

Presentation on the role of trapping in land use planning

From The Northern Planning Conference: Planning for the New North

For this presentation we spend some time bouncing around different ideas.

There are many ways to consider the traditional economy:

- From an historical or ancient history perspective understand how people and the ecology evolved together from the Ice Age;
- Another is the tribal social-political structure as the defining human ingenuity that got us here;
- Or possibly examine traditional economy from an economics perspective breaking down the different components and considering how they function; and
- We also looked at the fastest growing economies around the world and recognized many have active traditional economies today.

Finally we settled on exploring the how people live on the land and how that relates to stewardship.

Then I realized we were talking about trapping so my presentation is on trapping.

This topic offers many perspectives that relate to land use planning.

The Yukon trapline system establishes concessions across the landscape everywhere you go is someone's trapline.

Trapping is an established industry and lifestyle where all sorts of people participate.

Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal people share common interests in trapping.

As we will explore there is much to gain by focusing on through a renewed perspective on trapping.

Trapping is a component of the traditional economy people have always trapped and practiced stewardship over their territory.

I believe the best way to support traditional economy is by working through the trapline concession system and with trappers.

A 150 years ago the fur trade started to changed the ways Aboriginal people lived.

New harvesting technologies enabled individual people to become effective harvesters.

This was different than harvesting collectively as a group, the way it was always done.

People focused on exporting furs and less on internal trading of resources among families.

I would like offer my understanding of the trapper as a person.

They say people who live out in remote places are different than people in cities.

Of all the types of people who live on the land, it is the trapper who is most different.

They're out there looking at everything trying to figure out what's going on everywhere.

Trapping lifestyle is not easy from physical demands to the extremes of nature.

That's why it's important to be smart about things.

There's lots of ways to speed up tasks with better use of knowledge.

Much of this ingenuity is about figuring things out then considering how to improve technique on all these tasks.

It's a unique process of learning; the thinking about improvements and understanding the context. Combine that with a lifestyle of many connected activities and the natural surroundings.

It's an environment where people learn quickly and develop their own problem solving capabilities.

The trapper is a resourceful person their objective is to get the job done using whatever is on hand.

The unique aspect of trapping is stewardship.

The trappers knows animals need to be harvested and that's their responsibility.

That is also the traditional way.

What makes trapping special is this notion of territory boundary.

Trappers always want to know what is going on inside their concession.

Trapline boundaries were established by the RCMP and Aboriginal trappers in the 1940s.

Aboriginal trappers used traditional trails so today's concession boundaries to some degree reflect traditional harvest patterns.

More consideration should be given to how trapline concessions become active management units.

Existing concession boundaries can be adjusted to better capture important features or management objectives.

It's about better aligning resource management issues with a trapper who can support those on the ground objectives.

Logistics plays a dominant role in the trapper's life.

There's a lot to know about the trail.

Not just the terrain and weather factors but a range of other constraints too.

The trapper is always cutting more trail.

The way trappers use the concession creates need for trail.

For example trappers will leave certain places alone for a few years then move back in.

Many be a quarter of the total trail is not used in the average year.

The trapper is always planning to open up new areas.

Eventually more line cabins are needed to support greater distance.

In order to use the trapline properly trappers need lots of basic infrastructure.

As a trapline concession holder the trapper has a range of rights, privileges and interests.

In terms of the land use the trapper can utilize the landscape like no one else.

For example the trapper can develop trails and line cabins on either Crown or Settlement land.

We know trapping activities have declined in recent decades.

The further out you go the harder it is getting there.

The access factor means more remote concessions have less or no use.

Traditional trails once connected the landscape so it was easier to access all traplines.

There are 340 trapline concessions in Yukon.

If all concessions averaged 25 kilometers of trail that would be 8,500 kilometers of trail.

And 25 kilometers of trail is not considered much, many trappers would want twice that on a larger concession.

The transportation infrastructure value of trapline concessions could be significant.

Winter trail requires snow and cold temperatures to use effectively but traveling in winter is efficient.

There is much to learn by better understanding the traditional trails.

For example trails established pattern of human use and occupation so important heritage resources are often associated with traditional trails.

Traditional trails represent the most efficient way to move from place to place always following the best route.

So much of being a trapper is about the trail.

Getting to the trapline then checking the traps every few days.

In the off-season it's all about fixing trail and cutting new line.

In the traditional economy stewardship is approached from the territory perspective.

The trapper takes a similar perspective on the concession.

In the traditional way stewardship would be determined among the tribe and implemented by family groups.

In the system today so much depends on the abilities and experience of the trapper.

Supporting their knowledge and network development is a good investment.

Trappers are to work in collaboration with Conservation Officers on resource management.

Under the wildlife act the trapper can officially assist conservation officers to help hunt problem animals.

This relationship is important and needs to be strengthened.

It's not hard to imagine what more could be possible if trappers had a better system to collect data and information.

Everyone today needs better environmental information and baseline history.

In closing I will briefly discuss the benefits to Aboriginal communities.

We all know traplines are very significant to Aboriginal people who have traplines.

But trapping benefits the entire community with improved access to traditional lifestyle and country foods.

The fur supports manufacture of traditional goods keeping people busy and networking together.

I often hear stories from people who spent time on the trapline and how they still cherish those experiences years later.

In the communities people will see the revival of the traplines as a significant step forward.