

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS 2001-2

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Student Field Camp

**September 21-23, 2000
Heart Lake, Alberta**

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Student Field Camp – Heart Lake, Alberta,
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1. Field Trip Summary

The SFM Network held a student field camp September 21-23 in Heart Lake, Alberta. The field camp explored the interface between the forest industry and aboriginal issues. The 3 day camp was hosted by the Heart Lake First Nation (HLFN), with considerable support from Alberta Pacific Forest Industries Ltd. (ALPAC).

The trip began with a trip to the ALPAC mill, with presentations by Brydon Ward and Mike Walton of ALPAC that provided an introduction for the field camp, and explained their operations and activities with Aboriginal communities within their FMA. At ALPAC's aboriginal cultural camp, Walter Quinn, an ALPAC employee of Metis ancestry discussed the trapping lifestyle, ALPAC's trapper management program, and the close connection between spiritual beliefs and aboriginal uses and values in the forest. For all present, the beautiful forest setting, and Walter's fascinating stories and generosity of spirit will be an experience that will not soon be forgotten.

A reception and community feast followed at Heart Lake School on Thursday evening. The meal began with a prayer given in Cree by Phil Cardinal, an elder from nearby Beaver Lake First Nation. Chief Morris Monias of Heart Lake and approximately 25 community members welcomed all field camp participants. Following the meal, there was a signing ceremony where Heart Lake First Nations officially became a partner of the SFM Network, with Mike Walton of ALPAC presenting a cheque sponsoring their partner fee.

Friday morning, a panel discussion explored aboriginal and treaty rights, and the regulatory framework surrounding the relationship between forest companies and First Nations/aboriginal communities. The panel discussion was led by Marc Stevenson, with important contributions from Tony Mercredi, Brydon Ward, Mike Walton, Walter Quinn, and Phil Cardinal. In the afternoon, the group split up, with some students going on a field excursion to examine forest activities and aboriginal uses of the forest, and some students explored aboriginal culture first-hand, by going to a Sweat Lodge with Phil Cardinal.

Saturday's discussions focussed on two main areas: communication protocols, and ways to accommodate Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in sustainable forest management. At this point of the field camp we were joined by Jim Webb, a representative of the Little Red River Cree Nation. The discussion on communication protocols appeared to be very popular with students, judging by the many interesting questions and experiences that were shared. The rest of Saturday morning was spent in a panel discussion exploring varying ways to build consensus in forest management involving First Nations/aboriginal people. Following this interesting discussion, the field camp participants departed the Heart Lake community, and after a brief stop at Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park, headed back to Edmonton.

During the drive home, students formed breakout groups to complete an optional exercise designed to synthesize the material covered in the field camp. Three scenarios were

developed that reflected research, forest management, and consultation issues involving a First Nation/Aboriginal Community. The exercises generated considerable discussion, and the ensuing answers, a further demonstration of the usefulness of the camp for participating students.



2. Student Feedback and the Benefits to the Sustainable Forest Management Network

The student field camp was beneficial to all SFM Network staff and students who participated. The students completed an evaluation form, which contained many constructive comments on how the field camp could have explored additional topics, or benefited from slight changes in approach. The vast majority of the comments were extremely positive and underlined the value of this type of SFM initiative to students. A common theme in the evaluations was gratitude for the generosity of the HLFN community. The participation of Phil Cardinal was also recognized as being extremely valuable, especially in inviting students to participate in a sweat and in a very personal sharing of spiritual and cultural beliefs.

There was a general appreciation among students of the value of the field camp in providing an overview of First Nations/aboriginal culture with considerable input from First Nations people themselves. Further, many students recognized the value of the field camp to them in their future professions.

For example,

The best part of the camp was the opportunity to directly interact with First Nations people. This interaction complements the series of talks we were exposed to. I thought the interaction was excellent because it gave us a chance to see the First Nations people as people and explore their culture.

And,

While the field camp focused on forestry related problems, the issues discussed can be applied when we as professionals deal with any First Nations community. For example, I may be involved in the design of a wastewater treatment plant for a forestry or industrial mill near First Nations land. This workshop helped me see the broader picture and will assist me in dealing with such situations in the future

Finally,

Overall, the workshop was very useful and interesting. Having the opportunity to spend time at Heart Lake allowed me to see first-hand how aboriginal communities live, which provided me with a new respect and appreciation for native peoples in Canada

Further evidence of the value of the field camp could be seen in the comments of one student returning to Edmonton. The student expressed sincere thanks for the initiative, explaining that, had it been offered a year earlier, it would have saved her considerable embarrassment in her awkward dealings with a northern Alberta First Nation.

Finally, an important benefit of the field camp was the opportunity for HLFN to become a partner of the SFM Network. The partnership promises to increase the network's presence among First Nations, and will lead to exciting opportunities for collaboration in research designed to ensure that sustainable forest management initiatives are in part geared toward sustaining First Nation communities in Canada.



3. Benefits to HLFN

The field camp and HLFN's membership in the SFM Network will benefit the community in many areas. The SFM Network's approach to research largely focuses on developing collaboration and partnerships between the forest industry, governments, communities, and researchers. The partnerships that have been developed through the field camp are expected to yield benefits to HLFN through increased collaboration and consultation with ALPAC on important forest management issues. The SFM Network believes that ultimately these ties will lead to improved accommodation of the rights and values of the HLFN in forest management.

Another benefit to HLFN is the impact that the field camp had on all participants. The students were unanimous in their praise for the generosity of HLFN. It is expected that the display of friendship by HLFN will not be forgotten as these students move on to high level forest management positions with a better knowledge of First Nations/aboriginal culture, rights, and values.

As a member of the SFM Network, HLFN will also benefit from future research addressing forest management issues. The following section contains a breakdown of the research issues that have been identified so far.

Sustainable Forest Management Research

The Heart Lake First Nation (HLFN) is a partner of the Sustainable Forest Management Network (SFMN), an independent research Network of government, industry and First Nations partners committed to undertaking research to inform sustainable forest management practices. In concert with the SFMN, the HLFN has identified a number key research projects that it believes is fundamental to its vision for sharing its traditional lands with other people, while empowering its people to play a more active in decisions taken in respect to the exercise of their rights on their lands.

Monitoring Current Forest Cutting Practices for Better Management

The first of these projects involves using HLFN people to monitor and measure changes in critical habitat and species abundance and distributions resulting from current and future (see below) forestry industry cutting practices on their traditional lands. Current cutting practices range from clear-cutting to harvesting cut blocks with variable retention scenarios based on scientific knowledge. However, the impacts that these and future cutting practices have/will have on biodiversity, ecosystem integrity, and the attainment of non-commercial timber values of First Nations peoples are poorly understood. Indicators will be developed with knowledgeable First Nation elders and trappers to measure and monitor changes, while younger band members will be employed as monitors and data collectors/analyzers. These younger people will work with the forest companies to inform cutting plans that attempt to integrate the values of First Nations peoples and forest companies into an adaptable management framework.

Incorporating Elders Knowledge into the Design of Forest Cutting Plans

A closely related research project will develop and test the efficacy of a process that brings together First Nation elders and forest managers (RFPs) on the land and in the work place to design forest cutting plans that meet the needs of both First Nations and the forest companies. What species and habitat should be left in situ and undisturbed? What tree and understory species should be retained, at what times to promote sustainable use? These are the types of questions that this research will attempt to answer.

Buffer Zone Modeling and Cree Knowledge

Responsible forest companies often leave buffer zones around critical habitat such as riparian and lakeshore habitat. However, the extent or size of these buffer zones are viewed by many First Nations peoples as inadequate and potentially damaging. Many boreal forest dependent Cree people have extensive knowledge about the habitat requirements of critical species. Alternate buffer zone models based on this knowledge will be developed with HLFN members. These models will then be incorporated into cutting plans and tested using the same monitoring process identified above, with the goal of modifying the size of buffer zones around critical habitat.

Cooperative Planning and Cumulative Impacts Management

Forest companies are not the only industrial activities having an impact on HLFN traditional lands and the exercise of Aboriginal and Treaty rights on these lands. Oil and gas companies and other industrial activities have also had a major footprint. There is clearly a need to develop a coordinated approach to managing the impacts of these activities. The Caribou Mts.-Lower Peace Planning Board, on which the Little Red River Cree Nation sits, will provide a model for the development of a similar framework with the HLFN. Research will be aimed developing a landscape assessment/management/monitoring processes, goal/vision statement, etc. for the Board, incorporating the different values and needs of those represented on the Board. Periodically, decisions and activities taken by the Board will be evaluated to improve cumulative impacts monitoring and management.

Links to Other SFMN Initiatives

The SFMN is undertaking or planning to undertake other initiatives that link to the research proposed above. The Western Aquatic Research Program (WARP) is focused on riparian zone management, water quality and forestry, and would provide an ideal link with the proposed buffer zone model research project.

In terms of developing HLFN capacity to participate in the management and monitoring of forestry and other industrial activities on their traditional lands, the SFMN is currently contemplating the development of a two-year Aboriginal Forest Managers program for Aboriginal people living in the boreal forest. This program would be accredited and delivered to First Nations communities by satellite.