

CACAC Priorities/ Recommendations – March 26, 2018

This document is a summary of the Community Advisory Committee's recommendations, as of February 2nd, 2018. They are summarized according to 5 broad categories. These are:

- 1) *Restore and maintain healthy lakes, rivers, wetlands and surrounding habitats;*
- 2) *Protect, enhance and restore the village;*
- 3) *Improve management processes and decision making*
- 4) *Improve Infrastructure;*
- 5) *Support and Enhance Community Development and Cultural Well-Being*

The Committee emphasized that “**restoring and maintaining healthy lakes, rivers and wetlands**” is above all; the highest priority, followed closely by “**protect, enhance and restore the village**”.

Under each of the headings, there are a number of recommended actions and a brief rationale provided. The Committee acknowledges this is not a conclusive statement of recommendations. Other sources, such as citizen recommendations from the Traditional Knowledge Study, further engagement with CAFN citizens, and past General Assembly resolutions, all need to be taken into consideration.

1) RESTORE AND MAINTAIN HEALTHY LAKES, RIVERS, WETLANDS and SURROUNDING HABITATS

For years, the Committee members have witnessed continual impacts and stress put on the lakes, rivers, wetlands and surrounding habitats. It is paramount that the living land and waters are respected, and protected for future generations to enjoy and thrive from.

- a) Take pressure off the Aishihik area¹:** YEC/CAFN need to research other renewable energy alternatives to reduce the use and dependence on the Aishihik area. The dependence and intensity of use on the Aishihik area is not acceptable, and energy alternatives need to be developed (e.g. wind, other hydro, pumped storage, battery storage). The current regime is putting too much pressure on the Aishihik area.
- b) Stabilize water levels:**
 - Stop flooding and drying out the Lakes wetlands, and river systems. Water levels go too high for too long; and go too low too frequently under the current water management. The current use of the water reduces the health of the lakes and rivers, community wellbeing, and our identity and sense of place.
 - Stop the overbank icing downstream in Aishihik and Dezadeash Rivers, and stop high flows downstream. Winter releases of water creates overbank icing that have negative consequences to the land and water, and our rights to access and effectively harvest in the area.
- c) Protect spawning/ rearing areas**
 - Bays around the lake are frequently too low and for too long in spring
 - reduce cumulative impacts of fluctuating water levels, habitat reduction and sport fishing
 - Create designated protection areas around spawning grounds in Aishihik Lake bays
 - Fluctuating water levels creates problems for spawning of multiple species
- d) Ensure fish and other aquatic organisms are not prevented from free movement within and between lakes and in the river system**
 - The fish ladder is not working. There is a need to restore connectivity between Aishihik and Canyon Lakes.
 - Need to ensure grayling and other species can access spawning areas. Concern that low lake levels is preventing access between spawning creeks and the lakes
 - Access/ connectivity is affected by low water in Sekulmun River.
 - There is strong concern about water management practices and the ability for fish to thrive year round and return to the downstream areas.
- e) Prevent increased rates of permafrost thaw**
 - Determine what is in the permafrost and if anything hazardous is being released.
 - Determine the connection between water level fluctuations and permafrost thaw (i.e. does high variability in water level accelerate permafrost thaw?)

¹ Aishihik Area: This term includes all waterbodies, watercourses, wetlands and surrounding land, including Sekulmun Lake, Sekulmun River, Aishihik Lake, Aishihik River, Canyon (Otter) Lake, East Aishihik River, Aishihik River, Dezadeash River, Alsek River (effectively all waterways within the Aishihik Watershed and directly downstream).

- If water management is resulting in accelerated permafrost thaw, and in particular, if there is an increased risk of hazardous substances or compounds present leading to a reduction in water quality, then water use needs to be addressed.

f) Protect wildlife Habitat

- Need to ensure Wildlife are free to move within and between habitats year round. Impacts to wildlife movement have been observed (e.g. moose dying in canal crossing); and we are concerned about the project being responsible for what is happening downstream, as the results of areas being flooded, dried out, instability of lake and river shorelines, and unstable ice. These issues likely affect the quality and usability of wildlife habitat.
- Key habitat areas impacted. How to restore and protect key habitat areas (e.g. nesting areas for birds, riparian feeding areas for ungulates, muskrat denning-feeding)

g) Reduce or stop unnatural change in the ice

- Community is concerned about hollow spots in the ice, and the effect of the dropping of the water. Unstable ice impacts wildlife, personal travel, harvesting ability, etc.
- Need to stop the ice from freezing to the lake bottom (scouring) where it did not occur in the past. Concern partly based on the declining health of benthic ecosystem (from invertebrates to lingcod), particularly in shallow habitats.

2) PROTECT, RESTORE AND ENHANCE THE VILLAGE:

Äshèyi Village is one of the oldest villages in the Yukon because of abundant resources and interconnectivity. For people of Äshèyi, life beings, is lived and ends there as it did for our ancestors. Äshèyi is our true home for many CAFN people.

a) Erosion

- Changing water levels. Äshèyi Bay goes from full to drying out in less than a week. This has resulted in erosion that has put homes at risk.
- Permafrost thaw. There is new mud in the Village, and the ground is getting softer. Permafrost thaw changes infrastructure stability which impacts homes, travel and life in the Village.

b) Build/fix berms

- Current berms are ineffective and crumbling. Effectiveness of berms needs to be addressed to prevent further erosion. Alternative forms of stabilization also need to be explored (e.g. revegetation and/or different water management)

c) Manage water draining from melting permafrost and erosion

- Erosion and permafrost thaw are changes compounded by climate change that alter natural water flows and impact Village access, infrastructure, etc. Need to restore infrastructure and personal property

d) Other CAFN Settlement Land area, including downstream impacts.

In addition to Äshèyi, there are other village sites and CAFN lands that need to be protected from further damage, and restored to adapt to the changing conditions brought about by the operation of YEC and potentially other sources like climate change. For example: Chemi village site, Canyon, and other affected Settlement Land are affected by shoreline erosion and permafrost degradation.

3) IMPROVE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES AND DECISION-MAKING

- a) Review lake management every 5 years. Change and adapt if mitigations or operations are ineffective.
- b) There needs to be a shorter licence. Licence duration of 5-10 years, definitely less than 17 years.
- c) Need CAFN people to be involved in the design and operation of a monitoring program, to watch and be stewards of the environment and operations. There should be paid positions with CAFN and YEC for CAFN people to be the monitors.
- d) There needs to be explicit compliance and accountability so that there are changes to the operations according to the results of the monitoring. More frequent reviews and implementation of adaptive management are required to building a better relationship moving forward.
- e) Monitoring and management planning needs to respect and use CAFN traditional decision making processes and apply CAFN traditional knowledge, along with rigorous and defensible scientific research.

4) IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE

ROAD

- a) Need to increase summer and winter road maintenance and repairs (e.g., brushing, draining, grading, leveling, fixing wet spots, bridge repairs, signage)

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE:

- b) There need to be more cabins for community use. There is not currently sufficient infrastructure to address multiple users' needs (e.g. community, schools, etc.)

MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENTS OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

- c) Need to develop a cabin access/safety program. For example: keys, cached key, sat phone, emergency supplies.
- d) Shakat Kų improvements. For example: dedicated gear/supplies, fridge-freezer unit repairs, increased size to accommodate large groups
- e) Boat access/dock. Altered water levels and shoreline erosion in the Bay create different access requirements. A dock is required, as well as a sign by the boat launch to prevent gassing up at the dock and subsequent ground/water pollution.
- f) Outhouses/fire pits at Carnation Point and boat ramp.
- g) Drinking water. Needs to be potable water to supply the village. Metals – minerals in current well water is poor quality for drinking needs.
- h) FireSmart. More than just around Shakat Kų, needs to be through Äshèyi Village. Other fire protection options should also be considered (e.g., set up gear for fire fighting). Where water is available, sprinkler kits, pumps, hoses for fire crew staff to set up in the event of a fire.

5) SUPPORT AND ENHANCE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT and CULTURAL WELL-BEING

- a) There need to be substantial improvements to providing economic benefits from the project. This should include revenue sharing, employment and training, contracting for any YEC activities in our traditional territory (hydro plant operations, monitoring work, transmission line work)
- b) Traditional trail maintenance, mapping, use. Reconnect CAFN people with the land
- c) Need greater support for promoting more and better CAFN-led camps. Need CAFN government staff or an independent Community Association established to organize/lead culture camps.
- d) Camps should also include adult education. Culture camps/ support for bush university concept, for adults as well.