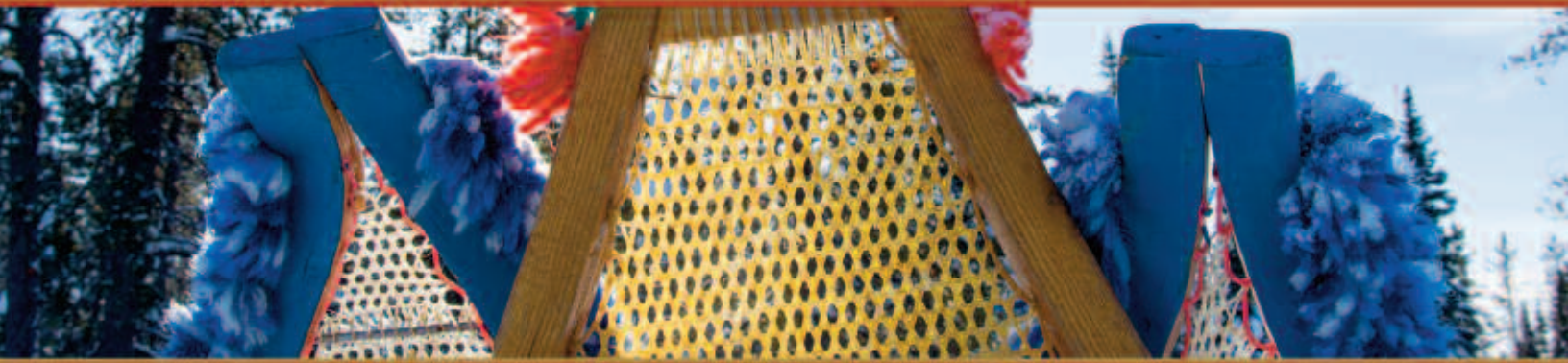




Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association

ANNUAL REPORT

2015-2016



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A note from our President

Titus Shecapio

It's hard to believe that this year marks COTA's 15th anniversary. Fifteen years is an impressive milestone, but what's really exciting is how much we've achieved in that time.

In recent years, we've made headway toward a tourism industry that is market-ready and economically viable. We've done this by working closely with tourism entrepreneurs and with support from community representatives and tourism advisors.

In my eight years working with COTA – first as a member of the board of directors and now as President – I've witnessed significant growth in our local tourism offer. With each new business comes the potential for job creation and economic growth and self-sufficiency. But beyond these tangible benefits, tourism enables us to share our culture and history with people from around the world and continue to engage in traditional activities.

This year, Nuuhchimi Wiinuu and Shammy Adventures – both focused on providing visitors with authentic cultural experiences – successfully completed COTA's Entrepreneur Coaching program. They're the first businesses to do so. Their accomplishment reinforces COTA's message that tourism success in Eeyou Istchee hinges on cooperation. Currently, four other culture and adventure tourism operators are taking part in the program.

We've also seen growth in the lodging sector with a new hotel recently opening in Eastmain and renovations to hotels throughout the region. We fully intend to support this positive development by holding our board meetings in these new and restored facilities.

Another positive development is the funding made available to implement the Destination Management Company (DMC). There's no doubt that the DMC's function of centralizing tourism sales and bookings will have beneficial effects on Eeyou Istchee Baie-James. The DMC will bring us that much closer to a market-ready industry that operates efficiently.

Sadly, this year also marks the passing of former COTA President Sherman Herodier. Sherman was proud of his Cree heritage and proud of Eeyou Istchee. He believed that tourism, in addition to other benefits, has the virtue of fostering the passing of traditional knowledge from elders to youths. It was a privilege to work with him.

In closing, I would like to thank our members and board of directors for their steady support and the staff for their unending efforts and contributions towards the positive growth of our organization. Together, we can look forward to another great year. I am confident it will be a productive and enriching one.



A note from our Executive Director

Robin McGinley

With each passing year, COTA's vision of achieving a sustainable tourism sector in Eeyou Istchee Baie-James gets closer and closer to reality. By concentrating on realistic objectives, we make tangible progress.

In the past year, we devoted a great deal of effort to providing training, product development and marketing services to support the continued development of an authentic Cree cultural tourism offer in our region.

COTA strives to supply services and resources in support of local tourism initiatives and objectives. At the same time, we need to forge strategic alliances with tourism associations, organizations, government agencies, and industry leaders from across Canada. To that end, COTA has joined forces with the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada (ATAC).

As the national destination marketing organization for Aboriginal tourism in Canada, ATAC is dedicated to providing leadership in the development and marketing of authentic Aboriginal tourism experiences through innovative partnerships. Our involvement with ATAC enables our members to benefit from its expertise in developing market-ready products and achieving enhanced visibility domestically and internationally.

With a number of major initiatives well under way – including the Destination Management Company, Air Access, and Product Development Coaching – we are well-positioned to make the most of this strategic alliance.

Since its incorporation in 2000, COTA has steadily moved forward, but we've also made time to take stock of our accomplishments and acknowledge individuals whose commitment and dedication have proved to be vital and indispensable to our mission. One of these individuals was Sherman Herodier, who passed away in April 2016.

Sherman was deeply committed to establishing tourism as a sustainable economic industry in Eeyou Istchee. His hope was that the Cree, especially the youth, would recognize the industry's potential to offer both a rewarding livelihood and opportunities to share our culture in a welcoming and meaningful way.

Sherman served as COTA's President for 3 years. His dedication knew no bounds. He was a mentor and good friend. In his memory and in his honour, we will continue to move forward, inspired and motivated by his example.

About COTA History



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 (JBNQA).

James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement

The negotiations leading to the 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.



About COTA Objectives

Implement Section 28.6 of the JBNQA

- Provide marketing, booking, and promotion services, where necessary, for Cree outfitting and tourist operations.
- Provide business, management, accounting and professional services, where necessary, for Cree outfitters and tourist 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.

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 tourist 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.

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.

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.

About COTA Board of Directors



The COTA Board is comprised of ten members who serve a 3-year term. One Board member is appointed by the Cree Nation Government (CNG). The remaining nine are elected by the COTA membership.



Pictured from left to right: Fred Wapachee, Anderson Jolly, Joey Blacksmith, Titus Shecapio, Raymond Blackned, Sherman Herodier (late), Anna Bosum, Jamie Moses, Janie Pachano, Isaac Masty

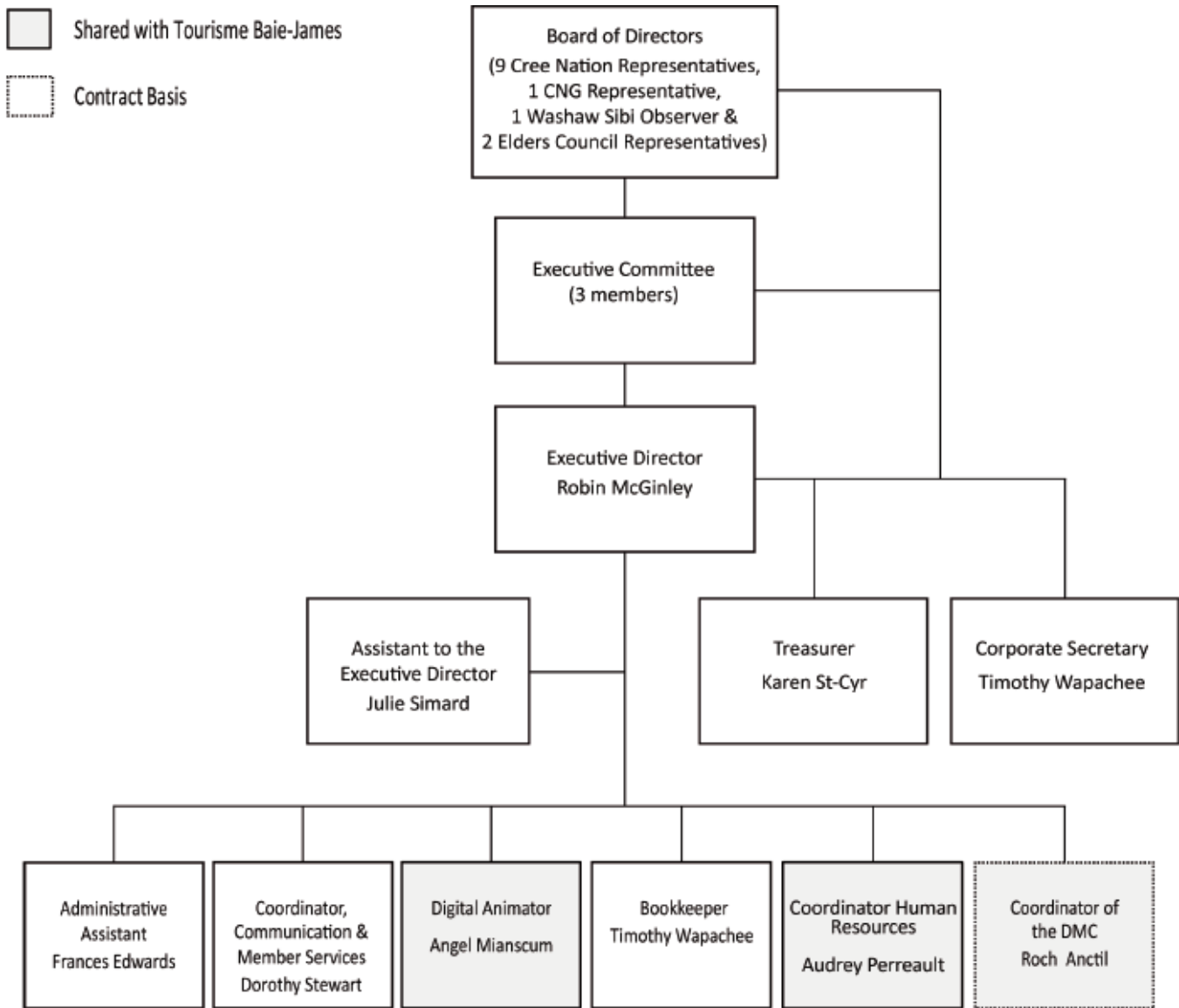
Missing from the photo Dianne O. Reid, Johnny Mark and Roderick Pachano



About COTA

Organizational Chart

The chart below illustrates COTA's organizational structure to June 1, 2016. All staff positions are shared between COTA and EIT.



2015-2016 Project Summaries



As a member-driven association, COTA works to develop and promote projects that meet the evolving needs of our members while striving to optimize the tourism potential of the region. With the support of our members, we continue to work to establish Eeyou Istchee Baie-James as a world-class tourism destination.

1. A DMC for Eeyou Istchee Baie-James

Efforts are continuing to establish a Destination Management Company (DMC) designed to promote Eeyou Istchee Baie-James as a unique and desirable travel destination and to market regional tourism products. The DMC is being developed in a partnership between Cree and Jamesians.

In September 2015, Roch Anctil was appointed DMC Project Coordinator.

While favourable market conditions for the creation of a DMC are fairly recent, the vision for such a resource was expressed over 40 years ago in the JBNQA. With the development of a DMC, COTA fulfils its obligation under Article 28.6.1 of the JBNQA to provide marketing, booking, and promotion services to Cree outfitting operations. Implementing the DMC is a major step forward in creating a tourism industry that is market-ready and operates with increased efficiency.

1.1 DMC business plan

With the recent completion of the DMC's business plan, initial funding to implement the DMC can now be secured.

The business plan is a comprehensive document that provides an overview (including partners, tourism trends,

and analysis of political, cultural, and socio-demographic factors) and encompasses sales and marketing, operating, and financial plans.

In its role as an inbound tour operator, the DMC will centralize the reservation process for tourists interested in visiting Eeyou Istchee Baie-James. Its commission-based booking system will facilitate travel to the region. The DMC will manage reservations and ensure that queries are answered in a timely manner. It will develop attractive tourism packages designed to appeal to travellers, thereby contributing to growing local tourism operators' customer base. In addition, it has the potential to provide logistics support, transfers, and other services, enabling operators to focus their time and energy on delivering outstanding visitor experiences.

DMC services may be summarized as follows:

- Call centre
- Centralized booking for hotels
- Centralized booking for outfitters
- Exclusive packages
- Special groups and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions)

Funding provided by ACCORD, Tourisme Québec, COTA and TBJ.

2. Annual General Meeting and Tourism Conference

The 15th Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Tourism Conference was held in the community of Eastmain from July 14-16th 2015.

2.1 Annual General Meeting

At the AGM, which took place on the 14th of July, in keeping with standard protocol, the audited financial reports and the minutes from the 2014 AGM were presented for review and approval. Additionally, presentations were given about important ongoing or upcoming projects including the 2015-2020 Strategic plan, Coastal Cruises and Marine Captain Training and the Destination Management Company.



2.2 Tourism Conference

The theme of the 2015 Tourism Conference, was “Working Together.” 58 people from 9 communities attended the conference. Over the course of the two-day event, two workshops were offered.

Workshop 1: Market Readiness

The first workshop, “Market Readiness Guidelines,” was hosted by Linda Sarazin of Aboriginal Experiences. Ms. Sarazin, an Algonquin from Pikwakanagan, Ontario has more than 20 years of experience in the field of Aboriginal tourism. Her presentation emphasized the importance of



offering visitors an authentic cultural experience through a market-ready product. Each participant received a copy of the National Guidelines for Aboriginal Cultural Experiences. The Guidelines are designed to ensure tourism entrepreneurs have the requisite information to develop and deliver a market-ready and authentic product that is competitive, reflects best practices, and meets or exceeds industry standards.

Workshop 2: Risk Management

The second workshop focused on the importance of developing and implementing an effective risk management plan. It was moderated by Pierre Gaudreault, Director General of Aventure Écotourisme Québec (AEQ) a sectoral association in adventure tourism and ecotourism in Quebec that offers ecotourism and adventure tourism packages. Working in groups, participants learned to:

- Identify and assess potential risks associated with specific activities
- Evaluate the level of difficulty associated with specific activities
- Match guides’ level of skill and competence with participants’ level of ability
- Implement appropriate emergency measures

Additional Activities

Day 1 of the Tourism Conference ended with a traditional feast followed by a private screening of Nunaaluk: A Forgotten Story, a video about Cape Hope Island released in December 2013 which features Mini Aodla Freeman. The evening came to a close with a traditional square dance performance.

On Day 2 of the Tourism Conference, participants were to take part in a field trip to Cape Hope Island to install interpretation panels at key locations. Unfortunately, poor weather made travel to the island too dangerous. Instead, the panels were unveiled at the Sport Complex. Mini Aodla Freeman, a former resident of Cape Hope Island gave a brief presentation at this event.

An Environmentally Friendly Event

As we are committed to organizing eco-responsible events, efforts were made to minimize negative environmental impacts. This year the goal was to be carbon-neutral and create minimal waste. Each participant received a set of reusable dishes and marked bins were set up on site to collect refuse, compost, and recycling, respectively. We are pleased to share that at the end of the event we disposed



of only 2 bags of garbage (compared to the average of 12-15 bags), 1 bag of compost and 1 bag of recycling were also collected.

A community clean-up was also organized. To make the clean-up more fun, teams raced to see who could collect the most trash in the 30 minutes allotted. Close to 800 pounds of garbage was collected. It was a great way to spread our message while also having fun.

We would like to thank Air Creebec and the community of Eastmain for sponsoring this year's event.

3. Communications Action Plan

The 2015-2020 Strategic Plan for the Eeyou Istchee Baie-James tourism region is a comprehensive initiative that promotes collaboration and provides a guiding vision for tourism development. One of the Plan's leading objectives is to improve our positioning in the international market.

In the plan, eleven sectors of activity were identified each of which has, or will be, assigned its own action plan that includes a timetable for completion and required human, financial, and material resources. One sector of activity focuses on communications with Cree and Jamesian communities and member relations.

The Communications Action Plan outlines strategies for:

- Improving communications with members and partners
- Promoting the benefits of membership
- Publicizing training opportunities
- Increasing awareness of the importance of offering market-ready tourism products
- Promoting tourism to Cree youths as an interesting and viable career choice
- Improving communications with employees and members of the board of directors
- Increasing outreach and visibility to residents of the 9 Cree communities (including improving methods for disseminating information)

Given the importance of these strategies, COTA has hired Dorothy Stewart as Communications Officer to implement initiatives to achieve these objectives.

4. Air Access Master Plan

Convenient and affordable air access is crucial for the development of a successful tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee Baie-James. The development of an air access master plan, initiated in 2012 is ongoing. We are confident that once complete, the master plan will prove to be a valuable resource to help guide the decision making process as we move forward on this important initiative.

The sophisticated air transportation network of Air Creebec makes Eeyou Istchee Baie-James quickly and

easily accessible to adventure travellers from Ontario, Quebec and the Boston-Washington corridor. COTA is, therefore, working closely with Air Creebec and TBJ to move this important initiative forward including looking at strategies to reduce the cost of travel to the region.

The initiative is made possible by funding from the ACCORD program, Ministère de l'Économie, de l'Innovation et des Exportations, Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement Fund, Mont-Tremblant International Airport, Eskan Company, and Air Creebec and TBJ.

5. Product Development Coaching

In 2012, in an effort to help Cree entrepreneurs upgrade and enhance their tourism products, COTA implemented a Product Development Coaching program. The program provides eligible participants with structured assistance from professionals to help them achieve their business objectives. The program helps tourism operators to develop market-ready tourism products that meet the needs and expectations of travellers to the region.

5.1 Developments in 2012 to 2015

This first Product Development Coaching program was launched in 2012 and completed in 2015.

Two businesses, Nuuhchimi Wiinuu run by David and Anna Bosum and Shammy Adventures operated by Angus Mayappo successfully completed the program. In April





2016, COTA was pleased to attend the grand re-opening of Nuuhchimi Wiinuu's new facilities. Shammy Adventures will open for business in summer 2016.

Thanks to additional funding provided by Cree Human Resource Development, Nuuhchimi Wiinuu and Shammy Adventures will continue to benefit from support provided by this program until November 2016. The new funding will help cover coaching costs during this important start-up phase.

5.2 Developments in 2015 and 2016

In 2015, following the success of the first Product Development Coaching program, a second such initiative

was launched. The new program is under way. Four culture/adventure tourism entrepreneurs were selected to participate.

The second Product Development Coaching program focuses on the development of a sustainable and authentic Aboriginal cultural tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee.

This second initiative is funded by ACCORD Program (Ministère de l'Économie, de la Science et de l'Innovation), the RTPA Program (Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement) and COTA

6. Specialized Training Programs

The food and beverage sector accounts for approximately 45% of employment in the tourism industry. The sector includes restaurants, hotels, and convention centres. As the number of travellers to the region grows, so too does the need to ensure that employers in this sector have the needed training to ensure compliance with food hygiene regulations and standards.

Accordingly, COTA provided access to a food safety and hygiene training program. Its aim is to establish and maintain prevention and monitoring systems designed to guarantee food safety. The program is offered by Centre d'études collégiales à Chibougamau (CECC).

The training includes 14 hours of practical learning. All participants are required to undergo a written exam.

Participants are taught:

- The standards and requirements regarding food-handling and how to implement them
- How to analyze risky situations in your establishment, implement work procedures, and correct any non-compliant situations
- Ensure personnel training and supervision with regard to hygiene and food safety

Following the successful completion of the program's written exam, participants receive official certification from the ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec as well as a participation attestation from CECC.

Funding for this training was provided by COTA and CHR.D.

7. Human Resources Coordinator of the Tourism Industry

One of the greatest challenges facing outfitters and tourism operators in Eeyou Istchee is finding qualified personnel. To address this issue, COTA and TBJ created a new position: Human Resources Coordinator of the Tourism Industry (HRC).

The Coordinator plays a key role in enhancing the quality of human resources to a level commensurate with a world-class tourism industry.

The Coordinator's primary role is to implement the Human Resources Development Plan for the tourism industry of Eeyou Istchee Baie-James. Tasks include:

- In conjunction with teaching institutions, organize and coordinate human resources training efforts for the tourism industry
- Study the possibility of implementing a tourism mentorship and coaching program for industry entrepreneurs
- Develop ties with teaching institutions to stay current with existing study programs, foster the creation of regional training opportunities, and encourage youths to consider training and careers in the tourism industry
- Publicize achievements and success stories stemming from the strategic plan to all client groups
- Manage the members database
- Create incentives to attract potential employees to the region

The position, led by TBJ, is funded by Emploi-Québec, Société du Plan Nord, TBJ and COTA.

8. Polar Bear Monitoring

Developing unique and appealing tourism packages for different categories of travellers is a requirement for success in our tourism industry. As noted in the Arctic Kingdom Tourism Development and Positioning Plan released last year, wildlife-viewing is a popular form of tourism and it was recommended we further explore the viability and sustainability of developing polar bear-

viewing, specifically on Twin Islands, as a sustainable tourism project for the Cree Nation of Wemindji.

Drone-Assisted Research

It is important that a monitoring program be established from the start, therefore a drone will be used to capture imagery and assess the polar-bear population. The drone will be equipped with a high-resolution video camera that also allows for direct viewing. To minimize disruption to local wildlife, the drone will be flown at a height of 100 feet. The polar-bear count on Twin Islands was scheduled for October 2015; however, due to inclement weather conditions, the project was postponed until later this year.

Funding for this project was provided by Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement, Tawich Development Corporation and COTA.



9. Cree Student Bursaries

To continue to promote tourism to Cree youths as a stimulating and rewarding career choice and encourage them to pursue tourism studies, COTA now offers student bursaries.

Bursaries are made available to Cree students who successfully complete their studies in one of five tourism sectors, namely, accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services.

Up to three bursaries are available in each of the ten categories of education established for this fund. Bursaries range from \$250 for graduates of a vocational program to as much as \$3,500 for students who have successfully completed a doctoral degree.

10. Training for the Digital Animator

In 2014 a new position was created, that of Digital Animator. The position which is shared by EIT/COTA and TBJ, is held by long-time COTA employee Angel Mianscum.

To prepare her for this role, Angel is receiving 3 years of on the job training. The third and final year of training will resume in the fall of 2016 when she returns to work following maternity leave.

The training is being delivered in Oujé-Bougoumou by Robert J. Palmer Ph.D., Professor Williams School of Business at Bishop's University. Angel will be receiving university credits for the training.

Funding was provided by Cree Human Resources Development and COTA

11. Collaborations

11.1. Research and development of Cree Culture experience kits for tourists

As part of our mandate to promote Cree culture and traditions through tourism and tourism-related activities, COTA was pleased to have an opportunity to work with the *Aanischaaukamikw* Cree Cultural Institute to support its proposed initiative to develop Cree cultural experience kits and Cree interpretive kits. The kits are designed to enhance visitor experience while highlighting selected aspects of Cree history and cultural tradition.

11.1.1. The Cree cultural experience kits are designed to provide hands-on activities that highlight aspects of Cree culture, such as traditional clothing and tools. These interactive kits are designed for use by visitors to the *Aanischaaukamikw* Cree Cultural Institute.

11.1.2. The Cree interpretive kits are similar in concept but are designed to be used at culture camps and other tourist attractions. The kits offer standardized speaking points on a range of topics related to Cree history, culture, and tradition and will, for example, contain instructions and materials needed to engage visitors in handicraft activities.

These projects began in early 2015 and are ongoing.

11.2 Responsible fishermen for sustainable sport fishing

Sport-fishing continues to be an important tourism driver in Eeyou Istchee Baie-James. As part of COTA's mandate to promote sustainable tourism practices, we are pleased to lend our support to FaunENord's initiative to educate visitors on the importance of engaging in environmentally sound fishing practices. Campaign objectives include:

- Raising awareness among anglers of the importance of cleaning boats to prevent the introduction of invasive species and pollutants in our waterways
- Promoting catch and release
- Reducing the appearance of blue-green algae blooms due to human activities
- Installation of permanent information panels at sites where popular fishing derbies are held

A longer-term goal includes erecting a permanent boat-cleaning station at all key entry points to the region (at the junction of Routes 167 and 113 and on the Abitibi side).

12. We've Moved!

The COTA/EIT offices are now located in the *Aanischaaukamikw* Cree Cultural Institute which provides office space to Cree entities concerned with language, traditional pursuits, arts and crafts, and tourism.

