

2023-2024

# ANNUAL REPORT





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Anderson P. Jolly

## A Message from our President

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As I wrap up my second year as president of the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA), I am pleased to reflect on the successes of 2023-2024. Our resilience and commitment to sustainability, economic growth, and innovation have helped us navigate challenges and secure a promising future for responsible tourism development in Eeyou Istchee.

The summer of 2023 brought significant challenges with devastating forest fires that further strained our local tourism industry, which is still recovering from the effects of the pandemic. The destruction of the Creetopia base camp, just weeks before its grand opening, was a heartbreaking setback. This project, seven years in development, represented the dedication and passion of many. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to this ambitious and innovative endeavour. The lessons we've learned from Creetopia will undoubtedly guide our future projects.

The fires' impact extended beyond tourism, destroying family camps, damaging ancestral hunting grounds, and necessitating widespread evacuations that deeply affected the entire Cree Nation. Despite these setbacks, our commitment to advancing sustainability has only strengthened. We remain dedicated to using tourism as a driving force for environmental stewardship, incorporating innovative technologies, responsible practices, and robust community engagement.

We are actively promoting ecotourism in protected areas through collaborations with community members, tourism officers, and tallymen. This initiative is crucial for building a sustainable green economy and preserving our region's rich biodiversity.

Another notable achievement was the completion of a comprehensive, hands-on sustainability training program by our development team. This program, which included Shipeku—an innovative initiative developed and funded by Indigenous Tourism Québec—equips Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs with both scientific and traditional knowledge to support their transition towards sustainability.

We have also initiated a feasibility study to install charging stations for electric and hybrid vehicles, marking a significant step in adopting greener tourism practices across Eeyou Istchee.

Looking ahead, COTA remains steadfast in our commitment to fostering a world-class, sustainable tourism industry that honours Cree culture and values. We are grateful for the support we have received and proud of our achievements as we continue to strive for a bright and sustainable future.







Robin McGinely

## A Message from our Executive Director

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I am pleased to have this opportunity to share highlights and news from what has been both a challenging and productive year. Our commitment to supporting and working closely with our members is essential for the continued growth and sustainability of the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee. Working together, we are better positioned to tackle challenges, achieve our collective goals, and foster innovation.

Over the past year, we've organized and attended numerous networking events, delivered comprehensive training programs, and hosted information sessions to keep our members updated about funding opportunities. Additionally, we now have a communications specialist to enhance our engagement and communication with our members.

In February 2024, we participated in the world's largest Indigenous tourism conference hosted by the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC). This conference offered an opportunity to connect with tourism professionals from around the world. Several members, including tourism operators, local coordinators, and artisans, joined us at the event, providing a chance to reconnect, learn, and draw inspiration from one another.

Our dedication to member success is reflected in our training programs, which are designed to prepare our members for the evolving demands of the industry, ensure necessary certifications, and support personal and professional growth.

One of the year's highlights was our team retreat held at the spectacular Waconichi site operated by Nibiischii Corporation. The floating studio and lake complex provided the perfect setting for two days of relaxation, fun, and team-building activities. We also took part in an organizational communication workshop in collaboration with Algonquin College designed to enhance our staff's communication skills, enabling them to better serve our members and improve interpersonal relations.

Moreover, we advanced several exciting and innovative projects.

The Boil-in-a-Bag Meals initiative, developed with Nibiischii Corporation, offers practical and sustainable food options for remote tourist locations. This project is part of a larger effort to offer customized meals made from locally sourced ingredients for remote accommodations, including outfitting camps and glamping sites.

Another significant project is our Innovative Technology Solutions for Hotels, which addresses common industry challenges such as staff shortages in essential services like check-in/check-out and meal service. This project introduces innovative technologies designed to bridge service gaps, improve operational efficiency, and enhance the quality of guest experiences.

With our continued focus on training, professional development, and innovative projects, we're well-equipped to seize new opportunities and ensure a vibrant and sustainable tourism industry for Eeyou Istchee.

**ΓΥΣ"ΔΙΠΡΟΪ" ΔΡΛ° ΔΝΑ·Δ**

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# ABOUT COTA



**The negotiations that led to the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) provided the platform for ensuring Cree control over tourism in Eeyou Istchee.**



## OUR STORY

The negotiations leading to the JBNQA provided the platform for gaining control over tourism development. With the signing of the Final Agreement in 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.

The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association was incorporated on December 7, 2000 as a non-profit corporation under Part II of the Canadian Corporations Act. Since our incorporation we've been active in the development of the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee. By promoting tourism, we're helping to transform our region's vast potential for economic, employment, and other growth opportunities.

Today, COTA is a member-driven association that provides services and support to our businesses, organizations, and communities so that we, as Crees, can build a thriving and sustainable tourism industry on our own terms.

## OUR OPERATING PRINCIPALS

- ◆ Development of high-quality and authentic Cree tourism products and experiences;
- ◆ Respect for individual initiatives and their role in economic development;
- ◆ Respect for values, including spirituality, self-reliance, and sharing;
- ◆ Honesty in communications and in operations;
- ◆ Protection and preservation of the Cree way of life;
- ◆ Recognition of a stewardship role regarding the environment;
- ◆ Encouragement of business opportunities through partnerships;
- ◆ Development and implementation of operational norms and quality standards; and
- ◆ Commitment to work together and communicate cultural pride.



# OUR MISSION

Our mission is to develop and implement a collective vision for a world-class sustainable tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee that is in harmony with Cree culture and values and that involves a partnership with Cree communities, institutions, and businesses.

## OUR 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.

### 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.

### Communications

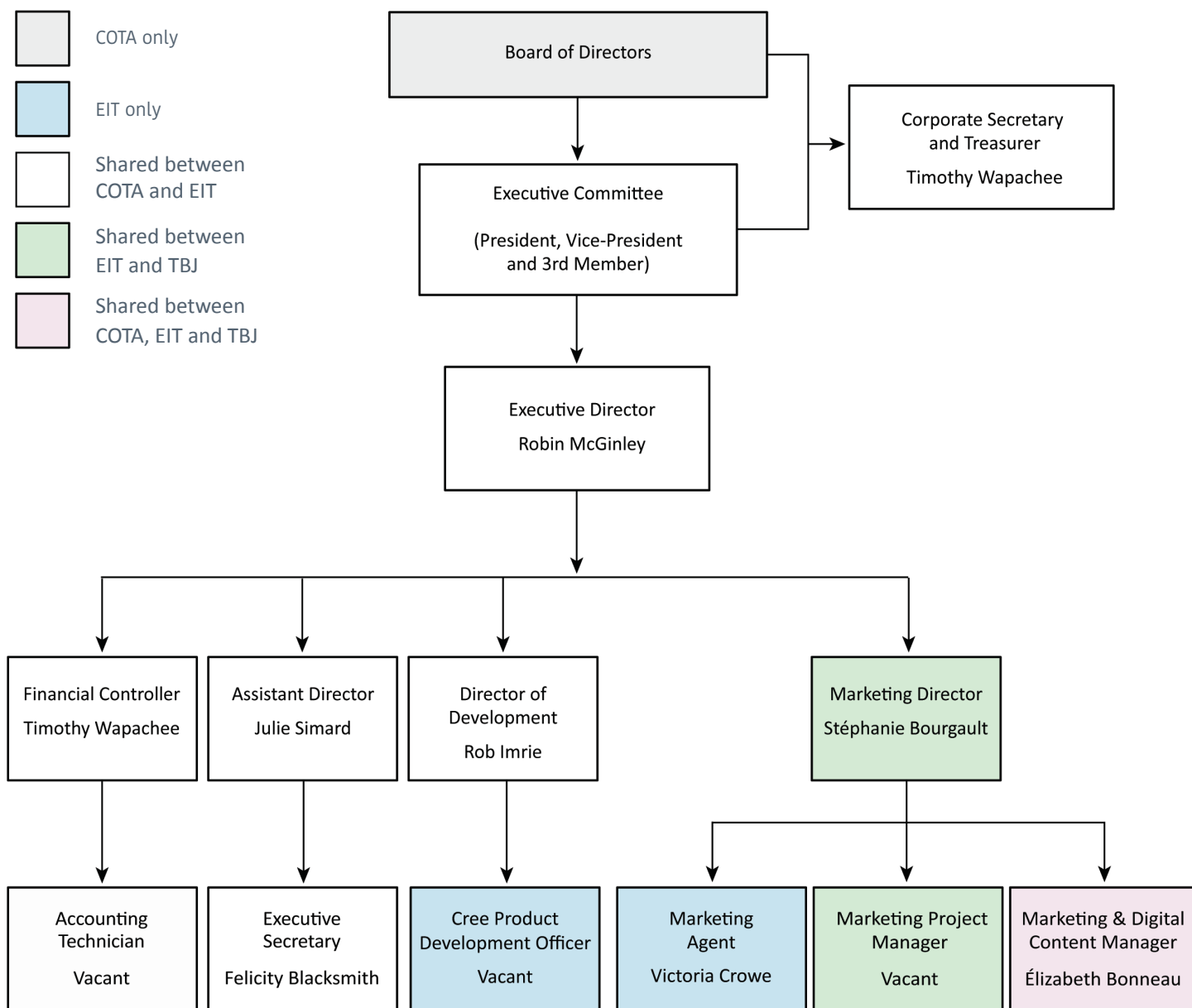
- ◆ Ensure effective communications with Cree stake-holders including Tallymen, governments, communities, and industry.
- ◆ Promote COTA's vision, objectives, activities, and accomplishments.
- ◆ Promote a positive image of the membership.
- ◆ Develop alliances and coordinate with other tourism and indigenous 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 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.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

The chart below illustrates COTA and EIT's organizational structure to March 31, 2024



## COTA Board of Directors

Anderson P. Jolly (Nemaska), Edward Bearskin (Chisasibi), Irene Otter (Waswanipi), Stanley Shashaweskum (Wemindji), Ron Simard (Oujé-Bougoumou), Gilbert Baribeau (Mistissini), Stacy Bear (Waskaganish), Elvis Weapenicappo (Eastmain), Isaac Masty (Whapmagoostui), Johnny Saganash and Louisa B. Saganash (Elders Committee), Alexander Moses (Cree Nation Government)

## COTA Executive Committee

Anderson P. Jolly – President  
Edward Bearskin – Vice-President  
Irene Otter – Executive Member

## EIT Board of Directors

Edward Bearskin – President  
Irene Otter – Vice-President  
Stanley Shashaweskum - Executive Member





# OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

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**COTA is dedicated to developing authentic Cree tourism products and experiences while supporting our members in creating sustainable tourism solutions.**



## 1. PROJECTS AND EVENTS

### 1.1 Annual General Meeting and Tourism Conference

COTA held our 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Tourism Conference in Whapmagoostui from November 7 to 9, 2023. We are always pleased to have this opportunity to meet and engage with our members and other tourism representatives.

#### 1.1.2 Annual General Meeting

At the AGM on November 7, the audited financial reports and minutes from the previous AGM were presented for review and approval. Following this, the meeting featured the following presentations:

- ◆ Sébastien Benedict from Alliance de l'Industrie Touristique du Québec.
- ◆ Allen Matoush and Chris Beck from the Cree Nation Government (CNG) discussed the importance of protected areas and marine protected areas, respectively.
- ◆ Robin McGinley, Executive Director of COTA, provided information on EPRTNT funding

We would like to thank Deputy Chief Rita Masty for delivering the opening remarks.



#### 1.1.3 Tourism Conference

The 2023 Tourism Conference, themed “Sustainability: The Heart of Cree Tourism,” took place over two days and featured presentations and workshops to inform and engage participants. Attendees were encouraged to visit our information booths, and local artists were invited to sell their arts and crafts.



Presentations and workshops delivered on day one of the conference focused on providing relevant and up-to-date information on the following topics:

- ◆ Developing ecotourism in protected areas
- ◆ Funding opportunities for tourism development
- ◆ Indigenous Tourism Best Practices
- ◆ Comprehensive Approach Towards Destination Excellence in Cree Communities of Eeyou Istchee

The first day concluded with a traditional feast graciously prepared by the cultural department of Whapmagoostui First Nation.

On day two, participants engaged in small group discussions facilitated by Marie-Ève Dufour from the *Ministère du Tourisme du Québec*. These discussions focused on identifying needs and developing solutions to ensure that local Cree tourism businesses are leaders in sustainable tourism.



The tourism conference provided an excellent opportunity for COTA to introduce boil-in-a-bag meals developed in collaboration with Nibiischii Corporation. These meals are designed for use in remote locations, such as protected areas, outfitting camps, and places with limited access to cooking facilities. Boil-in-a-bag meals offer convenience and quality and will contain local ingredients whenever possible.





## 1.2

## Promotion of Ecotourism in Protected Areas

Sustainable tourism can have a profound impact by protecting specific areas from industrial development and reserving them for ecotourism activities.

By promoting ecotourism in the protected areas of Eeyou Istchee, we are establishing a sustainable green economy and preserving biodiversity.

The Cree Nation Government has approved a project to develop ecotourism in Eeyou Istchee's protected areas. This initiative will involve:

- ◆ Conducting field surveys for species of conservation concern and cultural keystone species
- ◆ Providing training for field staff
- ◆ Performing inventory and procuring field technologies
- ◆ Organizing meetings to share results and integrate findings with management planning

Between 2020 and 2023, consultations with tourism officers and tallymen from each Cree community revealed interest in developing ecotourism activities. However, it also became clear that more information was needed to guide the process.

In 2023, COTA developed a guide titled *Guide to Cree-Led Ecotourism Development in Protected Areas*. This guide, aimed at Cree individuals interested in developing ecotourism activities, was presented at the Annual General Meeting in Whapmagoostui.

The ultimate goal of this project is to establish and co-manage a network of protected areas based on the needs and values of the Cree of Eeyou Istchee. This commitment reflects our shared dedication to preserving our natural and cultural heritage.

Environment and Climate Change Canada provided funding for this important project.



Extensive consultations ensured that the *Guide to Cree-Led Ecotourism Development in Protected Areas* incorporated input from Cree communities. This inclusive approach will empower these communities in conservation planning and management, benefiting the protected areas' natural and cultural heritage.



Photo: Annie-Claude Roberge

### 1.3 Sustainable NTFP Project to Increase the Quality of the Visitor's Experience

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are naturally occurring products other than timber that can be harvested from forests without cutting down trees.

Our region's abundant pine and spruce forests, peat bogs, rivers, and lakes offer rich biodiversity and significant potential for developing NTFPs.

FaunENord has been contracted to coordinate a project to inventory NTFPs found in and around participating communities. This inventory will help us explore ways to integrate NTFPs into our region's tourism offerings and enhance visitor experiences.

For example, we plan to include them in the boil-in-a-bag project, encourage local restaurants to include meals made from sustainably harvested NTFPs, such as mushrooms, berries, and tree bark, on their menus.

Additionally, we will train Cree tourism officers and local guides on NTFPs to help them create immersive visitor experiences that include forest exploration and education about NTFPs in the boreal forest.

The project encountered a significant setback due to the forest fires that impacted the region in the summer of 2023. Despite careful planning during the winter and spring, the fieldwork was postponed for safety reasons.

We remain committed to the project and have restructured our plans to ensure its completion in the summer of 2024, weather permitting.

This project is funded by the Government of Canada—ISC funding.



Photo: Annie-Claude Roberge

Once completed, the field inventories will provide valuable insights into the availability of resources in each community. This information will better enable local tourism operators and entrepreneurs to better assess how to incorporate NTFPs into their business models and tourism activities.



## 1.4

### Strategic Support for the Development of Culinary Solutions

This pilot project is designed to provide customized pre-made meal solutions, including boil-in-a-bag meals, for tourism establishments in remote regions. The first phase, currently underway, focuses on developing meals that reflect Cree culinary traditions and cater to visitor preferences, resulting in authentic and appealing recipes.

Various chefs will craft these exclusive recipes, which will be offered at remote locations, such as outfitting camps with an American Plan and the Nibiischii Wildlife Reserve.

The initiative addresses practical challenges such as:

- ◆ The remoteness of accommodation facilities makes maintaining a regular supply of fresh products difficult.
- ◆ The need for meals that are simple to prepare and assemble.
- ◆ Varying equipment at each site requires meals that can be prepared with easy-to-install equipment.
- ◆ Utilization of local resources and NTFPs such as herbs, berries, and mushrooms.

The pilot project will conclude with the creation of a business plan for preparing, distributing, and selling the pre-made and boil-in-a-bag meals.



There is both a growing demand to provide high-quality, easy-to-prepare meals using local ingredients. Travellers increasingly seek to experience destinations through their culinary traditions. According to an American Express poll, 81% of respondents stated that trying local cuisines is an aspect of their trip they are most excited about. This trend presents a significant opportunity for our project.

## 1.5

### Geopark

A feasibility study is underway to evaluate the potential for establishing a UNESCO Global Geopark in Eeyou Istchee Baie-James.

UNESCO Global Geoparks are designated areas that preserve and manage sites and landscapes of international geological significance, with a focus on protection, education, and sustainable development. They also involve active participation from local communities. Being part of the UNESCO Global Network will enhance the region's international visibility.

UNESCO's criteria require a recreational tourism component as part of the project, which will benefit the entire Eeyou Istchee Baie-James tourism region. COTA, EIT and TBJ will collaborate with regional stakeholders to develop and structure the tourism offer around this project.

One potential site in Eeyou Istchee under consideration is *Waapushukamikw* (White Quartzite Hill), a cave with smooth marble walls. Indigenous peoples have visited this site since the glaciers retreated 7,000 years ago to extract finely-grained quartzite for making cutting tools.

Funding for this project is provided by Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation.

## 1.6

### Innovative Technology Solutions for Hotels

The regional Development Corporations have identified a common issue: lodging establishments lack essential services such as on-site greeting, check-in, check-out, and meal service, primarily due to a shortage of qualified staff. Our project aims to bridge these gaps by deploying technology solutions that enhance both service quality and efficiency.

This project will introduce innovative technologies across Eeyou Istchee's hotel industry, focusing on improving services and guest experiences. The new technology will streamline and standardize amenities such as booking, check-in, keyless entry, and will include the installation of high-quality vending machines.

Key goals of the project include:

- ◆ Improve customer service and guest convenience
- ◆ Generate additional sales for local suppliers
- ◆ Facilitate daily operations and easing staff workload

- ◆ Mitigate employee turnover during workforce shortages
- ◆ Enhance sustainability ratings
- ◆ Help hotel operators meet industry standards and improve market readiness
- ◆ Increase the competitiveness of our hotels.

Phase 1, completed last year, involved researching and acquiring suitable technology and equipment.

Phase 2, currently underway, focuses on installing the new technologies and providing training and support for hotel staff and management.

We extend our thanks to Canada Economic Development for Québec Regions for funding this initiative.



The project's innovative, eco-friendly, and user-friendly solutions will help ensure our destination is a more welcoming and reliable option for travellers.





Photo: Annie-Claude Roberge

## 1.7

### Sharing the Talent from Eeyou Istchee: Video Capsules Cree Language & Culture

In the summer of 2021, a special project was launched in collaboration with the Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association (CNACA) to produce a series of video capsules highlighting Cree language and culture. Several artists and knowledge-keepers from across Eeyou Istchee were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Cree and the videos will be subtitled in French and English.

Among the interviewees are David and Anna Bosum, Stanley and Conrad Mianscum, Ella Neeposh, Dwayne Cox, Johnny and Louisa Saganash, and Charlie Ottereyes. They generously participated in this project to share our culture, preserve a vibrant record of our elders' teachings, and help Cree youth reconnect with their roots and traditions.

The video capsules promote the work of the participating Cree artists and are expected to be released in the fall of 2024. Once finished, the videos will be available online.

We extend our thanks to the Cree Nation Government for funding this important endeavour.

This project celebrates the unique talents of Cree artists and performers and is a testament to our rich cultural heritage. Showcasing these artists in various venues and locations across our beautiful region will ignite a sense of pride and connection.



## 1.8

### Coast Guard Marine Safety

The goal of this project was to assess coastal waterways, determine community needs for safe travel, provide secure routes, recommend buoys for navigation, and train marine captains.

We concentrated on identifying preferred navigational channels for accessing James Bay from the communities of Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, and Chisasibi. This involved collaborating with individuals with local knowledge to pinpoint traditional and historic routes to the bay and surveying these routes.

This project enhanced the safety of boating in the region and was made possible by funding from the Canadian Coast Guard.



## 1.9 Communications for COTA

COTA has engaged Freelance Communications to help us create and deliver timely and relevant communications to COTA members and key audiences, as well as to enhance the internal capacity of our team. To support this approach, we are taking the following steps:

- ◆ Developing a Communications Guidebook and Project-Specific Plans for team collaboration and best practices.
- ◆ Providing training and mentorship in email marketing, PR distribution, social media scheduling, and more.
- ◆ Hosting two brainstorming sessions for idea-sharing and priority setting.

Our goal is to empower the COTA team, build long-term capacity, and support the organization in achieving our current communications objectives by providing training and teambuilding alongside traditional communications services.

## 1.10 Digital Filing

This project, made possible with funding from Apatisiwin Skills Development, will streamline COTA's internal communications and electronic filing operations. Key goals include:

- ◆ Developing a filing system that meets information-storage needs and aligns with corporate and accounting requirements.
- ◆ Creating a compliant and streamlined filing system that adheres to regulatory standards.
- ◆ Establishing an archival system for proper file naming and storage.
- ◆ Supporting the transfer of existing files to the new system.
- ◆ Developing a plan to transition from physical to digital files.
- ◆ Training the COTA team to facilitate technology transfer to other tourism organizations.

Our partnership with Freelance Communications has equipped us to produce newsletters, update our website quickly, and efficiently disseminate relevant information about the industry and COTA happenings to members.

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# NEWS FROM YOUR PARTNER IN TOURISM

## 2. TRAINING INITIATIVES

### 2.1

#### Camp Management Training at Creetopia

The Camp Management Training program was designed to provide camp staff training on managing the Creetopia base camp—from check-in to check-out—while ensuring exceptional customer satisfaction. An experienced Huttopia employee conducted on-site training for the staff of Wiinipaakw Tours and the Creetopia Basecamp.

The training was cut short due to the forest fires that impacted the area in the summer of 2023. The Creetopia site was to be operated by WTSC. Both COTA and WTSC are deeply saddened by this loss.

This training was made possible thanks to Apatisiwin Skills Development.

### 2.2

#### On-Water Training

The On-Water Training program was developed to enhance marine captains' navigation skills, reinforce safety protocols, and improve professional skills for client engagement. The training covered the following topics:

- ◆ Review of skills from the Small Vessel Operations Proficiency training program;
- ◆ Advanced positioning techniques;
- ◆ Utilization of chart plotters, radar, depth sounders, and other electronic instruments;
- ◆ Hazard-avoidance using electronic devices;
- ◆ Collision-avoidance techniques using radar and global positioning systems;
- ◆ Working with tides, including knowledge of clearances, depth, and currents and piloting with winds and currents.

The training was conducted in Waskaganish and Wemindji. Twelve marine captains participated in the program, supervised by the Coast Guard Auxiliary. We are pleased to announce Willie Weistche's well-deserved promotion from junior to senior Captain. He was a dedicated participant in this training program, and we congratulate him on this significant achievement.



During the hands-on practical on-water training, participants applied their knowledge and reviewed safety protocols using their self-made manuals. This immersive experience enhanced their handling skills and prepared them to navigate boats in challenging real-life situations.

### 2.3

#### Advanced Wilderness First Aid Training

The Advanced Wilderness First Aid training is a 40-hour course, considered to be the minimum standard for professionals in remote settings. This 4-day program covers wilderness first aid fundamentals, including prevention, practical skills, decision-making, and managing environmental conditions, with advanced topics such as group leadership, accident scene management, rescuer responsibility, injury prevention, and trauma care.

The training is a unique and valuable complement to the Bush Kit training developed by Sirius Med for the Cree Board of Health and Social Services and the Cree Trappers Association. Graduates receive certification upon course completion. This year's training sessions were held in Waskaganish and Wemindji.

We extend our appreciation to Apatisiwin Skills Development for funding both the Advanced Wilderness First Aid and On-Water training initiatives.

## 2.4

### Mastering Organizational Communication

COTA's one-day workshop focused on enhancing team members' communication skills, which is crucial for successful collaboration and project development. This workshop was designed to improve internal and external communication strategies, facilitating better engagement within the team.

Specifically the workshop provided important insight on:

- ◆ Understanding personal communication styles and their impact on interactions and team dynamics.
- ◆ Building trust and transparency through strategies for fostering open and honest professional relationships.
- ◆ Handling workplace bias by recognizing and addressing biases to promote an inclusive work environment.
- ◆ Giving and receiving feedback with guidance on how to deliver and accept feedback constructively.
- ◆ Engaging in weekly scrum meetings and emphasizing the importance of regular team meetings for ongoing collaboration and progress tracking.
- ◆ Introduction to Chat GPT technology and how it can be used to boost productivity and efficiency.

The workshop, organized in partnership with Algonquin College and funded by Apatisiwin Skills Development, provided valuable insights and practical tools for refining communication skills.

Participants gained a deeper understanding of how their personalities influence their communication styles. By focusing on trust-building and transparency, the workshop enhanced the ability of COTA team members to interact effectively and professionally.

## 2.5

### Hiring a Coordinator for Training on Food Services for Creetopia Basecamp

In May 2023, COTA submitted a funding request to Apatisiwin Skills Development to hire a Food Services Training Coordinator for the opening of the first Creetopia site. The goal was to develop training programs for staff and guides to ensure an exceptional visitor experience.

Sadly, Creetopia was destroyed by the forest fires that ravaged the region in the summer of 2023. The launch of this inaugural site was eagerly anticipated as a significant milestone, promising to create new job opportunities and boost the local economy. As we move forward, we will assess the future of this innovative ready-to-camp concept and decide on the next steps.

## 3. NEWS FROM THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

### 3.1

#### Information Sessions

From January to March, COTA's development team organized a series of virtual information sessions in collaboration with various stakeholders. These sessions provided crucial insights into funding opportunities and fostered connections with funders and community members. The sessions focused on funding from:

- ◆ Apatisiwin Skills Development  
2022–2025 Entente de partenariat régional et de transformation numérique en tourisme (Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement)
- ◆ Cree Nation Government
- ◆ Consumer Protection
- ◆ Heritage Canada
- ◆ Canada Economic Development

The initiative is supported through partnerships with Apatisiwin Skills Development, Indigenous Tourism Quebec, Heritage Canada, Economic Development Canada, and the Cree Nation Government, reflecting a collaborative effort to advance tourism development.



## 3.2

### Sustainable Development Training

COTA's development team had the opportunity to participate in an in-depth, hands-on training program focused on sustainable development in regional tourism.

The training covered best practices in responsible visitor behavior, eco-friendly accommodations, and community engagement. It also featured workshops on implementing organizational changes to promote sustainability, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting local economies. The program provided strategies for measuring and mitigating the carbon footprint of tourism activities, enabling us to make informed decisions that enhance the organization's success while preserving the natural environment and benefiting local communities.

A key component is the *Shipeku* program, an initiative by Indigenous Tourism Québec (TAQ) to help Indigenous tourism businesses transition to sustainability. Developed with input from ten experts, *Shipeku* combines scientific

methods with traditional Indigenous knowledge to create a pioneering approach for sustainable practices in Indigenous tourism.

Nibiischii Corporation, which manages tourism in the Albnel-Mistassini-Waconichi Wildlife Sanctuary, was selected as a pilot project for *Shipeku*. TAQ representatives, consultants, and COTA's team visited Nibiischii to conduct an audit, identify improvement areas, and measure the carbon footprint of the visitor experience.

## 3.1

### Implementation of Protocols in Response to "Loi 25"

In response to Quebec's introduction of Loi 25, which mandates stringent measures for protecting confidential personal information, COTA's development team has undergone training to comply with the new regulations. This law requires organizations to implement robust protocols to safeguard personal data and ensure privacy.

After launching an on-water/on-ice outdoor cinema, astronomical and Northern Lights observatory, and unique cultural tourism packages in the summer of 2023, the Nibiischii Corporation was recognized with a finalist spot in the "New Operator or Business that Launched a New Experience" category at the Indigenous Tourism Awards. The Nibiischii Corporation, which manages and oversees tourism activities on the Albnel-Mistassini-Waconichi Wildlife Sanctuary, opened their *Mwakw* floating cabins in 2022. Since then, they have added a multitude of complementary attractions that bring together Cree culture, nature, and adventure.

