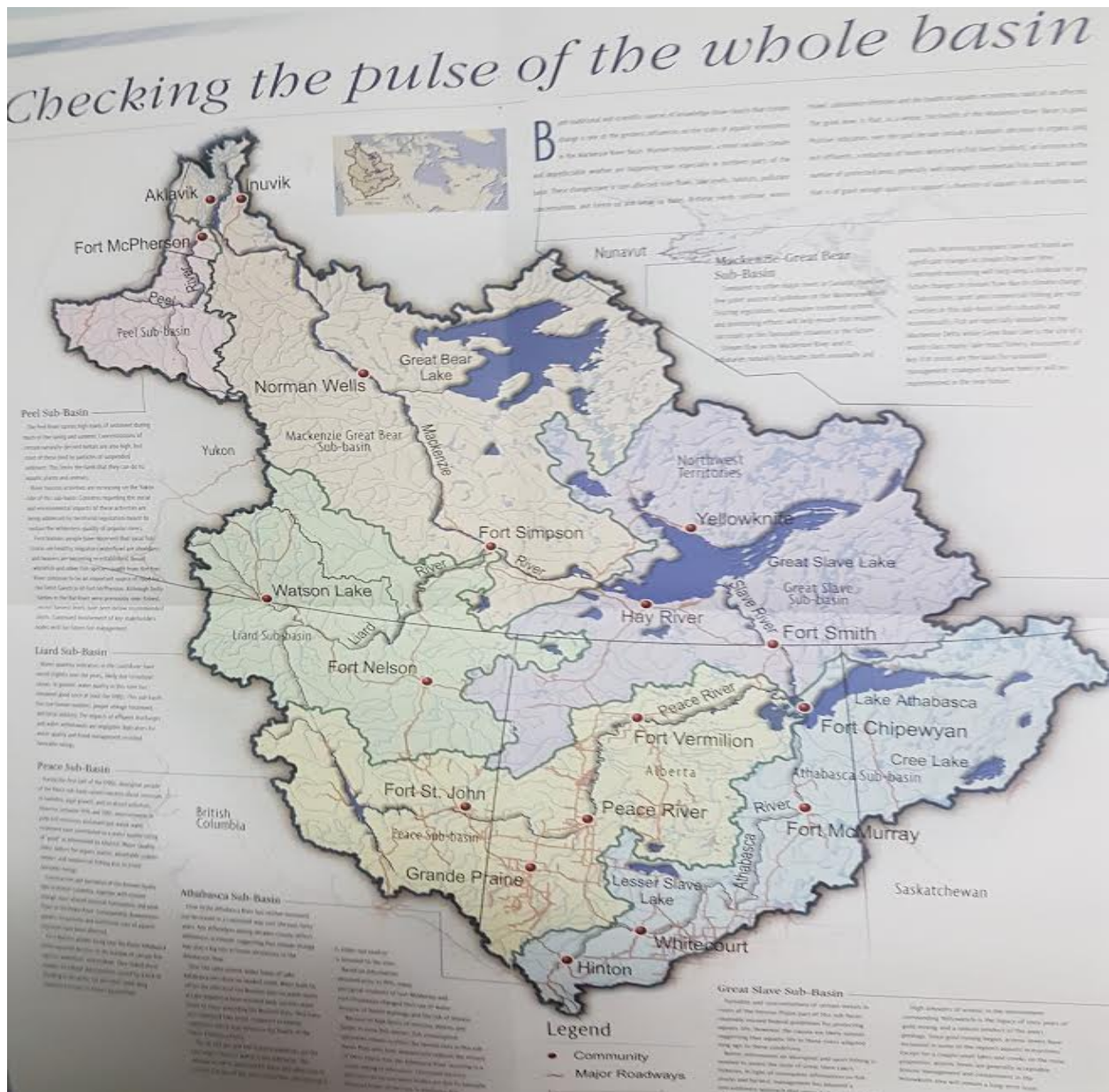


Taking Care of Our Water – Governance and TK

My name is Diane Giroux, my presentation today is being made as a Keeper of the Water NWT at large board member and I will be referencing my traditional territory but I wanted to note that I am not speaking on behalf of Akaitcho Territory Government. I am an employee and not authorised to speak on their behalf, this is a role of the Executive/Chiefs.

To begin my presentation, I want to provide a visual of where I come from in the NWT. I also wanted to make reference that our territory is in the Great Slave Sub-basin as seen here within the greater Mackenzie River Basin:



Water is life, it is necessary for all living things. As an indigenous person, it has always been understood that we have to follow *Dene Law*, to respect it, to take care of it and that it is our obligation to ensure that our future generations have it for continued survival.

Our Elders have guided us through teachings and spoken to great changes being seen in their life times with water going from pristine, clean, safe and good to being greatly altered. They have spoken to impacts being felt from activities both inside and outside of our territories with things like mining, hydro, agriculture, pulp mills, oil sands and climate change. In short, we have been experiencing a lot of changes in a relatively short period; decades.

With the number of changes being experienced it has put our communities in a position where we have to do something, we have to take action, we have to regain our voice, and our elders are saying that we must as people of the land. In my area, the NWT we have regions with settled land claim agreements that allow for this voice, within my own region we are still in negotiations with Canada.

What I would like to reference first is that in my region, we are establishing an aquatic program that will help to address these concerns and issues over time; by monitoring our areas and conducting research to find answers with changes happening. To date the focus of the program has been towards developing capacity at each First Nation with community-based programs; the communities decide what their priority is and they undertake the work. The current program includes; monitoring through what we call an eyes and ears angler survey programs which are intended to capture data on use within traditional areas of First Nations. At this point there is no enforcement capacity but relationships with responsible government agencies and incident reporting when violations seen.

Other areas of the program include; fisheries research that is being done in partnership with other organizations. We are also in the process of implementing a regional water monitoring program based on Traditional Knowledge and Western Science. A regional data base will be established to house information collected an annual reports generated based on community analysis of data. In addition, one of our member organizations is engaged in an air monitoring project that is part of a national program.

In the past we also supported a national water conference that brought together First Nations, Aboriginal organizations, government, industry and non-government agencies to discuss water. In building the program direction on programming has been to ensure TK and participation of both elders and youth.

At the regional level we support them and are beginning to address governance in developing a model with internal agreement on how things will be addressed; how we want to run our programs, our policy, so for our people, by our people and not others making decisions for us. Once we have a legal instrument with a negotiated agreement we can have a recognized voice that the governments will have to listen to, along with other mechanisms, such as law making.

Within this plan, Traditional Knowledge will play a key role to taking care of our waters to collect information from our land users, our elders and to teach our youth, the future stewards.



They will inherit what we leave behind; the foot print and legacy of what is happening to our waters today, it is their future we are affecting.

Our elders have said, 'How do you describe Traditional Knowledge when the only way you can contain the knowledge is by experiencing it? Our forefathers and our fathers have experienced the changes that they have gone through and it's an ever evolving knowledge. It cannot be confined to a specific area or a place.'

To move forward with TK, we know there have been many changes and we will have to distinguish between natural and man- made changes. We will need to teach our youth, we will need to further engage our remaining elders to guide us to work in this important area; TK information, what is it, what it means and to retain it for the future. We will need to collect archival information, we will need to preserve, store and address intellectual property of this valuable knowledge. Other areas to be considered are establishment of data bases to collect and interpret the TK on what it is saying, supporting things like language preservation, for interpretation of past/current elders as examples of things to be done.

With regards to Western Science, this will go hand in hand with TK, we can easily detect changes through TK but we also need to understand the reason for these changes. Thus we encourage our youth to also look at environmental fields to consider for future careers; based on working with all affected and in a collaborative manner.

In closing, my presentation is brief but the intent is to provide an understanding of one First Nation person's perspective within a hugely complex area of water. In short, not enough time to address government laws/legislation, specific challenges we all face but a solution to stop further detrimental damage to Mother Earth whom we all rely on to live.

Marsi Cho