



*Métis Women's Indigenous and Ecological Knowledge:  
Perspectives from Willow Lake*



## **Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research - 2019 Fellowship Final Research Report**

A collaboration between Willow Lake Métis Nation and Certes Applied and Natural Sciences, funded by the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research.



## Credits

Willow Lake Métis Nation (WLM) is deeply grateful to the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research (RCMR) for deciding to do something different in awarding the 2019 fellowship to a Métis community. We appreciate the support that was provided by Dr. Nathalie Kermoal and her team at RCMR and the University of Alberta for the ethics approval process. We hope that the knowledge and perspectives included in the report can help further understanding of Métis culture, rights and land use, and women's knowledge of these realms in particular.

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This study was conducted by WLM in collaboration with Certes Applied and Natural Sciences (Certes). Research guidance and support was provided by Keely Winnitoy at Certes, including methods design, research ethics application and clearance, analysis and reporting. Keely has a master's degree in anthropology and has been conducting cultural, land use and rights-related research with Indigenous communities since 2006. Willow Lake Métis has been working with Keely and Certes since 2017.

## Dedication

This report is dedicated to all the Métis and non-Métis Indigenous women whose knowledge was never recorded.

*There are silences  
in the interview transcripts, the field notes, the reports  
because of questions that were never asked.  
Information that could not be mapped  
about the berries  
and the medicines  
about childrearing and teaching  
sewing, beading, scraping, drying  
harvesting and making food.  
About family and community  
and living with the land.*

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## About Willow Lake Métis Nation

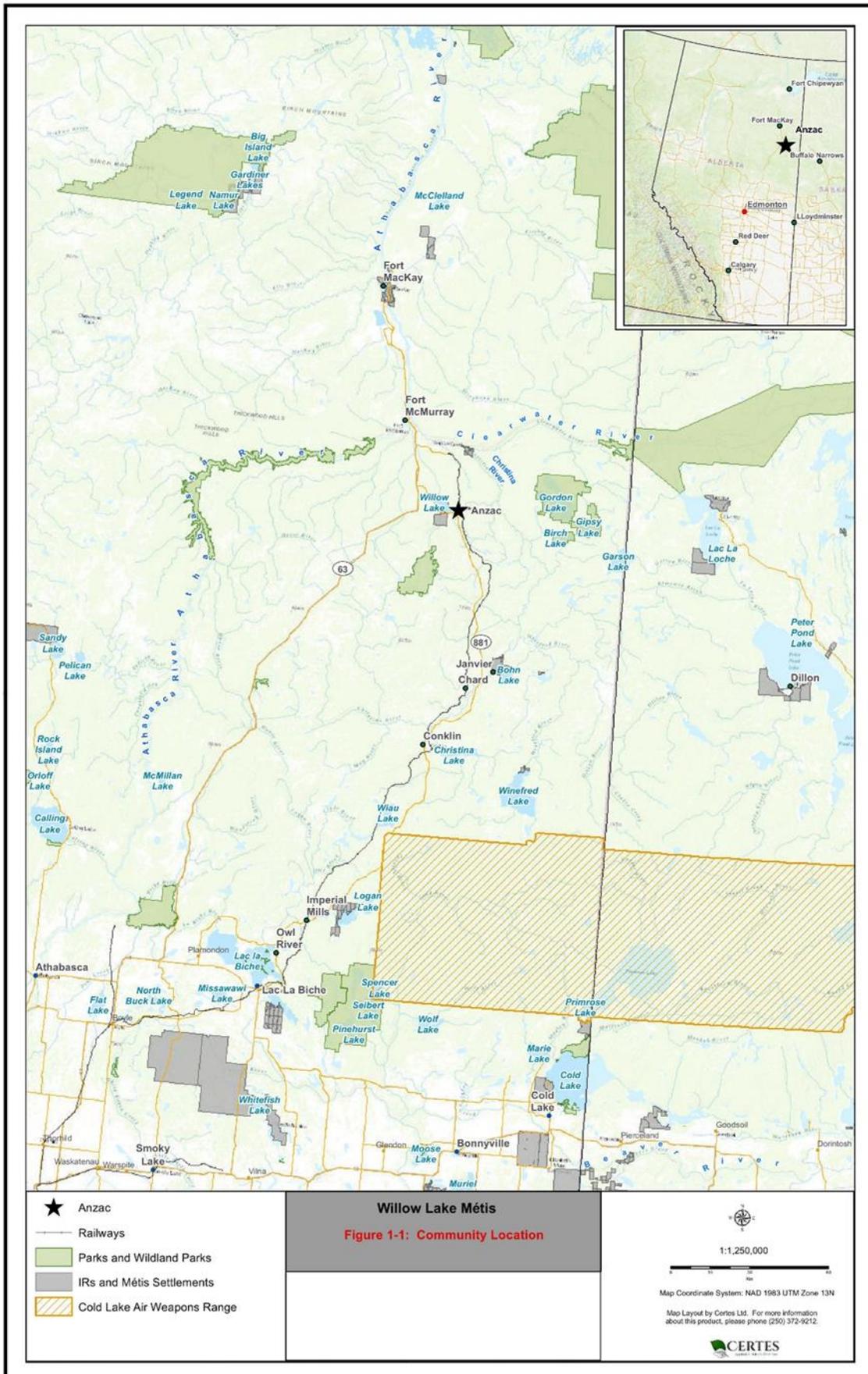
WLM is a Métis community in northeastern Alberta, whose members now mostly reside in and around the community of Anzac on the shores of Gregoire or Willow Lake (Figure 1-1). Anzac is about 35 km southeast of Fort McMurray, at the north end of what is locally referred to as “SAGD alley”—the wide swathe of steam and solvent-based bitumen extraction projects in the non-minable portions of the Alberta oil sands between Fort McMurray and Cold Lake.

Development in this area has expanded rapidly since approximately 2005. WLM members are connected through kinship, a common history, and a variety of economic and political ties to surrounding First Nations and Métis communities. Key family lines in the present-day WLM community include Bourque, Cardinal, Huppie, Lavallee, McKenzie, Quintal and Whitford.

WLM's roots lie in the history of the fur trade in Alberta and the economic and political circumstances that evolved during and after the fur trade. The historical Willow Lake community was close to trade and travel routes that connected Fort McMurray and Willow Lake to Lac La Loche to the east, to Fort Chipewyan to the north, and to Lac La Biche to the south. Willow Lake people lived on and derived their livelihood from the lands between these locations through much of the later fur trade period, and WLM people continue to use these lands to exercise their Indigenous rights, sustain their culture and identity as Métis people, support their community, and pass their knowledge and way of life on to their descendants.

Many of the personal histories of present-day WLM members reflect the history of northern Alberta (including the Lac La Biche and Fort McMurray regions) and aspects of Métis culture and connection to the land. Distinctive cultural practices that characterized Métis communities in northeastern Alberta before European control included living off the land by hunting, trapping, fishing and plant gathering, supplemented with varying degrees of wage labour. Present-day WLM members talk about how they were taught harvesting skills by parents and grandparents who were highly skilled at hunting, trapping, fishing and plant gathering; many current members were taught these cultural practices (and continue to teach them) on traplines that have been in their families for several generations. WLM members also describe how traditional practices of sharing food and labour, caring for Elders, and gathering to feast and dance used to, and continue to characterize the community today.

WLM connections to family, community and history are embedded in and passed on within the context of the boreal forest landscape of northeastern Alberta that has formed the geographic backdrop for several generations of WLM members, stretching from Anzac south to Lac La Biche, north to Fort McMurray, west to the Athabasca River and east into Saskatchewan. Cultural traditions linking WLM to the land characterize the past and the present of the community. Distinctive traditions include harvesting animals and plants; processing these resources for food, clothing and income; spending time on the land with family; and teaching children about the land and how to live on it. These cultural traditions persist today in the modern WLM community.



It is evident from historical records and interviews conducted with WLM members that subsistence land use has always underpinned and influenced the lifeways and culture of WLM and provided a means of livelihood in combination with participation in the wage economy. Many members recount having been raised on the land, by ancestors who were also raised on the land, and this legacy continues today within WLM family lines, on family traplines, and through events such as the harvest camps held by the community several times each year. Many members of the community are active harvesters who provide moose meat, berries and fish for their families and other community members, and supplant their wage earnings with commercial trapping, which also provides an ongoing connection to the land.

Since the middle of the 20th century, intensifying oil and gas exploration and the development of transportation networks in northeastern Alberta have led to significant changes in the lands known and used by WLM. Changes witnessed by WLM include deforestation; drying of the muskeg; reductions in the abundance and health of many wildlife, plant, and fish species; and the widespread permeation of the landscape with new access and non-resident people coming onto the land for work and recreation (including hunting and fishing). Increasing development pressures in the area combined with government regulation of traditionally harvested resources and harvesting practices, as well as environmental changes such as the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire, are leaving WLM people with fewer and fewer places to engage in land-based activities that provide for their families and their community, which many members consider essential in maintaining their way of life, their culture, and their distinctive identity.

*Willow Lake Members at a Harvest Camp  
March 2018*



## Study Overview

This report has been written to contribute to the scholarship regarding Métis land use and ecological knowledge, and Métis women's knowledge and land use in particular. The primary objective of this study has been to document Indigenous knowledge from female members of the WLM community regarding ecology, land use, culture, environmental management and impacts of industrial development. Women from Métis (and First Nations) communities are frequently underrepresented in studies regarding Indigenous knowledge and land use. Land use studies are often prompted by the possibility of an industrial development infringing on Aboriginal rights and therefore focus on the activities that are most commonly understood to directly support those rights: hunting, trapping, and fishing. The importance of traditional female roles in land use, cultural maintenance, and future stability are often under- (or un-) acknowledged in these kinds of studies.

This report documents the knowledge shared by five women who were interviewed for the study, as well as knowledge contributed by three women interviewers. These women were all born and raised in northeastern Alberta, in the vicinity of Anzac and Fort McMurray. All of them belong in one way or another to the small Metis community of Willow Lake, and the group of participants includes sisters, mothers and daughters, aunts and nieces, and grandmothers and granddaughters.

This study and report also serve a key priority identified by WLM members—to retain their culture to the greatest extent possible, in part by documenting land use knowledge and practices to help keep these alive for future generations.

## Why Women's Knowledge

This study provides a response to recent critiques that have highlighted the absence of Métis' knowledge and women's knowledge from research regarding traditional ecological knowledge and land use (Kermoal 2016), and related regulatory impact assessments tied to industrial development (Joly and Westman 2017). It challenges the predominant emphasis in environmental research and management on men's Indigenous knowledge and provides women's voices so that other researchers can benefit from the perspectives provided by women who have lived in a traditional Métis community and maintained a connection to the land through a time of significant environmental and community transition. It illuminates not only aspects of *what* women know about the land, but also *how* women know about the land and how their ways of knowing reflect the close connection between land, culture and community.

Kermoal (2016) describes the marginalization of women's knowledge and Métis knowledge in Aboriginal consultation and impact assessment processes in Canada. Joly and Westman (2017) similarly highlight the absence of information about and from Métis Indigenous communities and women in consultation and assessment processes related to Indigenous rights and land

use. The undervaluing of women's ecological knowledge has resulted in the underrepresentation (if not near absence) of this body of information in the extensive grey literature regarding Indigenous land use and ecologies, and has also led to a lack of consideration of the impacts of industrial development on Indigenous women's relationship with the land and the contribution of their land-based activities and knowledge to cultural continuity.

This study by WLM illuminates aspects of Indigenous culture and land use that have been overlooked when women's roles and knowledge are underrepresented in environmental impact assessment research and land use studies and brings forward women's ways of knowing about the land. WLM's research also helps to shed light on outcomes of the existing gender bias in Indigenous land use studies, which stem from colonial influences that underpin definitions of Aboriginal rights and continue to influence court cases, environmental assessments, environmental management decisions, and government policy. Land use studies are often prompted by the possibility of an industrial development infringing on Aboriginal rights, and therefore focus on the activities that are commonly understood to directly support those rights such as hunting, trapping, and fishing for consumption. Despite the holistic nature of Indigenous land use and the deep connection of land use to culture, Indigenous land use studies are usually mandated to highlight aspects of land use that are more tangible and may be more conventionally associated with male land use. Regulatory requirements, budgetary constraints, and the intended audience of most of this research (non-Indigenous industrial proponents and governments) further constraints the topics and scope of study. The importance of traditional female roles in land use, cultural maintenance, and future stability are often under- (or completely un) acknowledged.

Some of the knowledge shared by the women in this study was similar to men's knowledge commonly documented through this kind of research, including observations about species declines and health changes; some was different, both in the content of what was shared and the way it was communicated. When women were asked about the land and harvesting, many spoke about these subjects in relation to their families and communities, and linked their dialogues to topics of health, work, maintaining a home, childrearing, teaching and maintenance of cultural identity. This may reflect the questions that were asked in the interview to some extent, or it may reflect the way women think about the land and their harvesting and their roles and perspectives. For some women, these realms may be more familiar and comfortable than speaking authoritatively about landmarks and navigation, fishing, trapping, and hunting. These issues may reflect a need to find different ways to interview women about their ecological knowledge and land use.

Women's land use narratives emphasize the linkages between social, ecological and cultural systems and provide windows into different aspects of traditional knowledge. These new perspectives highlight some of the broader direction in the field of Indigenous Knowledge and rights research and impact assessment, as guidelines and practice move toward greater

exploration of linked social-cultural and ecological systems and inclusion of gender into impact assessment analyses.

## Methods Statement

The goals for this study were developed through collaboration between WLM and Certes, and in consideration of the RCMR mandate. They reflect broader initiatives of WLM, Certes and the RCMR related to research and cultural retention for Métis Nations and peoples. The methods were developed with WLM and Certes and the research was vetted and approved through the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board.

The Interview Guide (Appendix A) was developed collaboratively between WLM and Certes and focused on the topics of Indigenous and ecological knowledge regarding species, harvesting and processing practices, key cultural values, and changes to the environment and culture that have been observed during the interviewees' lifetimes. Every participant completed a consent form prior to starting their interview (Appendix B). Interviews were conducted with five women from the Willow Lake Métis community in the summer of 2019, three individually and two in a pair. The oldest interviewee was born in 1943 and the youngest in 1964. The women who conducted the interviews are also from the Willow Lake community but from a younger generation, ranging in age from early 20s to late 30s at the time of the study.

All interviews were transcribed, reviewed by the interviewers, and then analysed for specific aspects of knowledge such as harvested species, harvesting and stewardship practices, and ways of knowing about the land. Emergent themes that also appeared during analysis were also documented, including topics such as teaching, families, community, and values.

This report includes extensive quotations and limited commentary from the report authors. This was intentional from the outset of the study, so that the interviewee's knowledge would be the main output of the research and form the bulk of the report. WLM and Certes agreed that they wanted as much of the primary data from the study as possible available to the RCMR and other researchers seeking Métis voices in publicly accessible literature. It became obvious during transcript analysis that the interviewer's voices needed to be included throughout the study because the interviewers' contributions form an integral part of the narrative. In this community-based research, the interviews are very clearly a conversation between family and community members, and that needed to come through in the report.

Interviewee identity has been protected with codes and by redacting information as necessary. All quotes have been put in italics and centred in text and where it didn't interrupt the flow of reading, filler words such as 'yeah' and 'um' have been included to bring the reader more deeply into the real conversation that took place. Non-English words have been included with phonetic spellings provided by the interviewees, with explanations or definitions and alternate spellings provided via footnote where possible.

It was also intentional from the outset of the study that the interviews would have a semi-structured format that allowed for development of narratives by and between the interviewees. Mapping interviews are often the primary method of collection land use information whereby an interviewee's lifetime of land use, or land use in a proposed project area, are mapped in a highly systemic fashion. Focusing on women's knowledge in this study emphasized how a mapping approach doesn't work with all women as they are sometimes out on the land with men, and they are often not in charge of navigating. Therefore, some women struggle to map their land use despite extensive amounts of time on the land.

The report closes with a limited summary and reflections by the report authors. The report was reviewed with interviewees and by WLM leadership prior to finalization and submission to the RCMR.

## *We Used to Live with the Land...*

The central portion of this document presents the knowledge, stories and conversations shared between the eight women from Willow Lake who participated in this study, in their own words. The quotations have been organized by themes that emerged partly as a result of the interview questions and partly from the dynamic conversations that took place during the interviews.

### Our Lands and Waters

*Interviewer: What was the land like in this area when you were young? ...*

*1703: It was beautiful. Beautiful, eh? [Kitawasin] is beautiful ...*

*1722: It was beautiful. There was no pavement, it was all gravel. Fresh, everything's fresh. Especially in the morning. There was all kinds of birds.*

*1703: You can drink water from the mud puddle.*

*1701: It was so clean and pristine.*

*1703: It was so clean, yeah.*

*1722: Wash our clothes. Our hair used to be squeaky clean.*

*1703: Rainwater, yeah.*

*1722: A lot of difference.*

*1703: The birds, they sing all night.*

*1722: Yeah, all kinds of birds... Like early in the morning they used to sing.*

*1703: Worst than the jungle. ...*

*1722: Now all you hear is –*

*1703: Magpies.*

*1722: Is ravens and magpies. (Laughter)*

*1703: When these oil plants started coming. Everything started diminishing, even the colour of the trees. Like you don't see butterflies like you used to, or frogs. Everything is slowly fading away.*

*Interviewer: What was the land like in this area when you were young?*

*1707: Oh, it was beautiful. It was, like I said, you can go right outside, whatever. You can pick whatever you want, and well yeah, even the trees, they don't look as big and healthy as when I was growing up. Everything was so much more beautiful. So*



*clean, so nice ... And even if it was touched, you wouldn't see the footprints because of the way we lived. Right. We didn't make a big mess...*

*Interviewer: Are there plants or animals or other signs that you look for each year, as markers of how the environment is doing?*

*1703: I usually just look at the trees and the berries. Trees, you could tell if they're tired, like they get kind of faded colour. And just last year, they're coming back to life. The colour, the spruce trees. Before they looked so tired and worn out, like all faded and turning brown.*

*1715: I'm noticing a lot more colour too.*

*1722: I notice the leaves are more green this year, than they were before. Could be from the sun, too.*

*Interviewer: ... Are there plants or animals or other signs that you look for each year as markers of how the environment is doing?*

*1707: The trees, I guess. Like even the leaves, they're not as bright and I don't know, they don't look as bright as they used to. No. The colours. And some of them even have a little brown spots all over them. Like willows coming out and they don't even look nice anymore. They look like they're just struggling.*

*1701: ... Are there certain signs who like say, in the springtime how fast the snow melts or if you're getting certain weather patterns that you're able to predict kind of what your summer is going to look like. Is it easy to do that now? Or is it harder to do that now?*



*1707: It's harder to do that now because there's no more bush land around. It's usually the earth that tells you, and if you can't really, like you just see spots here and there, you can't really like tell nothing about it, all you ... But like if you're now, if you're out in the bush, wherever, and if you know there's going to be lots of snow, you look at the bees, the bees nest, if they put their bees, their hives higher then are going to get lots of snow and lots of rain and stuff. I learned that years ago, I think my dad taught me that. Told me that. Yeah.*

205: *It is concerning with all these oil spills like the one we had down there at Enbridge there. All that's falling into [someone's] trap line ...*

*Well I know they did a clean up, but you know there's always stuff that comes back, right. And I just wonder if anybody monitors that. Actually, it was here and then over there too, right? Nexen as well ...*

*And I know with all the pipeline industry ... I've seen how they cross the creeks and stuff. And they go right in there with their trucks. They plugged them up. I've seen it ... I think with the industry they should be more careful of the environment, and especially the pipelining guys.*

1703: *Nothing's the same there [in Fort McMurray and Waterways]. You know? Before the fire everything was all rearranged, you know? ... Nothing was the same. And after the fire, it was even worse. All new development ... They cut the hills, they made a road, they make all kinds of roads. Cut more hill. Earth moving. They rearrange the creek. Never used to run that way in Waterways.*

1723: *I think there is a lot of, a lot of pollution all over.*

Interviewer: *Because of industry too?*

1723: *Yeah. There's so much, the Al-Pac, all the place. You ever go through Al-Pac, that road?*

Interviewer: *I think so, yeah.*

1723: *Yeah, it just stinks like something terrible.*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

1723: *There's so much of everything. Years ago people lived a long time. I think because there were so much pollution them days, but now like I say, I won't eat anything from around here, like fish.*

1703: *Yeah. Nights are cold. Days are hot when the sun comes out. The nights are cold.*

1722: *And the sun burns, not only just hot.*

1701: *It's like the rays is hotter now?*

1722: *Yeah, the protection's gone ...*



1703: Do you remember when – snowflakes? You'd get big snowflakes and they all had little designs, like beautiful snowflakes. Now when it snows it's like little pellets. No form, or shape.

1723: Summers are ... I remember years ago when it used to rain. It poured, and the lightning used to be so bad, the thunder. We used to just get scared, and we'd sit in the corner. But I don't find the lightning and thunder are as bad as they used to be years ago.

205: We actually used to haul our drinking water from there [Willow Lake] a long time ago when we were kids, and now sometimes it don't even look fit to swim because of all the different algae. Yeah. It's bad.

1707: The water we used to drink out of that lake, used to give us food and we used to drink out of it. Yeah. Now like in the past. Oh my God. Maybe 30 years. Maybe not that long, but it's just been polluted, many people.

## Our Berries

205: In all actuality, it's a blessing when you go in the bush and you actually see all that stuff, and it's just getting a little harder to find those berries. But, when you see them, you're pretty happy about them...

Well, I know just no shortage of berries [in the past].

That's for sure, according to my mom. And I try to remember even when I was a kid we used to pick like five gallons of cranberries and blueberries. Now, it's pretty tough to do that.

Interviewer: Do you have to travel for it?

205: We travel a half hour away from here, our usual spot, but they are getting less and less from all these oil plants and what not. Roads are getting cut off. Can't find one trail I've been looking for, and it's only like 20 minutes away from here.



205: Blueberries, cranberries, high bush, high bush cranberries, raspberries all wild but now I can't even find those. Oh, and strawberries. Wild strawberries we used to

*pick. And what we used to pick a long time ago ... hazelnuts. Do you ever pick a hazelnut along the tracks here? ...*

*That used to be a real treat, and now I think there is some in Fort McMurray, I've seen some. But around this area, I think they're pretty much gone. They used to grow around the willow [bushes].*

*1701: Oh really?*

*205: And it was a fuzzy little shell.*

*1701: Okay. Yeah. I've seen them.*

*205: And then you open it up and you had a little nut. Yep. And I've been looking for those every time I go in the bush and I can't find them. But, mind you, I haven't actually walked down the railway tracks in the last little while, a year or two ago.*

*205: Yeah. Exactly. Even where the willows are still there or the plants are there, but there's no berries happening. And that goes for your cranberries, blueberries, and especially high bush where there used to be a lot. Now the willows are there, but nothing's actually growing.*

*Interviewer: When did that start happening do you remember?*

*205: Well, it wasn't that long ago. Well, I don't know. I know this one spot there by 235 there, the willows are still there but there's no berries. I'd say maybe four years ago, five years. Now there's nothing ...*

*205: Because I know like even here right by our raspberry patch in our garden, I noticed the leaves sometimes go silver.*

*Interviewer: Hmm. When did that start happening? Just recently?*

*205: Yeah. When Nexen moved in.*

*Interviewer: You guys said that you used to pick berries. Which one did you used to pick?*

*1703: The shorter answer would be, which didn't you pick? We picked all sorts of berries. In those days there was all kinds of berries. Blueberries, saskatoons, cranberries, 1722: Strawberries.*

*1703: Strawberries, pin cherries, gooseberries, raspberries. Moose berries. And then we used to go down by the river and pick those high bush cranberries. They grow really high in the trees.*



1722: *Just like grapes. Just one handful. They burnt, I guess. The time the forest fire went through.*

1703: *And chokecherries.*

Interviewer: *What kind didn't you pick?*

1703: *What kind didn't we pick?*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

1703: *We didn't pick the bearberries and the chicken berries. (Laughter). That's about it ...*

Interviewer: *Do you still pick berries?*

1722: *Still pick berries? Oh yeah, I don't pass them when I see them.*

Interviewer: *Have the type of berries, the amount of berries, or the health of berries changed? Compared to when you used to pick them, when you were a kid until now?*

1703: *Quite a bit, yeah. Before we used to go anywhere in the bush and you'd see blueberries or cranberries. Now you're lucky if you find cranberries in the bush.*

1703: *And gooseberries too. We used to pick them by water pail fulls, now you're lucky if you see the patch here and there.*

1722: *Not as much anymore.*

1703: *And the strawberries used to be big. Now you can just barely see them.*

*Pollution.*

1701: *They dry up fast now too. As soon as they're there, they are just shrivelled.*

Interviewer: *Can you still go to the same locations where you used to pick?*

1703: *No.*

1722: *The picking here is all destroyed. That's one of the main places.*

1703: *It's all full of housing and apartments and stores and whatnot; gas stations. Nothing's the same where we used to pick.*

1722: *Even the bears used to eat berries up there. We'd hear them in the distance, like the babies. But we never see them because we always had too many dogs and we make them make noise.*

1703: *Yeah. Now you've got to travel quite a ways for berries. Especially if you live in McMurray.*

1707: *Well of course they're [the berries are] going to be affected quite a bit around here. Like the health of them. And to pick like a person has to go. Like we used to just pick mostly berries around here, like go to Sand Hills and even raspberries. We used to pick raspberries like closer to home and now it's more, you got to go find them. You got to go look for them now and once you find a good spot then ...*

Interviewer: *Before it was easier?*

1707: Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Easier access. Everything was around. Everything was close by. Now, it's not that easy.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea why?

1707: Too many people. All these oil companies and too many people.

1701: I remember even when we were kids and we picked blueberries, we'd bring them home and we'd use the screen little makeshift thing my grandpa just to clean the leaves. We never wash our berries cause we never had to. But now we have to wash our berries because we are afraid of pesticide or if there was any gas releases from the plants around us and stuff like that.

1707: Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow.

1701: Yeah. Like there was never any, there was just berry. There you could tell. Now you can see there's like a film or dust or something fine on them. So you want to like instinctively wash them. And then it kind of makes when you're freezing them or other things, it makes it harder. They're not the same because there's, on a blueberry, there's already like this fine little peach fuzz kind of thing on, and once you wash it, that's washed off. It's gone too. So what kind of the quality of the berry goes down a little bit because of that.

## Our Medicines and Food Plants

1707: ...It was like I said the peppermint. And the rat root. I remember them growing up, we used to pick them. And I don't know. I can't remember. That's what I can remember. Yeah.

Interviewer: Was your mother the one that taught you?

1707: Yeah ... And when to pick it. Because a lot of things are good to pick in the spring, even the fiddleheads, that's when they come out in this only time. Right. And the mint, I think you can almost find anytime of the year in the rat root. That's really difficult to find because you go under, along the lakes



*you get these big round things like this. And that's where you find the rat root. You pick up that big thing. There's two different kinds. They almost look the same, but the rat root is a little browner and a little smaller. And you pick that and that's good to pick two in the spring.*

*Then you dry it and use it for colds and stuff ...*

*Interviewer: So you're finding the rat root harder to find?*

*1707: Yeah, I went and looked a couple of times when we went to the lake and I couldn't find any.*

*Interviewer: None?*

*1707: No. And even if we used to pick, that's where we used to pick the rat root and the mint all along the lake. We used to just go to the lake and you could just smell it right away. And now I don't think we can find any now. No ...*

*Because we lived on the lake. We lived at the lake.*

*Yeah, right down at the lake and that's where a lot of our food and medicine came from.*

*205: We used to pick cattails. For asthma, I know my dad used to get old man [X] to make him some tea for his asthma and that used to work wonders for him. Yep.*

*1701: Interesting.*

*Interviewer: Do you look out for that stuff when you're in the bush?*

*205: Oh yeah. For pimples, there's stuff out there for pimples. If you find a spruce tree with tree crowns, great for pimples ...*

*Yep. There's a certain way you've got to do it though ...*

*Interviewer: So it's pretty useful then, that medicine?*

*205: Oh yeah. Rat root and lots of spruce balm and spruce gum. I mean there's different things you can do with that.*

*Interviewer: What did you guys used to do with the cattails? I'm just curious.*

*205: For the burn?*

*Interviewer: Yeah. Do you remember?*

*205: Yep. I had a third degree burn and you just take that top part of the cattail, break off the fluff and break it up, mix it with lard and make it into like a patty to the size of your burn, and with white bandage or towel or whatever you had-*

*Interviewer: Just keep it on there?*

*205: Just keep it on there, change it fresh every day for 30 days and not even a scar at the end of it ...*

*Well, then rose hips too, that's good for tea. You mix rose hip, like the wild rose, take that bud. You guys probably know that. Dry it out, mix it with rat root. It's a perfect cold remedy.*

1723: He used to bring her blueberry roots, and they'd dry them and they'd string them. They said that it was good for diabetes. He used to bring his mother those roots. Like I say, we never ... I wish I would have. There was a lot of stuff out there. I know the rat root, I forget who first gave me rat root when you had such a cold, and chew on that. Tastes awful, but it's good.

1703: Muskeg tea, we call it. We still use that. Yarrow. You know what that's good for, eh?

1722: Don't forget chaga<sup>1</sup>.

1703: Chaga – wild mint. And bedstraw. There's so much out there, like all this medicinal stuff. Like clovers. Plantain. There's a lot of stuff.

1722: I know a few.

1703: Even the wild roses.

1722: Like mint, I really like that – you pick it by the shores of a lake, and is that leboom?<sup>2</sup>

1703: Leboom, yeah. I pick that every year, with that teaching the little ones. Grandchildren. What it's good for, what it's used for. Yarrow, we run out of yarrow and we ran out of muskeg tea. That's what we gotta do tomorrow. The best time to pick that is when the flowers are blooming. And right now they're just white all over. That's when they're good to pick.

1722: It's important now, I think, like a person should know all that herbs ...

1703: Even spruce trees are medicinal. The bark. It's good for arthritis and other things ...

1701: Have the types of plants you pick, the amount of plants growing, or the health of the plants changed?

1703: I don't think they've changed that much.

1701: What about the amounts? Are you finding it harder to find certain things?

1703: Some years. Yeah, there's not that much. Like one year it was hard finding the yarrow. Last year there was lots.

1703: ... I don't know what you call it in English – "mistanan."<sup>3</sup>

1722: Mistanan.

1703: The poplar trees.

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<sup>1</sup> Tinder fungus that grows on birch trees and is used in tea.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly from *le baume*, French for balm.

<sup>3</sup> The inner bark and cambium layer of trembling aspen or white poplar that can be peeled and eaten in the spring (Marles et al 2012).

1722: Sap, I guess, from the trees.

1701: Oh yeah, it's like the pulp underneath the –

1703: Yeah, you just scrape it off; it looks like sauerkraut, eh? But it doesn't taste like sauerkraut.

1701: Yeah, it's almost like a honeydew melon taste. A little bit sweet. Yeah, I remember. In the springtime was the best time to get it.

1715: I remember that! My grandma liked that.

1703: Because we'd spend all day eating from the tree. (Laughter)

1701: We used to - my dad used to holler at us, "Not too close to the house!"  
Because after the trees dry up and they die.

1722: You're going to kill the tree!

Interviewer: How about fiddleheads? Not back then?

1703: No, we never picked fiddleheads back then. I don't remember picking fiddleheads. You?

1722: No.

1715: What made you start picking fiddleheads?

1703: Anzac. First time I heard fiddleheads was [from a woman in the community]. She told me about them. That was about 30-some years ago.

205: There's less plants out there for sure. Especially through the muskeg. A lot of it's wrecked. You can't even find...

Even mint is pretty hard to find too ... It used to be everywhere.

## Our Animals

1703: We didn't see wildlife [when we were growing up]. We'd see a lot of tracks on the roads, but they were wild. Animals were wild. They hear noise, they're gone.

1703: That was a long time ago. Now they [bears] come right up to you. That's because people feed them, eh? From the plant sites and that. They're not scared of people.

Interviewer: Has the amount of animals changed?

205: Well yeah. I'd say so. I mean I still see them and really so far in our yard we've had two bears, a fox, and a coyote. Fox last week. And they're just really sad. They're really skinny, hungry.

1701: Mangy looking.

205: Really mangy looking. It was a red fox, and he barely had a tail.

*Interviewer: Wow.*

*205: Yeah.*

*1701: I think I see him too. He's walking along the road.*

*205: Yep. He was here for about two weeks in my backyard. I had to shoo him away, and he wasn't scared of me.*

*Interviewer: Why do you think he wants to hang out around here?*

*205: Because he's hungry.*

*Interviewer: Yeah.*

*205: He knows there's food here. Yeah. It's so sad to see them when they come in. He had no place to go.*

*205: Well, I know one time not too long ago when [my brother] got a moose. He was so happy. It was right on his trapline here about half an hour from here, 40 minutes. It was in the wintertime too, so it should have been good. And the moose was just full of blisters, and he had to leave the whole thing there. But he took a piece of it and took it to the person at wildlife.*

*1707: Yeah. It's actually pretty scary though because you've got to check your meat. Because last year when you guys went out there and you got that deer, it was, I don't know.*

*Interviewer: How can you tell? Like how can you check it?*

*1707: You just cut right into the meat and check it.*

*Interviewer: What do you usually see if it's bad?*

*1707: Well, little blisters and stuff ...*

*1701: We were finding them, yeah. And then we harvested a deer last year that had growths all over it, protruding outside of its skin. And it was almost like warts, like big huge warts. Yeah. So ...*

*Interviewer: And you weren't able to eat it?*

*1701: We didn't want to, we contacted fish and wildlife to let them know that we had harvested this animal and this is what was in there. Like, "Oh, that's just a skin condition and it's okay to eat." But to us that's not just a skin condition and we will not consume it ...*

*1707: That's scary. Yeah. Years ago, I don't remember my mom and dad having to worry so much about when they caught a moose or ducks or rabbits or anything like that. Right. But now it's even like you've got to check everything.*

*But it still won't stop me from eating moose meat.*

*Interviewer: Yeah. You just don't know what you're getting.*

1707: No. Well, just like even in the stores, look at all the crap they put in the meat. You don't know what you're getting there too. So, yeah, it's just a lifestyle you want to live right? I choose moose meat over cow.

1701: We're reluctant to eat some of the organs of the animal. Not so much the meat, the meat, but the organs are where most of the toxins would accumulate. So we're, yeah, look if something looks even the slightest bit off to us. We won't bother it. And for us that's a shame because most of the organs are usually a good delicacy and a good feed and we hate to waste it?

Interviewer: Do either of you guys notice a change in the health of the animals?

1703: Yes. Lots. Lot of moose you kill, they have these white, it's like blisters in the meat. And the meat doesn't smell the same. To me, anyway, not all of them but some of them. And the rabbit, same thing. If their liver – some of them, that's just white. And inside, between their hide and their flesh, they get like blisters.

1722: I wonder what caused that.

1703: Pollution, I guess. Whatever they eat.

1715: Cancer?

1703: Could be.

1722: Some people say they run too much, or...

1703: I haven't noticed chickens, they look the same. They're not as plentiful, but they're still...

1722: So are the rabbits.

1703: Kîkwây?<sup>4</sup>

1722: They have those –

1701: Blisters, like.

1722: Soon as I see one, garbage.

Interviewer: Yeah? That's too bad.

1715: You don't want to put that in your body.

1722: Yeah, it's just a waste, but I don't want to take a chance either.



<sup>4</sup> Cree for "what".

1703: *Oh, there was all kinds of frogs. All kinds of colour frogs. Remember Prairie Creek, we used to play with frogs in the evening? Blue ones, yellow ones, green ones, red ones. Little frogs just jumping on the road ...*

*You see toads, like you don't see toads anymore. They used to have big toads all over ...*

1722: *Even in our young days, we never even heard of caterpillars.*

1703: *Yeah, these ones that eat the leaves. Never see that. See all kinds of worms and different kinds of caterpillars, but never those ones ...*

*I think it had more to do with the pollution that these oil plants are causing. What they're taking out of the ground; what they're putting in the ground, in the water. In the air.*

1701: *It's beginning to have like a ripple effect, changing the cycle of everything.*

1703: *Plus Al-Pac. Al-Pac's a lot to blame too.*

## Our Fish

1701: *What about fishing? What kind of fish did you guys used to get? Then and now.*

1703: *We used to get grayling. We didn't do any fishing.*

1722: *We used to snare fish.*

1703: *Grayling. In the creek, that's the only place we were allowed to go fish. We didn't eat much fish, or ducks, or geese.*

1722: *Because there wasn't many fish. Only in springtime.*

1703: *There was no lakes around, just the river. We were never allowed to go near the river.*

Interviewer: *Do you still fish?*

1703: *No, I don't fish. I just go look. (Laughter) I'll take part in it; I'll clean fish once in a while.*

1722: *Maybe that's why we didn't care for fish.*

1703: I remember years ago, the fish in this lake, whitefish. Big jumbo whites. I remember coming up here with my parents, I was just small that time. And my dad come and helped Uncle James set a net, and they caught these fish, Whites. Big jumbo whites. Just like the hump, their backs are just like that. And the back was just full of fat. But now you don't see that.

1722: Whitefish?

1703: Yeah.

1715: Yeah, you got lucky if you see a whitefish there.

1722: I used to love whitefish. Put it in the oven with onions and mixed vegetables, stuff it.

1703: Winefred Lake, there's nice whitefish. Winefred Lake.

Interviewer: I heard there's clams.

1707: There used to be, yeah, we used to pick clams too. Yeah. And they used to be both fair sizable, that big. We used to just walk on the edge of the shore and you can just reach in and pick your clams and you take them home and eat them. Yeah. Yeah. We still had a clam here and there, when my kids were, we used to take them out camping around the lake and stuff.

Interviewer: Were you able to go grayling fishing down the river? Was that a thing?

1707: Grayling fishing oh, yes. Hangingstone and Horse Creek. We used to have grayling there. I think we still do. But not like before. Yeah. And they used to be bigger, Hangingstone. I remember I went fishing with my sister and her husband and then they used to be like very sizable, like that. Now I think if you catch them they are like about this. Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think it's for the same reason, too many people?

1707: It's got to be. Yeah. It's got to be for the same reason and they're not too many people and they're not letting them grow. They're just taking too much with the people in the pollution, everything is just, they don't know how to lure, make things-

1707: Yeah. I don't know if I, they said it's okay to eat fish out of the lake [Willow Lake], but I don't think I would because there's too much traffic. Too many people. Too much traffic.



1701: Too much boats.

1707: Yeah. Too many boats and it's been like that now since all these people moved in and all the people from McMurray coming here, and destroying everything. Now you can't trust.

Interviewer: Do you still fish?

1707: Not anymore. Not me personally anymore. Although I love fishing and I'm thinking about getting my fishing license but I don't know, like to go fishing and throw it away. Like "What's the point of fishing?" You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Okay. Do you do any fishing currently?

205: Well, yeah. A few years ago, yeah. I used to go fishing all the time but-

Interviewer: You used to in the past too a lot.

205: Yeah and go set nets with my brothers. Yeah. Yeah. I like casting a rod. Yeah. You bet.

Interviewer: And what kind of fish did you get?

205: Pickerel, white, jack, suckers, yep. Mariahs.

Interviewer: Do you fish in Gregoire Lake or you used to?

205: We used to. I still go. I have a spot where I go. I got a rod here, actually. I'm planning to go here. But yeah.

Interviewer: Do you eat the fish from that lake or is it just for fun?

205: Just for fun. Yeah. Well, I know awhile ago was that lake was polluted with too much mercury in it. So...

Interviewer: Yeah.

205: I don't know how it is now, but yeah. A person would have to find out for sure.

Interviewer: When you go fishing for food, where would you go?

205: Usually down Winefred.

Interviewer: Yeah.

205: Yeah. Kirby Lake.

1701: So back when you were a kid, did they set nets and harvest out of Willow Lake.

205: Oh yes we did. A lot. My dad used to do it a lot. Yep ...



1701: Yeah. Do you have any idea what would have caused the lake to be unable to be able to drink from it or fish from it anymore?

205: There's too much recreational use.

1701: Yeah.

205: Boats with motors.

Interviewer: People littering too.

205: Garbage. People throwing garbage. There's so much garbage in that lake there.

Yep. You bet. ...

1701: So what is one indicator that you can tell if the fish are healthy or not?

205: I don't know. Actually, in this lake here, fish used to come up floating. They can't even survive and will just float up and go on shore, so you know they're not healthy ... I can't remember, but I know a lot of them are deformed too, I mean now.

Interviewer: Yeah.

1701: Yeah. Or full of worms.

205: Worms. Oh yeah. That'd be a good one. Worms. Yep. You bet. Yep. I've seen fish with worms coming out of them here.

## Our Harvesting

1703: Yeah, it's about the same way we lived; the way she [the interviewee's mother] lived when she was young. But our grandmother was born and raised in the bush. And she lived in the bush all her life. So she did everything after her husband died. Did the hunting and the livelihood, you know? Everything.

1701: And everything was probably entirely off the land, right?

1722: Right. She said her husband used to go moose hunting and she'd wait for that shot. I guess he told her, if I shoot, then I killed a moose. So she'll wait for it, get everything ready. When she hear the shots she goes straight for that shot and sure enough, there's a dead moose. She'd skin that moose and make dry meat and everything. By the time evening comes, everything was just about ready, that moose. And by herself.

1703: I remember our dad used to come and get my mom when - after he killed a moose, and they'd go cut it up, make dry meat in the bush. Sometimes they'd stay out a few days. Come back with a whole bunch of dry meat. Then the people used to come up with their shopping bags, come and trade for dry meat.

Interviewer: So I'll ask some questions about animals. Which animals did you used to hunt and trap when you were younger, and that you still do now - if you do?

1703: Well beaver, squirrels, weasels. The small stuff.

1722: Rabbits.

1703: And dad did the big stuff.

Interviewer: When you were kids?

1703: Yeah. Mice. (Laughter)

1722: Well we used to shoot, too. Beavers.

Interviewer: Yeah.

1722: My dad used to give me, always give me the shells. You bring them back. If you don't use them, you bring them back. He'd count them.

1703: Six, always six. If you use six shells, you've got to bring back six animals that you killed. Hey? Especially her, because she's a good shot. She used to always carry the gun.

1722: I killed two partridges with one shot. But they use that gun, what is it called?

1703: Shotgun? ...

1703: ... And we were in the bush lots. Every spring we'd get pulled out of school to go out. My dad and mom used to go beaver trapping and we'd get pulled out of school for two weeks...

Interviewer: When you were a kid, you said it was your dad that hunted the bigger animals. Did it stay the same way with the men, Métis men in your life, always hunting the bigger animals?

1703: Yeah.

Interviewer: And it's probably still like that?

1703: It still is.

1701: What role did women play, though, when they harvested these big animals? Would – did you have a part even with your spouse, in processing the meat or canning it preserving it? Taking care of it after its harvested?

1703: Yeah. He just guts it, skins it in the bush and quarters it. Bring it home, hangs it. And I do the rest. The canning. You know, cutting it up. Bagging it and whatever.

1722: Drying it.

1703: But he makes the dry meat.



1722: And all the stuff that my parents made with the toboggan and the snowshoes, was all made from moose. Like the sinew, used for string to make the snowshoes.

And –

1703: Saganappi<sup>5</sup> –

1722: Yeah. Is that what you call it – sinew?

1703: Moya.<sup>6</sup> Sinew is sinew. Saganappi is when they cut around from the hide, they make, you know – mom used to use it for ropes.

1722: And toboggan, we used to watch him make it. Boil it in a barrel, the birch, and that way my dad used to make it soft. And he'd put it around that – what do you call that – the form, is it?

1707: It's not bad now. But when I was growing up, if you got caught eating berries, oh, you're in big trouble...

1707: Yes. I still go berry picking. I really love berry picking and camping and just being out there. In the woods. In the bush.

Interviewer: If you had to say one thing, what do you think has been the biggest environmental change in this area?

1707: The biggest is getting rid of all the trees and putting up a lot of the houses.

Interviewer: Yeah.

1707: Yeah. Getting rid of the water. Land. Good land ...

Interviewer: Tearing it up too?

1707: Yeah. Abusing it. Not taking care of it.

Interviewer: How has it affected your connection and your use of the land?

1707: Makes it harder.

Interviewer: Makes it harder?

1707: To get to. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It makes it, got to go further. Like for me, I just can't up and go. I've got to wait till one of the kids have the time and whatnot, to go and, yeah. And not like before I could just up and go for a walk and whatever and get whatever I needed...

1723: ... not the people I know anyway, they don't go out picking berries like the olden days. People, that's how they lived, their garden, their berry-picking, their canning. That's how people lived years ago.

1701: Was harvesting easier of anything back then [when you were young]?

205: Oh yeah.

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<sup>5</sup> Cree word for rawhide thong or rope. Alternate spellings include shaganappi (Houston et al 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Cree word for 'no'.

1701: Yeah.

205: Those days you didn't have to walk far. You didn't have to drive far. You just basically do it right here in our backyard. Yep.

Interviewer: And would you blame that on industry too?

205: Probably yes. Yep. I know I used to pick blueberries and cranberries right back here. Now we can't find nothing. It's the same ground.

Interviewer: Yeah.

1701: Just nothing's growing there anymore.

205: Just nothing's growing. The plants are there, but nothing's growing.

1723: Well the water now ... the rivers and that, oh yeah, they got to be a lot of probably chemicals from the sites and that. But I know I wouldn't eat no fish from here. Even moose meat. I got to know where it comes from.

205: ... And, you know, at the same thing there too when we're out getting an animal, nothing goes to waste. We take the castors. We take basically every part of the animal that we can take and do something with it, right? ...

Yep. Even the hides, especially. Everything. Yep.

Interviewer: Bannock?

1723: No, fried doughs, you ever see those? You fry-

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

1723: Your grandma must have know how to make them.

Interviewer: Yeah, sounds familiar.

1723: A lot of people used to make that. And I even remember my mother used to make saskatoon bannock.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

1723: Yeah. She'd do the saskatoons, and it used to be so good, that saskatoon bannock. You don't see that, you never see that anymore, people don't do that anymore I guess.

## Our Stewardship and Values

1701: Is there anything that you can do to make sure that the animals stay in good shape, or their numbers are healthy for the next year? Is there anything you know of, even growing up, like if there were certain things you didn't harvest because the number was low and you noticed – with tracks or whatever – if a number of ...

1703: You don't take more than you need. Right?

1701: From a cultural perspective, what's one of the important things that Metis people do to ensure that they're going to have another species? Like you mentioned before, you only take what you need.

1703: Take what you need, yeah.

1701: No waste.

1703: No wasting. My parents never wasted anything on a moose. They'd kill a moose or a deer; there was hardly any deer though. You kill a moose; every part of the moose was used. Like every part, even the gut. The bones. Everything. The head. I remember mom making head cheese, eh? Moose.

1701: Wow.

1703: Yeah. The hide. Nothing was thrown away.

1722: How do you say *lemuel*<sup>7</sup> in English?

1703: Marrow.

1722: Even that, we're allowed, I mean we used to eat that. Our mother used to make – just like chopstick – and put that into the bone and I'd eat it, just like a monkey.

Interviewer: ... What do you think is most important to teach young people about animals and hunting and trapping?

1703: About hunting?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

1703: Don't shoot an animal for no reason; for the fun of it. Don't kill anything for the fun of it unless you're going to eat it ...

1703: I remember, everything that was killed in the bush, we ate, except for squirrels and weasels. We ate muskrats, we ate porcupine. Groundhogs. Owls.

1707: Yeah. You just pick the ones [berries] that are ready to pick because they don't all ripe at the same time, right. There's like the ones that are ready to pick. Those are the ones you pick and you don't pick all the berries, you leave some, so they keep coming back all the time. Right. And then now with the strawberries and



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<sup>7</sup> Possibly derived from *la moelle*, French for marrow.

raspberries, it's like they can't do that anymore. Not around here because there is none. You can't find them around here ...

Yeah. Well, it's like the trapping. They come in seasons. Right. And like for the beaver, like we used to eat beaver, but it would only be like in the springtime, that's when the season was. So it was easy that way to get the beaver, like in the summertime to just go out and kill a beaver to eat. It'd be, I don't even know if you can eat them in a summertime. Beavers, it was just like they came in the spring. So that's what we ate at spring and then with the cow or the moose and everything, that's more like in the fall and the berries too. Same thing. Right. They have other seasons and that's when you harvest whenever the other seasons are there. The harvest.

1722: But one thing our parents used to get mad at us if we broke, even saskatoon piece of twig, or take the roots off from the berries. And we thought that if we broke something, it's not going to grow next year. And we were careful not to do that. Even touching a bird's nest, we weren't allowed to do that either.

1715: ... my grandpa. He'd get mad at me when I was a kid, for picking wildflowers, anything like that. He just got mad. I'm not allowed to touch anything.

1701: My grandpa wouldn't get mad. He'd just tell me, like if you pick a flower it will die. If you want to see its beauty leave it alone and let it keep growing, you know?

1722: I know I used to tell my children, even those tiger lilies, they're so beautiful, I just love to pick them but you know I'm not supposed to touch them.

1703: I used to pick them, but not by the roots. You cut them. Because there's like a bulb in the bottom and they regrow every year.

1722: I know our grandmother used to say, she used to take that white root and it's big.

1703: It's a bulb-thing.

1722: And it tastes good, and I asked her "How come you eat that? Is it good? Is it medicine?" "No", she said, "I just like the taste." (Laughter)

1701: What do you think is the most important thing to teach young people about hunting and trapping animals?

205: How to make use of every piece of that bird or beaver, not to waste, right? And you know, that's just like when you're breaking up the animal there's so many good parts and just about every animal out there, and then you've got to teach them properly how to skin and flesh it so you do get a bit of sell on that, right. And, yeah. Just not to waste.

*Interviewer: So respecting the land as part of the culture?*

*1707: Yes, yes. Very much. Yeah. Very much so, because it takes care of you, you take care of it. And that's what a lot of people are trying to do now with, go back live in the old way and start taking care of the earth. But it might be too late. These things are happening now. It's pretty scary.*

*205: But I know we always recycled and cleaned up after every spot we were at. Nothing was left behind.*

*1707: I see more like, more lots of unhealthy people. Like a lot of unhealthy people and like homes and stuff, places, we just taking up so much space that there is nowhere for the wildlife even. Like we used to, well still there's bears coming in, but we used to live like with the land, right? With the trees, with the animals, with everything ...*

*Interviewer: You were connected.*

*1707: Yeah. Connected.*

*1701: And you lived amongst it, you didn't clear away and kind of put a pad of your own. It was you, were so interwoven that nature was right out your back door. And that was okay.*

*1707: Yes. Yeah. And there was nothing scary about. It was just, I don't know, I think it was the best life I ever had when I was young and growing up and living like that. We spent a lot of time on the trap line, like summer holidays, even Easter, spring breaks.*

*1701: Yeah. And you would rather like, it was refreshing to be busy and not only that, whatever you were putting into the work you were doing, especially further back in the day was coming right back into you. So you weren't a slave to somebody else's rhythm or agenda, you were running your own agenda in your own life and this was benefiting 100% right back into you and your community or your family.*

*1707: And a ...*

*Interviewer: A purpose.*

*1701: Yeah.*

*1707: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.*

*Interviewer: I think that's why it's so important, to keep it alive too, just to keep that in the family. That sense of like the spiritual side of it.*

*1707: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Stay connected. Yeah.*

1701: Yeah. And the connection and the responsibility as well to your family. Like it's in Métis tradition, like you take care of your own. So you take care of, my mother takes care of my children. I take care of my mother. She took care of her mother; her mother took care of her children. You know what I mean? Like the whole family kind of takes care of each other when there's care that needs to be taken. You're not left on your own, it's your responsibility and I think that's a good thing.

1723: ... what you had on the table you had to eat, or you don't eat what your parents put out then you had nothing to eat ...

That's how ... You know a lot of older people, I think the children were brought up better, but they didn't have everything, like they have today, computers, iPads ... Children wouldn't be able to do it now [the work]. They have washers and dryers, and still no washing done, a lot. But I think 'cause we spoil them.

205: Yep. Do offerings. Absolutely. And actually, even picking berries too, I always do a little offering ... Just find a nice clean spot, sprinkle it [tobacco]. It's more like saying thank you, right? ...

I would [teach this]. It's respect, right? ... And giving thanks. Yep. That's really good.

## Our Families and Roles

Interviewer: I've noticed with other interviews that the grandparents had to watch over the grandchildren. Do you think that's kind of a Métis thing?

1723: Oh yeah, yeah ... My husband loved his grandchildren, he loved ... I know the girls, when they were younger, when they'd go out, I'd always be stuck with all the little ones. I babysat while they went out. Come Sunday, I said, 'Take your children home.' Yeah. Well that's how old people were, native people, they didn't like their grandchildren to be taken away, so they ... and we did the same thing, my husband and I did the same thing. We helped our children a lot. If I didn't, I'd be a millionaire today. But children comes first, the grandchildren. And I'm still doing it.

1722: Hunting, trapping, baby sitting. You name it, we done it. Especially on the traplines, we had to go. We used to carry our siblings on our back and pick berries same time. Yeah.

Interviewer: You too?

1703: Oh yeah. Haul water, cut wood, go out in the bush and get wood. Dog team, wintertime, no skidoos.

Interviewer: Yeah. And hunting and trapping too?

1703: Hunting, trapping.

1722: Beavers. Hunting squirrels with our guns, and snaring rabbits. We done everything the boys used to do.

1703: Yeah, same as our mother. She made the moose hides. Every year she made at least two. And she'd sew all winter. We'd help her bead.

1703: No, it was just mostly me and my mother that used to bead. I used to help her with the beading because she used to sell everything that she made.

1701: So that was another way that she helped support and bring, like, into the family, was through doing that beadwork and stuff?

1722: Yeah. I was forced to help her with make moose hide and I didn't like it.

Interviewer: What did you guys use the moose hide for? Everything?

1703: We used it for everything. Jackets, vests, mitts, gloves, moccasins, mukluks, you name it. She even made belts. She was really a very hard-working woman.

Interviewer: You think that's more of the woman's role than to do – to make clothing and stuff like that?

1703: Yeah.

1722: Our mother used to help with making snowshoes, and my dad used to make toboggans. Snowshoes.

Interviewer: So it was both the men and – your mom and your dad that did –

1703: They worked together, yeah. I never seen my dad work inside. You?

1722: Yeah

1703: Too many kids for them.

1707: My Dad used to go out and do the net and all that and bring the fish home and then together, they'd work together whoever kids were old enough to clean the fish, and smoke it, did. Can it, all kinds of good stuff like that.

1723: My mother-in-law did all that. They had a trap line, she used to walk for miles and miles, go trapping. He husband was sick, my father-in-law, he had TB, and he never done too much trapping after he got sick. But my mother-in-law she was like a man, worked like a man. Well she had to because my father-in-law couldn't do very



*much. Oh yeah, she'd skin whatever she killed, Lynx, stuff like that, I used to remember her.*

*1707: And that's what it was like to ... Whatever caught your interest then that's was kind of like the job you would get ... Yeah, you were still taught everything, but okay, for instance, like if I was more interested in the beading I would have been doing more so or that right. So whatever caught your interest then you were more inclined to be more focused on that, but yet you have to learn other things too right?*

*1701: And that's another thing that I really enjoy about our culture is yeah, you had a set role that a kind of an expectation because you were a girl or a boy, but if you wanted to, and if you showed an interest, there was no way anybody was going to deter you from following your own way and they would actually help you nurture it and grow it. And I think that's another good thing about our culture is the way we raised our children to be who they are and their true self and not have to fit into little kind of boxes.*

*... I for one I liked the staying home and the cooking and the cleaning and the beading. And I would sit there for hours sorting my grandmother's beads with her. Like tiny little seed beads into separate colors cause she had them in this big tin tray. But those were the things, that was the thing that I liked and it was my interest. So I spend like countless hours with my grandmother watching her do all of these things. And like even the mukluks that hang right there, I remember watching her cut every piece of that and stitch everything on. And just to see them come to life is so exciting for me.*

*Then I had like couple of cousins that were there at the time and my sister and they're kind of like, it wasn't their thing. You know what I mean? So it was just me sitting there like always interested and a lot of times like the hide was hard to make. The furs were hard to prepare. There wasn't a factory around that did these things, you did them yourself. The materials were hard to and expensive to come by. The felts and the wools and all of those things. So I couldn't just play with it.*

*1707: ... there's a lot more women getting involved in that too. Like the hunting. And a lot of women did too. Did a lot of the hunting too [in the past]. Right. But like in my family with my dad, it was mostly my dad and the boys. Right? But like now I see like women going out and doing it too. The hunting and the trapping and ...*

*1701: And the working and-*

*1707: And the working. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.*

1701: Yeah. I think that was one of the biggest changes in Métis families now is more and more, there's more and more women joining the workforce than just staying home and raising their children, which was a traditional Métis way ...”

## Our Community

1701: ... We had certain areas every summer we do like a grand tour, I'd call it. It was like our summer holidays because through the summer months it was a little bit relaxed while the garden was growing and the moose were getting fat, they could kind of chill and go do their visiting with family all over because everybody was scattered by then. So we'd start here and then we'd go from here to Lake St. Anne, and then we'd go from Lake St. Anne to Edmonton and we'd go from Edmonton to Lac La Biche Pow Wow Days. And then we'd come back home.

Then we'd have about a week or two before we'd start getting ready for picking berries, hunting moose and all of the fall activities would start up...

1701: Lake St. Anne was a big gathering place for a lot of them.

So they'd go to the pilgrimage and stuff like that. And it was a good time to kind of get together and network. And like I remember my grandma would bring things with her and she'd sell them or trade them for certain things that we didn't have. And that was a normal, that was a traditional thing that they did as well.

... we had family everywhere there and we visit all over the place for days and days. And we camp right at the powwow grounds. Like I remember sitting in a pow wow, me and my grandpa would just go sit in that circle and we wouldn't even leave there for days just to eat and sleep ...

1707: And that's how they work. Even when I was young, that's how it was. In the summer we'd go and do our visiting and then come home and ...

1701: And that's one thing, yeah. That we don't do anymore. Like now with my kids, they got summer camps, they got soccer, they got, you know what I mean? All of these other activities that are in mainstream society that they participate in more so than the old pilgrimage ...

1701: Back in the day Anzac was more isolated than it is now. So we could kind of live freely how we chose to live quietly off the land. Now that it's opened up and there's like the bulk of people living here in my youth where Métis or First Nations. There was a couple non-Indigenous people, but for the most part they lived the same type of lifestyle that we did. So they fit in good. And yeah, we did a lot of living off the line, like everybody did it in the community.

*So it was a norm. It was something that even the younger generations took pride in. And it seems like now they are, they're more reluctant to even showcase those skills or anything in any other type of setting because of just the society now.*

*1707.: Yeah. But it's still good to take them out when you can. Even to get that little connection with it. So they know, right?*

*Interviewer: So why do you think it's change from between when you were a kid until now?*

*1703: It's called technology. We didn't have power, running water in my day. Now you just turn the tap, there's the water. Years ago we had to haul – we lived up on the hill – we hauled it up the hill. And there was a spring halfway up Beacon Hill now. We used to get water there. And all year round we used to get water there, eh? ...*

*1703: Yes. Now they got washing machines, washers. We had to scrub with the scrubbing board, by hand.*

*1722: And wash clothes.*

*1703: There was no wringer washer; we had to –*

*1722: My mom used to wrap clothes in a blanket, put it on our back, and wash clothes in the bush.*

*1707: And that's why a lot of people now are not as healthy as they used to be because they're not getting the proper foods and stuff that we used to get years ago. And yeah, and everybody, I believe everybody was more healthier and more in shape, like more fit.*

*1723: There is a lot of pollution out there. You don't know what's being dumped in the lakes. Like Fort Chip, people, when I worked in the hospital, people used to come to McMurray Hospital, and so many of them had cancer ...*

*There's so much of everything. Years ago people lived a long time. I think because there [wasn't] so much pollution them days, but now like I say, I won't eat anything from around here, like fish.*

## Our Identity

*1703: Summertime, my mom would make dog packs for the dogs. We always had dogs. Wintertime they were for pulling toboggans. And summertime they were for packing. So the dogs were working dogs in those days. Not like today.*

*1722: They were also bush, like us.*

1703: Yeah. We were bush. We were scared of people, so were they. (Laughter)

1722: They'd say, there's a car coming. We all ran for the bush. The dogs were ahead of us, crawling, just whimpering.

1703: With their dog packs. We didn't think it was funny at the time.

1701: And why you do certain things. Because for a lot of years, like my mum would grow up in through the sixties and seventies and she wasn't even allowed to state that she was native at all because ... my grandparents were afraid that she'd get taken in the sixties scoop. So she wasn't allowed. So she didn't know why, "Why can't I say I'm Indian? Why do we do this?" "Never mind, just do it."

1723: Well, I think a lot of the people nowadays, they ... I think some parents don't admit that they're Métis. I remember when these Métis cards came out. People that you wouldn't think, came out of woodwork to become a Métis to get their card. People that never wanted to be Métis. I knew quite a few that they never admitted that they were Métis.

1723: ... I don't know too, too much because when you're brought up in town and we didn't know too much about Métis, we never really grew up like that. But things that I still kind of remember. My mother raised us. We always had a garden.

Summertime, mother put a garden, we used to dig all the potatoes and everything, and go picking berries. We used to walk two, three miles to go picking berries. And then my mother would can all berries.

In those days too, they only had the wood cookstove. You didn't have running water. That was the day ... Kids think they're poor today, but we weren't poor, poor, but we always had to eat and all that...

I didn't know too much of anything of Métis till I married my husband, and my mother-in-law used to tell me a lot. But for us, my mother to tell us, never really told us anything. It's hard because when you're not brought up like that, you don't know the culture. But you learn little by little from the older people ...

1723: I'm telling you, I'm a poor Métis. I don't know nothing too much. That's why I said, I told my daughter, I said, "I don't know too much history because we never really brought up like that."

1701: Like that's how it was. Right. Some years somebody couldn't get out on the line and do a certain activity, so another family would come in and provide for that family. Now they're calling that illegal, you know what I mean? And that's

*absolutely crazy. So there we go, underground again, because what else are you supposed to do?*

*This is our lifestyle. This is the way we live and this is how we have, the Métis people have survived is by helping each other.*

*1723: Children don't even speak their language anymore. My kids don't speak Cree. I speak Cree, but my children ... the oldest boy understands a little bit where he spent a lot of time with his grandparents, and they always used to speak Cree. We always speak Cree, my mother taught us how since we were small. But children nowadays, they don't speak Cree, it's mostly English...*

*Interviewer: Back to the children. What do you think is most important to pass on about the culture, to children, for future-*

*1723: Learning their language, first thing. They should learn how to speak Cree, and get more involved in the culture way. People that, years ago, you know how they lived. I think they should all get into that. These kids don't speak Cree. They don't understand a word. I think that's very important for children to speak their language and know more about their culture.*

*1707: You got to go to school, you got to know all of this, but then you still should got to know all your culture. Like you can have both worlds. You need to work it in together or somehow, right?*

*1701: Yeah. It's a stretch. But if it becomes a priority. You just begin to strike that balance and you kind of go with it. And that's what I continuously drill to my own children is, you need to maintain that balance. Like your culture and your heritage is just as important as your future. This is what will give you foundational values and morals to carry you through.*

*1707: It's like an identity and that's important too. When you know your identity, where you come from and all that. Right? So that's important to them too.*

*1722: Can't stop those plants, and they're the main concern.*

*Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Do you think it's getting harder to keep your culture because of it? And the way of life?*

*1703: In a way, yeah. People too, they're not too interested anymore. Culture. Like you know, they don't find it beneficial to them anymore. They move to the cities.*

*1701: Well and that's the thing, this economic assimilation is necessary.*

*1715: Well exactly. I left my community.*

1701: *I can't take my kids and live off the land. They'd come and take my kids away from me, you know what I mean?*

1703: *They need their education in order to get good jobs in the future. It's all technology.*

1701: *And even Anzac itself, it developed so quickly and so fast that it's almost like, I couldn't even afford to live in Anzac. The price of land. Everything just sky-rocketed after the 80s, you know? And it just became almost impossible to stay there. And there was nothing, you know, everything was sold off, sold out. Developed and industry moved right in. Next thing you know, we've got all kinds of people, don't even know half of them. You know? And then you become reluctant to even go to the lake and start digging around trying to pick rat root or something, because somebody's going to see you and report you to somebody and then you've got to try and explain yourself. And when you're a Metis person and you have no rights, what are you explaining? You know? They don't understand who you are at all.*

Voices: *Mm-hmm.*

1703: *All newcomers. They don't know your way of life.*

Interviewer: *So in that way, would you say it's affected your use of the land too?*

1703: *Oh yeah, like you know, just going to the trapline we've got to swipe cards and that, just to get past the gate at the site. Whereas before we used to just jump on the quad and we're there.*



## Our Teaching

1701: *Did you find it, as you were getting older, did you find it beneficial? Did it make it easier for you to preserve your culture because you were – your parents made it very important for you to go out on the land with them?*

1722: *I think so. Yeah.*

1701: *What do you think is the most important thing to teach younger generations about berries and berry picking?*

205: *It's where to find them I guess would be a good one because you've got to go by certain trees and certain ground. They're just not anywhere.*

*Interviewer: Do you think it's important to teach young people about berries and berry picking?*

*1707: Yes. It is important. It's important to teach them everything that we learned from our parents and our grandparents. No? Because, they'll never learn it any other way. It has to come from us.*

*Interviewer: Yeah.*

*1707: Because nobody, sure they can go learn it in school, but to actually live it and experience it, that's the real based teach. If you know, then you can teach them. And it's easier that way too. Because with hands on, that's the best way to learn, is if you're right there and learning and teaching.*

*1707: Yeah. And then it gets harder and harder to even take the kids out to the bush and stuff, because there's the schools, they got to go to school and there's so many other things like working and stuff like that, and then they got to go further. So it makes it even harder. Like when I was younger, we didn't have to go so far, so it was easier for my mom to do like show us how the berry picking and this and that and whatnot. Right? But now with so many people around, they got to take the kids out and now further. And that's not easy to do. You can't just up and go, "Okay, I'm going to take you today here, because there's always something else. Right? Yeah.*

*1707: Makes it harder. Yeah.*

*1701: Harvesting kind of was for the most part, out your backdoor type of deal.*

*1707: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.*

*1701: It's different now.*

*1707: It is, it's harder now. Yeah.*

*Interviewer: Because it isn't like necessary, but it is for your culture?*

*1707: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: It isn't a way, you don't have to go out and like hunt and trap to survive.*

*1701: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: But it's still necessary for the culture. Yeah.*

*1707: Yeah. And not only that, because I was raised that way, my kids were raised that way. I would like to see the grandkids being raised that way. And, maybe it's not like out of necessity, but it kind of like out of the spiritual feeling of the lifestyle and the living.*

*1701: ... last year we were fortunate enough for the whole community to get together and that was good.*

*1707: Yeah.*

1701: *That was nice. I think more of that needs to happen to be able to transfer our culture and especially to remain connected to our Métis community.*

1707: *Yeah.*

1701: *This day and age, it's a good opportunity for everybody to remain connected and everybody to continue sharing knowledge, stories and memories and all of those types of things. Yeah.*

1707: *Yeah. It should be part of the schooling. Like for instance, if you'd want to take your kids out to go and teach him something on the land, it would be part of the curriculum in the schools?*

1701: *Yeah.*

1707: *That would be easier, for the kids to learn. Right? And get the knowledge to know like how to survive and how to take care ... Because like I said, it's harder these days to get out there.*

Interviewer: *Do you think it's just going to get harder?*

1707: *I think it's going to get harder. Yes. That's why we just got to be more adamant and determined to keep this lifestyle and teach the younger generation. So we don't lose that. Right? ...*

1701: *What are some of the important teachings that you would show the younger generation about fish and fishing? Like as far as monitoring or how to prepare the fish, cleaning, any of those types of things.*

1707: *Well, you would show them right from the start, like how you caught it and the kind of fish, like the different species. And then you'd show them like how to clean them and well, there's different ways of cooking fish, show them the different ways and ... But to be right out there on the land and doing it, that's the best way. Like, sure you can, like ... whoever can go fishing and then they can come home and say, "Okay, look, I caught a fish." And then just clean it, whatever.*

*But then being out there and it's like, okay look, we caught all these fish, now we could teach them how we caught them, like in the net or on the rod, whatever. And then bring them back to camp and then teach them, how to clean them, how to take care of them and like what parts can they eat.*

*Because you can even eat eyeballs of the fish, some fish. Yeah. The best way is to teach them right from how to even hunt it. How to harvest it or how to clean it. Skin it, whatever. A lot of parts of the moose, so many parts can be used not just eating right? You've got the bones, you can use for your hides and the brains and stuff like that. So, that's a lot to learn. So in order for us to keep it this way, people have to go out more and further. But like I said, it's hard to do that.*



1723: Then my grandson phoned me here on Sunday. He said, "Nan, I gotta ask you something." I said, "What?" He said, "I'm going to make some fried doughs." He said, "Give me the recipe." He said, "I'm going to make them." So I told him about. Then he phoned me after and he said, "Nan," he said, "those fried doughs," he said, "the first batch I made them too thick." He said, "Second batch were good." He said, but he said, "I had to ask from the expert," he said.

When I could cook bannock, and they'd tell one another, and when I cook bannock, everybody they want their bannock and they want their fried dough. So that one is starting to learn. But the other kids don't know. Like these girls don't. Like I say, there's so many things now the younger generation don't do. And I think I was around over 12 year old when I used to watch my mother how to make this bannock, and that's how I started. First few times it didn't turn good. But after that, it's getting better.

Interviewer: Do you think it's important to pass on the knowledge of medicinal plants to younger people?

1703: I think so, yeah. Because now you get pills from the doctor, you don't know what's in it, what you're getting ...

1722: I usually tell stories. Wesakecha<sup>8</sup> or something. To the children, right?

1703: That's lies, telling them lies. (Laughter)

1722: Make them up ...

1703: Wesakecha. Every time I'd babysit, "Okay kookum, you can tell me a story of Wesakecha." Okay but before I'm finished telling a story she's sleeping already ... Yeah, those were our bedtime stories too, years ago. Because we didn't have no TV or mom didn't have any comics. We didn't have any comics to trade then, especially wintertime. That's when she used to tell us the stories. And she'd say, "Pick one." And then we'd pick a long one so we wouldn't have to go to bed right away. Remember that?

1722: Our grandmother used to tell us stories, too. If we talked while she's telling stories, she'd say, "I quit." So we never talked one word until the story was done.

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<sup>8</sup> A trickster character in Cree stories; a friend and teacher to humankind whose adventures are often humorous. Alternate spellings include Wisakedjak, Wesakechak (Native Languages 2020a).

1703: *All in Cree. Every word was in Cree, and I remember my mom, she used to sing. See if this otter was floating down the river on his back or something, and he'd be singing a song. And she'd sing the song. Word for word. I wish I would have remembered all those stories.*

1701: *I know, hey? Lots of Wesakecha and Chisha<sup>9</sup> and all them too. Just trying to remember them, yeah. Same with us too. And I forgot a lot. And a lot of the moral to the story.*

1703: *Chisha.*

1722: *That's where the chickadee, that's what it's saying when you hear it.*

*Chickadee? Wesakecha omegee mechoo<sup>10</sup>. (Laughter) Wesakecha is eating his scab; that's what it means.*

*Interviewer: I remember that one. That used to be one of my favourites.*



<sup>9</sup> A character in Métis stories, often with Wesakecha. Possibly derived from 'Ti-Jean,' Michif for French Canadian folk hero Petit John (Native Languages 2020b).

<sup>10</sup> In one story, Wesakecha eats his scab, thinking it is dry meat. The chickadees laugh at him, calling out in their song, "Wesakecha omegee mechoo" or "Wesakecha is eating is scab!"

## Reflections

What do the words, stories, observations and insights shared between these eight women from Willow Lake tell us? They speak so clearly for themselves, and they will speak differently to different individuals and bodies of work now and in the future. Undoubtedly, these women's words provide information that we are accustomed to seeing in studies of land use and ecological knowledge but they also provide information that is not usually available in such studies and offer different windows into experiences of the land and knowledge associated with the land. These women's words are the strongest, deepest, and fullest and most important part of this report, because they will still matter many years from now when research priorities and legal and regulatory systems have evolved, and the insights of the authors may no longer be particularly relevant. But to situate the words and this research in its current context, we offer an overview of some of the points that stood out about this study and these interviews from the perspective of practitioners working in the field of Indigenous rights, land use, and ecological knowledge.

The women interviewed for this study spoke eloquently about the natural landscape in northeastern Alberta that was relatively untouched in their childhoods and has changed at an accelerating pace over the course of their lifetimes. They illuminated the connection, commonly described as a defining aspect of Indigenous worldviews, between the land, water, plants, animals, fish and humans, as their conversations quickly flowed from topics of animal wellbeing to human health, harvesting, identity, and teaching the next generation how to live with the land. The narratives offered by these women about their land use and ecological knowledge very clearly demonstrate the indissoluble connections between the natural environment, land use, knowledge, culture, community, health and socio-economics—what are sometimes referred to as linked social-ecological values (see Berkes et al 2014 and Parlee et al 2012).

Interviewees expressed concern about changes on the land and about the ability to maintain a way of life and keep teaching young people their traditional practices and values as the demands of settler society continue to press in upon their families and the place they call home. They spoke about the importance of protecting the land, the plants and animals, water, fish and people, at the same time as preserving their knowledge and their connection to each other and the environment. They used expressive words like 'beautiful' and 'pristine' to describe what the land was like when they were younger, and terms such as 'tired', 'diminishing', and 'struggling' to explain the present state of some aspects of the environment.

Changes in the landscape were frequently described through the lens of plants. Women explained how they rely on the trees and shrubs and the colour and brightness of their leaves to tell them how the land is doing. When the land is not doing well the leaves are dull, have brown spots, or turn silver. They have observed significant declines in the quantities of berries and remember from their own childhoods and from their mother's and grandmother's stories

that there were never berry shortages in the past. Now the bushes grow but the berries sometimes don't come or dry up or don't ripen if they do form. Many explained how they used to be able to harvest berries within walking distance of their homes, and that these patches no longer exist. Some noted that medicines associated with water, like mint and rat root, can no longer be found in locations where they were commonly harvested in the past. Other interviewees shared their observations that the medicines vary year by year but can still be found.

It used to be easy to harvest berries and medicines close to home in Anzac and around Willow Lake. Being able to easily access these resources made it reasonable for women to combine these activities with other primary roles of caring for homes and small children. As harvesting sites in the vicinity of home have been disturbed or access has been lost, women are now either having to limit their land use or having to use more time and money or depend on others to travel to harvesting locations. This loss of local berries and medicines has significant implications for a type of harvesting that was formerly important and readily accessible to women and children in the community. The berry patch out the back door or across the road would frequently not be documented in land use research but the loss of this berry patch to a road or a gravel pit or a cement barrier changes women's ability to harvest, and therefore changes their children's involvement in those activities, their family's food and the knowledge associated with every aspect of this harvesting.

All the study participants voiced concerns about pollution and contaminants, and shared observations of fish, moose and other animals showing signs of disease or abnormalities such as cysts and worms. They also described waterbodies that used to provide food and medicine for their families and are now not even safe to swim in. Diseased animals and fish not only mean lost effort in harvesting and loss of food and lead to concerns about the health implications of eating contaminants; having to waste these harvests also contradicts traditional protocols which dictate that one should only take what is needed from the land and never waste.

Women also described how some types of animals are fewer in number and how much their behaviour has changed. Interviewees explained how when they children, they never saw wildlife because the animals were afraid of people and had enough food and places they could get away from people. Now, the animals have altered their interactions with people, becoming more acclimatized to human interaction and less afraid. Similarly, the interviewees are aware of changes in fish populations (such as the reductions in grayling and whitefish) and almost all were concerned about deformities and contaminants in fish. Most of the changes in fish and water, particularly in Willow Lake by Anzac, are attributed to industrial activity and recreational use of the lake.

The stewardship practices described by Willow Lake women are interwoven with and reflect their values; values that are underpinned by a very deep respect for the earth and for other

people. This results in practices of living with the land and harvesting carefully to ensure future abundance; not pushing the land aside to make space for people; harvesting in season; not taking more than what is needed; not wasting any of what is harvested; and working hard to take care of the earth and your family and community relationships of mutual care and reciprocity. These values show the intertwining or lack of separation between relationships between people and the land and people with each other.

There have been profound changes from the interviewee's parents' generation to the present in people's livelihoods, lifestyles and therefore how they spend their hours in a day. This includes changes to the amount of time people are able to spend on the land and visiting with family and community and the proportion of daily life that is made up of traditional activities. This in turn affects how much children are immersed in this lifestyle and learning environment. Study participants described how families used to travel to Lac Ste Anne for the annual pilgrimage and visit with family there and along the way. People generally visit less than they used to, even 20 years ago. People also used to spend regular and far more extended periods of time on traplines and at trapline cabins, as families. The influences driving this change are multifaceted, including the physical changes to the landscape with forestry and oil and gas development; a change to a much greater proportion of wage-based rather than subsistence-based work in households; the entrance of more women to the workplace; the dispersion of families in pursuit of work or schooling; and the transitions in northeastern Alberta and more recently Anzac, from predominantly Indigenous communities to settler communities. Changes in technology (including running water, electricity, dishwashers and washing machines) have profoundly changed women's work and child-rearing and have theoretically created more free time but women described how this time has been filled up with activities like sports, particularly for school-aged children.

These forces have combined to create a narrowing of the space available to engage in land-based activities. Some interviewees describe a transition from a land-based lifestyle as a cherished and necessary way of life to now engaging in a collection of activities undertaken more as hobbies or recreation that are not absolutely necessary for subsistence or survival in the way they were in the past. This is not to undermine the ongoing critical importance of harvesting and traditional foods given how interviewees describe that they choose wild foods over store-bought, but highlights how the activities of the settler society and particularly the wage-based economy and formal schooling take precedence due to their very structure, and traditional practices are forced to fit around these aspects of settler life. Some traditional activities, such as sewing and beading, which were once required for survival and later generated income, are now practiced in order to sustain culture and identity. Almost as a form of resistance against the settler way of life, women described how being on the land and providing for yourselves can give a sense of purpose, of very tangible productivity and also maintain a spiritual connection between the individual, the land, family and community.

Most of the study participants described flexibility in gender roles within their families and their community, based foremost on interests and abilities. When families lived or spent extended periods on traplines, it was necessary for men and women to be capable of undertaking most of the tasks required to keep sheltered and fed, and children's help was required as well. This meant early and regular learning, exposure and participation in hauling water, cutting wood, repairing machinery, hunting, trapping, fishing. Women worked traplines when their husbands were sick or had passed on, or worked alongside them when they were not occupied with small children. Bush knowledge was needed by everyone and significant effort was required from all family members in order to live off the land. Interviewees described how some individuals stayed closer to home and looked after domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and sewing while others took more interest and participated in hunting, trapping and fishing. Despite this flexibility, which appeared to more available to women than to men, some specialized tasks and associated knowledge commonly fell to specific genders in most families. Women had and continue to have primary responsibility for childrearing, making clothing (sewing and beading), picking berries, and processing meat, skins, hides and furs. Childrearing has always been and continues to be shared across generations, with grandparents and great-grandparents helping to raise children—but this work is still mostly done by women, especially the care of younger children. In most families, men were and continue to be responsible for hunting large game such as moose while women and younger family members would hunt smaller game. Men also are much more commonly trapline holders, and the ones responsible for net fishing.

The women in the study talked about their cultural identity and commented on the changes related to identity that have taken place over the years. Some recalled a time when many families hid their Métis identity because it put their children and their economic prospects at risk, and the later emergence of Métis cards and politics related to Métis rights. Interviewees demonstrated varying interpretations of what it means to be Métis but they all shared a general awareness of being part of a Métis community, and spoke openly about an ongoing tension between pride in their Indigenous identity and challenges embracing or even acknowledging this identity within mainstream society. One woman explained that she feels she is still at risk of losing her children if she takes them out of school to spend time on the land, a fear faced by her parents and her grandparents as well. Some of the women are concerned about how to pass their traditions and cultural identity on to their children and grandchildren, who have to live in two worlds and braid these cultural systems together, largely without the foundational experience of being brought up or even spending extended periods of time on the land; without hearing the languages of their ancestors spoken in their homes; and without the map of traditional place names being stitched together around them every time they travel the land. These Métis women living in Anzac now feel less comfortable and like their Indigenous identity is less well understood because the community of Anzac now has many settlers living within it, and this has hampered people's ability to freely engage in their Métis traditions.

Every woman involved in the study sees teaching younger generations about the land, harvesting and cultural practices as vitally important, and hands-on learning from family and other community members about harvesting locations and practices and protocols is seen as the only way to learn properly. The barriers to teaching younger generations are many and reflect similar barriers that impinge on all WLM members' ability to be on the land: time is more limited due to work and school and participation in mainstream activities; harvesting and teaching places now take longer to reach or cannot be reached at all due to changes on the landscape; and the skills involved in living with the land are no longer required for survival and are therefore no longer part of daily life, making it harder to teach and learn tasks, skills and knowledge that were formerly repeated time and again with necessity, if not some degree of urgency. Some feel that these aspects of culture are so critically important that they should form part of school curriculum but insist that these lessons can only be delivered through hands-on experiential learning, on the land. One woman noted that time on the land may now be more important for spiritual reasons and wellbeing than for survival but remains critical regardless.

### In Closing

Studies of Indigenous ecological knowledge and land use, as commonly implemented in northeastern Alberta and throughout Canada's regulatory system, ultimately have their roots in constitutionally protected Section 35 rights, the definition of these rights in historic treaties and case law, and in the fields of archaeology and heritage resources (where these studies were first done). These origins have resulted in Indigenous land use and knowledge being somewhat narrowly defined as the set of practices, species and locations related to subsistence hunting, trapping and fishing, and the trails, cabins and campsites that support these harvesting activities—all highly tangible aspects of culture that reflect colonial or settler priorities and worldviews. Is it important to ask what is lost when we focus only on these subjects as telling the story of Indigenous land use and knowledge?

As the words of Métis women included in this report show, what can be missed through this more narrow focus are stories about understanding the landscape through a more nuanced and less utilitarian lens; stories about knowledge transmission, nurturing future generations, and nurturing the earth; and stories about understanding the fundamental connection between changes to the land and changes to communities, families and culture. Our current regulatory systems do not allow for all these factors need to be considered in an integrated impact assessment that includes and also looks beyond impacts on harvested species, cabins and trails. Indigenous groups and the consultants working on their behalves have slowly worked to expand the topics studied in land use and related impact assessments but there is still not enough room in our current regulatory frameworks for language, health, childrearing, families, identity, and many other aspects of culture.

This research has highlighted silences that exist in our current documented information about Indigenous ecological knowledge and land use. Silences that stem from the exclusion of

women's voices, of Métis perspectives, of the interconnected web of culture that is moved in its entirety when a string in the natural environment is pulled and the possibility emerges that somewhere, at the distant end of that string, a child can't learn how to catch and cut an Arctic Grayling. This research has helped highlight the lack of knowledge about what is being lost, about the full extent of impacts, and the changes in women's lives, roles and contributions.

Hopefully the knowledge documented through this research has helped to fill some of these silences with women's ways of knowing about the land and how families and communities interact with and relate to it, and how economic and industrial changes are impacting Indigenous, and specifically Métis women's, lives in an area of intense extraction and associated environmental and socio-cultural change.

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## Appendix A – Interview Guide

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**WILLOW LAKE MÉTIS INTERVIEW GUIDE**

***Métis Women's Indigenous and Ecological Knowledge: Perspectives from Willow Lake***

**Questions:**

1. What is your full name?
2. What is your date of birth?
3. What activities have taken you onto the land during your lifetime? (For e.g., berry picking; plant gathering; teaching children/grandchildren; hunting; fishing; walking; trapping; staying at trapline cabins; firewood collection; etc.)
4. What activities related to land use were women primarily responsible for when you were younger (your mother/aunts/grandmothers as well as girls)? (For e.g. canning foods, skinning/tanning hides, cooking meals, hunting, trapping, fishing, berry picking, collecting medicines or plant foods, healing [household or community], making clothing or arts/crafts, teaching children, maintaining family connections, remembering and sharing stories/teachings).
5. Do women still have those same responsibilities now? What has changed? Why do you think these changes have happened?
6. Do you know any traditional teachings or stories from past generations of women about what their lives and time on the land were like, or about caring for or monitoring the environment? (For e.g. not hunting rabbits in certain months, not harvesting at certain times of year, harvesting in a certain way, etc.)
7. We'd like to know a bit about which plants and animals you have harvested during your lifetime.
  - a. Berries
    - i. If you pick berries, which ones did you pick?
    - ii. Do you still pick berries? If not, why not?
    - iii. Have the types of berries, the amount of berries, or the health of the berries changed?
    - iv. If so, when did this happen? Do you have any idea why?
    - v. How can you tell if the berries are healthy or not?
    - vi. Is there anything you do to make sure the berries will be good (quality or amount) next year? For e.g. pick in a certain way, make offerings, prune the plants, do anything to the soil or environment.
    - vii. What do you think is most important to teach young people about berries and berry picking?
  - b. Medicinal and Food Plants
    - i. If you collect other plants for food or medicine, which ones did you pick?
    - ii. Do you still pick food and medicine plants?
    - iii. Have the types of plants you pick, the amount of plants growing, or the health of the plants changed?

- iv. If so, when did this happen? Do you have any idea why?
  - v. How can you tell if the food and medicine plants are healthy or not?
  - vi. Is there anything you do to make sure the plants will be good (quality or amount) next year? For e.g. pick in a certain way, make offerings, prune the plants, do anything to the soil or environment.
  - vii. What do you think is most important to teach young people about food and medicine plants and picking them?
- c. Animals
- i. If you trap or hunt, which animals do you harvest?
  - ii. Do you still trap or hunt?
  - iii. Have the types of animals you harvest, the number of animals or the health of the animals changed?
  - iv. If so, when did this happen? Do you have any idea why?
  - v. How can you tell if the animals are healthy or not?
  - vi. Is there anything you do to make sure the animals will be in good shape (quality or amount) next year? For e.g. hunt or trap in a certain way or in certain places or at certain times, make offerings, do anything to the environment.
  - vii. What do you think is most important to teach young people about animals and hunting and trapping?
- d. Fish
- i. If you fish, which kinds do you get?
  - ii. Do you still fish?
  - iii. Have the types of fish you get, the number of fish, or the health of the fish changed?
  - iv. If so, when did this happen? Do you have any idea why?
  - v. How can you tell if the fish are healthy or not?
  - vi. Is there anything you do to make sure the fish will be in good shape (quality or amount) next year? For e.g. fish in a certain way or in certain places or at certain times, make offerings, do anything to the environment.
  - vii. What do you think is most important to teach young people about fish and fishing?
8. What was the land like in this area when you were young? Have you noticed any changes in the land over your lifetime to the land, water, weather, insects or birds? Do you remember when these changes occurred? Why do you think these changes happened?
9. Are there are plants or animals, or other signs that you look for each year as markers of how the environment is doing?
10. What do you think has been the biggest environmental change in this area? What do you think caused it? How has this affected your connection to and use of the land? How has it affected your community?
11. Do you have any concerns about contamination or pollution in wild plants or animals? If so, what have you noticed? Have these affected your use of the land?

## Appendix B – Consent Form

## **WILLOW LAKE MÉTIS INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM**

### **Study Title:**

*Métis Women's Indigenous and Ecological Knowledge: Perspectives from Willow Lake*

### **Research Investigator:**

Stella Lavallee-Kreutzer  
PO Box 30580 Clearwater PO  
Fort McMurray, AB, T9H 0C4



### Background

You are being asked to participate in this study regarding Métis women's knowledge about the land and land use, because you are a member of Willow Lake Métis and because of your knowledge and experiences. You have been selected by the Willow Lake Métis Local Board of Directors for participation in this study. The results of this study will be used by Willow Lake to write a report for the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research and will form part of Willow Lake's database of information regarding the community's history, environmental knowledge and land use.

This study is being conducted by Willow Lake with funding provided by the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research, an organization based at the University of Alberta specifically to support research on Métis issues. Certes Applied and Natural Resources (Keely Winnitoy) will be helping us conduct the study.

### Purpose

The purpose of this research is to document traditional and environmental knowledge held by women of Willow Lake because this knowledge is often not included or highlighted in studies about the environment and land use. Documenting this information will help create a more complete record for Willow Lake and will also help others gain a better understanding of Métis women's' knowledge and land use.

### Study Procedures

The study is expected to involve one-on-one interviews with five women from Willow Lake Métis Local, including yourself. Each interview will last between 2-4 hours. With your permission, a voice recording will be made during the interview and this recording will be typed out. A copy of the typed-out interview can be provided to you by the Local President or Secretary if you would like one.

The information from all the interviews will be reviewed for common ideas or types of information, and these will be written up in a final report that will include information provided by you and other interviewees during the study interviews. The final report will be provided to the Rupertsland Centre for

Métis Research and will be available to the public on the Centre's website. The report will belong to Willow Lake Métis and will also form part of the community's database.

The audio recording, notes and transcript from your interview will be securely stored at the Willow Lake Métis Local offices and will only be accessible to the individuals working on this study, including Willow Lake staff and board members and Certes. Willow Lake will add the information from this study to the Local's database, and the information may be used in the future to achieve Willow Lake Métis Local's goals of cultural preservation and retention, and may also support Willow Lake's efforts in environmental management and monitoring, and protection of the community's rights and interests.

The study interviews are planned to be completed in the spring of 2019 and the final report from the study should be completed by the fall or winter of 2019. The study must be finished by the end of December 2019. The final report will be presented to Willow Lake members at a community meeting, and you and other interviewees will have the opportunity to review the report prior to its submission to the Rupertsland Centre.

Each interviewee will be provided with an honorarium of \$300.00 for participating in the study.

#### *Benefits*

There may be no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. Any benefits will be limited to having an opportunity to share your knowledge and memories and contributing to the information held by your community. We hope that the information we collect through this study will help other people better understand Métis women's land use and knowledge about the environment, and that this information may be useful to other researchers.

We do not anticipate any costs to you for being involved in this research, apart from the time you will take to conduct the interview and review the report (if you choose to review it).

#### *Risk*

We do not anticipate any risks to you related to your participation in this study.

#### *Voluntary Participation*

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are not required to answer any questions or to complete the interview if you do not want to. You can ask to have any information withdrawn from the study before the submission of the final report to the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research by contacting the Willow Lake President (Stella Lavallee-Kreutzer) or the Willow Lake Secretary (Frances Whitford). You can also contact the Certes Research Coordinator (Keely Winnitoy). All contact information is provided at the end of this letter.

#### *Confidentiality & Anonymity*

In the final report produced for this study and in any future use of your information, your name will not be associated with your information. Instead, codes will be assigned to each person and these will be used in the report instead of individual's names.

*Further Information*

If you have any questions, you can contact the Willow Lake President (Stella Lavallee-Kreutzer) at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You can also contact the Certes Research Coordinator (Keely Winnitoy) at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.

**Consent Statement**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed) of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Verbal consent provided and witnessed by person obtaining consent