

Making a Place for Indigenous Fishing Livelihoods

Navigating Cross-Scale Institutions in Great Slave Lake Commercial Fisheries Management

Objectives:

ORAL HISTORY – How did Dene fish in the past?
Document Dene oral histories of the fish and the fishery.
Outcome: Understanding Indigenous fishing livelihoods in terms of the evolution of social norms and fishing management practices.

DOCUMENT REVIEW – of government archival documents related to commercial fishing.
Outcome: Understanding the development of Aboriginal community involvement in fisheries management.

FISHING LIVELIHOODS – Exploring community efforts to leverage community knowledge and rights in a multi-level and multi-scale fishery to secure fishing livelihoods for the future.
Outcome: Exploring and revealing the cross-scale linkages active within the fishery.

Theoretical Outcomes: Contributing to the literatures on cross-scale approaches to fisheries co-management, and expansion of the concept of Indigenous governance to include livelihood practices and social-ecological understandings.

Methods: Data collection through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and archival document analysis.

Methodology: A collaborative and community-based approach with emphasis on maximizing community benefits and participation.

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Tracking Change: The Role of Local and Traditional Knowledge in Watershed Governance

Dept. of Resource Economics & Environmental Sociology
Faculty of Agriculture, Life & Environmental Sciences,
University of Alberta

Community Partners

**K'at'odeeche First Nation
Deninu Kue First Nation
Akwai'tcho Territory Government**

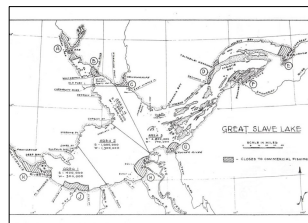
CONTEXT: The Great Slave Lake is in the Northwest Territories and has hosted a commercial fishery since 1945. There are seven Dene communities around the lake who have relied on fish from the lake and its inflowing rivers (whitefish, inconnu, lake trout and others) for thousands of years. My thesis project considers the role of these Aboriginal communities in the evolving governance structures of the Great Slave Lake commercial fishery.



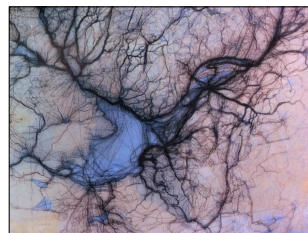
Denendeh, A Dene Celebration.
Yellowknife: Dene Nation (1984).



J. Siros, The Birds of Great Slave Lake,
NWT, Canada. Ecology North, Yellowknife,
NWT, 1994.



Northwest Territories Archives

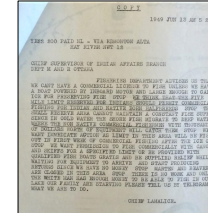


K. Wray photo of The Trails of Our Ancestors (poster),
Dene Nation, (n.d.).

The fishery exists within a human-environment system and has complex cross-scale interactions. Some features of the fishery demonstrating this include:

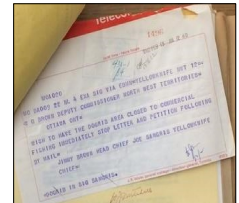
- An international commercial market for local lake trout and whitefish;
- Two sets of governments (Aboriginal governments and the Canadian State) each with multiple levels from community to federal);
- Significantly different cultural approaches to land use and environmental valuation;
- 7 Dene communities with both similar and different interests;
- Many other stakeholders with an interest in the management of the fishery.

This complexity can be a challenge for co-management.



RG85, Northern Affairs Program,
Series D-1-A, Vol. 1254, File 431-178,
Part 2, Great Slave Lake Commercial Fishing.

Soon after the commercial fisheries opened, in 1946, Dene communities began to notice changes in the size and the ease of catching fish in their inshore ("domestic") fishing areas. They communicated these concerns to government through letters and telegrams.



RG85, Northern Affairs Program, Series D-1-A,
Accession 1997-98/076, Box 74, File 430-1, Part 6,
Fishing – General File for N.W.T. & Yukon

Communications from community Chiefs, generally referred to as "complaints" within government papers, prompted a series of studies into the state of the Great Slave Lake fishery.

Following complaints from the Indians that the Commercial Fisheries were ruining the inshore fishing for them, it was agreed by the Fisheries Department, this Department and the Indian Affairs Branch that a further investigation of the inshore fisheries should be carried out this fall; the party to consist of two men from the Department of Fisheries, a representative of this Administration, a crew of two for the boat and two Indians.

RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Series D-1-A; Vol 155,
File 431/178 Part 3-A Inshore fishing, GSL (1951-1952)

Though Dept. of Fisheries biologists did not initially agree with local Dene conclusions of species decline, a decline in commercial species was declared in 1952. The archival documents suggest that Dene communities around the lake had noted the negative effects of the commercial fishery (at least) three years before the Fisheries biologists publicly announced it. This conclusion supports the emphasis put on Traditional Knowledge within this project as a legitimate and valuable source of knowledge about the Great Slave Lake system.

5. Discussions have been held with the Fisheries Department and that Department has expressed complete confidence in the Senior Scientist and his staff responsible for appraising the effect of the commercial fishery upon the fish population. A close watch is being kept upon the effect of commercial fishing and it is the view of the Department of Fisheries that their scientists will be in a position to warn of any imminent decline and be in a position to introduce remedial measures before irreparable damage can be done.

RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Series D-1-A; Vol 155, File 431/178 Part 3 - Inshore fishing, GSL (1951-1952)

Yesterday afternoon Dr. A. F. Fritchard, Director of Conservation and Development Services in the Department of Fisheries, telephoned me to say that reports from the Fisheries Research Board studies in Great Slave Lake were definitely indicating that the first signs had appeared of overfishing in Area 1. (Area 1 is the west end of Great Slave Lake and being directly off Hay River is the most popular fishing ground.) As a result of these reports the Department of Fisheries felt that they had no alternative but to reduce the quota of Area 1

RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Series D-1-A; Vol 155, File 431/178 Part 3 - Inshore fishing, GSL (1951-1952)



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