

NÉ DŪGŪZEDĪTCHĪ - WE ARE TALKING TO EVERYONE ABOUT IT

Official Newsletter of the Dena Kayeh Institute

Message from Executive Director



DKI
DENA KAYEH INSTITUTE

The team and I at the Dena Kayeh Institute are finishing the 2023 year ready for a break but satisfied that we have made substantial progress on our mandate to develop an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) to ensure the heart of the Kaska homelands in Northern British Columbia is protected and that our people will be the decision-makers to exercise our sacred responsibility to look after our lands and waters. It has been a very busy year, and our newsletter is here to give you a brief overview of this work.

We are in discussions with the Province of BC and look forward to some possible announcements related to the IPCA in the New Year. In the meantime, I am grateful for the attention to and direction from the Council of Kaska Chiefs for these efforts. Their support and timely input are, of course, central to everything we do and much appreciated. Community meetings are being planned for early in 2024 so our team can share more details of the project and continue to strengthen support and create excitement for our collective goals.

Over the past two years, we have been honoured to help organize and facilitate meetings of the Kaska National Elders Creation Committee at Iron Creek and recently in Whitehorse and assist in recording their wishes and aid in their planning for a launch of a Kaska National Kaska Elders Council in 2024.

As we look forward to the New Year, I am excited at the opportunities that lie ahead for our people. I am optimistic that with strong support from all our communities, with loud and proud Kaska gatherings, and continued hard work together, we will succeed with the IPCA, with an expanded Kaska Guardians program, and with new possibilities for economic advancement for our people.

I want to thank the DKI team for their hard work on behalf of the Nation and express gratitude to the members of the DKI Board of Directors for their support and guidance. I feel privileged to lead these efforts on your behalf. I hope everyone will have some rest and some quality time with friends and family. I wish you all the best, and may the New Year bring good health and happiness to our people and great promise for our Nation.

Shówe sénlá'

Corrine Porter - Executive Director

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**Dene
K'eh
Kusān**

ALWAYS WILL BE THERE

The Dena Kayeh Institute, with the support of Kaska Leadership, Elders and our communities, has been working to protect a large portion of our traditional territory in BC since 2018. We are actively pursuing a mandate with the Province of BC to work together to create one of the largest IPCAs in Canada. We are confident that we will find a path to work with our neighbouring nations and crown governments to protect over 40,000 square kilometres of land and water in Dena Kayeh.

We are at a turning point, and we're very hopeful that we'll get to a place where we can be working with governments, stakeholders and the public to steward this land in a better way, according to our values, ways, and customs because how the land is governed is just as important to having it protected in the first place.

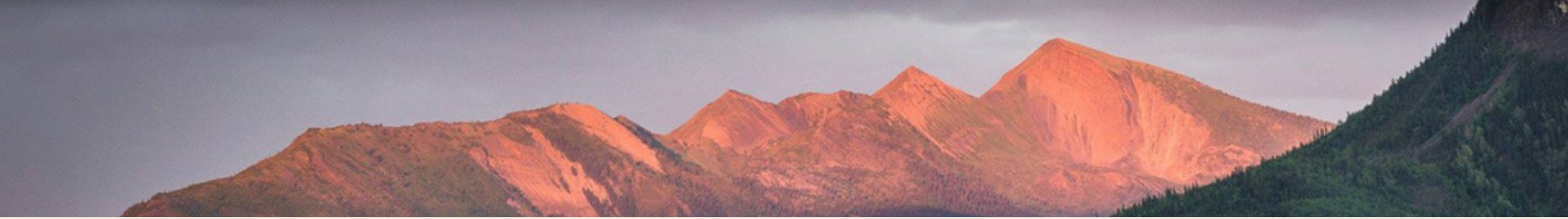
Last fall, we premièred a film that shares the Kaska story of land stewardship and how we plan to draw on Kaska knowledge and culture to protect our territory for all people to experience, honour and sustain for future generations. We are so proud of this film and would encourage everyone to see it! You can see it here:



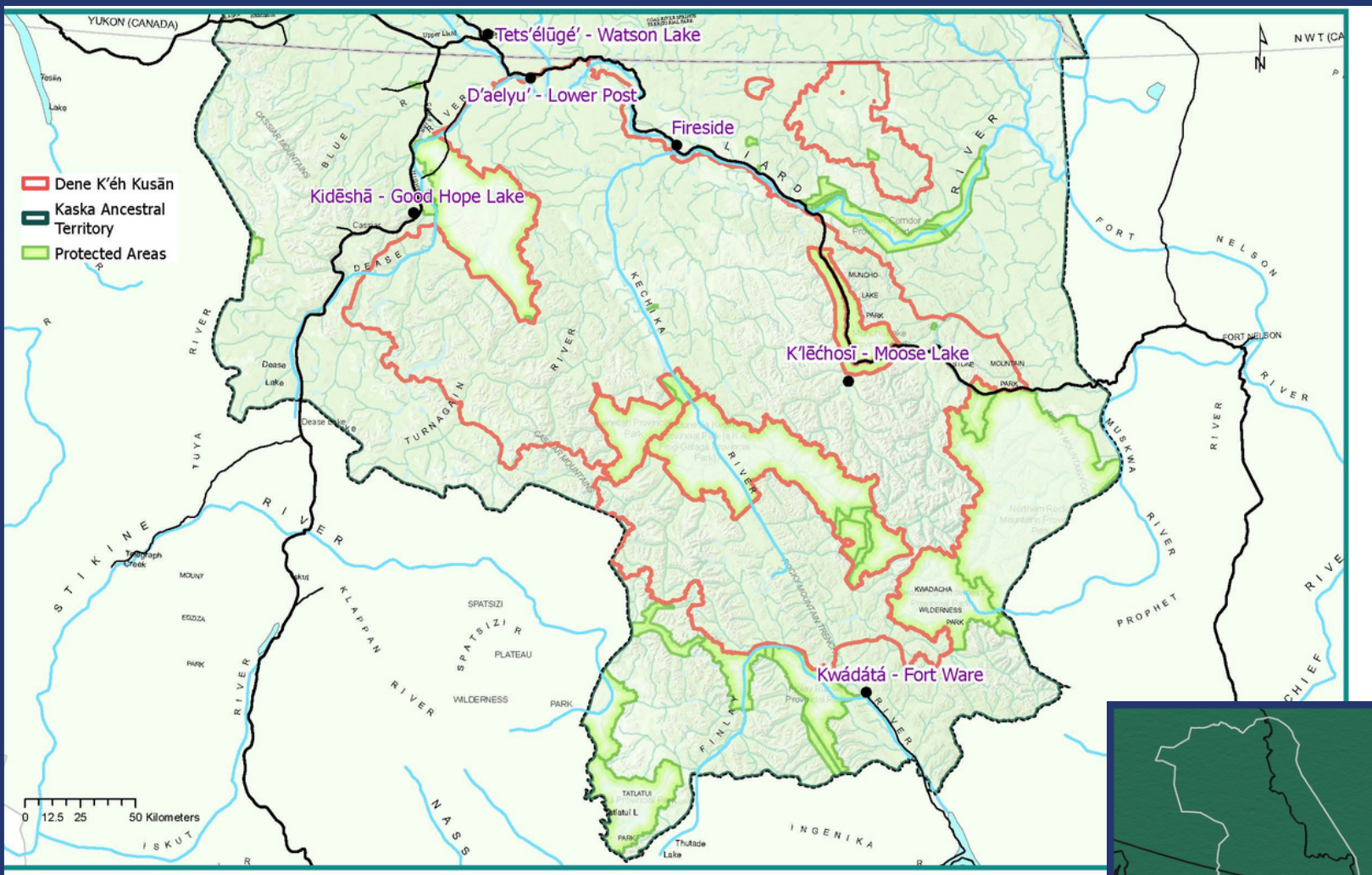
To find out more about the plan to protect the area known as Dene K'eh Kusān, check out our website denekayeh.com

The meaning behind the name of the IPCA is to remember that when we are on our land, we follow our ways.

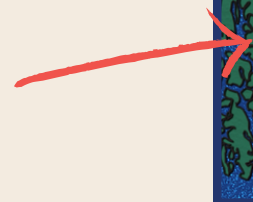




Map of Dene K'éh Kusān



To take the tour of Dene K'éh Kusān, check out our story map and click here:



In this region of our ancestral territory, our ancestors travelled between our traditional communities along our trails and waterways. At the centre of these networks lies the heart of our people.



Gukēyeh Sogadze'hí

We are taking Care of the Land

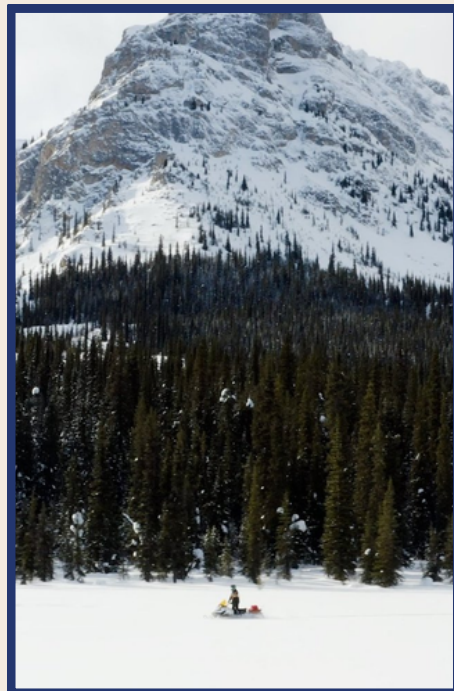
For almost 20 years, DKI has been focused on finding ways to help our communities recover their responsibilities as land stewards and honour the sacred duty we feel as Dene to protect our land and our culture.

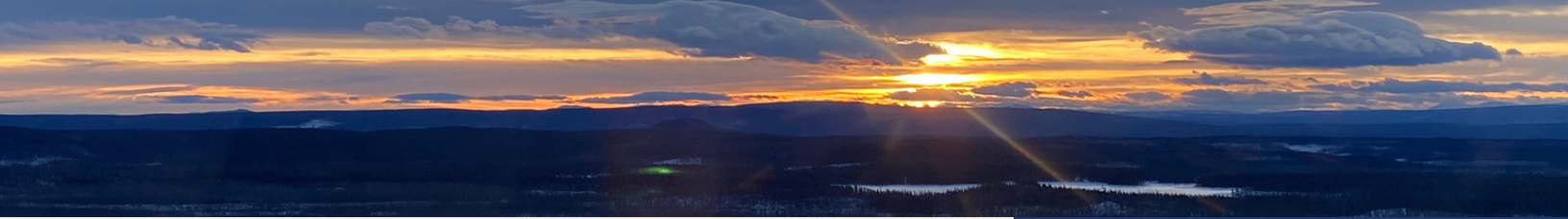
We know the responsibility to care for this land is more critical today than ever. Within our territory, multiple crises are being experienced at the same time: climate change and biodiversity loss; drug and alcohol abuse and mental health; and the challenges and pressures related to food security are being deeply felt by our people. All of this is having an impact on our communities and on our land. The displacement from our role as land stewards must end, and we know we need to act now to change the trajectory of our future. One of the significant shifts we want to see happen is for our people to connect back to the important Kaska stewardship principles. We know that we need to help fix the systems at play that impact how decisions are made on and for our land, and where we can begin to fix this problem is through education.

Within our communities, we have various land guardian programs who are the eyes and ears on the ground, researching and monitoring the land, water, plants and animals and they are helping our leadership make good decisions for our land that includes our worldview, our traditional knowledge, and our ancestral oral wisdom. We see the need to develop our own training to help decolonize the approach to science and education within our communities and, at the same time, help our people and our guardians better advocate for the land they are stewarding. DKI in partnership with the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, will work with our Kaska communities to help create a Kaska Dena Land Guardian Certificate Program. Funding through Ārramāt - arramatproject.org will be utilized for an Indigenous place-based project geared towards strengthening sustainable Kaska livelihoods.

We will carry out this work over 2024, our goal being to develop six modules that will become the prerequisite course for a position as a Kaska land guardian and help prepare future guardians for the tools they need to fulfill their duties and ensure they experience a rewarding career within their homelands because of it.

To learn more about this project, check out the online presentation here:





It is the First Nations Guardians who provide the ongoing management and stewardship of Dene Keyeh. The Dane Nan Yé Dāh Land Guardian Network has a hugely important role in the vision for land stewardship in Kaska Territory. Here is an update about the amazing work being led by Kaska Guardians in Northern BC..



Bison Collaring

Guardians Robbie Porter and Tanya Ball assisted the province with collaring bison (bulls). Blood, hair and feces samples were also taken from the animal. Bison are tranquilized and put to sleep to put the collar on as well as collect all samples. The purpose of collaring is to study the movement of bison and samples collected provide information on the health of the bison. Last year guardians Robbie Porter and Lisa Horsey assisted with collaring cows. Guardians will continue to meet with the province by zoom to look at solutions and mitigations to decrease the high collision rates as well as the nuisance that bison cause within the community.

Field Patrol Surveys

The Guardians have completed a number of surveys over the 2023 Field Season:

- 13 Hunting Camp Observations
- 61 Wildlife Obserbations
- 5 Environmental Concern Surveys
- 5 Traditional Knowledge Observation Surveys

Guardians are the ones who are out on the land, upholding their ancestral duties and responsibilities to be knowledge holders, land stewards, storytellers, and educators.





Moose Hide Tanning Camp

At the Iron Creek Lodge, the Daylu Dena Council and the Dena Kayeh Institute hosted a hide tanning camp in October 2023. Tanya Ball and Lisa Horsey coordinated and assisted with the camp. We built permanent hide tanning frames at the site. Our elders, Bernice Ball, Fred McMillan and Robbie Porter, demonstrated and provided instruction on the process of removing the hair, fleshing the hides and making bone tools for hide scraping. Various community members from Lower Post and Watson Lake assisted with the hides. Denetia School brought their students to the camp for a day to learn on the land. A guide will be developed to document the instructions and teachings that the elders shared and will be provided to community members.



Climate Station Installation

The 3 Nations Guardian Programs received funding through the Collaborative Stewardship framework to purchase and install climate stations within each of our respective territories. It was acknowledged that there are data gaps in climate data in our areas, the data collected will help fill in the gaps. Kaska installed the station at Crooked Lake with the help of Vanessa Foord, Research Climatologist for the BC Government. Data will be downloaded once or twice a year and shared with the BC Government.

Indigenous-led conservation is a massive movement across the world that is impacting global policy. IPCAs and Land Guardian programs are a big part of this movement as they unite us in our mutual responsibility to care for the land.





Placer Sampling

The Guardians have been collecting samples from McDames, Limestone and Troutline Creeks in the Good Hope Lake Area, since 2021. We are working with consultants from LGL limited on managing and assessing the data and will provide a report to the community in the new year. The purpose of this water monitoring program is to see if placer mining activities are negatively impacting our creeks and river systems. We sample for total/dissolved metals, mercury and general nutrients. We also take pH and water temperature data.

Temperature Loggers

Over the years we have heard from our members that the Liard Hot Springs water felt cooler than it has in the past. In partnership with the provincial government the Guardians installed temperature loggers in the pools as well as adjacent streams. This data will help us determine the temperature changes happening in the pools. Data will be reported to the community once we have enough data to report back on.

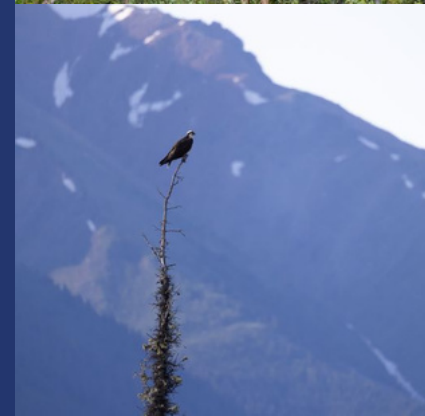
One of the main goals of the Kaska Land Guardian Program is to create a presence on the land and build relationships with land users. We want to educate people using our traditional knowledge and western science.





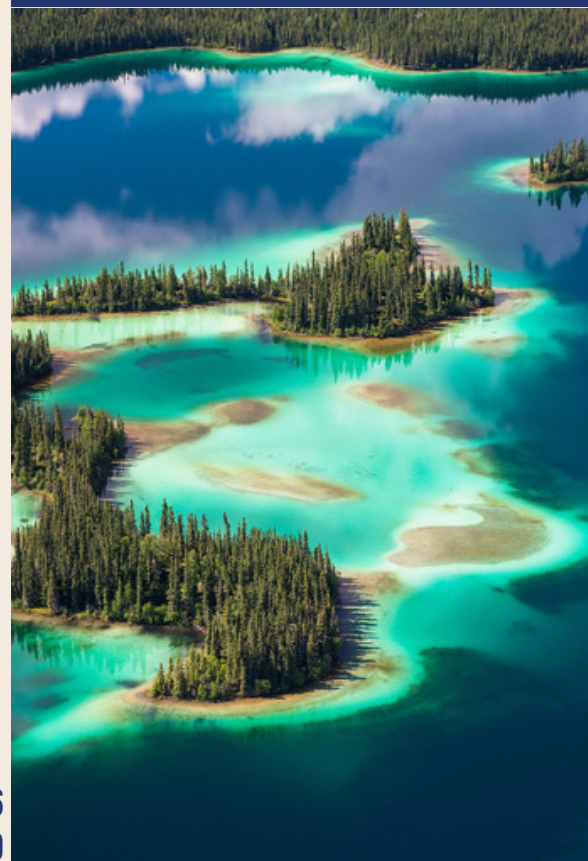
Game Checks

Robbie Porter & Lisa Horsey assisted with the game checks at Tā Ch'ilā (Boya Lake). This initiative is done in collaboration with the Province of BC under our 3 Nations Collaborative Stewardship Forum. The program is about augmenting information on hunter use and experience in northern BC to understand hunter activities better. The game checks allow us collectively to understand better when and where people are harvesting and not harvesting wildlife and how they access certain areas. Managing wildlife populations and hunting opportunities in large, mostly remote, and diverse regions poses unique challenges, requiring proactive management and engagement strategies that keep wildlife sustainability at the forefront of the decision-making process.



Bird Recording

In partnership with the National Audubon Society the Guardians are working to collect information on the migratory birds that pass through the Kaska Ancestral Territory. Guardians installed bird recorders (Automated Recording Units or ARUs) around wetlands and lakes. We are currently developing a story map as an educational tool on migratory birds and will incorporate the data we collected. We will be installing more ARUs next spring in places like Daylu (Lower Post) as a station to track banded birds on their migration route.



Contact Information

For more information about DKI and the initiatives we support in the Kaska communities, please contact us at: info@denakayeh.com

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