourism industry as a whole. Given this, tourism information offices should meet the following objectives:

- Welcome tourists in a friendly and professional manner and deliver an authentic and memorable experience.
- Maximize financial performance by helping to lengthen visitor stays, increase their average spending and encourage them to return.
- Ensure optimal geographical distribution of tourism clients.
- Collect strategic information about clients.

In order to meet these objectives we are making the following recommendations:

- Create a joint Cree and Baie-James Jamesian committee for reception
- Adopt a joint site plan for tourism information offices (road access)
- Adopt a joint Eeyou Istchee Baie-James reception policy
- Select a site for a regional tourism reception and information centre

It is crucial therefore that we review the regional plan for tourism information offices and implement a policy to ensure outstanding reception services across the region as a whole in conjunction with Cree and Baie-James communities.

As indicated in Tourisme Québec's study, which analyzed the profile and behaviour of clients at tourism reception sites, up to 38% of information requests answered in tourism information offices led to longer visitor stays.

## 6. Cree Product Development Officer

To further our efforts to encourage and promote regional tourism development, in 2013 the position of Cree Product Development Officer was created. The Product Development Officer plays an integral role in the development of regional tourism products by fostering partnerships with producers, small and medium businesses, development corporations, and other players in the tourism sector. Some of the key responsibilities include supporting the development of new tourism products while ensuring they meet quality standards and enhance the region's overall tourism offerings and providing product development support to businesses in the region wanting to pursue growing niche markets in the tourism sector.

Additionally, the Cree Product Development Officer supports the Marketing Agent with media relations including organizing press conferences and FAM tours and will work in collaboration with TBJ product development officer on initiatives that pertain to both associations.

We would like to thank Tourisme Québec for their generous support.

## 7. ACCORD Director

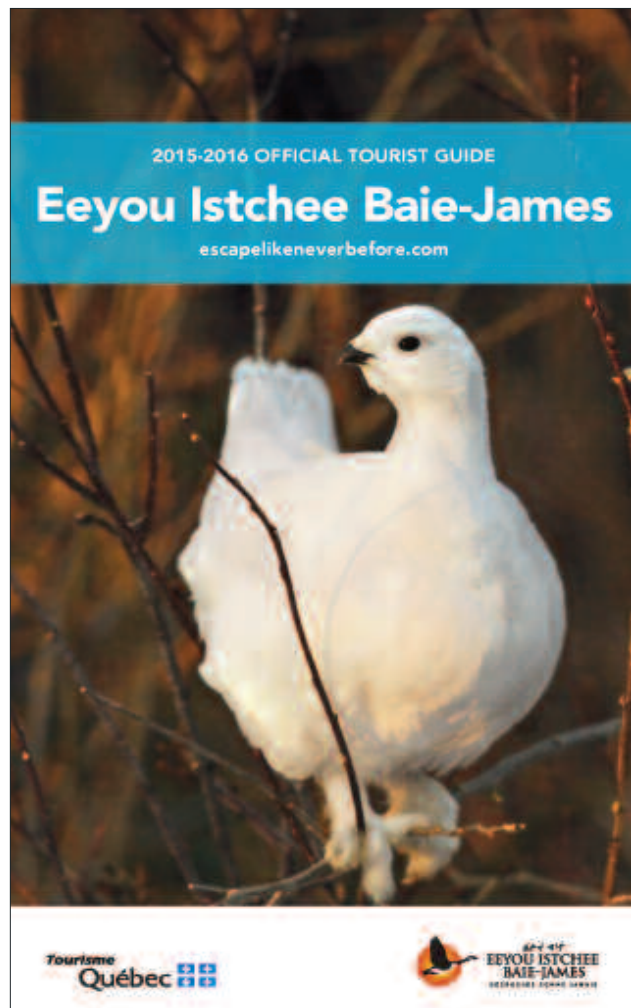
To support northern tourism development as it applies specifically to the ACCORD Niche of Excellence and in partnership with TBJ, the position of ACCORD director was established. The ACCORD director provides project management expertise in support of promoters and businesses operating within the niche of excellence as well as projects designed to deploy the niche's strategy and action plan.

The ACCORD Director actively participates in the development of regional tourism in Eeyou Istchee Baie-James by carrying out all required studies, developing action plans and strategies, and implementing all potential means of fostering partnership and cooperation in collaboration with both EIT and TBJ.

Funding generously provided by Tourisme Québec and Ministère des Finances et de l'économie under ACCORD niche.

## 8. Regional Tourism Guide

As part of our partnership agreement with Ministère du Tourisme du Québec, EIT must undertake to develop an annual regional tourism guide in accordance with the guidelines and standards agreed upon by the Regional Tourism Associations and Québec's ministry of tourism. The guide is produced jointly with TBJ. This year marks the completion of our seventh addition. The full colour guide highlights the many tourism attractions and activities available throughout the region and includes a profile of each Cree community. The regional tourism guide is a great resource for tourists interested in discovering all there is to do and see in the region and also provides a great advertising opportunity for Cree tourism businesses. The 2015-2016 edition is now available at tourism outlets throughout the province. Copies can also be ordered online at [www.escapelikeneverbefore.com](http://www.escapelikeneverbefore.com)



## 9. International Marketing and Cooperative Marketing Programs

The International Marketing Program (IMP) and Cooperative Marketing Program (CMP) which were introduced in 2013, provide financial incentives to members of EIT and TBJ to form alliances for the purposes of advertising and developing tourism packages. Such alliances allow members to promote regional tourism—including the new Eeyou Istchee Baie-James brand image— more effectively. In fact, all initiatives supported by the Program must showcase the region's new brand image. The goal of the IMP is to promote tourism outside of Quebec while the CMP applies to marketing initiatives within Quebec.

Both programs can be applied to:

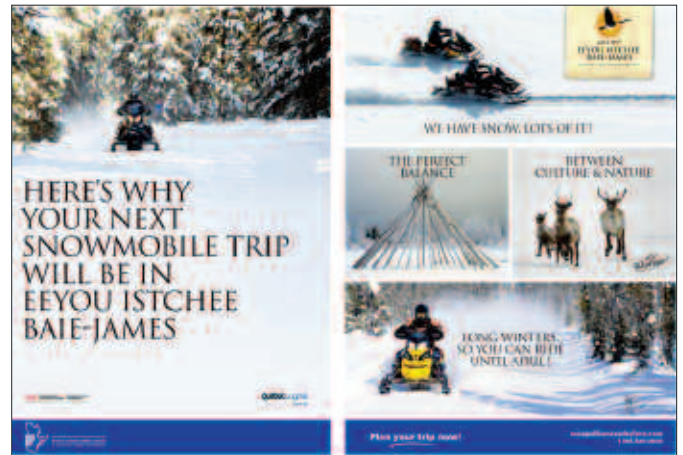
- Print advertising
- Tourism-package development
- Television, online and radio advertisement
- Participation in tradeshows
- Familiarization and press tours

To be eligible for one or both of these programs, applicants must demonstrate that their project meets the following criteria:

- Will attract visitors from outside the region
- Is not part of an existing marketing program

- Contributes to an increase in tourism promotion since the previous year (applies to existing projects and to previously submitted projects)
- Applicants must be members of EIT or TBJ
- Products must be market-ready

Approved promotional strategies will receive up to 50% of applicable costs.



Advertisements supported under the IMP include placements in publications such as but not limited to:

- Quebec Vacation Guide
- OSM Magazine
- Supertrax Magazine
- SnowGoer Magazine

Advertisements supported under the IMP include placements in publications such as but not limited to:

- Magazine Aventure Chasse et Pêche
- Guide des vacances au Québec
- Magazine Aventure Chasse et Pêche
- Magazine Motoneige Québec

The International and Cooperative Marketing Programs are an incentive-based program that encourages members of EIT and TBJ to form strategic alliances and develop joint marketing initiatives.

