



ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

WIINIPAAKW TOURS – SOLIDARITY COOPERATIVE

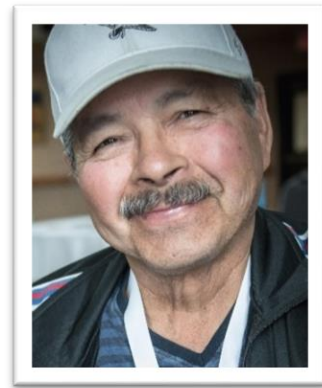
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A special thank you to the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association and our partners Tawich Development Corporation, Cree Nation of Eastmain and the Cree Nation of Waskaganish, who provided invaluable support for this initiative. To all the funding agencies, thank you for believing in our dream and for helping us make it a reality; Indigenous Services Canada, Société Plan Nord, Tourisme Québec, Canada Economic Development, the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec, Mistissini Opportunity Funds, Cree Nation Government, Apatisiwin Skills Development (*formally Cree Human Resources and Development*).

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This first year of Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Co-op (WTSC) has been very challenging and at the same time, very rewarding. It has been an incredible journey to work with everyone involved to take a dream, Sherman's Dream and turn it into reality. Although there were several setbacks, and unforeseen delays the fact remains that WTSC is now the proud owner of a boat to operate tours on James Bay, a stand-alone Coolbox office in Waskaganish, the safety equipment needed to operate and most importantly a team of dedicated individuals working together to ensure success. The tours led by our own Cree captains are scheduled to begin in the summer of 2020.



WTSC was designed to be a unifying force that would operate tourism packages along the coast both summer and winter, and on and off the water. The co-op structure was selected by the founding members because of the ability to include all the people committed to the vision, objectives and ultimately the growth of the organization. There are 3 categories of members; worker members, user members and support members. It is amazing the skills, experience and knowledge that the members have when taken as a collective; therein lies the strength of WTSC. Also, research shows that because people are working together, the long-term success of co-ops is often more secure than other business models such as sole proprietorships.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in making the dream a reality; the communities for believing in their members and investing in tourism, the dedicated Marine captains who have successfully completed the various trainings and have shared their knowledge of the bay, the local tourism officers who have organized meetings and shared their insights, the regional organizations that have provided hours of technical support and coordination, the outside partners such as Arctic Kingdom who have shared their professional expertise, and the various funding agencies that have supported the project and contributed financially.

WTSC is a project that will benefit the communities involved, the members and generations to come by creating meaningful employment and new business opportunities via the coop. These tourism packages will help to make the beauty and culture of Eeyou Istchee accessible to visitors from around the world and will contribute to the creation of a sustainable tourism destination in our territory.

Chiiniskumitin, Hugo Hester

HISTORY

Wiinipaakw Tours is a long-term vision fostered by Sherman Herodier, guided by the objective to prepare a future in tourism for Cree youth and to share with the world the beauty of the beloved waters of James Bay.



It took many years to find the proper way to develop that dream.

In 2011, COTA developed a project to evaluate and identify the potential tourism points of interest and to evaluate the feasibility of marine tourism. Part of the project, a reconnaissance tour was planned on the bay with the tourism officers and local guides. The team, immediately recognized the potential of the coast and started to discuss with the coastal communities to know their interest and to understand what they would like to develop. Through all the process, one item needed to be resolved, a really important one. The coastal Crees already knew how to navigate on the bay, and knew the various points of interest including traditional, historical and natural attractions such as where to observe wildlife. However; the Cree navigators did not have the proper certifications to allow them to bring visitors on the bay, nor the commercial vessels, insurance and risk management procedures required. Therefore, in 2014-15, COTA and its new partner, Arctic Kingdom, put together a marine training to provide the Cree navigators from the 5 coastal communities the right certifications recognized by Transport Canada and the experience of navigation with bigger commercial boats. During that time, several research projects, a film and scientific studies were carried out that further confirmed the potential for future tourism development. Following that, COTA, with the certified captains, wanted to continue to work on coastal tourism development initiated with the training. Together, they looked for the best way to develop marine tourism to ensure the captains would be key players in any development.

During the Marine Tourism Pre-commercialization phase led by COTA, the cooperative structure was identified as the preferred structure for the development of a coastal tourism business that would be composed of Cree captains, communities

and/or local corporations. A solidarity Co-op was selected because it allowed for different categories of members (worker, user and support).

In April 2018, Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Cooperative was incorporated and it is the first tourism cooperative created in Eeyou Istchee.

MISSION & VISION

The mission is to develop sustainable coastal tourism in Eeyou Istchee in accordance with authentic Cree culture and values and in harmony with nature.

The vision of the cooperative is to build the marine tourism industry on the coast of James Bay in Eeyou Istchee by bringing businesses and communities together for the greater benefit of all.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The **Board of Directors** consists of nine members, three from each category:

Worker:

Ernie Hughboy
Anderson Jolly
Hugo Hester

User:

Henry Stewart
Stanley Shashesweshkum
Starr Hester

Support:

Brenda Weistche, *Cree Nation of Waskaganish*
Robin McGinley, *Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association*
Holly Danyluk, *Tawich Development Corporation*

The **Executive Committee** of the Cooperative is:

Hugo Hester, President
Holly Danyluk, Vice- President
Robin McGinley, Secretary & Treasurer



SUMMARY OF THE FIRST YEAR

Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Cooperative was created on April 28, 2018, with the main objective to provide the visitors a variety of unique boating eco-tours along Eastern James Bay.



Annual General Assembly

The first Annual General Assembly was held in Wemindji on August 20th & 21st, 2018. Managed by an interim committee since its creation, that first meeting was the moment for Wiinipaakw Tours to adopt the General By-Laws, including the categories of members and the share capital, the election of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee, the appointment of the auditors and the approval of the insurer.



The cooperative proposes three categories of membership:

⚓ **Worker member**

Employed as boat captains and crew, coordinators, camp operations, maintenance workers etc.

⚓ **User member**

Members operating their own business within the co-op

Supporting member

Members who are partner businesses, associations or individuals

The cooperative is fortunate to have 18 members for its first year. The many years of combined experience and knowledge of the members contributed to the success of the organization.

Business Plan 2019-2023

On November 28, 2018, the Board of Directors approved the Business Plan 2019-2023. This plan was developed as part of COTA's Marine Tourism Pre-Commercialization project, and was drafted by Arctic Kingdom in collaboration with COTA and the co-op members. With the Business Plan approved, Wiinipaakw Tours was able to plan the next steps and proceed with the various funding requests for the start-up and the beginning of the operations expected in summer 2019.

Presentations by Wiinipaakw Tours

In the perspective to introduce Wiinipaakw Tours to the coastal communities and organizations, various presentations were made throughout the year. The objective was to present the cooperative, the structure, the services and the products, and most importantly to create an interest to take part by becoming a member and investing financially in the co-op.

In January 2019, an important presentation organized by Tourisme Quebec was done in Québec City. Known as "Réseau Express", this presentation was done in front of an audience composed of various government agency representatives, federal, provincial and regional. A "Réseau Express" is used when a project is unique and has a strong potential. The presentation was made by Hugo Hester, President and Robin McGinley, Secretary/Treasurer, and resulted in securing the funding for the start-up phase 1 and laid the groundwork to submit a request for Phase 2.



Start-up - Phase 1

The project Start-up Phase 1 was mainly the start-up phase of the business that included all the purchases required to be ready to operate in summer 2019, as planned in the Business Plan 2019-2023. Therefore, Wiinipaakw Tours acquired:

- ⚓ A ***Titan***, a first boat for Wiinipaakw Tours and all the necessary equipment, such as a customized trailer, spare motor, navigation equipment and docks. In order to offer short trips on the bay, starting summer 2019, the purchase of a boat was essential.



- ⚓ A first ***office***, style “CoolBox”, that will be located in Waskaganish, with a container as storage.

- ⚓ Office equipment and supplies

The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association provided support to Wiinipaakw Tours by coordinating the project until the cooperative will be able to hire and train permanent employees. Without an office, the correspondence was sent to the secretary at 205 Opemiska meskino, P.O. Box 1167, Ouje-Bougoumou, Qc, GoW 3Co

Funding was generously provided by Société Plan Nord, Indigenous Services Canada, Tourisme Québec and our financial partner Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association.

Corporate image and logo

As part of the pre-commercialization phase, the corporate logo for Wiinipaakw Tours was developed. Selected by the WTSC's Executive Committee, the corporate logo's colour represents the sky and the bay and the logo includes syllabics, teepees and a polar bear. The lively image evokes the fun the visitors will have on their adventure.



NEXT STEPS; START-UP PHASE 2

The project Start-up Phase 2 will begin in April 2019 and will include organizing the operations for the summer 2019 as well as the planning and operations for the seasons 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

Funding confirmed as of April 1st, 2019, are provided by Cree Nation Government, Apatisiwin Skills Development, Mistissini Opportunity Funds and our financial partners Cree Nation of Waskaganish, Cree Nation of Wemindji and Tawich Developement Corporation.

Human Resources

As part of the Business Plan 2019-2023, Wiiinipaakw Tours planned the hiring of staff to start and operate the cooperative. Before the summer 2019, Wiinipaakw Tours expects to hire:

- ⚓ **Director**; to ensure the business management, human resources and financial resources, the development of projects, the promotion, the planning and development of boat tours
- ⚓ **Assistant to the Director**; Assist the Director in the business management, financial resources, the development of projects, the promotion and do the coordination of the boat tours as planned

Services for its members

Various services are proposed to the members:

- ⚓ Equipment rental
- ⚓ Boat maintenance services
- ⚓ Equipment and material - Corporate rates
- ⚓ Provide support
- ⚓ Provide team leaders
- ⚓ Access to promotion, hospitality and customer service
- ⚓ Packaging and Marketing
- ⚓ Consulting services
- ⚓ Organization of events
- ⚓ And more...



A Top-Quality Product

The region of Eeyou Istchee Baie-James is in need of an iconic product. Wiinipaakw Tours is committed to provide a such experience.



A vibrant Cree culture, unspoiled waters, starlit nights and northern lights, spectacular sunsets and the infinite horizon on James Bay are the views awaiting our guests. Fortunate to be accessible by road and by plane, the eastern James Bay is scattered with dozens of islands rich with wildlife and history. Entirely owned and operated by local Cree, Wiinipaakw Tours will provide the visitors an opportunity to experience the beauty of the bay through excursions to observe the nature and of course a variety of species, such as polar bears, beluga, caribou and a wide variety of migratory and nesting birds. During the different activities, the visitors will appreciate the customized interpretation by our local Cree guides.

Wiinipaakw Tours will propose three types of experiences to its clientele;

Local coastal tours

Planned to begin in summer 2019, the **Local coastal tours** will offer day trips out on the bay from the communities of Wemindji, Eastmain and Waskaganish. These trips will be operated by Wiinipaakw Tours and by its User Members. These trips will allow visitors to experience the Cree culture and to know more about our history.



Base Camp Expeditions

Planned to be in operation in 2020, the **Base Camp Expedition** will be 5-day trip, with high-end services and accommodation. This excursion includes meals, professional guides, boat excursions to offshore island frequently visited by polar bear during summer season. The camp will accommodate up to 16 people. Wiinipaakw Tours plan is planning 4 departures in 2020 and 8 departures in 2021.



Boat Rental & Charters

In order to answer to different needs, Wiinipaakw Tours will offer charters. The **Charter** services could be used for on-water trainings, shuttles services and water taxis, research programs, by Cree trappers, business travelers and/or organizations as well as a variety of custom tours.

Marketing and Promotion

As Wiinipaakw Tours aims to focus on its operations and services, the main channel for its sales, promotion and marketing will be done through Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Travel.

Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Travel is a Cree owned; Québec licensed inbound travel agency.



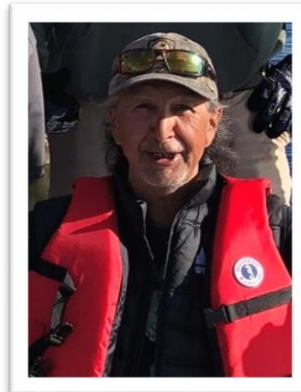
V O Y A G E S
E E Y O U I S T C H E E
B A I E - J A M E S
T R A V E L

OUR CAPTAINS – OUR TEAM

Peter Esau



James Georgekish



Starr Hester



Ernie Hughboy



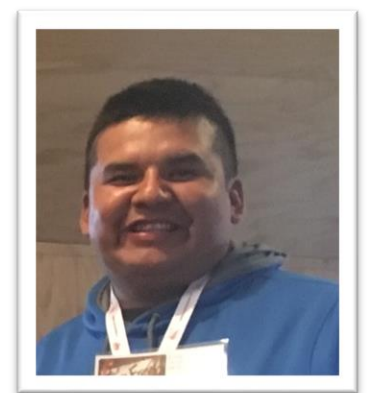
Anderson Jolly



Charlie Louttit



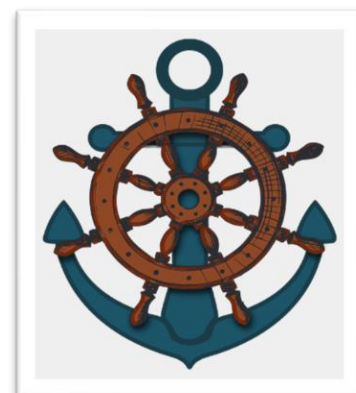
Jamie Moses



Henry Stewart



Willis Weistche



Thank you for your trust, the cooperative was founded for you!