

# •Δσ•Vd WIINIPAAKW *Tours*



## ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

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, Ministère du Tourisme, Canada Economic Development, the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec, Mistissini Opportunity Funds, Cree Nation Government, and Apatisiwin Skills Development.

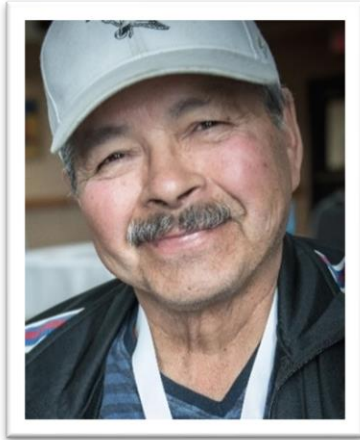
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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Co-op (WTSC) continues to be a unifying force that brings together members from the communities of Waskaganish, Eastmain and Wemindji. It is my belief that together we will be successful at developing the potential of coastal tourism in Eeyou Istchee.



The co-operative structure is a first for the Cree tourism industry and by having 3 categories of members it opens the door for many individuals and organizations to be involved. The first category is the worker members and includes the administrative staff, the basecamp operations team and our proud Cree captains who drive our 2 vessels owned by WTSC. The second category is user members and this includes the certified captains who want to offer commercial tours with their own boats. The requirements are to be a certified captain and their boats insured and certified as commercial. As members, they are able to rent the necessary safety and communication equipment from the co-op to offer tours safely. By being part of WTSC, they also benefit from the marketing and promotion efforts. The final category is support members. This includes the Cree communities, development corporations, and regional entities such as the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association and our regionally owned travel agency, Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Travel. When the skills and experience of all of the members in the 3 categories are combined, it creates a strong team to support our growth and sustainability.

We are a new co-operative in the early stages of our development. There have been significant challenges over the past few months due to situations beyond our control. The current COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our organization in more ways than we currently understand. Our first priority remains the health and safety of our staff, our partners, our clients and our community at large. As we go forward, we will be implementing all of the necessary sanitation measures required and we will be focusing on improving our organization and training our team members. We will be revising our strategic plans and trying to develop creative solutions to meet the needs of our Cree clientele in the short-term and in the long-term, the visitors who will come to Eeyou Istchee once the pandemic is over.

I would like to thank our members and our government partners for the support that they have provided and continue to provide to WTSC, without it we would not have been able to make our dream a reality. We look forward to working with our members in the coming months as we begin offering tours on the bay for a local clientele and take the necessary steps to develop WTSC to its full potential.

Chiiniskumitin,

Hugo Hester

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## HISTORY

Wiinipaakw Tours is based on 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 islands and 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 projects, including Nunaaluk: A forgotten Story a film about Cape Hope and other research studies were



carried out that further confirmed the potential for future tourism development. COTA worked with the certified captains to find a model for coastal tourism development that would 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 was the first tourism cooperative created in Eeyou Istchee.

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## 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.



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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

**Worker Member:** Employed as boat captains and crew, coordinators, camp operations, maintenance workers etc.

Ernie Hughboy  
Anderson Jolly  
Hugo Hester

**User Member:** Members operating their own business within the co-op.

Henry Stewart  
Stanley Shashaweskum  
Starr Hester

**Support Member:** Members who are partner businesses, associations or individuals

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

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

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

The cooperative is fortunate to have 20 members for its second year. The many years of combined experience and knowledge of the members is a key success factor for the organization. Although the co-operative training for the Board of Directors was planned for this year, it was postponed until August 2020 and will be delivered virtually due to COVID-19. There was also on-water training originally scheduled for 2019 that was postponed to summer 2020; however, it is unclear at this time if it will be possible due to the Cree communities requiring a 14-day quarantine for visitors from outside region 10. The training for the set-up of the Creetopia basecamp is also delayed because the trainer from Huttoopia was travelling from France to Eeyou Istchee; therefore, it is likely that it will be rescheduled it to summer 2021.



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## SUMMARY OF THE SECOND YEAR

Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Cooperative has completed its second year of operations and has begun its third year. It has not been easy; however, the members remain committed to making it a success not only for the organization but also for the communities involved.

## Annual General Assembly

The second Annual General Assembly was held in Waskaganish on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Following the first year, there were 3 seats that were up for election to create a rotating Board of Director in order to provide stability for Wiinipaakw Tours. The 3 Directors were re-elected and they include:

*Users member* – Stanley Shashaweskum

*Workers member* – Ernie Hughboy

*Support member* – Holly Danyluk



## The WTSC head office

During the AGM, the members decided that the Head office for Wiinipaakw Tours would be located in Waskaganish. The office is in the new Coolbox located in a prime location at 12 J.S.C. Watt Street, across from the Kanio Kashee Lodge and beside the Cultural center. It was designed to be an office space, a meeting place for clients and also staff accommodation for when captains or other staff members from other communities are in Waskaganish.





## **Presentations by Wiinipaakw Tours**

The Wiinipaakw Tours team made various presentations throughout the year. The objective was to present the cooperative, the structure, the products and services, and when applicable, to invite organizations to become members and contribute to the development of the co-op.

### ***Council Board March 27, 2019, Chapais Québec***

A presentation was made by the President Hugo Hester accompanied by Robin McGinley, Secretary/Treasurer to the Chiefs and community representatives on Council Board so as to inform them of the developments and seek their support. WTSC was well-received and there was interest expressed from other coastal communities to join in the future.

### ***Eeyou Marine Planning Commission June 27, 2019, Montréal, Québec***

The Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission (EMRPC) is an Institution of Public Government (IPG) established under the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement (EMRLCA). Its mandate is to develop planning policies, priorities and objectives for the Eeyou Marine Region, including the development and implementation of a land use plan. The presentation was made by Robin McGinley, Secretary/Treasurer and as a result, WTSC undertook the process of obtaining an operating permit from the Eeyou Marine Impact Review Board.

### ***Eeyou Marine Wildlife Board April 4, 2019 Québec, Québec***

The Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board (EMRWB) is responsible for wildlife management, regulation and harvesting in the Eeyou Marine Region. The Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board (EMRWB) is an Institution of Public Government (IPG) established under the *Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement* (EMRLCA). The presentation was made by Robin McGinley, Secretary/Treasurer and as a result the WTSC will work the EMRWB to develop guidelines for wildlife observation for both the captains and the visitors to safeguard the wildlife on the coast.

## **Start-up - Phase 2**

The Phase 2 was significantly delayed by a number of situations beyond the control of WTSC, not the least COVID-19. Phase 2 included multiple funding partners and their contributions were dependent on the positive response from the other partners. Therefore, Wiinipaakw Tours has been slow to complete all of the actions in Phase 2 including the purchase of the equipment and infrastructure originally planned for the deadline of March 31, 2020 because the final approval was only received on October 31, 2019. The project Start-up Phase 2 included the hiring of human resources for the operation of the organization and the basecamp, construction of

the basecamp, the construction of the storage warehouse to store the boats, the purchase of a second boat, a marketing strategy and activation to promote Wiinipaakw Tours, legal services and the operations for the summer 2020.

## Human Resources

As part of the Business Plan 2019-2023, Wiinipaakw Tours planned to hire staff to operate the cooperative and this year, 2 team members were hired.

**Hugo Cowboy was hired on July 2, 2019 as the Director.** His role is to ensure the business management, human resources and financial resources, the development of projects, the promotion, the planning and development of boat tours.



**Marc Beaulé was hired as the 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.

## Purchase of Equipment and Infrastructure

Below is an update on the major purchases planned or completed in Phase 2.

⚓ A **Silver Dolphin**, a second boat for Wiinipaakw Tours and all the necessary equipment, such as a customized trailer, spare motor, and navigation equipment. The construction of the boat began in the fall of 2019 at the FAB-Tech factory in Newfoundland and it is scheduled to be delivered to Waskaganish in July 2020.



A second **office**, style "CoolBox", was purchased in partnership with Tawich. It will be located in Wemindji and will be shared with the Tawich tourism office. It has the same layout as the first one in Waskaganish. It is built but has not yet been shipped due to COVID-19.

⚓ A **warehouse** has been purchased in order to protect the boats and equipment over the winters. It will be built in Wemindji to store both the Titan and the Silver Dolphin.

However, there have been delays due to COVID-19 and it has not yet been shipped to the community.

- ⚓ A **Creetopia Basecamp** was planned in Phase 2. The first Creetopia luxury basecamp was to be built on Charlton Island during the summer of 2020. The Creetopia tents were designed in partnership with the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) and Huttopia France, a company specializing in not only designing glamping tents but also in building and operating Huttopia resorts around the world. Due to COVID-19, WTSC is reviewing the location of the Creetopia basecamp to match the needs of the target markets that are now Quebec and Canada instead of international visitors at least in the mid-term, next 2-3 years.



- ⚓ **Vehicle** WTSC had researched and secured the funding for the purchase of a FORD 350 pick-up truck to haul the boats and also to refill them with a fuel tank in the back of the truck. Due to delays, it was only purchased in summer 2020.

## Professional Services

Professional Services included **translation** for marketing material such as the website and brochure. The permitting process for the Impact Review Board also required that the project description be translated in to Inuktitut and Cree.

WTSC worked with the Coopérative de développement régional du Québec (CDRQ) to obtain **Legal Services** from Maître Cooper who specializes in cooperatives. He worked on a variety of files to help structure the co-op including:

- ⚓ A property access service contract for basecamp
- ⚓ Partnership agreement with Tawich to share the Coolbox office
- ⚓ Member contracts (user, producer, support);

- ⚓ The required insurance of contractors
- ⚓ Employment contracts (Executive Director, Assistant, worker member, seasonal worker)
- ⚓ The revision of the Office Policies, with comments;

The **Marketing Strategy** was done by Masse Communications located in Quebec City. They reviewed the existing Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Co-op (WTSC) documents, researched the tourism markets and the competition, and developed a 3-year strategy to launch Wiinipaakw Tours. Although it was written prior to COVID-19, we are confident that it will provide a solid plan of action for the coming years that can be adapted as required. The Marketing Strategy identified the “big idea” for Wiinipaakw Tours:

***Discover the extent of our nature***

« A BIG IDEA FUNCTIONS AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL PILLAR AROUND WHICH STRATEGY BEHAVIOR ACTIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS ARE ALIGNED. THESE SIMPLY WORDED STATEMENTS ARE USED INTERNALLY, AS A BEACON OF A DISTINCTIVE CULTURE AND EXTERNALLY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE THAT HELPS CONSUMERS MAKE CHOICES ».

**DISCOVER**

Represents adventure that awaits our visitors, what we are inviting them to live. The discovery through which we will guide our visitors. The act of offering these experiences.

**THE EXTENT**

Represents the size of the territory, the grandiose landscapes as far as the eye can see, so immense, full of possibility, so vast that we cannot distinguish the end. Also represents the richness of the Cree culture, the different elements that differentiate your community.

**OUR NATURE**

Represents the wild nature (flora, fauna, landscapes) and human nature (Cree, who are at the heart of this adventure).

**Website with CMS**

WTSC was fortunate to work with both Masse and Locomotive to develop the website. Following the approval from ISC, WTSC re-allocated funds from legal services and translation services to upgrade the initial website project to include a content management system (CMS). This will give WTSC the flexibility going forward to make changes to the content as required. This is particularly important in the current COVID-19 context because we do not know how things will evolve.



Due to COVID-19, we have experienced some delays; however, everything is close to being completed. The URL is: <http://www.wiinipaakwtours.com> and it will be live in September, 2020.



## Brochure

We also were able to produce a brochure to be used to promote the services of WTSC both within the region and within the country at a later date once Eeyou Istchee is able to welcome visitors without a 14-day quarantine for visitors from outside of Region 10. This was again as a result of COVID-19 and the fact that we did not need to purchase \$5000 worth of on-line advertising for a region not open to visitors.



## Professional services provided by support members

As Wiinipaakw Tours aims to focus on its operations and services, the main channel for its sales will be done through Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Travel, a Cree owned; Québec licensed inbound travel agency.

WTSC will also work closely with Eeyou Istchee Tourism to benefit from the marketing efforts of the region.

The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association has continued to provide technical support to Wiinipaakw Tours by coordinating the funding with the various governments and providing professional services such as assisting with the application for permits, coordinating the external service providers such as marketing, legal, accounting and translation until the cooperative's permanent employees are comfortable to take over the role.



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## NEXT STEPS; START-UP PHASE 2 EXTENDED

Due to COVID-19 many of the funding agencies have extended their deadlines to accommodate the delays caused by COVID-19. Therefore, we are still in Phase-2 of the project and the end date of the project is extended until March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022 giving WTSC the time to adjust and plan as well as develop an economic response plan.

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## ECONOMIC RESPONSE PLAN

Many industries have been affected by COVID-19, including tourism and WTSC. Therefore, WTSC is planning to work with Raymond Desjardins and the members of the cooperative to develop an Economic Response Plan to COVID-19 impacts. The Plan aims at readjusting WTSC's development to the changing needs of the tourism industry and clientele, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. It is also a perfect timing to learn from the first two years of existence of WTSC (which was created in April 2018) and build on this experience. The plan will be useful to update both business development actions, marketing and management practices. More specifically, the plan is a strategic tourism development plan that will serve to identify in the short term the best options that will allow WTSC:

- 1- to generate profits in the shortest possible time despite the circumstances;
- 2- to increase its self-financing capacity and
- 3- to gradually reduce the cooperative's dependence on external funds, taking into account the assets and investments made since 2018.

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## OUR TEAM

*Hugo Cowboy* - Director



*Marc Beaulé* - Assistant Director



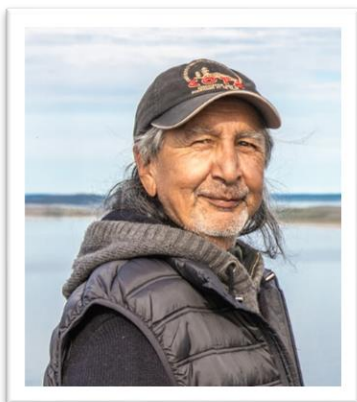
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## OUR CAPTAINS

*Peter Esau*



*James Georgekish*



*Lindy Georgekish*



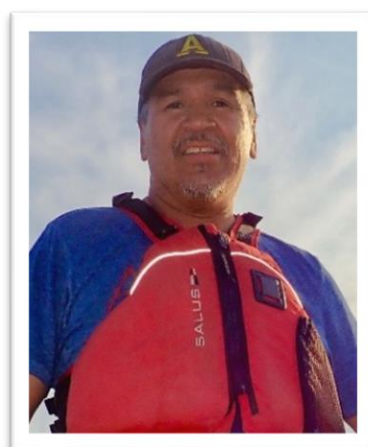
*Starr Hester*



*Ernie Hughboy*



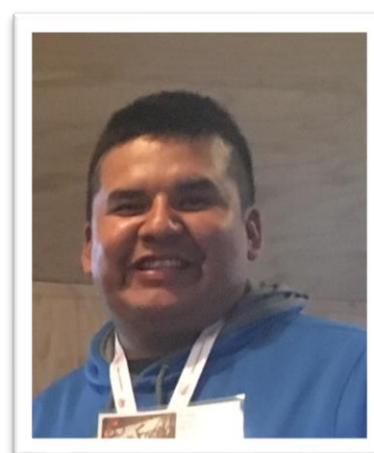
*Anderson Jolly*



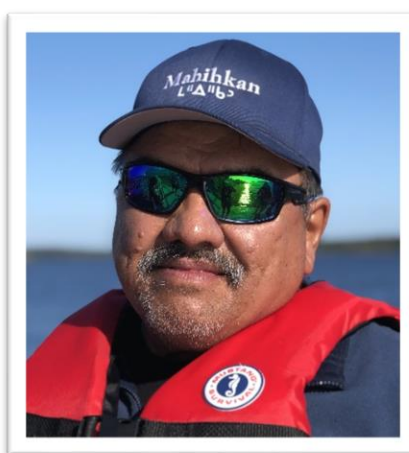
*Charlie Louttit*



*Jamie Moses*



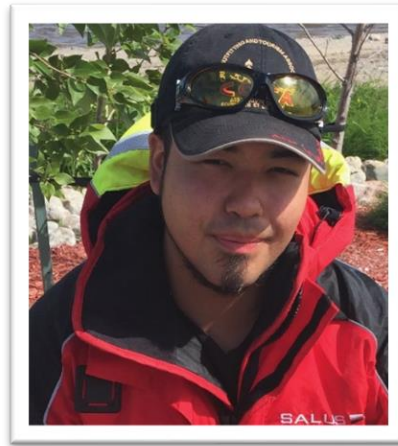
*Stanley Shashaweskum*



*Henry Stewart*



*Willis Weistche*



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