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# NÉ DŪGŪZEDĪTCHĪ -WE ARE TALKING TO EVERYONE ABOUT IT

Official Newsletter of the Dena Kayeh Institute

### Dena Kayeh Institute - Message

I'm happy to present you with the first issue of the Neh Dūgūdzedjī Newsletter. Neh Dūgūdzedjī is what you say when you're about to tell a story and we thought it was a fitting name for our newsletter. The last couple of years has been both challenging and a time for growth for Kaska Dena and Kaska organizations, such as the Dena Kayeh Institute.

The pandemic has compelled us to be creative and to think outside of the box with respect to how we engage Kaska citizens on the many great projects we are working on. We've increased our efforts to communicate with all Kaska citizens with the development of tools such as online and paper surveys, a website and online interactive story map, updating the Kaska contact database, inviting community members to join our guardians for activities on the land and now this newsletter.

At the heart of our work at the Dena Kayeh Institute is the importance of Kaska Traditional Knowledge, preserving our stories and the revitalizing of our language to carry out our sacred responsibilities to care for the lands and waters of our ancestral territory. We know that every goal we set and every milestone we reach is and will be because we have the support, involvement, direction, input and ideas from each of you, the Kaska citizens.

Through these newsletters, we will also share news of relationship building with our neighbouring First Nations so we can cooperate and amplify our collective voices to advance shared interests and goals. Working with ally organizations to keep them informed of our work and our aspirations is another important way we can build support and together ensure the success of our efforts on behalf of our people. We encourage you to become engaged and to stay updated on the many projects we will tell you about in the coming pages.

I feel very honoured and much appreciate your confidence in me to serve in this position these many years. As we "tell the story" I believe more than ever that you will come to share the excitement we feel about the opportunities DKI is working to bring about and the potential to contribute to a brighter future for our people and our homelands

As we look forward to a New Year and keep hope in our hearts for an end to this dreadful pandemic, on behalf of the hardworking team at DKI, I want to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year.

> Shốwe sénlá' Corrine Porter - Executive Director

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### What is the Dena Kayeh Institute?

The Dena Kayeh Institute ("DKI") is a non-profit society, with charitable status, registered in British Columbia and the Yukon territory. DKI was established in 2004 and created to empower, preserve, and protect the Kaska Dena language, oral traditions, history, culture, and traditional knowledge. The BC Kaska communities have designated DKI as their representative to administer the collection and management of their Traditional Knowledge, which focuses on the collection, storage and management of traditional ecological knowledge that provides for:

- Reclaiming our role as stewards of land and resources in our ancestral territory;
- Development of a long-term capacity to promote and implement a Kaska land ethic;
- Recognition that land stewardship requires our communities to be healthy and it is our belief that economic activity that generates jobs and wealth can be achieved consistent with our land ethic; and ultimately; and
- The mission of the DKI is to use the tools of traditional knowledge and western science to
  protect the ecological integrity of our lands and waters and enhance the cultural heritage and
  socio-economic well-being of our people.



The primary work of DKI over the past year has been working with the Kaska communities to design an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area ("IPCA") within the Kaska Ancestral Territory in BC.

The Dena Kayeh Institute office is located in the Daylu Dena Council Health Centre in Lower Post.

PO Box 76 Lower Post, BC VOC 1W0 (250) 779-3181 ext 1003

### **DKI Board of Directors**

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### **DKI Communications**

We are currently increasing our communication tools to keep Kaska Dena up to date on all of our projects. Following is a list of the tools that have or are being developed:

- Neh Dügüdzedji Newsletter;
- Kaska Contact Database- We are asking everyone to fill out this important form, which can be found at this link: <u>https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc4PpP</u>
   <u>5p rJyKH24ajpbnXunw0QTEAidbVNSBYi5dd90EoDA/viewform.</u> If you require a printed copy please phone our office and we will have one mailed to you.
- Dena Kayeh Institute Website We are currently in the process of expanding the denakayeh.com website to include a section for all Dena Kayeh projects;
- Online/in-person surveys Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic we are having to reply on using surveys to collect our communities' ideas, questions, concerns.
- Posting on community Facebook pages;
- Video series we are currently working on developing short videos that will be posted on our social media sites. These will offer information on the different projects and will allow for Kaska Dena to watch them at their leisure;
- Community Meetings communities meetings will resume when in person when it is safe to do so.
- Zoom Webinars we will be looking to use the community zoom hubs to conduct information sessions, open houses and community meetings. This will also provide opportunities for Kaska Dena who do not live in our Kaska communities to become involved.



We encourage you to communicate with us at every opportunity. We value your ideas, questions and concerns.

info@denakeyeh.ca

# Dena Kayeh Institute Website

#### HTTPS://DENAKAYEH.COM/



### Dene K'éh Kusān

Dene K'éh Kusān ("DKK") is the largest intact piece of wilderness within Northern BC and it is ours to protect. 40,000 square kilometres of land represents the spiritual and cultural core area of Kaska Dena ancestral lands in the Province of British Columbia.

To advance these outcomes, Kaska Dena has identified the DKK as a candidate for the Kaska IPCA under the Canada Nature Fund - Pathway to Canada Target 1 Challenge. Our goal is to ensure:

- That our ancestral territory does not suffer the devastating effects of climate change and biodiversity loss we're seeing across British Columbia, Canada and around the world;
- That it remains intact, which is critical to preserving Kaska peoples' material, cultural and spiritual lives;
- That it continues to shelter caribou and all species that are at risk of becoming endangered;
- That it sustains and creates economic opportunities for Kaska and others in northern communities; and
- That it becomes a world-class protected area for all people to explore and enjoy.



Dene K'éh Kusān - These important words represent our way of life and Kaska Dena's worldview of our ancient, historic, current, and future relationship with our Ancestral Territory. DKK also speaks to our spiritual, cultural, traditional, governance, rights, and title to our land.

In our Ianguage, we say Dene K'éh Kusān, which means "Always Will Be There".



### Kaska IPCA Logo

DKK reflects many spheres that can signify what it means to our vision. Our logo focuses on what makes us who we are as Dene. Our traditional territory has 15 major watersheds within our lands. Our rivers and lakes were our highways and our traditional and contemporary communities are located along these water bodies. Water as a symbol is essential to describing Kaska's messaging around stewardship and its responsibilities.



Confluences of water represent a convergence of knowledges. In the western science of geography, a confluence is known as the meeting of two or more bodies of water. In indigenous science within the Kaska worldview, confluences represent important cultural water crossings and unions that served as a meeting place for our people.

Where the waters flow together symbolized an important braiding of wisdom which is essential for how multiple knowledges must be utilized to help us better steward our lands and waters.

Environmental stewardship, which DKK represents, is an important action taking place by individuals, communities, and networks with various motivations to protect and care for the environment. A valuable and holistic way to guide these relationships that we have for the environment is through promoting multiple ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Rivers to the Kaska are fully interconnected both physically and symbolically to all living things. We know that threats to our rivers are a real topic of concern. Rivers make up an essential aspect of our cultural landscape that continued to shape our community's identities in our ancestral lands. Dene K'éh Kusān represents the protection of this connection to our past and also the revitalization of our renewed relationship to the various important riverscapes in our traditional territory.

Riverscapes are resilient, just as our people are.

This is a cultural heritage symbol of river stewardship for the Kaska Dena



#### Land Stewardship Declaration

DKI intends to help the communities further develop a Declaration of Land Stewardship through the mutual aspiration to further the well-being of our people and Dena Keyeh. Since time immemorial, the Kaska Dena have existed, occupied, and relied on the lands, waters, and resources of the Peoples Country. We share a common culture, a language with distinct dialects, history tied to the stories, myths, oral traditions of our Elders, and our Dene K'éh Gu s'ān. Within our traditional and present-day communities, we stand united in support of our inherent collective rights, title, and interests to our ancestral lands that have been recognized and affirmed through various declarations, including the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples.

Together we support each of our communities' unified aspiration and responsibility for the stewardship of Dene Kēyeh. This Declaration represents our Nations' desire to work together to protect the land in unity and respect and is a solemn commitment to do so. With this commitment, we will work to codify our traditional laws that will help make our vision operational for modern times. That vision, which our elders remind us, is for all Kaska Dena to acknowledge our gift as a Nation, to steward our lands in the Kaska way, and to move forward together in building a future for the generations of Kaska Dena to come that is founded on the sacred responsibilities and inherent rights granted to us by the Creator.



#### Land Stewardship Framework

To help prepare for the management of the DKK, a draft framework is being established to demonstrate the stewardship structure of the area, the roles and responsibilities of all governments including Kaska, the process for establishing the priorities and focus for DKK, and the linkages to the management and future operational plans for the area. Engagement and feedback from community members will be needed on this framework where we hope to have feedback available online and through community meetings in 2022.

### Our Land

The Kaska Dena Nation has an inherent right to govern its ancestral lands and our communities. We have the right to protect our indigenous rights, titles, and interests within Dena Kēveh.

### **Our Laws**

The Kaska Dena Nation will protect our inherent rights by honouring our ancestors' traditions, the authority of our laws, and the wisdom of our Elders and are willing to live by the authority of Dene K'éh Gu s'an.

## **Our People**

The Kaska Dena Nation has a sacred obligation to protect, preserve, and defend the air, lands, waters, plants, and animals of Dena Kēyeh for the well-being of our Nation and our people.

# **Our Future**

The Kaska Dena Nation stewardship obligation includes maintaining and restoring conditions in our ancestral lands that provide our people and future generations with environmental, cultural, spiritual, and economic foundations to live in according to Denetie.





#### Kaska Laws Project - Dene K'éh Gusān

The Kaska Dena Law Project is focused on researching, documenting, analyzing and implementing Kaska Law to inform the Kaska Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area proposals within the Kaska Dena Nation. We are wanting to understand Kaska Dena Laws and Traditions within each of our communities. In order for us to manage our lands according to our Kaska values, we must adopt our laws and practices as the foundation for governing the land that anchors us to our sacred beliefs and our longstanding relationship with the land. The Kaska have the right to use our ancestral laws as a tool to unite us together and decolonize the knowledge systems being used to make decisions within our ancestral territories.

Through DKI, we hope that this project can restore concepts of Dene K'éh, A'ī, and Dena Ah Nezen to our communities. The goal of this research is to create a Kaska Dena Land Relationship Model aimed at managing the Kaska IPCA's that is based on Kaska laws and protocols.



Over the past year the project lead, Brittany Tuffs has been conducting research on Kaska Law as well as doing interviews and talking circles with community members about the project. COVID-19 has limited our ability to come into each of the Kaska communities to share information on this important Kaska nationwide project as well as connect with community members who would like to be involved in the work. We hope this will change in time.

In the interim, to help guide our work we have established an oversight committee that consists of Kaska Elders and Knowledge Holders.

For more information about this project, please contact, Project Lead - Brittany Tuffs: <u>brittany\_tuffs@hotmail.com</u> Our Land, Our Language, Our Laws is who we are as Dena.



#### **Conservation Economy**

In our goal to project DKK, we want to foster economic opportunities that enhance that goal and provide long-term jobs and careers for our people. Tourism activities like cultural tourism and eco-adventures are an example of a conservation-based economy. These types of economies are one of the fastest-growing and provide tremendous opportunities to the Kaska Dena. DKK is seen as a globally significant wilderness area where our people can build Kaska-specific economic strategies for this important area in Dena Kayeh. In order to guide these strategies, DKI is working with the three BC Kaska Dena communities to develop a Kaska Cultural Tourism Plan that will look at traditional indigenous economies and different types of tourism assets and opportunities. By assessing these options it will help our communities identify the needed capacity, infrastructure and capital to develop our short and long-term tourism goals.



#### **Carbon Offsets**

Dena Kayeh, known as "the People's Country" is a storehouse for carbon. In our world today, where increased CO2 is warming our planet, protecting our boreal forests is of vital importance. To help reduce global climate change, countries are looking at ways to protect our trees through a process called carbon sequestration. DKI is currently in the process of looking at how carbon could be sequestered in DKK. DKK is nearly 4 million hectares in size, of which approximately 3 million is forested and sequesters carbon. Looking at carbon sequestration can potentially allow for the sale of carbon offsets within our traditional territory. Once these types of markets are more understood and regulated, the Kaska could develop their own Carbon Offset program which would provide jobs and further research opportunities around our forest health in DKK.

The Carbon Offset program could be a significant source of income for our communities, where portions of those funds would be utilized in the management, infrastructure development, research, and the Kaska guardians' program for Dene K' éh Kusān.

# Dena Kayeh is the "People's Country"



### Mackenzie River Basin Board and Yukon - BC Bilateral Water Management Agreement

Corrine Porter is currently the Yukon Indigenous Representative on the Mackenzie River Basin Board (MRBB) and has served in this role since 2017. The MRBB was established as a result of the signing of the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement in 1997. Further information on the board and the Master agreement can be found at: https://www.mrbb.ca/

The Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement committed the YT and BC Governments to negotiate a Bilateral Water Management Agreement. The objectives of the bilateral agreement are:

- To effect cooperative watershed management among the jurisdictions which share the water resources of the Mackenzie River Basin,
- To sustain the ecological integrity of the aquatic ecosystems of the Mackenzie River Basin, and
- To facilitate equitable and sustainable use of shared water resources by establishing criteria and desired outcomes that address water consumption, flows, quality, groundwater management and aquatic ecosystem health commitments.

The YT-BC Bilateral Water Management Agreement was signed in 2017. The Kaska Nation was consulted on the agreement and was offered two seats on the Bilateral Water Management Committee (BWMC), one representative from British Columbia and one from the Yukon Territory. Corrine Porter sits as the representative for the Kaska in BC and the Yukon seat remains unfilled. The BWMC has met 8 times since the signing, if you are interested in reviewing the Bilateral Water Management Agreement, Terms of the Reference, work plan they can be found at:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/water-planningstrategies/water-management-agreements



# Dena Kayeh Institute Facilitated Initiatives



### **Management Planning**

Both Tā Ch'ilā Park and the Ne'āh' Conservancy are part of the Dene Kēyeh in Northern BC. It is the common goal that Tā Ch'ilā Park and the Ne'āh' Conservancy be managed in a way that protects the Kaska Dena way of life, their cultural sites and landscapes; to sustain biological diversity and important wildlife habitat, and to protect landscapes for sustainable recreation and tourism. The Ne'āh' Conservancy Management Plan development was initiated in 2016. Due to capacity issues in the BC Government plan development was delayed. We picked up the work again in 2019 and have been actively working on it since the spring of 2019. As part of the restart, it was decided to include the Tā Ch'ilā Park Management direction into the Plan. We now have a final draft plan for community review. The community outreach plan will include:

- Online presentation via Zoom hubs with a platform like 'Bang the Table' or an alternative that would work with the existing program;
- Surveys that will be made available for feedback on Mail Chimp/ Survey Monkey;
- Guardians can go door to door to review the draft plan with community members; and
- In-person community meetings/open houses if the communities are comfortable with people coming into the community.



DKI is assisting the BC Kaska Dena Land Departments in the consultation and engagement of the management planning processes for the Liard River Hot Springs Park Management Plan and the Muswka-Kechika Protected Areas Strategic Management Plan. Community engagement on these plans is expected to happen in the spring of 2022. These management planning processes are being done with the Kaska IPCA in mind, with dialogues around joint authority and management of these important protected areas and parks within the Kaska Dena Ancestral territory.

For more information on these DKI facilitated initiatives please contact Corrine Porter: <u>denakayeh@gmail.com</u>

# Dena Kayeh Institute Facilitated Initiatives



### Dane Nan Yế Dāh

Land Guardians help Indigenous Nations honour our collective cultural responsibility to care for our lands and waters, where there are over 70 Guardian Programs across Canada that have been established to honour and uphold this responsibility.

In 2014, DKI, in partnership with the Daylu Dena Council, Dease River First Nation, Kwadacha First Nation developed the Dane nan yế dāh Network ("DNY"), which means "People Protecting the Land". The Network is intended to provide long-term ecological and cultural monitoring support to the three Kaska communities in British Columbia. The vision of the DNY is to revitalize the stewardship responsibilities of the Kaska people and protect lands and waters, which are central to the preservation of our unique identity and vibrant Kaska culture.

As part of the DNY Strategic Plan, the goals of the Network are:

- Expand the Network's Stewardship Activities in the Territory;
- Build Guardian Expertise within the Network;
- Support co-management and consent-based decision making;
- Work collaboratively with neighbouring Nations to advance regional stewardship priorities;
- Establish strategic partnerships to build the knowledge base and capacity in the communities and;
- Address key infrastructure, coordination and communications needs of the Network



DNY Principles are the foundation of the Kaska Land Ethic:

- Maintain ecological processes, which sustains biological diversity;
- Respect for sacred laws A'IE and Dene K'eh;
- Respect for fish and wildlife;
- Safeguarding Kaska intellectual property rights to traditional knowledge; and
- Sharing benefits.

To learn more about DNY please contact Tanya Ball: dki.gistech@gmail.com

# "People Protecting The Land"



### **Guardian Monitoring**

DNY partakes in various monitoring programs in Northern BC and Southeast Yukon.

Water Monitoring:

 DNY is performing baseline data collection to monitor the effects of Placer Mining within the traditional territory. The water sampling sites are located on Limestone, Troutline, and Mcdames Creeks DNY has data loggers installed in various locations as well to collect continuous data on water levels and depth. The purpose of these water monitoring stations is to measure seasonal water flows, collect information using the Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) protocols so as to record information that can be used in reporting systems. DNY is also involved in an Aquifer Mapping Project to study groundwater in the Watson Lake region through water well records. This project will be taking place in 2022.

Yukon Parks Monitoring:

• DNY has a contract with the Government of Yukon to assist with park monitoring and planning for the Watson Lake Territorial, Liard Canyon Territorial Park and the Coal River Springs Ecological Reserve Park



Wildlife Monitoring:

• DNY performs wildlife and traditional knowledge monitoring during all seasons. The purpose of this monitoring is to collect the presence and absence of culturally important wildlife between seasons and years. Regional study areas have been set up by the network to allow for statistical comparisons within the traditional territory and neighbouring nations.

Yukon Seismic Station Monitoring:

• DNY has a monitoring contract with the Yukon Government to conduct monthly assessments on installed seismometers in an area that is being studied for geothermal energy potential in South East Yukon.

# Eyes, Ears, and Boots on the Ground





Training is an ongoing activity that the guardians must undergo, whether it's re-certification or new training there is always yearly training that they must complete to keep safe in the field and increase skill sets. This year's training involves the following:

- Drone Stewardship Training: Lisa Horsey and Kyla Magun successfully completed the Transport Canada RPAS Small Basic Exam and are now certified to operate Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UVA). As part of this training, they also received their Restricted Operators Certificate with aeronautical qualification.
- Ice River Rescue re-certification for Lisa Horsey and Tanya Ball is scheduled for February 2022. This will be Kylan Magun's first training in Ice River Rescue.
- Pesticide Application Training.
- Indigenous Mapping Workshop with ESRI and Google.
- Climate Monitoring Training with BC Government



### **Collaborative Stewardship Framework**

The 3 Nations Society and British Columbia Government have created the Collaborative Stewardship Framework ("CSF") which is a 3 year funded pilot program by which the Kaska, Tahltan, and Tlingit Nations have agreed with the Province on the co-design and the building of shared capacity with the goal of shared management of land and resource values across the traditional territories of the 3 Nations in BC. One of the biggest accomplishments so far in the program is the development of community-focused information collection programs on wildlife, land use, and research on how we collectively make wildlife decisions as well as the ability to address information gaps for wildlife. This pilot program is run by a Governance Team and a Technical Working Group. Tanya Ball and Corrine Porter sit on the Technical Working Group and Gillian Staveley sits on the Governance Team. The CSF program is working to produce a newsletter in the new year providing updates on all the projects being funded under that initiative.

https://3nations.org/collaborative-stewardship-framework/







#### **Data Collection**

Various types of data are collected by DNY. One of the biggest is Harvest data which is used to record information that can be used in Wildlife Management decisions. DNY collects this data through surveys word of mouth and community input to the Network. This data is always kept confidential and used only for Kaska purposed to understand what the First Nations harvest numbers area so as to ensure people are meeting their sustenance needs. There have been ongoing concerns raised about the health of wildlife by Kaska people for many years. To help assess the situation, DNY has created a wildlife health sampling program. Health samples are being collected from moose, caribou, sheep and goat to be analyzed for baseline levels of contaminants. This information helps us better understand any potential human health risks and risks to the species.

You can request kits from the Guardians. You will need to take samples from your harvest. The kits will have everything you need to take samples and instructions if needed. The guardians are available to train you on how to collect the samples yourselves. Information required includes:

- record of the location of harvest, sex, age, body condition;
- sample of the Liver, muscle, hide, hair, left kidney with fat, lower left hind leg, lower jaw, feces, blood on filter paper and any strange stuff, if any.

You can drop the samples off to the Guardians at the Health center and we will freeze and ship them to the lab. If you can't bring it in right away, we request you store the sample in the freezer in a safe place till you can hand it off to the guardian program.



### **Public Outreach**

Part of the DNY Network involves public outreach and relationship building. The Land Guardians often are invited to present about the program. This past year due to COVID most workshops were held online. Some of the presentations were given to the following organizations: Yukon Universirty, Kaska Dena Council, RIVER Trust, and the Invasive Species Council.

# **Report an Issue:**

HOW TO REPORT ISSUES OUT ON THE LAND IN REGARDS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS, POACHING, ETC.

REPORT ALL POACHERS AND POLLUTERS (RAPP LINE) 1 877 952 RAPP(7277) OR REPORT TO CONSERVATION OFFICER.

CONTACT THE GUARDIAN NETWORK (250) 779-3181 EXT 1003

> YOUR LOCAL LANDS AND Resources officer

REPORT A SPILL BC - 1 800 663 3456



#### Arramat

The Dena Kayeh Institute is one of many indigenous-led organizations, worldwide, who are working with governments, university researchers and other resource people to apply for funding for research and action in support of the health and well-being of the environment and people. We want to strengthen Indigenous voices and capacities to document their knowledge about the importance of the whole environment (including biodiversity) to the health and well-being of their communities."

The Arramat research Project proposal titled "Biodiversity Conservation and the Health and Wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples" was submitted earlier this year in partnership with the University of Alberta. We are currently waiting to hear if it was successful.

More information about this partnership can be found at: https://arramatproject.org/



### **Course Development**

DKI has been involved in the development of two different curriculums to educate others on Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being. One of the curriculums focused on the co-learning needed for land relationships and responsibility within a university-level environmental and conservation science program; the other focuses on the need to illuminate our ways of knowing to inform reconciliation for specific audiences.

Education around Kaska Dena understandings of land stewardship is an essential mandate of DKI. In 2022, the institute will be pursuing funding to develop a Kaska-based curriculum on land guardianship to help promote our land ethic and way of life.

# Education



### Kaska Community Projects

DKI helps administer the funding for some Kaska Community based projects in our Traditional Territory. Some of the projects that our team has assisted with in 2021 are the following:

- Kaska Drummers
- Ross River Hide Camp
- Kaska Bird Project



### Highlight - Kaska Bird Project

One of the goals of DKI is to produce educational materials for our youth that will further their understanding about the land and its inhabitants, and how the Kaska are deeply connected to this land. To this end, we are initiating a project with funding from Audubon Society, to record Kaska stories and knowledge about birds, with the eventual goal of publishing these stories in a book designed for Kaska secondary school students. The narrative will draw on Dena stories, legends and knowledge about birds, as well as interesting ecological facts drawn from scientific studies.

The importance of this project is to preserve Kaska oral knowledge about birds, and pass these stories onto our young people so as to broaden their understanding about our culture and the land. Note that any publication will require the support of the Kaska elders.

If you would like to be involved in this project, please contact DKI.

# Community Projects



Showe sénlá' for reading our newsletter