

Wrigley Dene Band Research Report

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Executive Summary

Wrigley or Pehdzeh Ki is a Dene community located on the Deh Cho or Mackenzie River, approximately 222 kilometres north of Fort Simpson by road. It is situated in the Mackenzie River valley bordered by the Mackenzie Mountains on the East and the Franklin Mountains on the West. The town originally was located at Willow River and later on western part of the 15 kilometres down river, before moving to the present site in 1966.

It is part of the Slavey language group of the Dene Nation consisting of predominantly Dene population. Governance at the moment is based on a regional tribal council which refers the community concerns to the Dece nation, Denendeh. The language spoken in the South Slavey dialect, however, due to location Wrigley is situated between the North and South Slavey dialects so has some local distinctions in language.

Traditionally the people lived in nomadic family groups depending completely on the natural resources of the land. Survival was related to respecting the land and co-existing with it. The arrival of the Europeans and the establishment of a trading post by the Hudson Bay Co. altered much of this life style. Governance was by consensus and rules were made by the elders.

Research project.

This was carried out by interviewing all adult members the Dene community and non-Dene residents through a questionnaire. Members of the Band residing elsewhere were sent questionnaires by mail. Three separate focus group meetings were held with the Elders, Women and Youth.

The project revealed that the majority of the Dene felt the Indian Act and Canadian laws were not appropriate for a Dene format of self-government. The present justice system was considered inadequate and biased and didn't consider the Dene ideals in regard to culture, language and beliefs.

The traditional justice system combined with related aspects of the present system was considered as an appropriate model for building a Dene procedure of justice and law.

The Dene desire a governing system for themselves based on traditional values. This would be not only understood but respected more and the feeling conveyed through the survey indicated that the Dene felt it would be more beneficial to the community as a whole.

The traditional justice system possibly combined with related aspects of the contemporary system was considered an appropriate model for building a Dene procedure of

justice and law. The consensus format in combination with Dene contemporary law should form the basis for a constitution.

This survey has revealed an increase in educational levels producing a diversity of skilled Dene members in the present community. The desire for skills training, upgrading, and vocational education preferably locally is considered to be a priority by the community.

The present Band Council have maintained a keen interest in the project and value the information for establishing priorities and future directions.

Message from the Chief

I am happy to have taken part in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples research project in our community, particularly in the Northwest Territories. We are the only Dene community funded by RCAP to take part in the research on Aboriginal governance. For the community, the self-government project will define the type of government the people desire. It will influence what we do and the type of control we have as a community.

Self-government means having a land-based economy. Self-government is the ability to set up our own political body made up of our people. It means taking control of health, infrastructure, and community facilities among other things.

In some ways the community already has self-government. You don't have to follow the *Indian Act* and its regulations. We need our own constitution. The people have to decide what they want. It will take a great deal of time to implement self-government changes. In order to achieve self-government, we need a land base to negotiate land claims. We don't have a choice in the matter. Otherwise, there will be things imposed on the land without our input. For example, we don't have a say in mining leases to non-Aboriginals on our land. Miscommunication is a negative factor.

Election regulations have to be discussed by the people. For example, the people have to discuss a community constitution. They also have to talk about treaty and Aboriginal rights and land issues, such as land claims, land ownership, land use and land selection.

In terms of self-government, we are doing a lot better in preserving our culture and language within the school system. For example, the band is looking for an individual to co-ordinate cultural activities. If self-government is to be implemented, we need more direction from the people. The people give direction, then the band council makes the final decisions on the basis of input or feedback. At times, the chief has to make a spur of the moment decision. We are doing the best we can. We still need more control over our economy.

Band Elections, February 1994

In February 1994, there was an election for the chief and councillors in Wrigley. Gabriel Hardisty was elected as the new chief of the Dene Band Council. The following are some of his views on the future of Aboriginal governance in Wrigley.

Our people are the First Nations in our community. According to our elders, the Dene had

an Aboriginal government system that worked well. Today we are still following the same system. We, Deh Cho leaders, are discussing budget requirements and possible framework for establishing Dene government in the region with DIAND. Any land claims must respect our treaty rights and prior ownership of the land we call Denendeh. We will be making decisions on the direction our community will take. We will develop our own constitution.

Self-government means we will be able to control all aspects of community life such as land development, education and community justice, health, and many more. Young people will play a significant role in community self-government. The educating of our young people is very important for the future. We will need resource people to become self-governing.

We will retain our Treaty 11 rights because our great grandfathers made this peace treaty and that is the way it will remain.

There is no equivalent of the word 'government' in our Dene language. Before the arrival of non-Aboriginals, a leader was chosen by his hunting and communication skills. The leader must present himself to the people in a positive manner. The people are the government. Decision making was by consensus of the people. There was equality among the people.

Wrigley Dene Band Research Report

by Laureen Nayally and Stella Pellissey

The community of Wrigley — or Pehzdeh Ki in the Slavey Dene language, meaning 'shale rock house' or 'a house (trading post) by the big rock' — has joined with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to study self-government and its meaning for the people of Wrigley.

The five Athabaskan tribes in the Northwest Territories are the Slavey, Dogrib, Gwich'in, Chipewyan and Hareskin, who together are the Dene Nation of Denendeh. The Dene of Pehdzeh Ki are also referred to as Deh Cho Dene because they live along the Deh Cho (Mackenzie River).

The Dene and Métis peoples and Inuit form a majority in the Northwest Territories. The North is the only jurisdiction in Canada where Aboriginal people are in the majority; Aboriginal people form the largest proportion of the population, of the electorate, and of representatives in the legislative assembly of the Northwest Territories.

Wrigley is one of nine communities in the Deh Cho region, which is the largest of five regions in Denendeh (Denendeh in our language means the 'land of the Dene people'). The other regions are the Delta (the Gwich'in signed a regional comprehensive land claims agreement on 6 September 1993); the North Slave region, which is in the process of settling a land claims agreement in their region; and the South Slave region (Treaty 8 Tribal Council, which currently supports a Treaty 8 Land Entitlement Agreement). The Deh Cho Region (Deh Cho Tribal Council) is currently supporting a Treaty 11 Land Entitlement. The five regions all maintain a regional tribal council which represents the regional community and brings its concerns to the Dene Nation, which is the Dene's political organization in Denendeh.

Three of five Denendeh regions form the Dene Nation; the Delta and North Slave regions recently detached themselves from the Dene Nation for a variety of reasons. However, no two northern communities are the same in the Northwest Territories. "Some are nestled in the forests of the Mackenzie Valley, others are located in the treeless high arctic, three time zones away. Some sit quietly by themselves, while others are located next to rich resource deposits and huge mega projects, which brings with them outside cash and rotating work crews. Some date back to old trading posts, while others are more modern, government-created administrative centres", and "the north is a constant contrast of old and new, big and small, and ruggedness and fragility".

(GNWT, 1991, p. 23)

This project revealed that the majority felt that the *Indian Act* and Canadian laws are not appropriate for a Dene form of self-government. The present justice system is considered inadequate and biased, as it doesn't consider the Dene ideals in regard to culture, language and beliefs. The traditional justice system, combined with related aspects of the present system, was favoured as an appropriate for building a Dene procedure of justice and law.

The Northwest Territories has nine official languages, seven of which are traditional Aboriginal languages. The Aboriginal language spoken in Wrigley is the South Slavey dialect (part of the Athapaskan language group). Wrigley is uniquely situated between the South and North Slavey, and the community dialect spoken is slightly similar to, but different from, the two dialects. Sixty per cent of the people in Wrigley speak the traditional language today.

Many ethnic groups all over the world are proud of their own languages and cultures. We are the Dene, but if a Dene cannot speak in the Dene language, it embarrasses us. It is important to maintain and value our Dene language because it is our Dene root. To understand how our ancestors lived and worked, their laws, their legends and most important, the language. We were born and raised on this land and we have learned many valuable lessons from our ancestors. I believe in our Dene language. (Mrs. Elizabeth Mackenzie, Fort Rae, N.W.T., Dene Yati, Language Bureau, N.W.T., 1985)

Community Profile and History

As a Dene I have a certain way of looking at the world around me. I am a well-educated person. The forests have been the school I went to. Nature has been the book I read. The animals have been my teachers. The seasons became my calendar. My needs are the clock I work by; my senses and my imagination, the tools of survival. (Dene Nation, 1984, p. 78)

Wrigley is a Dene community located in the Northwest Territories, 150 miles downriver from Fort Simpson on the banks of the Mackenzie River (or in Dene, Deh Cho, meaning Big River). It is situated in the Mackenzie Valley, framed on the east by the Franklin Mountains and on the west by the Mackenzie Mountains.

Originally, the Dene of Wrigley were nomadic and lived solely off the land. With the arrival of trading posts in the early 1800s, however, the people settled in one community located 15 kilometres up the Willow Lake River. After this time, the community of Wrigley was relocated four times: to the mouth of the Willow Lake River, then to Old Fort Island, then downriver to the west bank of the Deh Cho across from the legendary "Roche-qui-treme-a-l'eau rock" (the Rock that Plunges into the River), and eventually to the present location, across the

river on the east bank of the Deh Cho. The new location had the particular advantage of accessibility to an airport built in 1944 by the U.S. Army and subsequently maintained by the department of transportation as an emergency strip for Wrigley.

The following are some of the Dene traditional ways of living off the land.

Aboriginal Governance

For centuries the Dene had a unique and effective way of surviving in their northern land and lived according to their own customs. (Cooke, 1980, p. 7) The Dene leaders were selected because of their medicine power. "They had the power to help heal the sick, help the poor, plus they had a voice that people have to listen to otherwise it was dangerous. If people don't listen they could make your life short. That was how the people were kept in line." (Cooke, p.9)

The Dene lived with nature and lived according to the laws of nature. The Dene passed on their knowledge of nature and life stories from generation to generation by word of mouth. There were no written records. The Dene could read the land and see how the animals lived and they learned from it.

The Dene of Wrigley had their own traditional system of government based on consensus, sharing and caring, respect for one another, and the land and its animals. The Dene had their own customs for ensuring society functioned in an orderly way.

Before the arrival of Europeans, the Dene had rules for living harmoniously with each other, the land and its animals. Survival often depended "on reciprocal relationships with the human, animals and natural worlds." (Joan Ryan, Marie Adele Rebesca, Diane Romie, Lawrence Nitsiza, 1993, p. 4) The Dene had rules for co-existing harmoniously with the land and animals.

According to Felix Tale, the Dene "hunted moose, caribou to survive a depressed winter when the threat of starvation was pending. The women dried and smoked the meat. They waited till the summer when they could fish and stockpile a winter supply." (Men's Focus Group Meeting, 1993, p. 5).

Traditionally, certain rules were made by elders. Decisions were made on the basis of consensus. Rules were developed by elders, as situations changed. At an early age, young children were taught "lifeskills, the day to day activities such as tanning hides, sewing" (Women's Focus Group, 1993, p. 3) and other essential skills necessary for survival on the land. Such rules governed Dene relationships with one another and with animals and the land. Rules

were transmitted orally to children.

There were rules for political organization describing who made decisions and who enforced them. A long time ago, rules were developed by elders on a consensual basis. (Ryan et al., 1993, p. 4) The others in a camp were consulted on important matters such as relocation and rules of conduct.

The enforcement of rules for proper conduct, marriage rules, and responsibilities of men and women were made by elders through consensual discussion with others. (Ryan et al., 1993, p. 4)

Political leaders were chosen on the basis of hunting skills. A good provider was usually chosen as leader. The leader enforced rules. Elder George Boots had this to say about how a leader was chosen: "The leader usually led this time, people chose a leader. The leader led hunting and trapping excursions. People travelled to hunting camps. The leader supervised the excursions. He consulted people regarding camp events, activities." (Elders' Focus Group Meeting, 1993, p. 4) Political leaders often consulted elders on decisions made.

Aboriginal Justice System

The Dene of Wrigley had their own culturally appropriate justice system.

The traditional legal system ensured that people understood what the rules were and that they were expected to follow them; that is, socialization ensured that the rules were the base for the normative way of behaving. These rules were based on social, physical and spiritual realities and were the only means of survival. They were enforced through the absolute authority of the leader and through consensus of the adults in the camps. The rules were passed down through oral traditions, that is, story telling and advice. They were also reinforced by medicine people. (Ryan et al., 1993, p. 69)

Long before the introduction of Canadian laws, the Dene had laws to ensure society functioned in an orderly manner. For example, there were rules for socialization that outlined proper behaviour. Traditional rules were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Political leaders were responsible for the enforcement of rules with permission from the elders and adults.

Those who violated traditional laws were severely punished. Temporary banishment from the camp for a period of time was a common punishment. Elders were the primary arbitrators of sentencing. Punishment such as banishment ensured acts of improper conduct were not repeated. There were other forms of punishment that the Dene practised.

The Dene had a particular way of dealing with criminal activity. More serious crimes "required a gathering of the total local group which placed the individual in the middle of the circle and discussed ways of dealing with the matter so that the family and group harmony could be restored. Serious crimes included rape, adultery, divorce and impregnating a young unmarried woman". (Ryan et al., 1993, p. 5) Justice circles comprised family members, leaders, elders, and the victim. The circle group decided sentencing and forms of punishment, which the people generally agreed on.

Economy

The Dene of Wrigley lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering and they ate mostly the food available in each season. The Dene were nomadic hunters who followed the supply of fresh moose and caribou and bird migration patterns. They hunted moose and caribou seasonally and fished in all seasons.

In the summer, the Dene moved to summer fishing camps. They hunted moose and caribou. In the summer, the Dene, travelled by canoe, following the waterways. In winter they used snowshoes, towing their possessions on light toboggans, originally made of pieced caribou leg skins. On the big lakes when the snow was swept clean by the wind, dragging a toboggan was easier than on land.

Ducks and geese were hunted for their meat and eggs. Muskrats and beaver were hunted for their meat and for fur to be used for clothing. Wild berries were picked from July to September: strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, gooseberries, cranberries, saskatoons and rosehips were some of the berries picked and eaten.

In the fall, preparations were made for the winter season. Dried fish were smoked and stored as a winter supply of food. The women prepared pemmican (pounded dried meat mixed with animal fat, usually caribou or moose) and dried meat for the winter, and they also tanned the hides for clothing. The people traded items such as moose hide clothing, animal bone tools, and meat with each other.

Social Relationships

The social relationships in traditional Dene society were well defined. The Dene gathered once a year, usually in the summer, for spiritual and entertainment purposes. It was a time for festivities,

consisting mainly of singing, feasts and drum dancing. One special song (a prayer song) was used to start off a dance. The Dene also played handgames whenever the men got together and when they received visitors from other encampments. Archery games were also played to test the skills and abilities of the men. These annual celebrations were a time to share and discuss the year's happenings — the state of food supplies, births, deaths and other relevant issues. Marriages were another occasion to gather for feasts and drum dance.

"A woman was supposed to be very well trained by the mother. When a woman was cutting dry meat with a stone knife and if she made a hole in the dry meat that meant that at the time of the warpath the husband is going to get killed. The moccasins had to be tied a certain way. If the lace was too long that meant the woman didn't love her husband," says Baptiste Cazon. (Lanny Cooke and Camille Piche, 1984, p. 8) The Dene men sometimes took two wives. The old people were respected among the Dene people.

Health and Natural Medicine

The Dene men and women had a knowledge of many natural medicinal plants, herbs, roots, sage and tree bark for cures of various illnesses. To cure illnesses such as colds and aches, tree bark was boiled in water and one drank the dark juice. Red berries with green branches were boiled, and the red juice was used as a cure for all kinds of illnesses. White grass with one branch was also used for colds. The grass was boiled and the hot juice was used to cure chest colds. A certain small green rock (light in weight) was crushed to a powder and mixed with water, used for colds. One drank the liquid. The Dene were healthy from drinking animals meat juices and animal blood; the animal blood was consumed as a source of nutrients.

In addition to natural medicine, the Dene of Wrigley had powerful medicine men and women who helped the Dene in times of hardship. An elder had this to say: "My grandmother was a powerful medicine woman. She possessed the powers of an eagle. I have seen her cure sick people with her hands. I was absent when she died. Blue berries grew on her grave site in the form of a cross. I put her cup on her grave site. After her death, people died from illnesses. She was like a doctor." (Elders' Focus Group meeting, 1993, p. 3) Dene medicine women and men cured illnesses long before the introduction of non-Aboriginal medicines, doctors, nurses.

Roman Catholic and Anglican missionaries introduced conflicting views of Dene medicine women and men. An elder had this to say: "In the eyes of the Roman Catholic priests,

all medicine men were evil until they gave up their ways". (Cooke and Piche, 1984, p. 19) After the arrival of Europeans, the Dene were told Dene medicine women and men were evil. Despite this, the Dene continue to believe strongly in Dene medicine women and men.

Spirituality and Religion

The concepts of a Creator, good and bad influences, life after death, and spiritual leaders were not foreign to the Dene. There was a strong system of beliefs that surrounded the medicine way of life. Nature and the Land were strong spiritual forces. (Cooke and Piche, 1984, p. 16)

The Dene learned from nature and what was written upon the land — the animate and the inanimate of nature, that all the trees, plants, herbs, water, rocks, etc. are alive and have their own spirit to guard them.

In the 1850s, the Dene lived by the medicine power. Their teachings came from the medicine power laws. The strong spiritual forces were the land and nature.

Most strong medicine men received this medicine before they were born. They were given it by Nature... Some people have net medicine to catch fish; some people have moose medicine that can kill moose at any time and they feed all of the people out of that. Some people have duck medicine, some people have power to put up a wind or to make rain. The power comes from Nature, says George Blondin. (Cooke and Piche, 1984, p. 17)

The Dene of Pehdzeh Ki were spiritual people. They believed in the Creator or a higher being who protected them from diseases and physical harm and ensured the well-being of the people. At bush camp gatherings, the Dene prayed among themselves to the Creator. They had dreams and visions that gave them spiritual guidance.

The drum beat represented the heart beat of mother earth. The sound of the drum beats is what makes the Dene happy. It makes the bad things appear minor and lifts their spirits. The powerful spirituality of the Dene can be expressed in the following way not to forget the past and the Dene ancestors and grandfathers.

The drum beat slowly at first, that haunting rhythm that has been called the heartbeat of the people. The chief began to sing, a solitary piercing lament...echoing down the centuries. (Cooke and Piche, 1984, p. 29)

"Religion is the law of nature. It is already there. It is not man-made." (Cooke and Piche, 1984, p. 11) The Dene legends and stories that are taught by the Dene elders are quite similar to the gospel teachings. "What's in the bible is already written on the land." (Cooke and Piche, 1984, p. 28)

The late Ted Trindell said, "Religion is good, it keeps you in line. No religion — you have

no protection. You are exposed to whatever comes. It's like facing a bear without a gun." (Cooke and Piche, 1984, p.27).

The sweat lodge was used for healing of various illnesses.

The Dene's Code of Ethics included giving thanks for all life; respect for others, treating guests with consideration; to have a balance in all things; knowing the positives and negatives of one's well-being and following the guidance of visions and dreams. (Neyelle, 1993, p. 35)

Tools and Weapons

The Dene of Wrigley made tools and weapons from animal bones, stones, wood, moose antlers, flint and iron. Wooden bowls and arrows with stone heads were used for hunting game animals such as moose, caribou and birds. Large compounds were constructed to trap moose and caribou. Moose hide strings were used to snare large game animals. The women used sharp bones to scrape hides, and fish bones were used as needles. Stick traps (deadfall traps) were used to trap fur-bearing animals; axes were made from sharp stones; rotten wood was used as charcoal and also to tan moose hides; and the women and men made birch bark bowls, usually in the spring and fall. The women assisted the men in making snowshoes for the winter, and the women laced snowshoes using caribou hide (babiche) strings. In the springtime, the people made boats with birch bark and moose skins, covering the cracks and holes with melted spruce gum to make the craft more waterproof. The Dene were skilled in these techniques.

The Community of Wrigley

At the turn of the century, the Dene population was close to 2000 people. Between 1900 and 1905, however, almost 1500 people died in the influenza epidemic which swept through the Mackenzie district. Since that time, the population has fluctuated, with about 300 people on the current band list. Half the membership lives outside the community of Wrigley at the moment, and Wrigley is currently about 99 per cent Dene.

Traditionally, the Dene people in the area fished, hunted, trapped and gathered food in order to survive. Today, approximately half the community continues to practise such subsistence activities. Seasonal employment in the areas of forestry, construction and student employment is also important in the community.

The people of Wrigley are governed by a band council, established in accordance with

section 74 of the *Indian Act* and the customs, traditions and practices of the members of the band. The Wrigley Dene Band is unique in Canada, being governed by an elected chief and council under territorial legislation and the federal *Indian Act* (unlike other northern communities, which are incorporated under territorial legislation) and not situated on a reserve (as defined by the *Indian Act*).

As of 1993, the Wrigley Dene Band Council consists of the chief, Timothy Lennie, and six councillors: Michael Canadian, Martha Drake, Gabriel Hardisty (elected chief in 1994), Edward Hardisty, James Hardisty and Lloyd Moses. The employees of the band council are Joseph Nayally, band manager; Carey Moore (now band manager); Sally Yendo, finance and administrative manager trainee; Richard Ekenale, recreation co-ordinator; Robert Nayally, facility maintainer; Harry Carey, alcohol/drug co-ordinator; Marvin McDonald (laid off), economic development planner and facilitator for the Dene Band Development Corporation, Cap Mountain Ventures Ltd; Mary Alice Cli, resource management co-ordinator; Stella Pellissey, justice co-ordinator; Michael Canadian, employment officer. The chief and councillors are elected every two years for a two-year term. Monthly band meetings (now bi-monthly), special meetings and annual general meetings are held at the community complex to address issues such as finance, programs, services, and other relevant programs and activities.

The Wrigley Dene Band has a development corporation called Cap Mountain Ventures. The corporation has a board of directors, but final decisions regarding its operations are made by the band council. The general manager is Steven Moses (now interim manager Les Christopher), and the business administrator officer is Lorayne Moses (she no longer works for the company). The community also has a local management board, which oversees all training needs in the community.

There are some services and programs currently available in Wrigley. There is a one-room school, moved from its previous location in (Old) Fort Wrigley. There is also a one-room portable school, which was brought in on the barge in 1969. A third multi-grade log school was then built in 1974, and a new four-classroom school was built in 1992. The newest school has the advantage of a photography room, library, home economics room, boys' and girls' washrooms, principal's office, community education council (CEC) office, and two storage rooms. The community education council consist of a chairperson, secretary-treasurer, and five local members. The chairperson and members serve as the advisory committee for the school,

including the community cultural inclusion program. The secretary-treasurer maintains the CEC's financial accounts/records and also performs clerical tasks for the school. The school also has a custodial position. There are currently four Aboriginal staff at the school, and they are all from Wrigley. The principal, Gerald May, who also teaches grades four to eight, is non-Aboriginal. Doris Pellissey, an Aboriginal person, is the elementary teacher and teaches kindergarten to grade four. Charlotte Canadian is the assistant and Slavey immersion teacher. The special needs assistant is Sarah Lennie, originally from Wrigley.

A Hudson Bay Company store was built in the new community in 1966, but it was later closed down when the people decided that they wanted to have their own co-operative store; a new log co-op was built in 1973. The Petanea Co-op is operated under the authority of elected board members. The manager is non-Aboriginal (Jim Moore), and the office clerk, cashier and stock person are from Wrigley. Local water delivery is administered by the band and sub-contracted to the Petanea Co-op store. The Co-op also has a hotel, managed by Joyce Moses. There is also an arcade with pool table and a few games tables. Video movies are available for rent at the store. The hotel has five shared accommodation rooms.

There is one gas station in the community, which is contracted to the local residents through the government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) Division. A fuel truck is used to deliver fuel to furnace-heated homes. Under a program offered by social services, elders over the age of 65 receive subsidized fuel and wood for heating purposes.

There was a portable nursing station in service until 1985. A new nursing station was built in 1985-86 with modern facilities. It has a patient room, a clinical examining room, a multi-purpose room also used for x-rays, one laboratory, a main office, a reception area, storage, a janitor's room on the main floor, and two single apartments upstairs. A doctor, a dentist, an ophthalmologist and an ear doctor visit the community on a regular basis. There is one registered nurse who lives in residence. The clerk-interpreter is Phoebe Nayally, and she is originally from Wrigley. The clinic hours are 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. for public health. (Monday is for chronic care; Tuesday for a well baby clinic; Wednesday for a well women clinic; Thursday for chronic care (home visits); and Friday afternoon is for health centre administration.) Wrigley also has a community health representative, Ruby Ekenale, who works part time at the health centre and was trained by Arctic College in Yellowknife. She makes home visits to elders with

the nurse in charge, and seventy per cent of their work consists of promoting good health in the school and community. She also provides interpreting services for the nurse.

Wrigley also has a forestry (renewable resources) fire crew that works on a seasonal basis. A cook and cook's helper are also hired on a seasonal basis. In addition, a highways maintenance camp is operated by the GNWT department of transportation, staffed by one foreman, a mechanic, two operators and one casual position. An observer communicator, Urban Antoine (Martha Drake as of 1994), also works at the Wrigley Airport. He is employed by the Arctic Airports Program, a division of the GNWT department of transportation. Brian Niziol, the plant operator, operates and maintains the community diesel-generated power plant. He is employed by the NWT Power Corporation.

Some people privately rent video movies. A small convenience store is run by a local resident. There is a local Women's Group which is active in promoting handicrafts of local women and offers services such as food preparation.

Treaty and Aboriginal Rights

The Dene treaty rights and Aboriginal rights are very important and relevant to the Dene of Wrigley. The Dene elders in the community have knowledge of the Treaty 11, to which Chief Julien Yendo's signature was forged in our community (Old Fort Wrigley) in 1921. Treaty information collected from the elders is currently documented in our community.

Treaty rights extend from Treaty 11, supposedly negotiated and discussed by the elders who appointed Chief Julien Yendo to be leader. Julien Yendo was 36 years old in 1921, during the time of the treaty negotiations. Yendo's signature was documented in syllabic characters on the treaty records but he said he did not sign it. "I do not remember having signed anything. Someone might have signed my name. A White man, or the Bishop might have done it." (Fumoleau, 1973, p. 178) The late Philip Moses, the only surviving witness said in 1973 that he "didn't see anybody signing any paper or making a cross of alphabets on any paper at all", and some Dene who knew Julien Yendo stated that Yendo didn't write or read Dene syllabic characters. (Fumoleau, 1973, p. 178)

Rights to hunt, trap and fish are treaty rights extended in exchange for non-Aboriginal use of Dene land. Free medical services and education were also promised as treaty rights. The Dene of Wrigley were promised that they could continue to hunt, trap and fish as long as the Deh

Cho (Mackenzie River) flows and the sun shines. The federal government to this date has not fulfilled some of its treaty obligations and promises to the Dene of Denendeh, for example, the current taxation of Aboriginal people and the lands. The Dene are currently being taxed by the federal government through personal income tax and the goods and services taxes and by the government of the Northwest Territories through payroll taxes.

There is a question regarding land title that is not clear in the minds of the Dene people.

Well, they talked about the land, and the Indians were scared that by taking Treaty they would lose all their rights, but the Indians were told not. But if they were taking treaty they would get protection. They were told it not to get the land. But they would still be free to roam and hunt as usual. No interference. (Fumoleau, 1980, quoting Trindell, pp. 6-7)

The land, "and all it provides for our people has been the very spirit of the Dene way of life. From the land came our religion...from the land came our life...from the land came our way of life." (The Dene Nation, 1984, p. 93) The Dene believe the land is not for sale and it is to be used by everyone. They never gave permission to non-Aboriginals to take their land. Treaty 11 was a friendship and peace treaty, not a land surrendering treaty.

The history of the Dene has been written all over the land. Every creek, hill, peninsula, bay, and lake has a name indicating what historical event happened in this particular place. The whole land is a gigantic history book for the Dene. (Fumoleau, 1980, p. 5)

"Aboriginal peoples have long maintained that they have 'special' rights that differentiate them from other Canadians. These rights which include property rights (such as title to unceded lands), rights to hunt, fish and trap on traditional lands and political rights (such as the right to self-government), are presently called "aboriginal rights". (Michael Asch, 1984, p. 26)

In 1973, sixteen Dene chiefs went to court in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories to have their interests in the Denendeh land protected. After six months of deliberations, Justice William G. Morrow ruled in favour of the Dene:

I am satisfied that those who signed the caveat are present day descendants of those distinct Indian groups who, organized in societies and using the land as their fore-fathers had done for centuries...(immemorial) I am satisfied that those same indigenous people...are prima facie owners of the lands covered by the caveat that they have what is known as aboriginal title. (Fumoleau, 1980)

The Dene say that in 1921, in the supposed signing of Treaty 11, they never gave up their Aboriginal rights to the government of Canada.

The Dene Aboriginal rights are inherited from their ancestors and forefathers and are therefore not subject to extinguishment by any means.

The Dene of Denendeh, Northwest Territories passed the Dene Declaration at the Second Joint General Assembly of the Indian Brotherhood and the Metis Association on 19 July 1975 in Fort Simpson, N.W.T. (see Appendix 1). See appendix 16 for important dates in Wrigley history.

Residential School

The residential school in Fort Providence, Northwest Territories was run by the Grey Nuns of Montreal and Roman Catholic priests and brothers from 1876 to 1960. About 30 children and teenagers from Wrigley were forced to attend residential school at Fort Providence during the years the school was in operation.

Some of the people who attended the residential school were dissatisfied with the treatment they received. Many spoke painfully of the negative treatment they endured as students, the harsh discipline practised, the fact they would be punished for speaking the Dene language. Like the residential schools in the south and across Canada, the chief purpose of the one in the Northwest Territories was to assimilate and Christianize the Dene people by denying them their culture, language and lifestyle. Today, the people who attended the residential school are bitter about their experiences.

The old Indian sat down and lit his pipe, and saw his grandchildren go. Where the White River flow. He tries to call them back but it's too late, too late. They learned too much and forgot too much. And he wonders if it will ever be the same with tears and sadness in his eyes". (James Caesar, Dene Nation, 1984, p. 16)

The Wrigley/RCAP Research Project

Research Personnel

The research conducted in Wrigley was guided by a local guiding committee. The function of the guiding committee was to meet with a representative of the governance project of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to establish mutually beneficial research progress. For example, the guiding committee reviewed the study interview questions, the survey instrument, and the focus group discussion outlines, and they made suggestions regarding format, language and potential participants.

The local guiding committee also recommended two researchers to conduct the study. Laureen Nayally was chosen as the principal researcher. Laureen is a status member of the Wrigley Dene Band. She was born in Fort Simpson on 25 May 1958. Because her father worked for the Department of Transportation at the time, she lived and grew up at the Wrigley airport.

Laureen had the opportunity to live with her maternal grandmother for two years in old Fort Wrigley, where she attended grade one and two.

In 1966, Fort Wrigley was relocated to the present site, about half a mile from the airport. Laureen learned to talk in the Dene language first; then she learned the English language in grade one. It was foreign to her at the time. She also learned a great deal about the Dene ways of living and culture from her grandmother, who encouraged her to continue her education because one day, everything will change for the Dene of Wrigley, and with an education she would be in a position to help her people some day. In 1970, at the age of 12, Laureen left Wrigley to attend a residential school in Fort Simpson. She later moved to Yellowknife, where she completed grade twelve. After grade twelve came employment in Yellowknife, then college and university in the south. In 1988, Laureen came back to live in Wrigley after being away for about fourteen years. She now lives in the community and has fond memories of her childhood at the Wrigley airport. Laureen became very involved in the community. She agrees with the elders who say that they have to protect and enhance the Dene culture and language for tomorrow lest they be forgotten. Laureen sees a lot of potential for her community.

An assistant researcher was also involved throughout the process. Stella Pellissey, a university graduate, spent eleven years away from Wrigley attending school in Fort Simpson. While attending school, she lived at a hostel for girls and boys operated by the territorial government. Stella finished grade ten at Thomas Simpson School in Fort Simpson. She graduated from Sir John Franklin High School in Yellowknife and then returned to Wrigley to live with her parents for a year. Stella spent four years studying history at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. She thinks that her Dene culture and language define who she is, a Dene. Stella can still speak the Slavey language despite spending so many years away. It has not been easy trying to fit into life in southern Canada, but being Dene has helped her adjust to life outside of northern Canada. Wrigley has always been a special place to Stella. It is the place she calls home.

Research Methods

The aim of this research project was not only to examine the historical development of the Wrigley Band and the current band structure, but also to explore possibilities for future governing structures. The emphasis in this project was on the people of the community and their

vision of the government arrangement that would be appropriate, respectful of Dene traditions, and that would best meet their needs and aspirations. Eliciting this type of information required direct discussion with the people of Wrigley, to allow their voices to direct the research and shape the findings.

Several research approaches were combined in this study, so as to include as many people as possible in an appropriate manner. The guiding committee and researchers felt it was important to reach not only band members now living in Wrigley, but also band members currently living outside the community. Their views and opinions were deemed to be relevant and interesting. There was also a general feeling that every effort should be made to involve a wide variety of people, including women, youth and elders.

Interviews

Many of the people living in the community were included in the research process through the interviews. Non-Aboriginal people living in the community were also interviewed. Their perspective on self-government was also included in this report. As with any participatory research, some people declined to be interviewed, possible because of a lack of interest in or knowledge of self-government (see Appendix 3).

Information packages were distributed to every household, as well as to anyone who visited the band office. Included in the packages was information about the project and the involvement of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Also, there was information about the history of Wrigley, the structure of the current band council, and potential government structures (see Appendix 4 and 4a).

Following this initial contact with potential participants, the researchers telephoned and made visits to each household to inform people that they would be conducting interviews. In several cases, appointments for the interviews were arranged at this time. Otherwise, people were comfortable simply expecting one of the researchers to come by at some point in the future.ⁱ

Some people requested that the interview questionnaire be left with them to be completed on their own. In particular, members of the local guiding committee who were already familiar with the interview questions felt comfortable answering them without a researcher's assistance. As participation was voluntary, the researchers agreed to this, and 21 questionnaires were answered in this way.

Elders and youth were very concerned about the future of self-government issues and wanted the Dene culture and language to be protected in our community. The interviews with elders were very informative and interesting. They were keen on bringing back some of the Dene's traditional ways of governing and the traditional justice system, too. The only part of the questionnaire that the elders could not comprehend was the 'self-sustaining' issue and how self-government could be maintained in financial terms. The researcher felt that it was probably because the elders never had to use such terms before. It was the middle-age group of people who did not seem too interested in the implications of self-government in our community, and the researchers feel that either they were not very knowledgeable about the topic or they could not read or write in English. They had to be given examples of answers during the questionnaire interviews.

Most of the people interviewed seemed comfortable, except for a few who thought that they might be giving the wrong answers or inadequate answers. Also, some respondents were not very knowledgeable about the topic of Aboriginal self-government, and some of the respondents felt more comfortable when we asked the questions in our language rather than in English. Most of the respondents were interested, and elders and the youth were particularly interested, and we accumulated a great deal of relevant information from them. Both the elders and the youth saw enhancing our Dene culture and language as a priority issue for self-government.

About half the respondents gave detailed responses to the interview questions. The researchers felt that some did not because either they were not very knowledgeable about the questions, or they wanted to let others give better examples and they would then follow suit or expand on someone else's ideas and comments.

The interview questions seemed appropriate, except perhaps we should have included a few questions about possible self-government models and structures. A lot of the respondents had no knowledge of possible models or structures, with the exception of people who had some college or university education in the south.

The respondents who answered the questionnaires on their own did not give adequate answers. We came to the conclusion that either they did not understand the questions, they were not very interested in the topic, or they did not have enough knowledge of Aboriginal governance issues. Several of the respondents have non-Aboriginal spouses, who may have influenced their answers to the questionnaire.

About 60 per cent of the current adult population participated in the interviews; many of the others were out of the community and could not be interviewed. Approximately 18 per cent of the population chose not to participate, for reasons not given to the researchers at that time. The actual number of possible Dene participants in the community was 108, and an additional 10 non-Dene. The number of Dene interviewed was 66 and non-Dene 10. There were 36 males and 28 females interviewed from the Dene population. Of the non-Dene, 8 were male and 2 were females. Of the 108 Dene, 19 males were employed, 9 were unemployed and 1 was self-employed. Among the females, 10 were employed and 14 were unemployed. In the 65 plus age group, 6 were male and 5 were female (see Appendix 15).

Education levels in the 15-25 age group ranged from incomplete elementary to university level. In the 26-65 age range, 11 attained university or college level, 11 completed grade 12, 10 completed grade 9, 7 elementary, and 2 no formal schooling. In the 65 plus category, 1 completed elementary level, 8 did not attend school (see Appendix 15).

Surveys

In addition to the interviews with band members living in the community, people living elsewhere in Canada were included in this study through the use of a survey. Everyone currently listed as a band member but living away from Wrigley was sent a survey, along with an information package including a project overview and an introduction to the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.ⁱⁱ Forty-five surveys were sent to people living across the country.

Like the interview questionnaire, the mail-out survey included structured and open-ended questions (see appendix 2). The survey was shorter in length than the community interview questionnaire, however, as it was felt that this would increase the response rate (which is typically low for mail surveys).

Most of the returned survey questionnaires were well filled out, and all the questions were answered adequately, supplying relevant information for the development of self-government in our community.

However, we did not receive back even half the survey questionnaires we sent out. The researchers came to the conclusion that either the band members who live elsewhere were not interested, or they did not have enough knowledge to answer the questions adequately. Mail-in

rates are typically low in all studies.

Focus Group Meetings

To consider in more detail some of the issues examined in the interviews and through the use of surveys, focus group meetings were held to allow people to discuss questions at length. Small groups of people were invited to take part in these meetings, during which they would get together in an informal atmosphere and answer questions developed specifically for each group.

Focus group meetings were initially planned for elders, women and youth. One workshop was added, however, in response to concerns as the research progressed: the researchers added one more focus group meeting specifically for the elderly women who felt uncomfortable talking about women's traditional practices in the presence of the male elders. Invitations were extended to seven elderly women, and four of the seven showed up at Dora Nayally's house, where we held the meeting. We typed up ten questions on the computer for this special meeting. We started the meeting with a question about Dene childhood tasks, leading up to the last one about Dene spirituality. We had a positive discussion, and we accumulated a great deal of information from the questions. The four women all had input and were very outspoken in the privacy of Dora's home. One of the women said she chose to participate so that Dene women's practices could be documented for the younger generation to read and learn from, rather than having the information forgotten.

The other focus group meetings were all held at the community complex (council chambers), except for the elderly women's special meeting held at Dora Nayally's house. Thanks to her.

We held the elders focus group meetings for two days (12 and 13 May 1993). We have 21 elders in the community, including one at River Between Two Mountains (outpost camp) and five at Willow Lake River (outpost camp), 30 and 60 kilometres away from the community. Fifteen elders attended on Wednesday. The elders sat in a circle. The first day, only a few elders answered some questions and commented on various issues. The elder from Willow Lake River talked the most, as he was very outspoken. Perhaps the others felt intimidated by him. The elder from River Between Two Mountains hardly said anything. A few other elders from the community commented. Some of the elders talked among themselves only and not to the group at large. There was a general feeling that some community elders felt intimidated or did not feel

comfortable talking in a group. Some elders just sat in a circle and listened to the others talk. As mentioned, it seemed that some of the women elders felt uncomfortable talking about women's issues in the presence of male elders (see Appendix 4).

The second day of the meeting, 13 elders attended and eight were out of the community. Five elders did not attend the meetings, for reasons unknown at that time. A couple of the elders were very elderly so they could not attend. A couple of the women elders talked about women's issues the second day, as did one of the male elders. A general feeling the second day was that some elders still felt uncomfortable talking in a group setting. Gabriel then suggested that if the elders preferred, we could talk to them as couples rather than in a group setting.

In addition to the elders focus group meetings, the women's focus group meeting proved valuable in terms of future aspects of their involvement in decision making in the community. Seventeen women were invited to attend the women's focus meeting held on 10 June 1993. Each of the women was sent a letter of invitation and information package. Five of the seventeen women invited attended the meeting. It is not known why so many of the women failed to attend the meeting or make arrangements to attend. It may have been because of a lack of child care or unexpected circumstances (see Appendix 5).

As with all the other focus group meetings, the women's focus group meeting was held at the council chambers. Questions were written on the board for the women to read. The researchers then asked the women to write down their answers on a sheet of paper. The women's focus group meeting began with a brief introduction to the RCAP self-government project and the purpose of the meeting. Most of the women responded to the questions on an equal basis. The topic of the meeting was taken seriously and with great interest. The women, unlike the youth, did not require any clarification as to what was expected from them as participants. It was clear that they had done the suggested readings. The researchers provided several examples of the benefits of self-government to facilitate discussion. Most of the prepared questions pertained to women and the role they would like to play in a self-governing community.

The fourth focus group meeting was a gathering of community youth for a discussion of their concerns, hopes and dreams for the future, and how they saw their participation in an Aboriginal government of the Dene in Wrigley. Youth between the ages of 15 and 25 were chosen to attend the youth focus meeting. The researchers decided to invite all the youth in the community, given the small numbers involved. Half the invited youth attended the meeting at the

council chambers. The focus group meeting questions were written on the board for the youth to read. The youth responded to the questions enthusiastically. It is clear the topic was taken seriously and it was deemed important and relevant to them. Many of their comments reflect a keen desire for self-government (see Appendix 6).

The meeting was about the role youth would like to play in a self-governing community and how self-government might resolve some of the problems facing them. Self-government seemed to be a concept the youth were familiar with to some extent. A few clarifications and examples were provided to facilitate discussion. Those who came, however, were interested and felt the meeting was an important one. A couple of the youth made arrangements with their employers to attend the meeting. The answers the youth gave generally substantiated the importance of self-government to the youth and the implications of such a system for their lives.

A Discussion of the Methodology

The combination of methods was positive. The researchers managed to speak to the majority of the people in the community, with the exception of some people who were out of the community at the time of the door-to-door interviews and the few individuals who chose not to be interviewed. In all, it was a fairly good representation of the community. The researchers feel that they acquired relevant information, despite the few respondents who did not participate. The researchers came to the conclusion that the participants responded to the best of their knowledge, even though a few were negative in their comments about the topic. For example, they provided a few answers that were not relevant to self-government at all.

The amount of information that the researchers were able to accumulate was valuable in terms of the Dene history in our community, current circumstances, and the future aspirations of the Dene. The only weak area in the findings that the researchers think may require more information is in the area of a detailed Dene government model or structure, and the various services and programs that would be implemented according to the community population and the needs of the community.

Study Results

The Desire for Self-Government

According to other Aboriginal peoples across Canada, self-government means:

We are the original inhabitants of this country now called Canada, and First Nations peoples we never gave up our sovereignty. We are the First Peoples and we are a Nation with the inherent right to create and maintain our own identities and cultures, languages, values, practices, to govern ourselves and to govern our relationship with other governments as distinct entities. (*Framing the Issues*, 1993, p. 23)

Many people spoke of self-government as a vehicle to restore Aboriginal identities and cultures, to heal communities and to revitalize traditional governing structures. (*Framing the Issues*, 1993, p. 19)

Self-government is not [something] that can be given by any government, but rather...flows from our Creator. It has never been up to the government to give self-government. It has never been theirs to give. (*Framing the Issues*, 1993, p. 19)

The people interviewed were asked whether they feel that the *Indian Act* and other Canadian laws are legitimate rules for the Dene of Wrigley. Seventy-five per cent of the respondents said that they did not, while twenty-five per cent indicated that they do feel them to be appropriate.

The people living outside the community were also asked this question, and in this case the responses were dissimilar. Fifty per cent said that they do feel that Canadian laws and the *Indian Act* are legitimate for the Dene of Wrigley, while the other fifty per cent indicated the opposite. Some of the members who lived out the community responded that they consider the *Indian Act* and Canadian laws to be legitimate because they make Canadians and non-Aboriginal people across Canada equal, and that it would create some difficulties if every community established its own laws and rules. The other respondents indicated that "only the Dene in their own communities know the type of government structure is workable for them". (IS4)ⁱⁱⁱ

Of the seventy five per cent of people interviewed who felt that the *Indian Act* and other Canadian laws are not legitimate rules for the Dene of Wrigley, many indicated that they believe the Dene should establish their own laws: "As Dene people, we should make our own laws rather than depend on laws created by non-Aboriginals (written Canadian Laws)"; "self-government means...to be able to run our own affairs without federal funding, to set our own laws and constitution." (I2)

The establishment of its own laws and rules by the Wrigley Dene Band Council is a clear example of a step toward self-government. In fact, when asked what self-government means to them, the interview respondents generally answered that self-government implies control of

institutions and decision making by the Dene of Wrigley. The youth expressed a similar sentiment in their focus group meeting. From a youth perspective, self-government means taking economic, political and social control, with community leaders securing the right to determine their future. They want the right to define who they are and the place they will take in Canadian society. They also feel it is important to have ownership of the land and its resources before self-government is implemented in Wrigley.

Many of the respondents noted the connection between self-government and the ability of the Wrigley Band to make its own laws and constitution without interference from the federal government, and they indicated that self-government would allow the people of Wrigley to make laws and acts accordingly to their own beliefs and cultural background, rather than having laws imposed on them that are not relevant: "The *Indian Act* does not adequately represent the Aboriginal peoples north of 60. It applies mainly to reserves. Other laws do not reflect the ideals of native peoples such as justice, health, and housing"; (I15) "The *Indian Act* and Canadian laws were not created, legislated by our people. We want to create our own laws which reflect our values, cultures, lifestyle." (I13)

The Establishment of Self-Government

If Wrigley were to attain self-government and establish its own laws and rules, the question then arises as to whether the present Wrigley Dene Band Council is the appropriate body for the implementation of these laws and rules. The interview respondents were asked whether the Wrigley Dene Band Council is an appropriate and workable form of government for the community. Sixty per cent of the people interviewed thought that is it an appropriate form of government, while forty per cent said that the Wrigley Dene Band Council is not a political structure they would like to be governed by. Of the community members elsewhere who were surveyed, however, only half felt that the Wrigley Dene Band Council is an appropriate government structure.^{iv}

Many people expressed a concern that they are not informed enough about issues, particularly land claims and treaty rights: "I feel the Band Council should inform the people particularly on important issues, such as lands, community affairs, economy, jobs." (I7) The out-of-community members also indicated that they would like to be more informed about what is happening in the community, perhaps on a regular basis.

The issue of representation and information dissemination was raised again and again. The youth who participated in the focus group meeting said they would like to be more involved in the decision-making process and have their concerns taken more seriously. Most of the respondents, including those who indicated that the Wrigley Dene Band Council is a workable form of government, felt that improvements could be made to the current structure, and this usually had to do with the election process, which they believe should be modified to give equal representation for women, youth and elders. It was recommended by some that youth, women, and elders committees be established: "Band members have to get more involved in the decision-making process in order for representation of everyone." (15)

In fact, the primary concern of the women who participated in the focus group meeting was their perception that the Wrigley Dene Band Council does not adequately represent them and address their concerns. Many of the women expressed a desire to become more involved in the political process if they were given the opportunity to participate. Many of the women who attended the meeting discussed the fact that only a small percentage of women sit on the current band council. In fact, of seven band councillors, only one of them is a woman. The only female band councillor was at the focus group meeting, and she felt more women should attend meetings and run for band council. There is widespread dissatisfaction among the women that they are being excluded from participating in the political process. Many of them feel their concerns are being disregarded or are seen as secondary to other important issues such as land claims and treaty rights. They feel the political process in the future should be more partial to them than it is now. They want to be equal partners in the effort to make Wrigley a successful self-governing community. They want to play a major role in the decision-making process, particularly if the issues directly affect them. The desire to be more politically involved was repeated throughout the women's meeting. The discussion seemed to centre around the disenchantment of women with their political leaders and the need to make the political process more fair to them.

A year ago, a women's group was formed in the community, which provides support for women. The group sponsors sewing nights and bake sales among other activities. Political concerns of the women are also addressed to the band council by the group's executive. Thus, the women of Wrigley are involved to some extent, but it is not the effective political power they desire for themselves. Many of the women who attended the meeting share a desire for greater

political control over their lives. The women would like to participate in a self-governing community that will provide economic and employment opportunities for them. They want employment and training programs created for them. Also, the women felt that the education system should encourage strong academic performance and achievement by women. Many of the women feel they should be given equal opportunities with men to reach their potential. For instance, the women recommended that they operate a handicraft store and daycare centre; many of the single mothers in the community require affordable daycare services, and handicraft sewers need a place to sell and buy their handicrafts.

The majority of the women who participated in the focus group meeting — most of them over the age of 30 — said that women played an equal role in the decision-making process in the past. Women worked just as hard as the men. They said women prepared food and cared for the children while the men hunted large animals. Usually matters of concern to the family were discussed by women, and some women held high profile positions. Women played an important role in the daily lives of the people. The researchers would like to note that the information provided on traditional women's practices was based on secondary sources, most likely their parents and grandparents.

It appears that the common desire of the women in Wrigley is to become more politically involved in the decision-making process, and many of the women who attended the meeting believe that self-government may be one avenue by which they can achieve their full potential.

In making modifications to the present system, the majority would like to include aspects of the traditional governance system, based on consensus, as part of any future governing structure. The people said that they would like the political structure to integrate traditional practices of governance that reflect Dene culture, language, customs and ideals: "Yes, I agree, the Dene traditional laws and structures should be combined with the existing government structure (band council). It may mean people will become involved in the decision-making process. The new system will be more efficient, workable, and acquainted with people than the present system." (I7) The elders were particularly interested in this issue, and they stressed the fact that they would like traditional governance based on consensus, sharing, and respect for each other brought back and included in the existing structure. One respondent also indicated that the Dene had their own laws before the federal government imposed their system on the Dene communities: "Before the arrival of white people, the Dene were self-governing in a consensual

political organization. Decisions and policies were implemented by general agreement among the people. The *Indian Act* and election system was imposed on the Dene without their consent or approval. Traditional laws and structures should be amalgamated with the current political structure." (I41)

In keeping with their desire for a governance system based more on their tradition of consensus and respect, many people indicated that the implementation of self-government would require co-operation between everyone in the community. The people suggested that it is important for everyone to work together and co-operate with each other, as self-government must be a community, not an individual effort: "In a self-governing community, co-operation must exist between the people." (I7) "In order for Wrigley to become self-governing, people must work together to make the system work efficiently. It will require planning." (I10)

Interestingly, many people also pointed out that the establishment of self-government would require that the Dene of the future be well-educated and well-informed about the issues concerning them, an issue that was raised again and again throughout the interviews and surveys: "The Chief and Councillors should preferably be educated individuals with an absolute interest in Aboriginal governance and with only good and positive intentions for the future of our people, community, traditional values, culture and language." (I53) For the women of Wrigley who participated in the focus group meeting, self-government requires providing more employment and training programs. In addition, the elders say self-government means the youth must obtain a good education. We need strong leadership for our people, and it is important the youth learn survival and leadership skills at a young age. The youth were also greatly concerned about their immediate and future needs. Many of them stressed the fact that they need training to prepare them for permanent employment in a self-governing community. The wish to occupy key positions in the work force seemed to be a common desire among youth. They spoke about their desire to employ Dene teachers, administrators, nurses, policemen, etc.

The Benefits of Self-Government and Priorities of a Self-Governing Community

Almost all the interview respondents indicated that self-government would help to protect the Dene language and culture: "Instead of relying on the territorial government or federal government, self-government will provide the avenue for better protection of our language and culture as we are here in the community." (I5) Like most Aboriginal people, the people of Wrigley are very concerned with this issue, and the protection of language and culture is central

to discussions regarding self-government. The elders commented that self-government would enable the community to preserve and revitalize the Dene culture and language. The women who participated in the focus group meeting also stressed the importance of the Dene culture and language. The achievement of self-government would have to include as a priority community control of education. The community members want to assume full endeavours and aspirations. Many people said that they would like the elders to teach culture and language programs in the school. One of the women at the focus group meeting, who is a teacher, spoke about teaching culture and language in the school. The Chief Julien Yendo School has a cultural inclusion program, which has been in place for about ten years. Many of the elders skilled in snowshoe making and moose hide sewing were hired to teach.

"Dene culture and language will be a priority for the Wrigley self-government. Culture and language will be promoted in schools and by elders." (I41) One of the points repeated in the youth focus group meeting was also the need to revitalize and preserve the traditional Dene culture and language. The youth stressed their desire for cultural and language programs, and they recommended that the school and elders be the primary teachers of traditional culture and language. Culture and language play an important role in defining who the Dene of Wrigley are and connects them with their past and ancestors.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the youth had a great deal to say about the benefits of self-government, as such benefits will affect their lives more than any other group. The youth realize that they are they ones who will determine and take control of a self-governing community in the future. The underlying concern is that the onus is on them to make a self-governing community work effectively for the betterment of the people of Wrigley.

The youth said one of the positive aspects of self-governing could be a drug- and alcohol-free community, if the stress of unemployment could be alleviated through the creation of employment through resource and business developments. The youth participants believe that most of the social problems in the community are indirectly linked to unemployment and people having not enough to do. Some of the youth who participated in the focus group meeting have engaged in criminal activity which they say was because they did not have a place to socialize. (However, the researchers would like to point out that Wrigley has a low rate of suicide and alcohol-related deaths compared to other Dene communities in the Northwest Territories). The field of recreation should be expanded, with more facilities available for general use. The youth

would like a drop-in centre, arcade and dance hall to be built in the community, so that they would have more opportunity to socialize among themselves. The youth feel they should be a target group for any future planning, and early intervention may reduce some of the problems the youth and people of Wrigley are facing. They would like their social needs to be taken seriously. In fact, the need for cultural activities and gatherings and entertainment was greatly emphasized by most respondents. Most people feel that Dene activities should be more commonly practised and learned by the younger people. They also recommended that the community implement cultural camps, where young people can learn to live off the land.

The interview respondents also indicated many things that would be important to them if self-government were to be achieved. In general, people want their immediate needs to be met, and they see self-government as a vehicle for accomplishing this. A lack of employment was reiterated by many of the respondents as a central problem, and people want a system put in place to create employment and training programs and meet the economic needs of the people. To the people of Wrigley, then, self-government is to some extent about making money and maintaining a steady flow of money within the community. Families have to be fed and cared for, and one of the ways people can achieve self-sufficiency is through training and retraining for full-time employment.

For some, self-government also means meeting community service needs. Many people want a self-government system to improve service delivery, be it water delivery, garbage disposal, or road upgrading. Such services are basic to most communities, and Wrigley is no exception; the need for proper services is a concern taken seriously by those who were interviewed.

One respondent also commented that self-government has to be "a government which protects the environment and animals. I am concerned about the careless attitude people have towards the land and its animals, resources. The land takes care of us, and without it we [Dene] are nothing." (I58) Such comments indicate a concern for the environment and its preservation for future generations' use. The land is the heart of Dene existence, and the respondent who made the comment is only saying what the people of Wrigley all feel. In the future, self-government will have to be structured to protect the environment and ensure that it is not destroyed. Inevitably, the land and its animals will help sustain the people of Wrigley long after self-government is achieved. The Dene of Wrigley have been close to the land and its animals

since before the arrival of non-Aboriginals on their land. Any self-governing body in the future will have to make preserving the environment a priority. Indeed, the land is seen as a provider of jobs and business opportunities. Once self-government is achieved, the people want to develop the land and profit from its resources. For example, Wrigley is situated along the Deh Cho (Mackenzie River) which provides opportunities in the tourism sector. Rivers and lakes around Wrigley have excellent fishing.

Self-Government and Justice

Particularly important to the people of Wrigley is the relationship between self-government and the traditional justice system. Seventy five per cent of the interview respondents indicated that when self-government is achieved, Wrigley should not continue to rely on the current justice system. In most of the interviews, the people rejected the current justice system, mostly based upon its ineffectiveness in rehabilitating criminals. Twenty per cent believe that the traditional justice system would provide a good basis for a new system, and seventy per cent feel that it should be combined with the current structure to develop an appropriate system; the traditional justice system based on arbitration by elders and community involvement should be amalgamated with the current justice system. Trial and sentencing could be determined by the Dene themselves with consultation from non-Aboriginals on an advisory basis. (I41)

At present the main types of crimes being committed are spousal assaults, disturbances of the peace, thefts, break and enter, and liquor act violations (see Appendix 13, RCMP report). The accused persons are taken out of the community to stand trial at a territorial court and sentenced by a judge. They are usually sent to jail in Yellowknife or Hay River. The community is not involved in sentencing or rehabilitation of members convicted of crimes.

Most of the respondents indicated that the present Canadian and territorial justice system is unfair to the Dene. Some responded by saying that the current justice system is inadequate, that they have very little knowledge of the justice system and its laws and rules, and that it does not take into consideration the Dene culture, beliefs, values, language and ideals. "I think Dene traditional laws should override the modern laws so it would be more workable with more involvement among the people of the community." (I54) The current justice system is designed to punish an accused rather than concentrating on the healing aspect of rehabilitation.

Some respondents indicated that the Dene traditional justice system would be beneficial

to the community: "Take the positives of the traditional and existing justice structure to develop our own justice system. The traditional laws would override the modern laws so it would be positive." (I54) As an example of how it might work, an offender could be sent to a Dene cultural camp for a period of time (or banishment) instead of being sent down south to an institution, where they would be denied access to their cultural lifestyle. The youth in the community also agree that the traditional and modern justice system could be combined to suit and benefit our community. The youth discussed at length a number of ways of rehabilitation. The justice system was of particular concern to the youth because they feel the present structure does not treat them fairly. They are often sent away to stand trial in a youth court in another community and sentenced to a correctional centre for youth. The community has no say in what happens to them once they are in the court system. They want an alternative to the current justice system. In the future, they feel the traditional justice system based on elder participation should be integrated with the current structure. The elders are the repository of traditional knowledge in the community, and they should be consulted.

Thirty women who were interviewed did not comment on the types of crimes being committed and what types of punishment should be imposed (see Appendix 15).

The elders indicated that in the past, they had a traditional justice system in place based upon arbitration by elders and community involvement, which proved effective in all aspects. Some respondents also indicated that many Aboriginal organizations are currently looking at traditional justice forms, and models are materializing that could be implemented to meet our community needs.

As of October 1994, Wrigley had implemented a community justice system based on Dene culture, values, beliefs. The band hired a justice co-ordinator to serve as a liaison between the community members and government departments and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The community had decided to try the justice of the peace program in taking greater responsibility for the administration of justice. The JPs will form a panel of four. They will co-operate with the justice committee members in determining sentences. The band is in the process of requesting funds for a cultural camp in the bush for offenders. It will concentrate on healing of community offenders according to traditional Dene justice practices.

The community has formed a justice committee consisting of four young people and two elders. The committee will meet once a month with the RCMP and others interested in dealing

with criminal activity and rehabilitation of offenders in a culturally appropriate manner. The committee will also meet with the territorial court judge when he or she is in the community. The members will also work closely with the Wrigley Band Council and community members in addressing justice issues and concerns.

The Issue of Membership

Membership will also be an important consideration. When asked about this issue, the interview respondents indicated a number of possible alternatives, including that community membership be based on registration on the current band list; the membership code; the Wrigley treaty list; treaty signatory's descent only; birthplace in Wrigley; marriage to band members; or residency requirements. Others indicated that it should be by community input and decision by the band council: "You have to be a descendant of an Aboriginal person from Wrigley Band (i.e., grandparents)." (I35) "As long as you have treaty status and are a descendant of an Aboriginal person." (I32) "Only the descendants of the Wrigley Dene who signed the July 1921 Treaty 11 can be a member and they have to have a treaty card upon Aboriginal governance implementation. And they have to prove that they are a descendant by document." (I54) Some of the respondents also expressed that a new membership code should be implemented with input from the band members who currently live outside the community. A few had little knowledge about the issue of membership status.

Some survey respondents indicated that the membership status of people living outside Wrigley should be based on individual choice, and that if they want to be involved in the community, they have to return to the community. Some said the outside members should be encouraged to return to the community to assist in the development of a new government structure. The majority of the interview respondents indicated that the current outside membership should be informed about community activities on a yearly basis.

Also, this question arose in the women's and youth focus group meetings. The youth indicated that the outside membership should not be discriminated against based on their residency status, and that they should be able to return to the community should they so desire. They did not have much to say about the roles of the outside membership, other than that they would have to wait for a while if they want employment in the community, and that the people living in the community should have the first opportunity for employment.

Some of the women's responses were that the outside membership has made a choice about where they want to live. They also said that the band office should assist them if they require help, but not necessarily financially.

Very important in this regard are the responses of the people living outside Wrigley, as the question of membership may have the greatest effect on them if self-government is achieved. Of those surveyed, fifty per cent indicated that they would like to be involved in the governing of Wrigley. They suggested that their role might be "part of the management team to organize and put an appropriate structure in place." (SI) Fifty per cent of the survey respondents indicated that they were not interested in governing, but that their role might be "to assist in obtaining necessary information and resources to help the community maintain its operation". (S46)

Almost all the respondents indicated that membership must be decided by the people once self-government is implemented. Membership is an important issue, particularly in a community such as Wrigley where the majority of the people are of Dene descent.

Summary and Discussion

The current view of the government of the Northwest Territories on Aboriginal self-government is summed up in these words:

The north is a young and changing society. More than half its population consists of young people under the age of 25, who are growing up in a world of Detroit television, modern homes, personal computers and megaprojects. Yet the trappings of modern life are superimposed on native value systems, culture, and languages which are centuries old. Against this backdrop, effective northern public administration is difficult and complex in a way unexperienced by any other Canadian political jurisdiction. The GNWT must respond to a world of changes and contrast between new and old, a world which at one and the same time holds rotating southern works crews and centuries-old northern traditions, megaprojects and micro-communities, deeply felt cultural values and ultra-modern technology, untouched beauty and environmental contaminants, and new jobs and nagging unemployment. (GNWT, 1991, p. 23)

The government of the Northwest Territories sees community self-government as the progression toward resource development, and it has indicated that the best social policy for the North is an economic policy that gives priority to greater community self-sufficiency. According to that view, communities must be developed through oil and gas exploration and exploitation, tourism, logging, building and road construction, and business opportunities. The GNWT wants to distribute more of its capital evenly with the communities. The government plans to manage its

money and expenditures and to shift responsibility for community-based building and rebuilding of an economic and social base. It will transfer more responsibility and resources to individual communities to allow them to provide services to the people.

In the 1960s and '70s, communities were created with schools, nursing stations and family allowance cheques. During this period, services expanded rapidly. These expansions included housing, water and sewer services, airports, social assistance, libraries, public buildings, child services, small businesses, and power plants. Communities have become dependent on government funding and services.

According to the *Report of the Project to Review the Operations and Structures of the Northern Government*, the GNWT created local governments across the North between 1970 and 1990 and transferred to them services such as water supply, fire protection, sewage and waste collection, recreation programs and operations of local airports. This was regarded as Phase I in the evolution of northern community governments. In Phase II, the government "intends to augment the current services to property with broader responsibilities for services to people". The development of community government "represents a major step for the GNWT" in Phase II. It signals a new partnership and new balance in the relationship between the territorial government and the communities of the North. It is a recognition that managing the North is a large and difficult task that requires the combined and fully harmonized efforts of two strong levels of government. (GNWT, 1991, p. 39)

A plan for the transfer for the next phase of community self-government is included in the GNWT's Community Transfer Agreement.

The key elements in the proposed agreement include block or semi-block funding; multi-year funding; and considerable flexibility for communities to reallocate funds and/or reconfigure programs to suit local conditions, within the broad policy guidelines of the territorial government. (GNWT, 1991, p. 46) Some other essential features of the community transfer agreement include multi-year agreements (specific program responsibilities); negotiations between the GNWT and interested communities or with groups of smaller communities; and the time frame of the transfer, which is an ongoing gradual process. As of 1994, the process of community transfer agreements is being actively promoted by GNWT.

The GNWT community transfer agreement is a process in which northern communities are given the opportunity to become self-governing. It gives communities the political authority to

administer services, programs, and funding budget. The ultimate governing authority lies with the GNWT through its powers of disallowance. GNWT ministers can approve and disapprove services and programs and funding in accordance with government budget constraints. This is the GNWT community transfer agreement which is also a self-government option the Dene of Wrigley may consider.

Conclusion: Self-Government and the Wrigley Community Study

To enhance and protect the Dene culture and language is a number one priority in the implementation of self-government in Wrigley. The majority of the people in Wrigley have stressed the relevance of their language and culture and want to ensure that they continue to be taught in the school by the elders and the community members.

The Dene of the future also have to be well-educated and well-informed about issues they face. In fact, a human resources survey was conducted in Wrigley in 1992, which revealed that almost fifty per cent of the respondents have less than grade 9 education. The education levels in Wrigley are low, and adult education has to be a priority of community planners. There are few college/university graduates employed in Wrigley. Yet while the numbers are small, it is still a significant change since 1986 when there were no post-secondary graduates. The main interests in the community are in training in academic studies and trades. The majority of the respondents want to advance their education, as lack of basic education is a primary barrier to advanced education. Ninety per cent of the people want to obtain a General Education Diploma through adult education, but due to family responsibilities they do not want to move away from the community. The desire for education is very positive for self-government in Wrigley, and interest in training is quite high for a small community.

The present band council supports this finding, and the priorities of the current council in fact include education and training. In addition, they are very concerned with economic development, housing, and an effective mode of communication within the community. Suggestions of the following were discussed: weekly radio community reports, a monthly band newsletter sent to households in and out of the community, videotaping of band council meetings and the annual general meeting for community members and school students, and a videotape for the elders to view in their homes on current community affairs.

The majority of people also indicated that the *Indian Act* and Canadian laws are not seen

to be legitimate and appropriate for a Dene form of self-government, and that the current justice system is unfair and inadequate and that it does not take into consideration the Dene ideals (culture, language, beliefs). Only the Dene themselves know what type of government would work for them and one that would benefit the community as a whole. They believe that they should establish their own laws and write own self-government constitution. These laws and constitution should be based on the Dene traditions and consensus, and be a basis for the future. They also stated that the combination of traditional and contemporary laws would be a more positive form of government for them.

Many people involved in this study indicated that the Wrigley Dene Band Council as it now exists would not be an adequate structure for self-government, and that it should be changed in some ways. It is important for the Dene of Wrigley to work together and co-operate with each other, and the youth and the women want to have more involvement in community affairs and any changes that would affect them directly. The importance and relevance of this is a priority for the current band council, and listening to elders and youth for their input and ideas for the future is crucial.

The Wrigley Dene Band Council responded to that point at a regular band council meeting and agrees that the structure of the band council could be changed in the event of self-government being implemented in the community. They feel that all band councillors should have a portfolio and should be required to sit on various committees in the community. The band council has to write a constitution based on Dene laws and a consensus format, with some integration of contemporary laws. On the question of band council elections regulations, the band council agreed that it should be revised and updated, and the traditional form of elections was better. The council supports the implementation of an elders council and a youth council in the community right away, and they also feel that the elders council could also act as the justice committee in the community to work along with the RCMP.

Membership is also an important consideration for the Dene of Wrigley. The research participants stated that membership should be based on registration on the current band list; the treaty list; birthplace in Wrigley; and the membership code to name a few. The out-of-community membership who responded to the survey also indicated that they would like to be included in the future governance of Wrigley, but they also feel they would have to return to the community to be involved. The current band council feels membership should be determined by Treaty 11

list and their descendants. They agree the membership code should be revised and updated to reflect the concept of self-government.

The Deh Cho Tribal Council held a Deh Cho Regional Assembly on 13-15 August 1993 in Kakiska Lake to discuss their regional concerns, issues and self-government. The delegates discussed and reviewed the history of the relationship between the Dene and the government of Canada. The final outcome of the assembly was a Deh Cho First Nations Declaration of Rights:

We the Dene of the Deh Cho have lived on our homeland according to our own laws and system of government since time immemorial. Our homeland is comprised of the ancestral territories and waters of the Deh Cho Dene. We were put here by the Creator as keepers of our waters and lands. The peace treaties of 1899 and 1921 with the non-Dene recognize the inherent political rights and powers of the Deh Cho First Nations. Only sovereign peoples can make treaties with each other. Therefore our Aboriginal rights and titles and oral treaties cannot be extinguished by any Euro-Canadian government. Our laws from the Creator do not allow us to cede, release, surrender or extinguish our inherent rights. The leadership of the Deh Cho upholds the teachings of the elders as the guiding principles of Dene Government now and in the future.

Today we reaffirm, assert and exercise our inherent rights and powers to govern ourselves as a nation.

We the Dene of the Deh Cho stand firm behind our First Nation government. (See Appendix 14.)

Recommendations

Notes

We would like to extend our many thanks to the Wrigley Dene Band Council: the past chief, Tim Lennie, and the current chief, Gabriel Hardisty; band councillors Michael Canadien, Martha Drake, Edward Hardisty, James Hardisty, Lloyd Moses and Gabriel Hardisty; and Joseph Paul Nayally, the band manager.

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The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples gave us the opportunity to be included in this relevant research by conducting the study of our people's aspirations in the years to come.

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Mahsi to everybody in Wrigley. We could not have put this report together without your input.

References

Appendices

i The exceptions to this process were in cases of interviews with elders from the community. The researchers felt that in these situations it would be appropriate for both of them to conduct the interviews together, for transportation purposes. It was sometimes difficult for the researchers to explain the questions and provide any necessary clarification, and because of concerns like these the researchers were more comfortable working as team.

ii The exception was people who were adopted out of the community as children — approximately 10 to 20 people. The band was not able to locate these people.

iii Quotations taken directly from the interviews and surveys are noted in this way, referring to the code used to identify the responses.

iv It is important to note when analyzing these results that of the out-of-community respondents, only half felt that they understood the existing structure completely or very well. The people living in Wrigley expressed a much greater level of confidence in their understanding of the way the Wrigley Dene Band Council operates.