

# Aboriginal Peoples & Canada's Parks & Protected Areas



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CASE STUDY #4

## *Great Bear Lake Watershed Management Plan: Conservation Zones and Protected Areas Designations*

*A number of organizations came together at the request of the people of Déline to assist the community in protecting and preserving Great Bear Lake and its watershed. The work of this group was guided by the vision: “to keep Great Bear Lake clean and bountiful for all time”. The group developed the Great Bear Lake Watershed Management Plan (Management Plan) to guide decision-making in the watershed. Some areas of the watershed are Neh Karila K’ets’Edi: Conservation Zones and Protected Areas. The remaining Sahtu portions of the watershed are Special Management Zones where land use is guided by tests for ecological and cultural integrity, including conditions and prohibitions.*

### **Background**

The Great Bear Lake Working Group (Working Group) was formed at the request of the people of Déline to assist them to protect the natural and cultural heritage of Great Bear Lake.

Led by the people of Déline, the Working Group developed the Management Plan beginning in October, 2002. The Working Group consisted of several Déline elders and representatives of the Déline First Nations Government (Déline Dene Band/Déline Charter Community), the Déline Land Corporation (including the Déline Self-Government Office and Déline Uranium Team), the Déline Renewable Resources Council, the federal Departments of the Environment, Fisheries and Oceans, Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the territorial Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, the Sahtu Land Use Planning Board (Planning Board), the Sahtu Renewable



Bluenose West Caribou Tracks,  
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Resources Board (SRRB), the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society—NWT Chapter (CPAWS-NWT). The Sahtu Land & Water Board (SL&WB) was an observer of the management planning process. The Working Group was not established by any legislation.

Since the Management Plan is not based on legislation, it is not binding on all the parties. However, the final Management Plan was intended to form part of the Sahtu Land Use Plan (SLUP). Provision for the SLUP is part of the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement. The SLUP will be legally binding once approved. Everyone working on the land in the Sahtu will need to follow the rules of the SLUP (including the Management Plan) once it is approved by the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the Federal government.

The Management Plan was presented to the SLUPB in January 2006. The Planning Board took some sections of the Management Plan, along with information from the two other districts in the Sahtu, and produced a draft SLUP in February 2007. The draft SLUP is now out for consultations. All groups will provide comments on the draft SLUP; the Planning Board will then make appropriate changes based on comments it receives.

Until the SLUP is finalized, groups are informally using some aspects of the Management Plan to help guide their action.

## Initiative

The Management Plan deals *only* with the Sahtu portion of the Great Bear Lake Watershed. About 62% of the watershed is in the Sahtu region, mostly in the Déline District.

The Great Bear Lake Watershed is a special place for the people of Déline. Their ancestors have been part of and have cared for this place for countless generations. The elders assert that we in turn have a responsibility to treat this watershed with respect and to keep it alive, and that the lake and its watershed must be protected for generations to come. Both healthy land and healthy people are the basis of this plan; these ideas cannot be separated.

During the Management Plan development, many of the cultural and ecological values were pulled together to help explain the importance of Great Bear Lake, and the 'state' of the lake. From this information, the Working Group developed special conditions that would need to be followed in any development. Conditions for activities within the Special Management Zones are based on the 'precautionary principle': if in doubt, don't do the development. The burden of proof is on the developers to show that the land (or people) will not be harmed, rather than on the community (or others) to show that the land (or people) could be harmed (Section 9.1 b).

Conditions are also based on early, inclusive consultation with the appropriate Déline authorities. Joint planning between Déline authorities and the developer should emphasise the prevention of any problems, along with benefits to the community.

Besides placing certain conditions on activities, the Management Plan also prohibits certain actions/activities. For instance, fish farming and

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fish stocking for recreational use are prohibited, and so is digging up or otherwise harming the bottom of Great Bear Lake.

The rules given above will *control* development, but they *don't stop* development. The Working Group agreed that some areas within the planning region should have no industrial development at all. These areas are called *Neh Karila K'ets'Edi* in North Slavey (the language of the people of Déline). They include some small areas such as islands in Great Bear Lake, and extensive areas such as Edaiila (Caribou Point), the most easterly

peninsula of Great Bear Lake. At this point, two areas with the planning region have been identified for permanent protection: *Sahoyúé-?ehdahcho* as a protected National Historic Site, and Edaiila (Caribou Point). Both are in the Protected Areas Strategy (PAS) process for determining boundaries, designation and management framework. Parks Canada and Déline organizations have entered negotiations to work towards a cooperative management agreement for *Sahoyúé-?ehdahcho*. Edaiila is at step 2 of the PAS process, currently seeking support from an agency with legislation to protect the land.



Community of Déline,  
photo copyright Erica Janes



Children and Gulls,  
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The Sahtu co-management boards (SL&WB, SRRB, The Planning Board) do not have enforcement capabilities. Government departments are required to carry out their respective enforcement work, which includes permits from these boards. All groups need to improve communications and co-ordination to ensure all groups are aware of what is happening in the watershed, and that laws and permit conditions are followed. This includes working with non-enforcement people (such as biologists and monitors) and training Déline residents so they can have a greater input and role.

### Lessons Learned

It took time at the beginning of the process for Déline and the partners in this project to develop a relationship and common vision for the management of the Great Bear Lake Watershed. However, establishing this is crucial to the development of a comprehensive product that is supported by all partners. This work took considerable time and resources, as well as patience and understanding, as there were participants with differing mandates and differing world views.

The strength of this plan is its success in integrating complimentary ways of looking at the world. Dene Law, as expressed by Elders through stories, teachings, and prophecies, fed into the planning process as did the western scientific perspective. This plan is seen to be a marriage of two world views with one guiding vision: to keep Great Bear Lake clean and bountiful for all time. This was accomplished through special sessions held with Elders to document specific stories for each of the sections in the Management Plan. As well,

feedback throughout the Management Plan preparation was complemented by various oral presentations to the Elders and others more comfortable with oral communication.

### Conclusion

This inclusive process was very worthwhile in developing suitable material for the Sahtu Land Use Plan. The community of Déline has completed a review of the draft SLUP to determine how well their wishes were incorporated and to provide feedback to the SLUPB. The Management Plan will not come into effect until it is included in the approved SLUP. There is considerable urgency to the approval of the Management Plan. Mineral and oil and gas exploration and development have accelerated in the Great Bear Lake Watershed. In 2004 and 2005 mineral and oil and gas rights were acquired pursuant to existing legislation. This may limit the options available to the Management Plan and to the SLUP, in particular in the areas that were identified for permanent protection.

*Conditions are based on early, inclusive consultation with the appropriate Déline authorities.*

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#### References

Great Bear Lake Working Group. May 31, 2005 with Caveat of February 7, 2006. "The Water Heart": A Management Plan for Great Bear Lake and its Watershed. Directed by the Great Bear Lake Working Group and facilitated and drafted by Tom Nesbitt

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