

PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

The Cree Regional Conservation Strategy

(hereafter the Strategy) is a Cree Nation initiative, developed by the Eeyou Protected Areas Committee.

This Committee is comprised of representatives from all 10 Cree communities, along with members from the Cree Trappers Association (CTA), Cree Nation Youth Council (CNYC) and the Cree Nation Government (Environment and Remedial Works Department and the Culture and Language Department.).

The Strategy provides a framework for the development of conservation and protected areas initiatives in the Cree territory (Eeyou Istchee). This document outlines our vision, goals, planning approach, proposed conservation designations and a schedule for implementation of the Strategy.

It will become the policy document guiding Cree work in the area of conservation and the establishment of protected areas.

This Strategy is designed to ensure respect for Cree rights¹ and protect Cree lands waters and resources for today and tomorrow.

Generally these are the rights of the Cree under the Constitution of Canada, Cree values and customs such as those codified in the Eeyou Hunting Law and the protection of Cree language and culture.

¹ Cree JBNQA beneficiary rights for hunting, fishing and trapping rights in protected areas supersedes any other legislation, such as the provincial or federal protected areas legislation.

More specifically, this includes Cree rights that stem from a number of Agreements and treaties including the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (1975), the Cree-Quebec New Relationship Agreement, more widely known as the Paix des Braves (2002), the Cree-Canada New Relationship Agreement (2008), Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement (2010) and the Governance Agreement (2013).

Furthermore, it is consistent with the rights related to conservation that are enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as Article 8j (and others) in the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity.

This Strategy is built using Cree traditional knowledge and western scientific knowledge to ensure that the best of both of these knowledge systems inform our planning and decision-making.

The Strategy is also designed to provide a guiding framework for the establishment and maintenance of effective partnerships between the Cree and other Governments (both public and Aboriginal), as well as with non-Cree residents of Eeyou Istchee, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers and other interested stakeholders to achieve the vision and goals set out in this Strategy.

ABOUT EYYOU ISTCHEE

“Eeyou Istchee” is the traditional territory and homeland of the Cree of northern Quebec. The term means “the land of the Eeyou/Eenou” (the “people”). The Cree, have used and occupied all of Eeyou Istchee for thousands of years, from time immemorial, and continue to do so today.

Eeyou Istchee covers some 400,000 square kilometers (see map Appendix A) with over 300 traplines that continue to be occupied and used for traditional practices.

It includes the lakes and rivers that drain into eastern James Bay and south-eastern Hudson Bay, as well as significant portions of both those marine areas. This enormous territory embraces a wide range of environments, from the marshes, estuaries and islands and waters of the coastal zone to the upland areas far inland, and from the dense, coniferous forests in the southern areas to the sparsely-treed tundra further north.

For the Cree, all of it - the lands and waters, the plants and animals – is sacred.

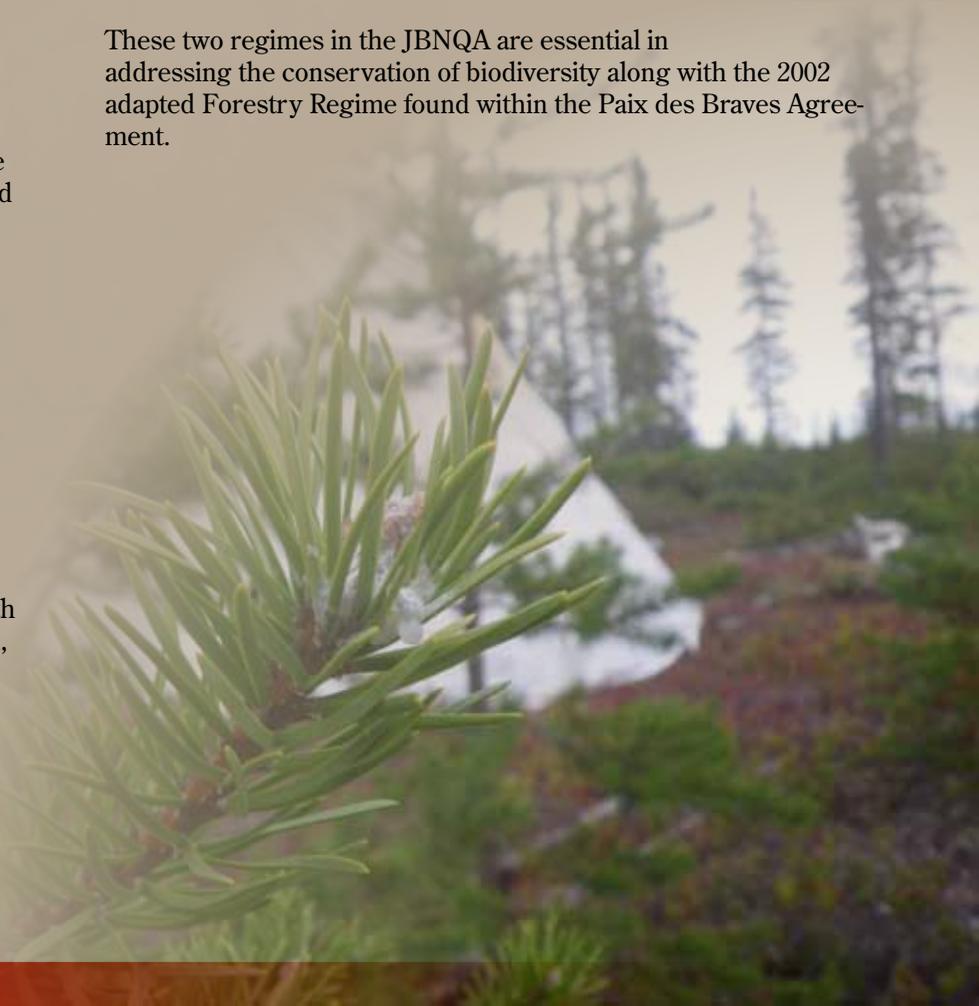
There are more than 18,000 Crees, with almost 16,000 residing in ten Cree communities. The five communities located along the east coast of James Bay are Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, Chisasibi and Whapmagoostui. The five inland communities are Waswanipi, Washaw-Sibi, Nemaska, Oujé-Bougoumou and Mistisini. The southern part of the Eeyou Istchee territory is shared with non-Cree residents, who reside in the towns such as Chibougamau, Chapais, and Matagami.

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement solidified the rights of the Crees and set up regimes for the protection of these rights such as the Environmental and Social Regime of Section 22 and the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Regime of Section 24.

More specifically concerning conservation, JBNQA describes the

principle of conservation in section 24.1.5 as “the pursuit of the optimum natural productivity of all living resources and the protection of the ecological systems of the Territory so as to protect endangered species and to ensure primarily the continuance of the traditional pursuits of the Native people, and secondarily the satisfaction of the needs of non-Native people for sport hunting and fishing.”

These two regimes in the JBNQA are essential in addressing the conservation of biodiversity along with the 2002 adapted Forestry Regime found within the Paix des Braves Agreement.



ABOUT EYYOU ISTCHEE

The categorization of Cree land plays an instrumental role in the level of conservation performed by the responsible governments:

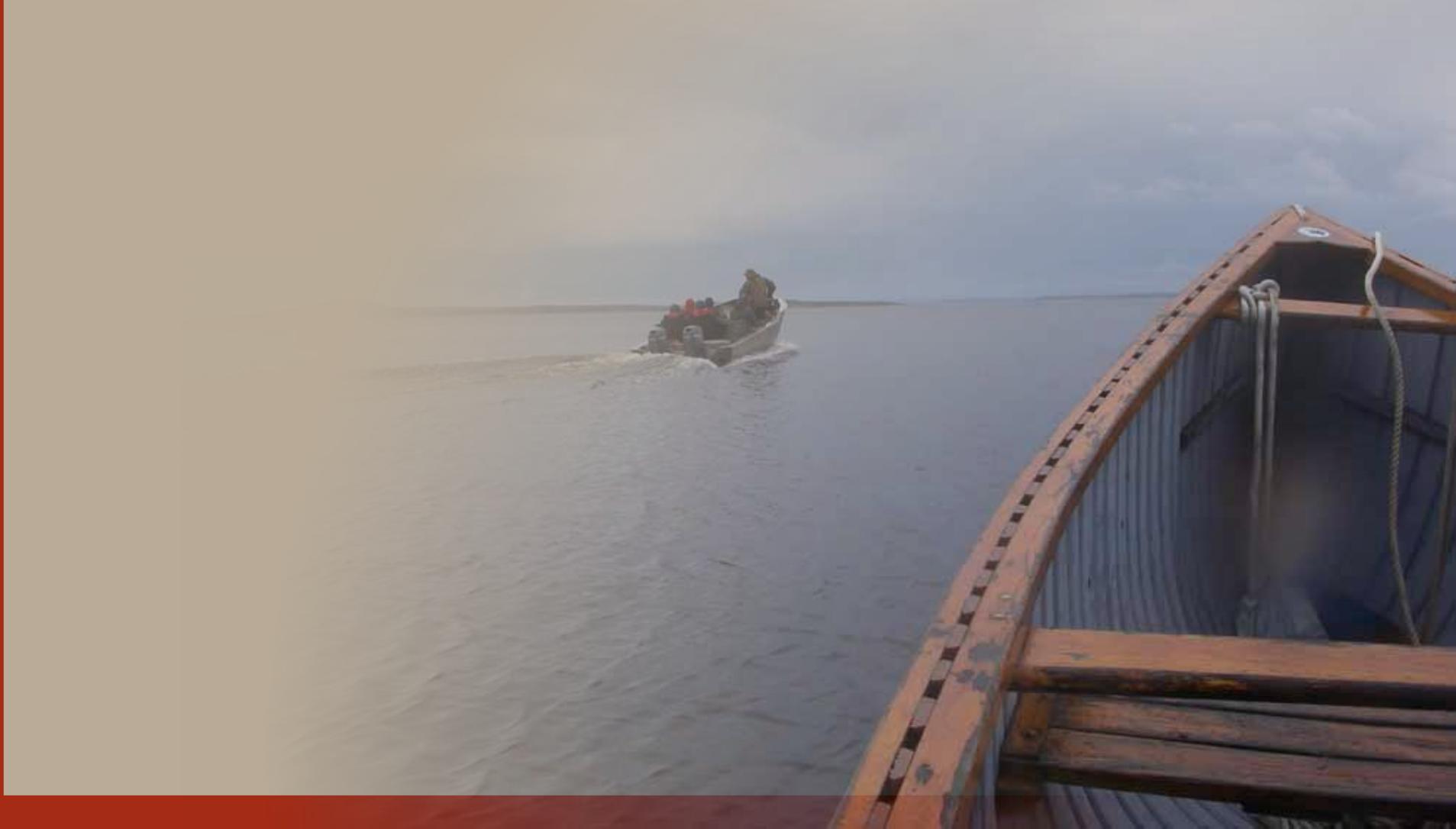
- Category 1 lands surround local Cree communities and are for the exclusive use of Cree individuals.
- Category 2 lands are public lands where Crees have the exclusive right to hunt fish and trap.
- Category 3 lands are public lands which Cree can use for their traditional activities.

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement covers the Hudson Bay drainage basin in Québec. Eeyou Istchee is predominantly found within this drainage basin; however some Mistissini and Ouje-Bougoumou traplines are located within the St-Laurent drainage basin. Eeyou Istchee is located within three administrative regions: Nord du Québec (James Bay and Kativik Regions), Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean. The area is dominated by the Central Shield Forest Ecoregion, with the Southern Hudson Bay Taiga Ecoregion to the northwest and the East Forest/Boreal Transition Ecoregion to the south.



ABOUT EYYOU ISTCHEE

Eeyou Istchee is not limited to terrestrial boundaries; the coastal communities are connected to the shores and water of James and Hudson Bays. The Eeyou Marine Region Lands Claims Agreement recognizes the rights of the Crees in the offshore region of Eeyou Istchee. Under federal jurisdiction, this agreement provides for the creation of marine protected areas within the offshore area. This conservation strategy is therefore designed to assist in the development of protected areas in both the terrestrial and marine regions of Eeyou Istchee.



OUR VISION

Is to maintain strong ties to the Cree cultural heritage and way of life, and sustain biodiversity by creating a large, interconnected network of conservation areas in Eeyou Istchee.

This will be achieved through Cree-leadership in conservation planning.





OUR GOALS

1 *To create an interconnected network of conservation areas of cultural and ecological importance for the safeguarding of biodiversity.*

These areas will serve as the building blocks for an interconnected network of protected areas and conservation areas, and assist in the planning and evaluation of proposals for industrial development.

2 *To conserve wildlife populations and enhance food security for present and future generations*

As a hunting society, the Cree culture is grounded in hunting, fishing and trapping.

A key driver for the conservation planning is therefore the sustainable use of key wildlife species.

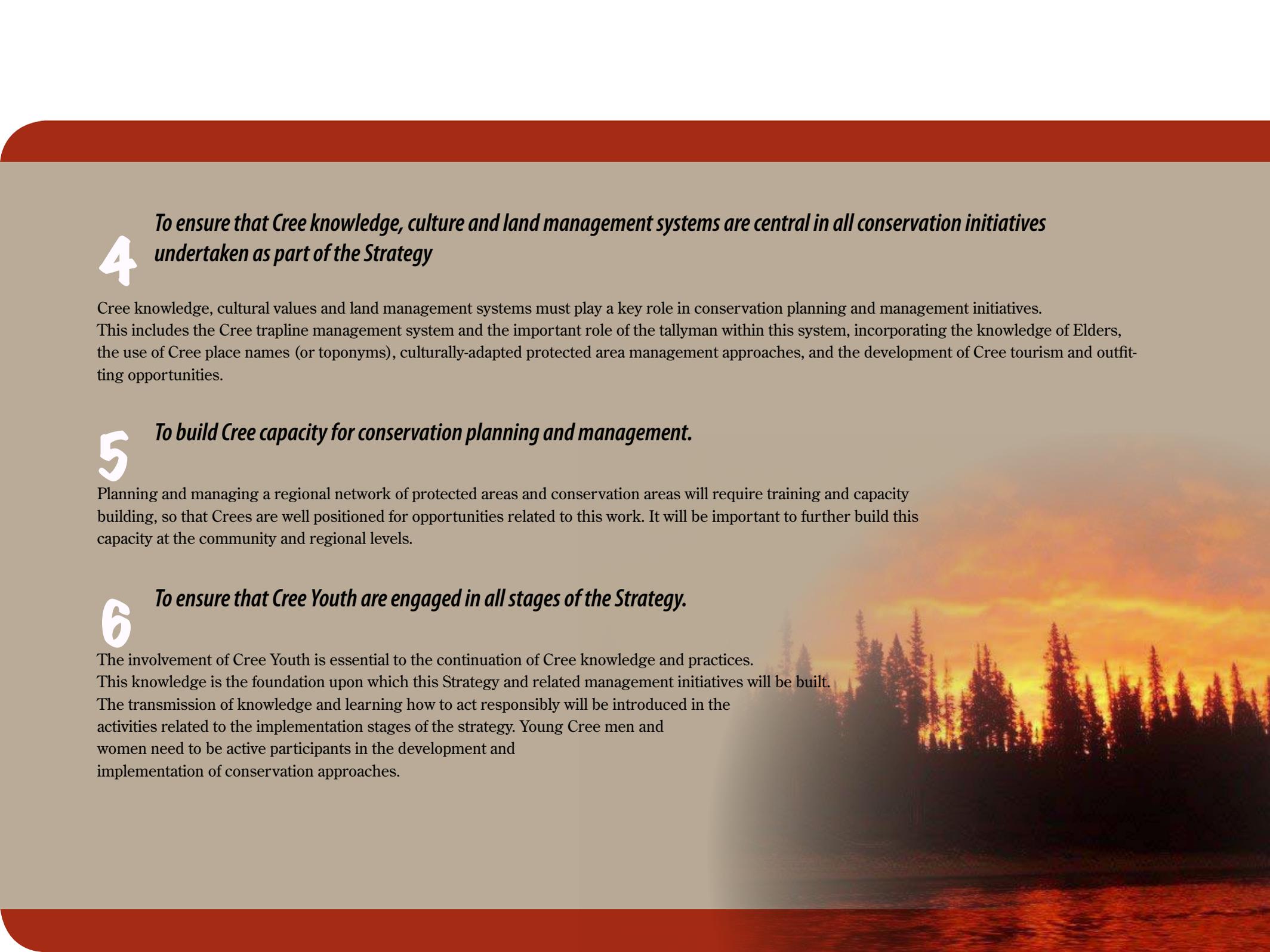
Protecting key habitat areas and facilitating the free movement of these species will help them thrive.

Healthy and abundant wildlife populations in turn ensure food security for the Crees.

Food security is a key concern as the Cree population is growing rapidly and the nutritional and cultural contribution of traditional food is highly valued. Particular wildlife species that have been classified “at risk” - such as the forestry dwelling Woodland Caribou - will require particular attention.

3 *To ensure full Cree participation in conservation planning and management*

Crees need to be fully engaged in decision making and planning for all conservation initiatives in Eeyou Istchee. This will require the building of effective working relationships and partnerships with provincial, federal and regional governments, academia, environmental groups, stakeholders and neighboring aboriginal nations.



To ensure that Cree knowledge, culture and land management systems are central in all conservation initiatives undertaken as part of the Strategy

Cree knowledge, cultural values and land management systems must play a key role in conservation planning and management initiatives. This includes the Cree trapline management system and the important role of the tallyman within this system, incorporating the knowledge of Elders, the use of Cree place names (or toponyms), culturally-adapted protected area management approaches, and the development of Cree tourism and outfitting opportunities.



To build Cree capacity for conservation planning and management.

Planning and managing a regional network of protected areas and conservation areas will require training and capacity building, so that Crees are well positioned for opportunities related to this work. It will be important to further build this capacity at the community and regional levels.



To ensure that Cree Youth are engaged in all stages of the Strategy.

The involvement of Cree Youth is essential to the continuation of Cree knowledge and practices. This knowledge is the foundation upon which this Strategy and related management initiatives will be built. The transmission of knowledge and learning how to act responsibly will be introduced in the activities related to the implementation stages of the strategy. Young Cree men and women need to be active participants in the development and implementation of conservation approaches.

7 *To ensure that Cree knowledge, culture and land management systems are central in all conservation initiatives undertaken as part of the Strategy*

Cree knowledge, cultural values and land management systems must play a key role in conservation planning and management initiatives. This includes the Cree trapline management system and the important role of the tallyman within this system, incorporating the knowledge of Elders, the use of Cree place names (or toponyms), culturally-adapted protected area management approaches, and the development of Cree tourism and outfitting opportunities.

8 *To ensure that the Strategy is adaptive and based on the best available knowledge*

The Strategy needs to be adaptive. This requires it to respond to the best available knowledge and to provide for regulation, monitoring, reporting, review, as well as opportunities for reflection and feedback. Dedicated efforts will be made to draw on best practices from elsewhere, experiment where possible, foster social learning, and maintain openness to revising and adjusting plans and decisions.





THE PLANNING APPROACH

Conservation planning: Opportunities and constraints

Eeyou Istchee can be divided into distinct sub-regions in terms of impacts from industrial development. Below the northern limit for commercial forestry, the majority of the landscape has already been transformed by forestry, roads, and mining activity.

In this sub-region, the principle approach taken for conservation planning is to focus on protecting “what’s left” (areas that remain intact or undisturbed by industrial activities) and areas of high cultural importance. Above the commercial forestry limit, the situation is quite different. This more northern part of Eeyou Istchee has been very heavily impacted by hydroelectric development and by some mining related development, however in much of the northern portion there still exist the opportunity to build a conservation areas network focused on “the best” in terms of key habitats, ecosystems and areas for maintaining cultural and ecological integrity.

This strategy will be implemented as a whole, both above and below the commercial forestry limit. However particular attention will be given to areas where the development pressures are high, in order to try to achieve some balance in conservation and development goals before the opportunity to do so slips away.

Planning scales: Trapline, community level, and regional

There are three key scales for conservation areas planning in Eeyou Istchee: the trapline (or family hunting areas), the community level and the regional level. The planning of a conservation and protected areas network requires that work at all three of these levels is coordinated. Most Cree decisions related to conservation currently take place at the trapline level, given the central role of the tallymen and the Cree trapline management system. The trapline management system provides the foundation upon which the Conservation Strategy can be built.

Several parks and protected areas projects in Eeyou Istchee have resulted from collective initiatives at the community level, with the support of the tallymen and the local Cree communities. These Cree led trapline and community level protected area and conservation initiatives can be seen as the building blocks of a regional conservation areas network.

The regional “big picture” planning scale is critical to ensure that the conservation areas network covers the whole of Eeyou Istchee, and that the goals of large intact areas, connectivity, ecosystem processes and species habitats are maintained across the region in a way that works as a whole. Achieving this requires regional leadership and coordination in conservation, which will be achieved through the implementation of this Strategy.

Watershed approach for ecosystem management

Eeyou Istchee is located mainly in the Hudson Bay Drainage basin. There are roughly a dozen watersheds within Eeyou Istchee. Using a watershed based planning approach provides an interesting option for the Cree Conservation Strategy, as it a way to managed the wellbeing of the ecosystems for both conservation and development planning.

Partnerships

As mentioned above, many administrative boundaries have been superimposed on Eeyou Istchee. The region is not limited to the land but also extends out to encompass significant marine areas. These boundaries create some jurisdictional complexities for achieving our conservation goals. However the establishment and maintenance of good relations with our neighbors and other parties can allow us to achieve common trans-boundary conservation objectives.

Effective partnerships and collaborations will be built to facilitate the coordinated and effective implementation of this Strategy. In particular, collaboration with public governments (such as the Québec Government, the Eeyou-James Bay Regional Government and the Kativik Regional Government), Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS), academic institutions and researchers, and other stakeholders will be encouraged.

TYPES OF CONSERVATION AREAS AND TOOLS

The Cree Regional Conservation Strategy envisions the creation of different types of conservation areas and tools, which as a whole will form a large scale conservation areas network. The principle conservation designations and tools are outlined below.

Core conservation areas

Core Conservation Areas refer to areas which will be selected and managed for conservation purposes and for maintaining the traditional Cree way of life. These areas will provide for large scale wildlife habitat protection and/or the preservation of cultural heritage sites. No industrial activities will be permitted in these zones.

Conservation corridors and connectivity

Fragmented conservation areas will limit the goal of achieving strong and thriving biodiversity by restricting its interchange with other areas. The conservation zones established in Eeyou Istchee should therefore ideally be linked to promote movement of wildlife and the flow of healthy ecosystems downstream. The Strategy therefore aims to ensure that initiatives at the community level are connected with other community level initiatives, and that wildlife habitats and ecosystems are protected and connected across all planning scales.

Conservation corridors and conservation “stepping stones” are areas that are used to create connectivity and promote the movement of wildlife between the core conservation areas. This technique has been in practice for several decades around the world with positive results in wildlife conservation.

Special management areas

Special management areas will be designed to meet both conservation and resource development goals. Development activities would be subject to certain conditions or rules to minimize ecological and cultural impacts. Tools such as road density analysis and development thresholds could be used to help in the planning and management of these areas.

The goal for the special management areas is for them to contribute to the overall effectiveness of the conservation areas network. Special management designation and implementation will be achieved by working collaboratively with the Government of Québec (Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment, Parks and Wildlife) and in with Regional Government structures.

Buffer areas

Buffers applied around the core conservation areas will also be important for maintaining the integrity of ecological and cultural values and to ensure that these values are not compromised. The size of buffer zones will be influenced by the threats within the surrounding area (ex. upstream areas will be bigger than downstream areas or a function of the proximity of industrial development). Buffer areas, like special management

areas, are managed for both conservation and development purposes. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected areas category system may be used to illustrate the level of development allowed in these areas.



MECHANISMS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

LEGISLATED

Protected areas refer to areas where no industrial development² is permitted. In Québec, there are many different types of protected areas, such as National Parks, Biodiversity Reserves and Aquatic Reserves. Many federal departments promote the protection of the environment and wildlife through various legislations. For example, the Crees have been exploring the National Marine Conservation Area designation under Parks Canada for the offshore area of Wemindji. Other federal tools that may be of importance are: National Parks, Marine Protected Areas, Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, National Historic parks and others.

NON-LEGISLATED

Non-legislated conservation areas are identified for their importance, but are not protected under government law. Such mechanisms are recognized and implemented on a national or international scale. Although they may not be protected from development under legislation, having an area designated in such a way can build awareness of the importance of an area. Examples of existing non-legislated conservation tools are: Canadian Heritage Rivers, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, and Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs).

² Industrial development in this document refers to forestry, mining, hydroelectric and energy development

SUMMARY

This strategy addresses the need for coordinated conservation planning in Eeyou Istchee. The Cree Nation Government will work closely with the community leadership and representatives, tallymen and land users, elders, youth and other Cree entities to develop guidelines for protected areas development, provide technical support and expertise, develop community level capacity, and develop effective partnerships to ensure that the vision and goals set out in this Strategy are achieved across all of Eeyou Istchee.



ACTION PLAN

The implementation of the Strategy will involve the following actions:

1. CONSERVATION AREAS NETWORK PLANNING (2014-2017)

- Create an information base (Cree knowledge and western science)
- Create planning support tools to integrate conservation science knowledge into conservation network planning
- Undertake Cree community level consultations to identify priority conservation areas (areas undergoing high development pressures will receive more immediate attention)
- Assess suitability and local support for existing protected areas that were established without the appropriate level of Cree consultation
- Bring all of the priority conservation areas together to design an interconnected, conservation areas network for Eeyou Istchee
- Once identified and documented, priority conservation areas should be made temporarily off limits to further development until decisions on their designation status are made through implementation mechanisms

2. DESIGNATION/ESTABLISHMENT (2014-2020)

- Establish protected areas through collaborative work with provincial and federal governments.
- Establish protected areas through collaboration with Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission (Eeyou Marine Region Agreement)
- Establish conservation areas through collaboration with regional land use planning commissions

3. MANAGEMENT (2014–ON)

- Explore opportunities for Cree management under different conservation designations
- If needed, explore the possibility of creating a new conservation designation specifically designed to meet Cree needs
- Build capacity for Cree management opportunities for conservation areas in the network

4. MONITORING AND RESEARCH (2014–ON)

- Establish and implement a monitoring program for trends, changes, interventions etc. Develop methods to measure the effectiveness in relation to goals, ex. protection, restoration and benefits.

MAP OF PROTECTED AREAS IN EYYOU ISCHEE

Status of protected Areas in Eeyou Istchee



-  EMR Boundaries and Zones
-  Trapline
-  Watershed
-  roads
-  Transmission lines
-  National Parks
-  Biodiversity Reserves
-  Proposed Protected Areas
-  Community Boundary

* Grey Protected Area known as Burton-Lake-Roggan-River-Pointe-Louis-XIV is not yet classified.

0 75 150 300
Kilometers

Source: Cree Regional Authority,
MENR BDGA 1M 5M, MFFP prepared June 2014

