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Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) Becomes First Indigenous Destination Management Organization in North America to Earn Sustainable Tourism Certification from GreenStep

Oujé-Bougoumou, Quebec – The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) has achieved a significant milestone, receiving a Silver Sustainable Tourism Certification from GreenStep Sustainable Tourism, North America's largest tourism and hospitality certification program. COTA, which represents the vast Cree territory of Eeyou Istchee in Northern Quebec, is the first Indigenous Destination Management Organization (DMO) in North America to earn such recognition.

Sustainability has been at the forefront of COTA's work for decades. Twenty-five years ago, community members came together to shape the association's mission, which begins with a call to "develop and implement a collective vision for a world-class, sustainable tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee." This vision continues to guide COTA's efforts across Eeyou Istchee, a destination renowned for its stunning natural beauty, world-class fishing, and authentic cultural experiences.

"This Sustainable Tourism Certification reaffirms our commitment to safeguard Cree land, communities, and culture for future generations," says Anderson Jolly, President of COTA.

"GreenStep's certification process sparked important conversations about how we engage people, serve our communities, and grow our tourism industry in a responsible, values-centred way. We are incredibly proud of this achievement and more motivated than ever to continue learning and advancing our sustainability journey."

To receive a Silver Certification, COTA had to meet specific standards after a one-on-one assessment was completed by a GreenStep Assessor. The process compared COTA's practices against a set of criteria in four different categories that are recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and aligned with the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

"We are so excited to celebrate the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association as the first Indigenous destination management organization in Canada to achieve GreenStep's Silver Certification for sustainable tourism," states Angela Nagy, President and CEO of GreenStep. "This fully reflects COTA's commitment to stewardship, cultural integrity, and community leadership. This milestone demonstrates how Indigenous-led tourism, and authentic, values-based sustainability can be embedded at the heart of a DMO's vision and operations."

In order to uphold the integrity and credibility of the program, COTA will be required to undergo a reassessment every three years. Guided by its founding mission and empowered by the GreenStep certification process, the association looks forward to building on this success and strengthening

sustainability in a way that, as its mission states, “is in harmony with Cree culture and values and that involves a partnership with Cree communities, institutions, and businesses.”

Industry Partners Applaud COTA’s Sustainable Tourism Leadership

Leading voices in Indigenous tourism, including the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) and Indigenous Tourism Quebec (ITQ), have commended COTA's achievement:

"The Indigenous Tourism Quebec team salute this remarkable achievement by the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA). Achieving GreenStep’s Silver Certification is a testament to Indigenous leadership in sustainability. COTA has always been proactive and has long oriented its actions in line with the principles of sustainable tourism. This is why it is now a true leader in this field. We are proud and inspired by how far we have come.”

Patricia Auclair, Acting Executive Director of Indigenous Tourism Quebec

"Congratulations to the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) for becoming the first Indigenous Destination Management Organization in North America to receive GreenStep's Silver Certification. This notable achievement is a powerful example of leadership in our sector. Through collaboration, GreenStep is helping Indigenous tourism businesses access the tools and support they need to grow responsibly—respecting sustainability in all its forms: social, cultural, environmental, and economic."

Keith Henry, President and CEO of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada

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About the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association

The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) was established under Chapters 28.4 & 6 of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), signed in 1975, and incorporated as a non-profit corporation on December 7, 2000. COTA’s 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. To learn more, visit www.creetourism.ca.



About GreenStep Sustainable Tourism

Founded in 2008, GreenStep is dedicated to empowering DMOs, industry associations, hospitality providers, and tourism operators with the tools and frameworks to meet the growing demand for sustainable tourism. Sustainable Tourism Certified businesses have received a one-on-one assessment of their sustainability performance against a set of 87 criteria, and a customized action plan on how to make their operations more sustainable. Sustainable Tourism is delivered by GreenStep Solutions. To learn more, visit www.greenstep.ca.