



 enison Mines

Wheeler River Project

Final Environmental
Impact Statement

November 2024

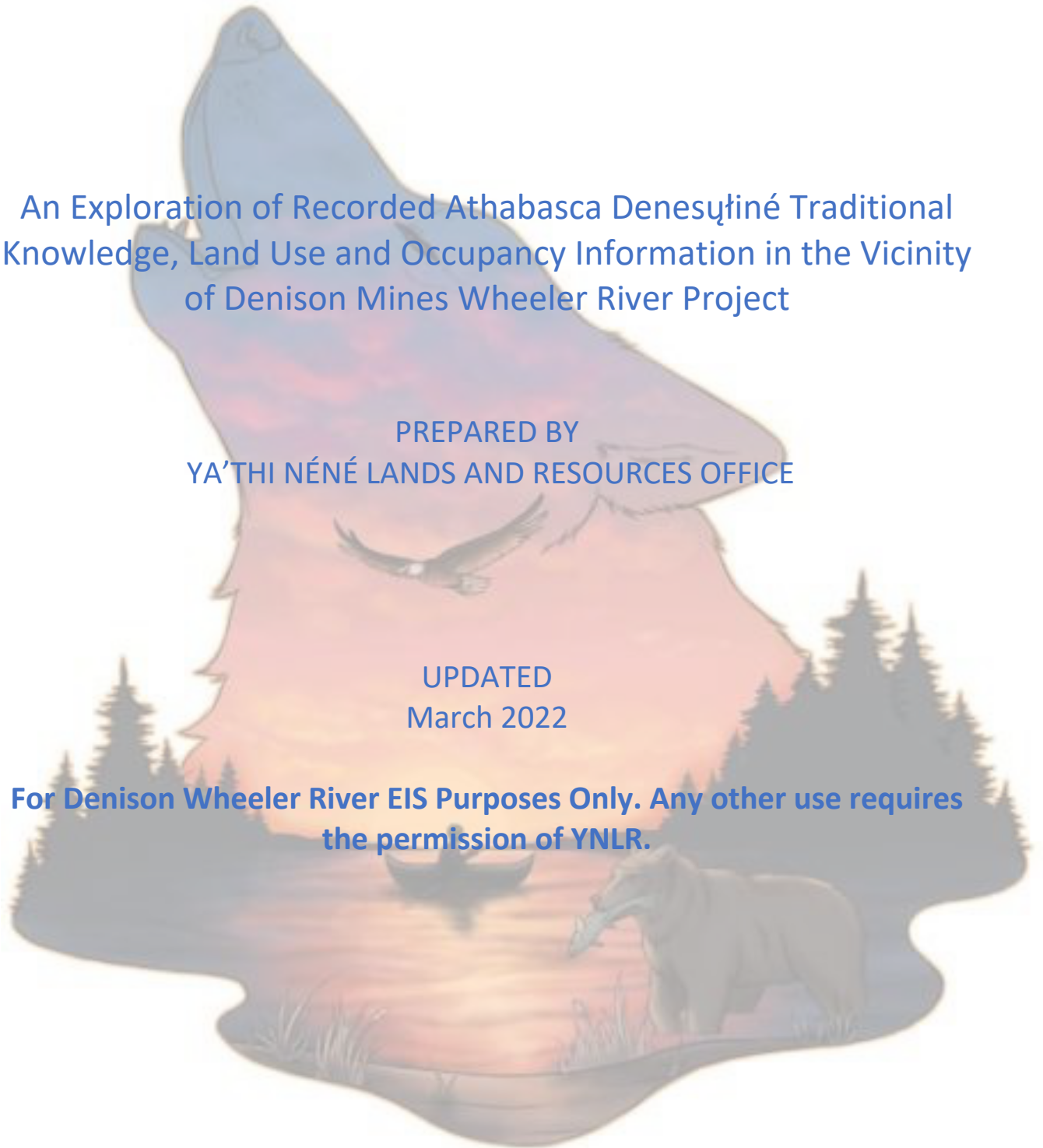
Powering
**PEOPLE, PARTNERSHIPS
AND PASSION.**

An Exploration of Recorded Athabasca Denesų́finé Traditional Knowledge, Land Use and Occupancy Information in the Vicinity of Denison Mines Wheeler River Project

PREPARED BY
YA'THI NÉNE LANDS AND RESOURCES OFFICE

UPDATED
March 2022

For Denison Wheeler River EIS Purposes Only. Any other use requires the permission of YNLR.



This document is an initial exploration of recorded Traditional Knowledge, Land Use and Occupancy (TKLUO) information of the Athabasca Denesų́liné (AD) First Nations and Communities in the Wheeler River area. It does not represent the full extent of historic or current TKLUO in the area. This document was prepared to facilitate participation in the regulatory process. Its use by anyone else or for any other purpose may not be appropriate. Any party wishing to use or disseminate the information contained in this document must first seek approval from Ya'thi Néné Lands and Resources Office.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| LIST OF FIGURES | 4 |
| 1.0 INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| 2.0 BACKGROUND | 6 |
| 2.1 NUHEN N  | 6 |
| 2.2 TREATY 8 AND TREATY 10 | 8 |
| 2.3 LAND USE PLANNING | 9 |
| 3.0 RECORDED TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, LAND USE, AND OCCUPANCY INFORMATION | 10 |
| 3.1 TERRITORIAL ATHABASCA DENESųŁIN  TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, LAND USE AND OCCUPANCY STUDIES | 11 |
| 3.2 REGIONAL / LOCAL ATHABASCA DENESųŁIN  TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, LAND USE AND OCCUPANCY STUDIES | 12 |
| 3.3 OTHER LAND USE INFORMATION – DUTY TO CONSULT RESPONSES | 14 |
| 3.4 OTHER LAND USE INFORMATION – ORAL HISTORY CONVEYED TO DENISON | 15 |
| 3.5 CAUTIONS | 15 |
| 4.0 SUMMARY/CONCLUSION | 16 |
| 5.0 REFERENCES | 17 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. Communities represented by Ya'thi Néné Lands and Resources office. | 5 |
| Figure 2. Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou ranges based on government surveys, tracking collared cow by telemetry and traditional and local knowledge of caribou harvesters (BQCMB, 2000). | 7 |
| Figure 3. Denesų́liné and related Archeology sites within Nuhenéné (Athabasca Denesų́liné Negotiations Team. 2009. Denesų́liné Atlas. Unpublished Contract Report). | 8 |
| Figure 4. Caribou Range, Treaty 8, Treaty 10, and Athabasca Denesų́liné (AD) Asserted Territory North of 60 (Athabasca Denesų́liné Negotiations Team. 2009. Denesų́liné Atlas. Unpublished Contract Report). | 9 |
| Figure 5. Traditional Territory (Nuhenéné) of the Athabasca Denesų́liné and Land Use Plan in Saskatchewan. | 10 |
| Figure 6. Overview of Traditional Land Use in the Athabasca Denesų́liné (AD) Asserted Territory North of 60 and in Saskatchewan (Hunter, B.W. Forthcoming. Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Athabasca Denesų́liné and Land Use Planning in Northern Canada. Unpublished PhD. University of Sheffield.). | 11 |
| Figure 7. Athabasca Denesų́liné recorded ADKLUO data in the southeast part of Nuhenéné. | 12 |
| Figure 8. Local map of recorded ADKLUO information in the vicinity of Denison Mines Wheeler River Project. | 13 |

While all the Athabasca Basin communities are relatively close to the Wheeler River Project area, this report will generally focus on the Athabasca Denesų́liné First Nations including Hatchet Lake, Black Lake and Fond du Lac.

The project is located within Nuhenéné, the traditional territory of the Athabasca Denesų́liné First Nations. Denison is proposing to develop an underground uranium mine at the Gryphon deposit, and an in-situ recovery process for uranium at the Phoenix deposit of the Wheeler River Project site located approximately 35 km northeast of the Key Lake mill and 35 km southwest of the McArthur River uranium mine (<https://www.denisonmines.com/projects/core-projects/wheeler-river-project/>).

2.0 Background

The Black Lake, Hatchet Lake, and Fond du Lac Denesų́liné First Nations are collectively termed the Athabasca Denesų́liné (AD). Fur traders originally referred to the Denesų́liné as the Northern Indians and later as the Caribou Eaters or Ethen-eldèli (Smith 1981, Elias 2003, Usher 1990, Bone *et al.* 1973). We have also been called Chipewyan; a name we found offensive since it was given to us by our traditional enemies, the Cree. In recent times, we have moved away from both terminologies, preferring the term Denesų́liné, meaning “the Real or Genuine People”. This is the term our ancestors used to define themselves. Apart from the specific references cited, the following works offer additional insight into the Athabasca Denesų́liné way of life: Birkett-Smith 1930, Sharp 1975 and 1977, Gillespie 1976, Irimoto 1981, Usher 2003, Gordon 1996, and Kasstan 2016.

2.1 Nuhenéné

Athabasca Denesų́liné culture, history and way of life are interwoven with the movements and health of the Beverly, Ahiak, Bathurst and Qamanirjuaq barren-ground caribou herds. We are so intrinsically tied that it is often stated that Caribou are Dene; Dene are Caribou. Our ancient legends and stories explain and reinforce this belief (Kasstan 2016, Elias 2003, and Smith 1981).

Every year, the barren-ground caribou migrate south into the forests of Nuhenéné for shelter and food. During this time, the communities begin their yearly harvest. The communities start harvesting caribou in December when they enter the boreal forest, and the hunt continues until the caribou migrate back north to the calving grounds in the barren lands above the treeline. The migration north begins in March and continues until mid-May.

Where there are, or have been, barren-ground caribou there are Athabasca Denesų́liné. This has been true for at least 2600 years. The attached map produced by the Beverly-Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB) (Figure 2) shows the range of the barren-ground caribou. Archeological records of the Denesų́liné and our closest ancestors, the Taltheilei, correspond very closely to the caribou range (Figure 3). Since the range is large, portions of our traditional territory are shared with other Indigenous Peoples. The range of the barren-ground caribou

fluctuates due to natural cycles and is impacted by climate changes, forest fires, industrial development, and other factors.

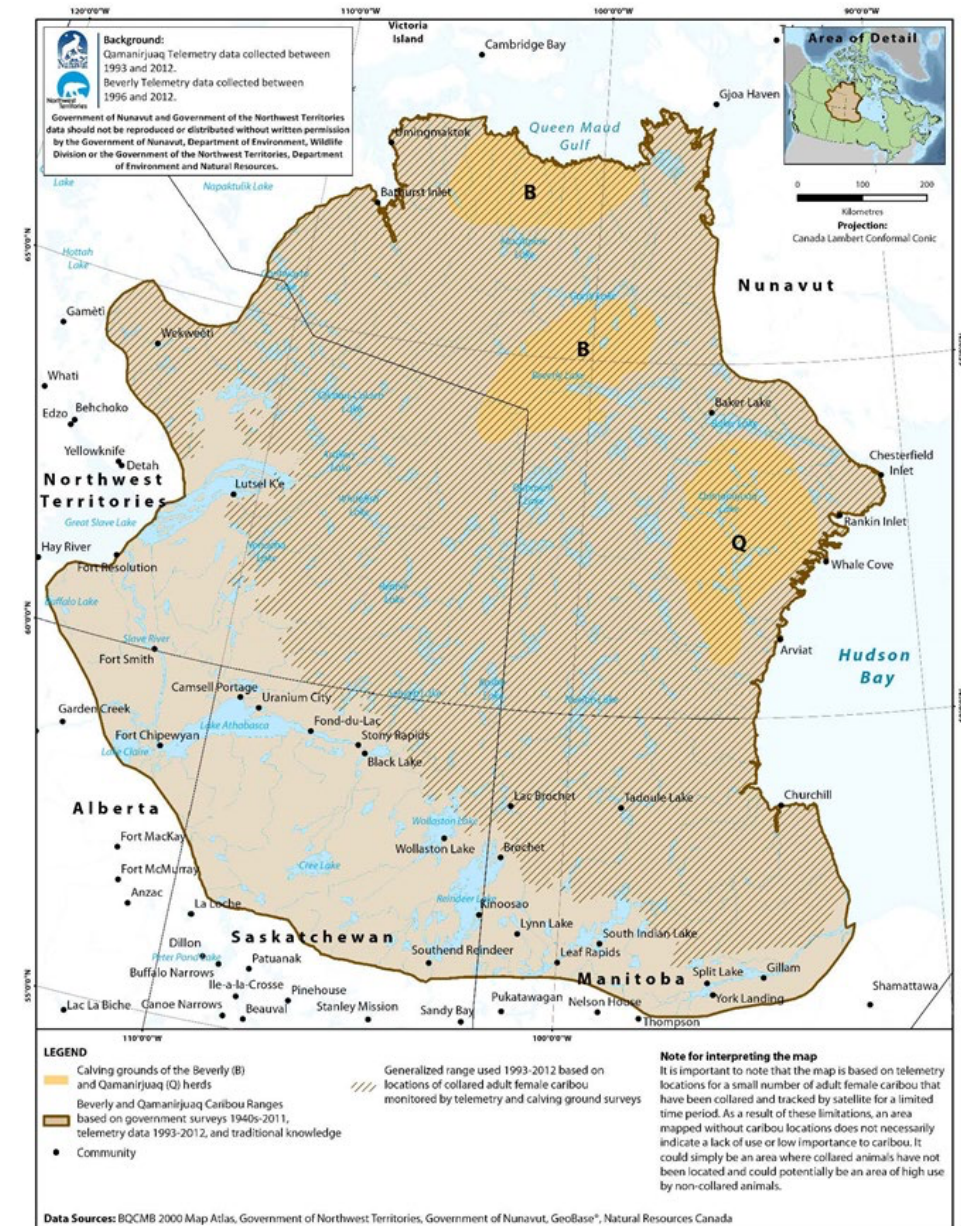


Figure 2. Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou ranges based on government surveys, tracking collared cow by telemetry and traditional and local knowledge of caribou harvesters (BQCMB, 2000).

Note: The map authors indicate that a small number of collared female caribou were tracked for a limited time period. Areas that may appear to lack caribou do not indicate a lack of use or importance, only that the collared animals may not have been located there. These areas could be of high use by non-collared animals. (BQCMB, 2000).

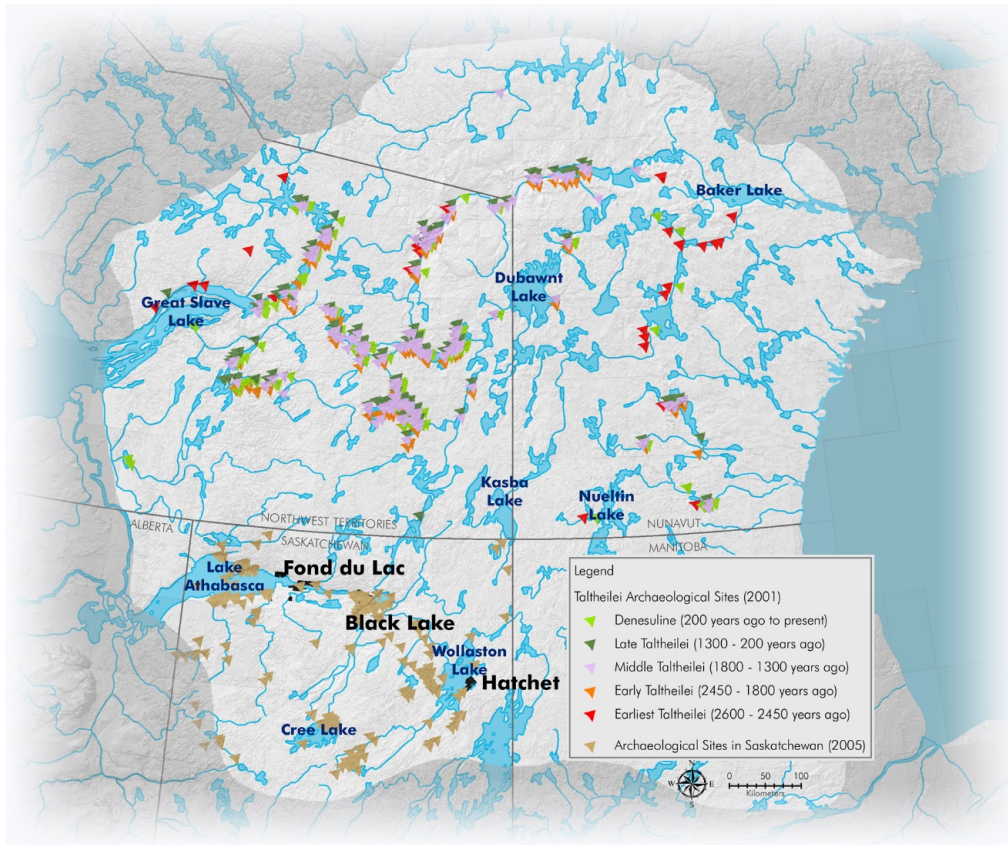


Figure 3. Denesų́nė and related Archeology sites within Nuhenėnė (Athabasca Denesų́nė Negotiations Team. 2009. Denesų́nė Atlas. Unpublished Contract Report).

While we talk about caribou being the lifeblood of the Athabasca Denesų́nė, it must be remembered that the range of the caribou defines the extent of our territory, and it is within this territory that our members have or assert Aboriginal or Treaty Rights and conduct many on-the-land activities beyond the harvesting of caribou. These activities include, but are not limited to, the hunting of small and other large game animals, fishing, trapping, and the gathering of foods, materials, and medicines.

2.2 Treaty 8 and Treaty 10

The Athabasca Denesų́nė signed Treaties #8 and # 10 with the Crown in the late 19th and early 20th century (Figure 4). Hatched Lake Denesų́nė First Nation is the only Athabasca Denesų́nė First Nation within Treaty 10, whereas, the Black Lake and Fond du Lac Denesų́nė First Nations are within Treaty 8. The proposed Denison Mines Corp. Wheeler River Project is within Treaty 10 territory and is close to the boundaries of Treaty 8.

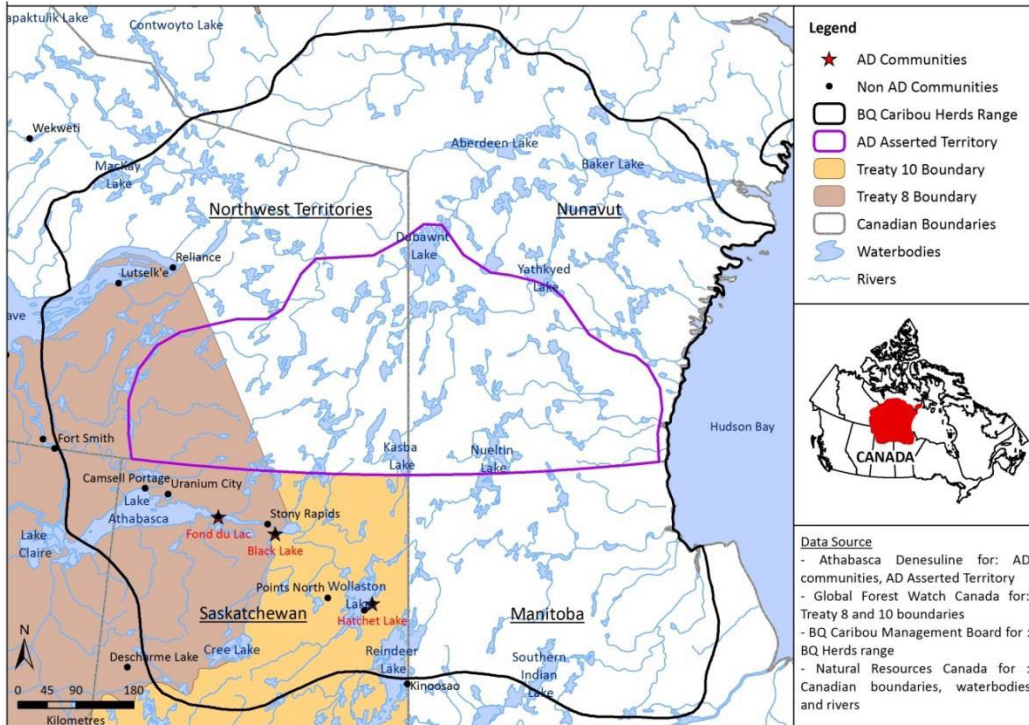


Figure 4. Caribou Range, Treaty 8, Treaty 10 and Athabasca Denesų́nė (AD) Asserted Territory North of 60 (Athabasca Denesų́nė Negotiations Team. 2009. Denesų́nė Atlas. Unpublished Contract Report).

2.3 Land Use Planning

From 2003-2007, the Athabasca Denesų́nė and non-aboriginal community partners (and at times in conjunction with government, industry, and NGOs) developed a regional land use plan that covers approximately 116, 000 km² (Figure 5) of our territory. The Multiple Use Zone of this plan includes the Denison Mines Wheeler River Project area.

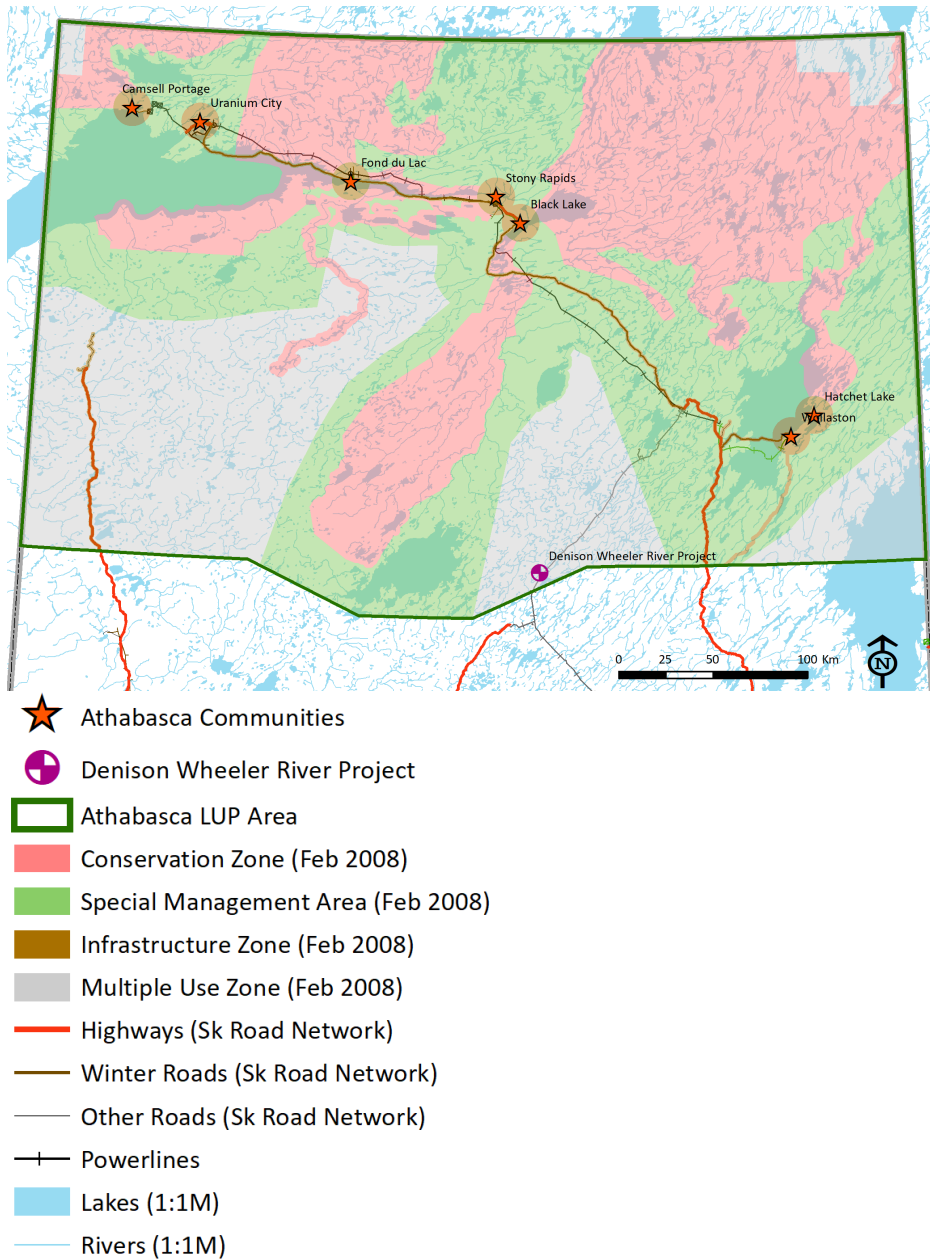


Figure 5. Traditional Territory (Nuhenėné) of the Athabasca Denesų́nė and Land Use Plan in Saskatchewan.

3.0 Recorded Traditional Knowledge, Land Use, and Occupancy Information

On behalf of the Athabasca Denesų́nė, YNLR holds datasets of recorded ADKLUO information for portions of Nuhenėné within Saskatchewan. Some of this data shows land use in proximity

to the project area. The data YNLR currently holds only shows part of a larger picture of land use as the existing datasets are not comprehensive and do not include all users and all areas.

3.1 Territorial Athabasca Denesų́nė Traditional Knowledge, Land Use and Occupancy Studies

Since the 1970s over 500 Denesų́nė have participated in traditional knowledge/oral history/land use and occupancy studies that recorded their lives, history and resource use (e.g. Holland 2001; Elias 2003; Usher 1990 and 2003). These studies have covered various areas within Nuhenėnė, but certainly do not cover all of the territory. Many of these studies have been undertaken to elicit information specific to a given area or project. Data from these studies is aggregated in Figure 6, which shows the general pattern of known travel routes, burial sites, and overnight sites around which hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, and cultural activities occur throughout all of Nuhenėnė. This area is synonymous with the range of the Barren-ground caribou herds. It is important to note that this is not a complete description of Athabasca Denesų́nė land use. This is especially true as one nears the boundaries of Nuhenėnė. It reflects the uses and values of the individuals who participated in these studies within the associated study areas. Naturally, reports, and maps created with such data, are but a sample of the actual knowledge and land use of the Athabasca Denesų́nė.

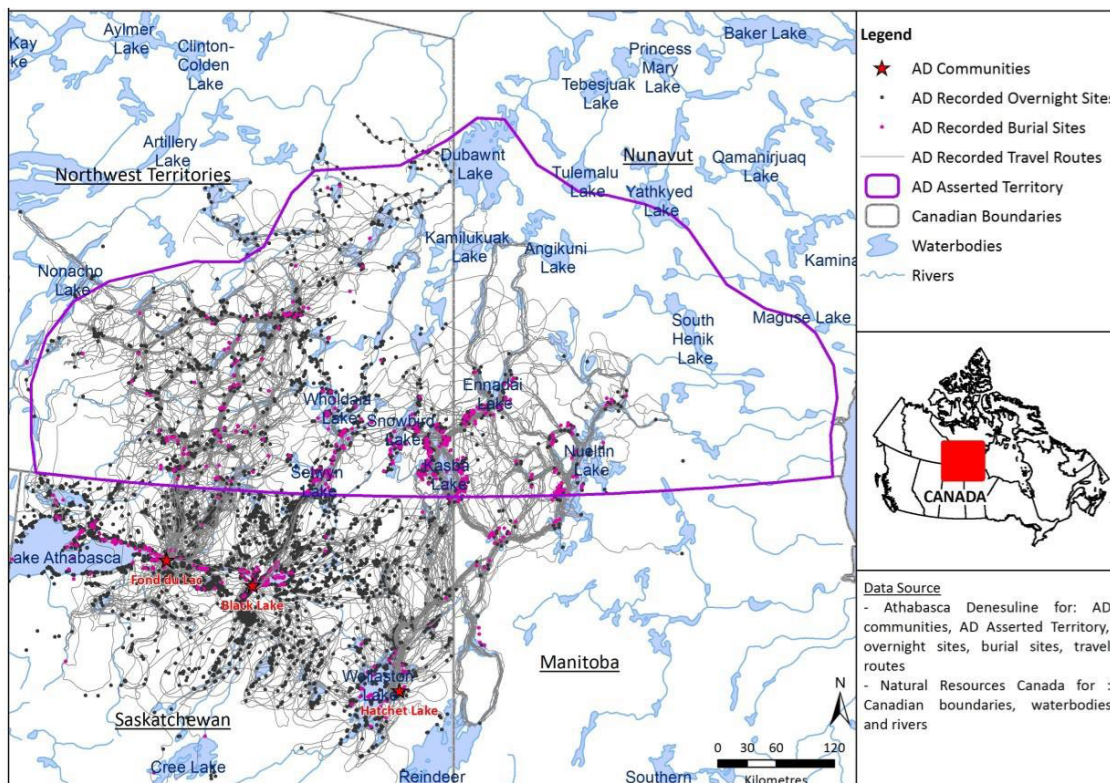


Figure 6. Overview of Traditional Land Use in the Athabasca Denesų́nė (AD) Asserted Territory North of 60 and in Saskatchewan (Hunter, B.W. Forthcoming. Between a Rock and a Hard Place:

Athabasca Denesųliné and Land Use Planning in Northern Canada. Unpublished PhD. University of Sheffield).

3.2 Regional / Local Athabasca Denesųliné Traditional Knowledge, Land Use and Occupancy Studies

We have extracted relevant and available information from these existing datasets in order to produce more focused regional and local maps of known TKLUO data in relation to the Wheeler River Project (Figure 7, Figure 8). These figures also indicate areas where “Duty to Consult (DTC)” interviews were undertaken.

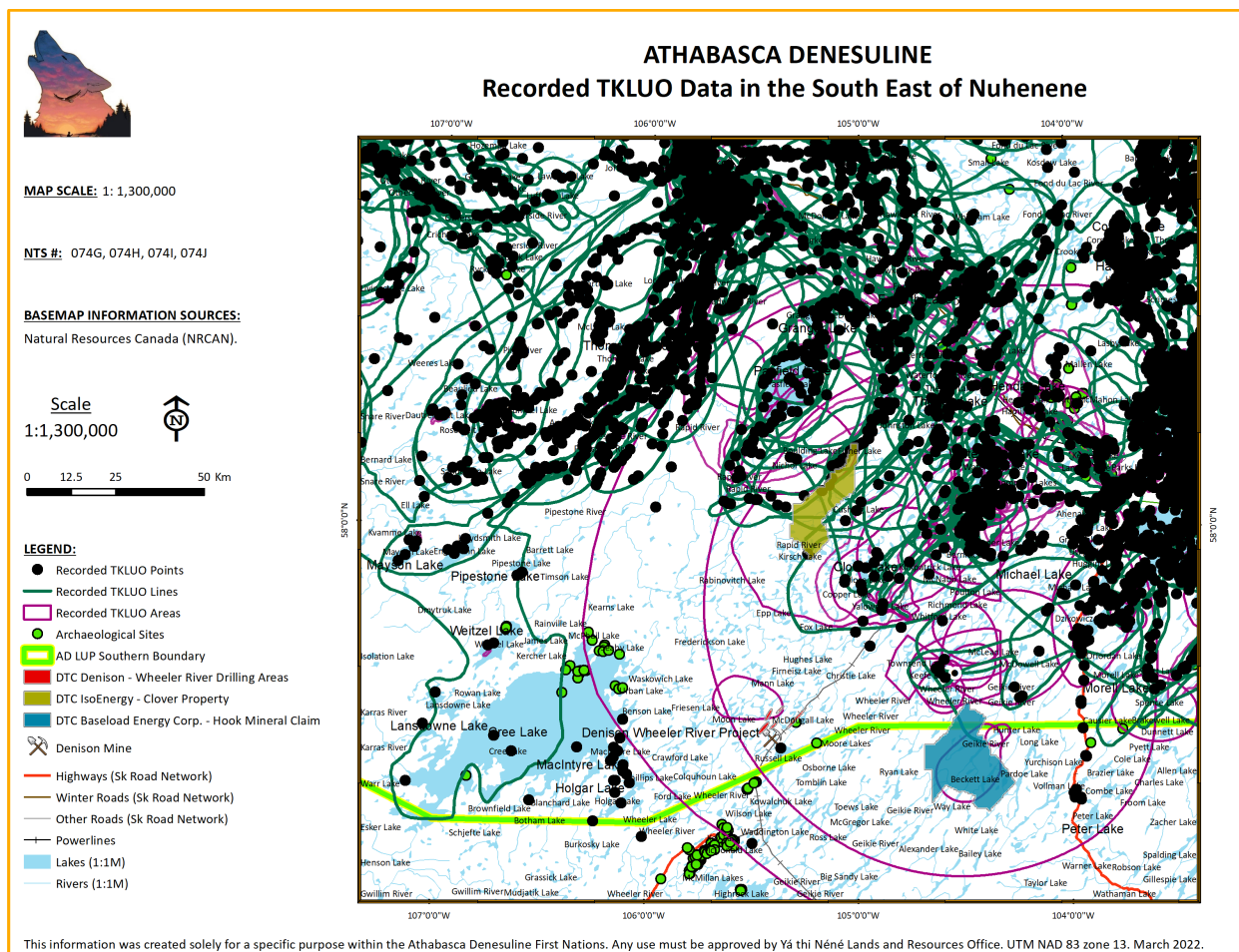


Figure 7. Athabasca Denesųliné recorded ADKLUO data in the southeast part of Nuhenéné.

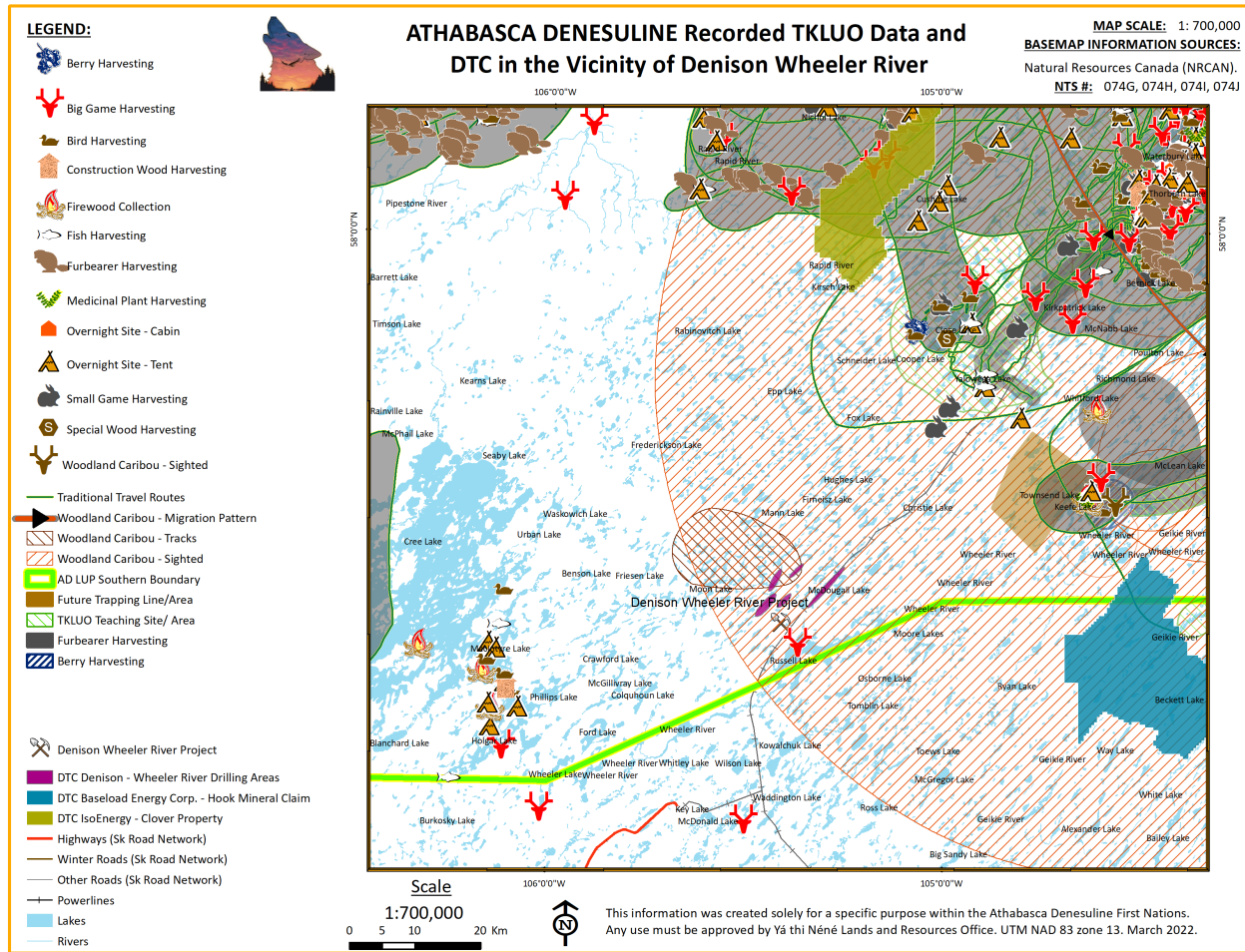


Figure 8. Local map of recorded ADKLUO information in the vicinity of Denison Mines Wheeler River Project.

The represented studies have collected data over a period of approximately twenty years. Figure 8 clearly shows AD traditional knowledge, land use, and occupancy in the vicinity of the Denison Wheeler River Project. This map excludes archaeology sites.

General categories of information recorded by these points, lines and areas are activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, teaching of traditional activities, travel routes, occupancy, and local knowledge of woodland caribou.

Hunting activities include:

- Large game harvesting – barren-ground caribou, woodland caribou, black bear, and moose;
- Small game animals harvesting - porcupine and rabbit; and,
- Bird harvesting - wild chicken, ducks, geese and any of their eggs that were found.

Fishing activities represented include:

- gill net;
- hook & line;
- fish weir captures;
- commercial fishing sites;
- fish harvested include northern pike, suckers and burbot.

Animals trapped or shot for fur include:

- beaver, muskrat, marten, fisher, mink, and otter.

Gathering activities noted in these data includes:

- berry picking sites;
- timber for construction or firewood;
- medicinal plants;

Several overnight sites were indicated including tent and cabin sites.

One Athabasca Denesųliné member with a registered trapping block near Keefe Lake has plans to extend his block further in the area, while another member has considered the possibility of extension but is unsure if there would be conflicts from southern users who also may have trapping interests in the area.

3.3 Other Land Use Information – Duty to Consult Responses

Other information held by YNLR includes the duty to consult interview responses for proposed projects in AD traditional territory. While these are not complete TKLUO studies, nor are the activities geo-located, the duty to consult responses provide insight into land use and any concerns regarding these projects in the area being considered. Figures 7 and 8 show the aggregate ADKLUO data in addition to the duty to consult areas. These DTC areas include the Baseload Heli Drill Exploration, Iso Energy, and the Denison Wheeler River projects.

The areas considered in the duty to consult responses indicate that the surrounding land is used for activities such as hunting, fishing (including commercial) and the gathering of berries and medicines. The land is also used for therapeutic purposes, youth gatherings, fish camps and general camping. Accessible areas were utilized year-round for hunting, trapping and fishing, with activities such as berry picking occurring in summer.

Concerns raised by the interviewees include damage to the lands and water, how wildlife will be affected, disruption to traditional activities and accessibility to the areas while projects are ongoing. Line cutting was raised as an issue that affects both land and wildlife. One interviewee suggested that if trees are being cut down more should be planted. Even when the interviewee

was not a direct user of the area in question, there were desires to protect the areas for future generations and current youth.

“Fishing, hunting, trapping....we the Dene people live off the land” (Athabasca Denesųłin  member)

3.4 Other Land Use Information – Oral history Conveyed to Denison

In October of 2019, a YNLR-led meeting took place that included several leaders from the Athabasca Denesųłin  First Nations and communities. Denison was invited to this meeting and has acknowledged the importance of historical information that was shared. Some notable participant quotations from this meeting include:

“An Elder [described] travelling from Hatchet Lake to Russell Lake, Highrock River and the Geikie River. The area along the Treaty 10/Treaty 8 boundary towards Cree Lake and Geikie River are areas Dene travelled around.” (Hatchet Lake Denesųłin  member)

“The whole area of the Athabasca Basin was historically used by the Dene Nation. There were no boundaries to where we travelled. Although there may not be anyone active in the Wheeler area now, it is part of our historical land use area.” (Fond du Lac Denesųłin  member)

“We have Black Lake members in  le a la Crosse, Beauval etc. There was always interaction between the west side communities and the northern communities. We would travel through Cree Lake.” (Fond du Lac Denesųłin  member)

3.5 Cautions

Information collected during the various studies and duty to consult interviews are limited to the responses of those who participated and should not be taken as a complete picture of collective Denesųłin  knowledge, use or value. The identification of some knowledge holders and resource users indicates that there is broader importance and use of the region likely not captured in the available data. **This study does not represent all Denesųłin  knowledge, uses, values, and interests in the project study area, and an absence of data does not signify an absence of use or value.**

4.0 Summary/Conclusion

The Denison Mines Wheeler River Project is located within Nuhen n , the traditional territory of the Athabasca Denesų́łn . Further, the project site is situated within the bounds of Treaty 10, to which some Athabasca Denesų́łn  are signatories. The Wheeler River site is within the range of the caribou herds that are the key cultural species for the Athabasca Denesų́łn  that defines the lands, waters, and resources that have underpinned Athabasca Denesų́łn  culture for more than 2600 years. Existing ADKLUO information demonstrates continued traditional and contemporary land use in the vicinity of the Denison Mines Wheeler River Project. The Athabasca Denesų́łn  are concerned about the project and its potential adverse impacts on their Aboriginal and Treaty rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather.

Safeguarding the ability of the Athabasca Denesų́łn  to practice our Aboriginal and Treaty Rights to hunt, fish, trap, and gather is critical. The Athabasca Denesų́łn  must be considered and directly involved during all stages of the Wheeler River project. The Athabasca Denesų́łn  expect further consultation and engagement with Denison Mines about project activities, potential impacts to the environment, and how these impacts can be mitigated. Our ongoing relationship with Denison Mines should be outlined in an impact and benefits agreement and any related study agreements.

5.0 References

Athabasca Denesuline Negotiations Team. 2009. Denesuline Atlas. Unpublished Contract Report.

Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB), 2000. Maps of the Caribou Ranges. Accessed on December 13, 2021. https://arctic-caribou.com/pdf/fig2_BevQam%20caribou_ANNUAL%20RANGE-CALVING%20GROUNDS_2012.pdf.

Birkett-Smith, K.A.J. 1930. Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology, V.6, No. 3. In: Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-1924. Gyldendal, Copenhagen.

Bone, R.M. and E.N. Shannon and S. Raby. 1973. The Chipewyan of the Sony Rapids region: a study of their changing world with special attention focused upon caribou. Institute for Northern Studies, University of Saskatchewan.

Denison Mines Corp. Wheeler River Project. <https://www.denisonmines.com/projects/core-projects/wheeler-river-project/> accessed December 7, 2021.

Elias, P.D. 2003. Athabasca Denesuline territory: 2600 years in history. Contract Report for Athabasca Denesų́nė Negotiating Team. Prince Albert Grand Council. Saskatchewan.

Gillespie, B.C. 1976. Changes in territory and technology of the Chipewyan. Arctic Anthropology. Vol. 13. No. 1. pp. 6-11.

Gordon, G. C. 1996. People of sunlight – people of starlight: Barrenland archaeology in the Northwest Territories of Canada. Mercury Series. Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper 154. Canadian Museum of Civilization. Ottawa.

Holland, L. 2001. The Dene elders project: excerpts. Contract Report for Prince Albert Grand Council. Saskatchewan.

Hunter, B.W. Forthcoming. Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Athabasca Denesų́nė and Land Use Planning in Northern Canada. Unpublished PhD. University of Sheffield.

Irimoto, Takashi. 1981. Chipewyan ecology: group structure and Caribou hunting system. National Museum of Ethnology. Osaka.

Kasstan, S.C. 2016. Caribou is Life: An Ethnoarchaeology of Ethen-Eldėli Denesų́nė Respect for Caribou. Simon Fraser University.

Sharp, H.S. 1977. The Chipewyan hunting unit. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 4 (2). pp. 377-393.

Sharp, H.S. 1975. Introducing the sororate to a northern Saskatchewan Chipewyan village. *Ethnology*. Vo. 14 (1). pp. 71-82.

Smith, J.G.E. 1981. Chipewyan. In: *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 6 Subarctic, June Helm ed. Smithsonian Institution, Washington. 1981. pp 271-284.

Usher, P. J. 2003. Environment, race and nation reconsidered: reflections on aboriginal land claims in Canada. *The Canadian Geographer* 47, No. 4. pp. 365-382.

Usher, P. 1990. Recent and current use and occupancy in the NWT by Chipewyan Denesuline Bands. Contract Report for Prince Albert Grand Council. Saskatchewan.

Ya'thi Néné Lands and Resources. <https://www.yathinene.ca>. Accessed January 10, 2022.