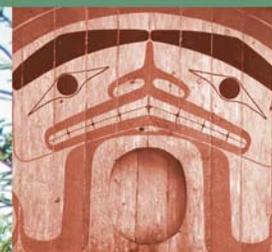


Aboriginal Peoples & Canada's Parks & Protected Areas



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CASE STUDY #9

Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre

Interest to develop a Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre that would celebrate the Mi'kmaw heritage and its people is a major undertaking that has brought together many stakeholders and landowners to discuss and find solutions to a wide variety of land use conflicts. The project is in its infancy, however, many positives have already resulted.

Background

In Debert, a small community in the heart of Nova Scotia, several sites of archeological significance were first found in 1948 and formally excavated in the 1960's. Additional archeological evidence has since been discovered in the 1980's. The 'Debert Site' is the oldest dated site in Canada; archeological evidence dates back more than 11,000 years.

The land encompassing the sites is presently designated a National Historic Site under federal legislation as well as a Special Place under provincial legislation. Land tenure in Nova Scotia is such that only 25%



Don Julien, Executive Director of the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, holds an Artifact from the Mi'kmawey Debert Site, photo copyright The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq

Protection of cultural resources often requires support from a multitude of landowners.

of Nova Scotia is public land. Protection of cultural resources often requires support from a multitude of landowners. Such is the case in Debert where a mix of private, municipal and crown ownership exists. The known archeological sites occupy provincial crown land, which hosts a working Tree Breeding Centre and clonal orchard and lies within a vibrant and growing industrial park area.

Initiative

Cultural traditions and stories of the Mi'kmaq people rely upon the oral histories of the Elders. In today's ever changing society the means to maintain and tell the Mi'kmaw heritage (language, culture and history) is more challenging than ever. Appreciation and understanding of heritage is a source of improving family relations and bonds between generations and different cultures.

Aboriginal peoples need to share the cultural knowledge and traditions with their youth as well as all others. One means to provide access to cultural resources is to create a place to meet, gather and share pride in a history. The Elders Advisory Council of the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq was paramount in developing the vision – 'Connecting with our past' – and three guiding principles:

- As Mi'kmaq we are descended from the people who come before us in Mi'kma'ki.
- Our elders refer to the past for healing and spirituality, not only knowledge and information.
- As Mi'kma, we respect knowledge of the past and are dedicated to learning more about our people, L'nu'k.

The Debert archeological site provides a significant opportunity to engage the Mi'kmaq community and for the community itself to share and protect its heritage, particularly the knowledge of the Elders, the language and its history.

Over the past few years the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq (CMM) has been working to develop a place where they can "... share, protect and explore the stories and lives of our earliest ancestors and those who have come after them in Mi'kma'ki."

To that end the CMM has developed a concept for the development of a cultural centre located in association with the Debert archeological site. Federal, provincial and municipal governments are all involved in land use planning and development. A multi-sectoral Steering Committee was established to ensure issues were discussed and a good exchange of information occurred. Ultimately the goal is to find solutions to issues of conflict and provide protection for a nationally significant archeological site. Represented on the Steering Committee are six provincial departments, Parks Canada and the CMM.

The first success resulted in the establishment of a 5 kilometre interpretive trail called the Mi'kmawey Trail. Established within an area of the industrial park not considered suitable for development, it has provided an initial connection and focus to the area for the Mi'kmaq, while also generating benefits for residents of the industrial park as a contribution to a healthy lifestyle.



Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre



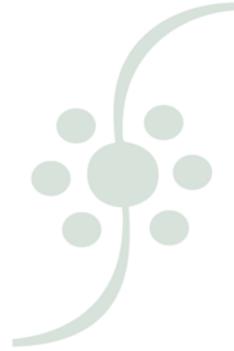
More recent efforts have focused on defining the full range of the archeological evidence within the historic site and around its periphery. The long-term focus is certainly on the development of the cultural centre, however, any further development of the cultural centre concept plan requires delineation of the archeological resources. The second major outcome has been the creation of a new set of protocols for archeological reviews within lands proposed for development. Such a change would not have been possible without the cooperation of archeologists from Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, and federal and provincial agencies.

Lessons Learned

There remains a lot more work to do in advance of a cultural centre. Consideration of how to deal

with the provincial tree breeding centre is a priority. Continued discussion is allowing for improved understanding of the points of view of all involved, as well as of issues to consider. Despite the initial challenges and apparent conflicts there is common ground. Key to the success so far has been establishing an understanding of the various perspectives and allowing the various partners and participants time to learn and appreciate each others point of view.

Planning for such a facility has required significant effort, initially within CMM and as the scope of the project evolved others became more engaged. Critical to having a successful engagement of all the parties was to provide clarity on the project scope in advance of any discussions with federal and provincial agencies. Establishing a program



statement and guiding principles internally using an Elders Advisory Council was critical. This provided context for the planning and design work.

Regular meetings with a variety of provincial and federal stakeholders were established early so that information exchange was frequent and complete. Working groups were also established to deal with specific technical issues, most notably the archeological protocols.

Conclusion

The completion of a cultural centre and resolution to all the potential issues in a future point in time, the Debert project is providing a focus that will hopefully provide benefits beyond the limits of the site.

Key to the success so far has been establishing an understanding of the various perspectives and allowing the various partners and participants time to learn and appreciate each others point of view.



Parks Canada Atlantic Centre conservator in preparation of a Latex Soil Peel from a prepared profile, photo copyright The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq

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