



ENGINEERING CONSULTING SERVICES

Transportation Infrastructure Program Feasibility Study, Phase I Cree Land Use Study – Oujé-Bougoumau Technical Report



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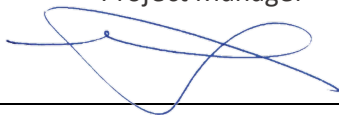
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**CREE LAND USE STUDY – OUIÉ-
BOUGOUMAU TECHNICAL REPORT**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 LA GRANDE ALLIANCE

La Grande Alliance (LGA) program is a plan to protect, connect and develop the Eeyou-Istchee Baie-James territory. It includes a study of a transport development that encompasses a renewal of existing Cree Community roads, the implementation of a north-south link Matagami to the James-Bay area and finally, a deep-sea port. It materialized in 2018 when the Grand Council of the Cree (GCC) and the Gouvernement du Québec (GQ) signed a memorandum of understanding for the study. The study has involved the Cree First Nations communities from the beginning of the initiative to ensure community engagement, and respect for the traditional way of life and values. The study is overseen by the Cree Development Corporation (CDC) on behalf of the Cree Nation Government (CNG).

The CDC, on behalf of the GCC/CNG and the GQ, has been mandated to oversee the study. In turn, they have assigned Vision Eeyou Istchee (VEI), a consortium formed by STANTEC, DESFOR and SYSTRA, to carry out a Feasibility Study on the technical, socio-environmental and economic components in Phase I of the LGA infrastructure program, covering years 1-5 from the beginning of construction. The CDC appointed WSP to perform a pre-feasibility study of Phases II-III of the program (covering years 6-15 and subsequently years 16-30).

Phase I of LGA includes:

- Upgrades to the access roads between the Billy-Diamond Highway (BDH) and the Cree communities of Waskaganish, Eastmain and Wemindji.
- Upgrade to the access road between the Route du Nord (RDN) and the Cree community of Nemaska.
- Construction of a new secondary access road to Mistissini via the RDN.
- A railway line following, as much as possible, the Billy-Diamond Highway between the town of Matagami and KM257 (Rupert River bridge) of the Highway.
- A return to service for the railway line between Grevet (Lebel-sur-Quévillon) and Chapais (approximate distance of 225 km).
- Trans-shipment areas along the Billy-Diamond Highway and the Grevet-Chapais railway corridors, specifically one located at KM257.

Among the tasks to achieve the stated objectives of the Feasibility Study for Phase I — Infrastructure, a socio-environmental feasibility study was conducted. This study included a Cree Land Use Study among the communities potentially impacted by the proposed infrastructures, including Oujé-Bougoumau.

1.2 SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL FEASIBILITY STUDY

Development projects cannot be carried out without bringing changes in the environment and to the social environment. The James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) was established in 1975 to ensure, among other things, that development in the Cree territory is carried out taking into account the protection of the environment and the maintenance of land use by Cree communities for the practice of their traditional activities. The JBNQA also provides a pathway for Cree in the decision-making as part of the environmental assessment process under Chapter 22 of the Agreement.

This Environmental and Social Feasibility Study is an important tool to guide future developers wishing to carry out the Phase 1 of La Grande Alliance. It is an innovative approach that plans to document, upstream of design by future proponents, the expectations and concerns of affected Cree communities, identify key potential land use conflicts

and propose solutions (avoid, mitigate, offset), anticipate key potential impacts and recommend mitigation measures.

The CDC made it clear from the beginning of the LGA process that they wanted local community involvement, and environmental and social criteria evaluated at the same level as technical and financial criteria in the infrastructure design and planning. To meet these principles, VEI did the following:

- Organised internal bi-weekly meetings and direct exchanges between colleagues to share relevant land use and environmental information with the other study teams as it was collected;
- Used an online database (interactive ArcGIS map) to make land use, environmental and technical data accessible to targeted team members:
- Organized a workshop, bringing together tallymen and engineers, to review the potential Billy-Diamond Highway (BDH) railway alignment, and identify main issues;
- Accommodated the tallymen’s recommendations as much as possible.
- Encouraged team members to communicate with the Cree Liaison Officers (CIOs) and have ad-hoc discussions with them.
- Prioritised Cree workers and companies in the organization of field campaigns.
- Invited tallymen and land users to meet the field crews and to participate in fieldwork.
- Reviewed and included information shared by the following organizations:
 - Cree Nation Government (Land Use Planning Commission, including the Protected Areas Working Group and Environment Department);
 - Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute;
 - Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association;
 - Cree companies, Cree communities, and the CIOs.

1.3 CREE LAND USE STUDY

As part of the socio-environmental study, the mandate included a Cree land use study which covered each proposed infrastructure’s study area. The Cree land use study’s main goal is to document the land and resources use in the study areas, so as to better identify and understand potential risks, conflicts and opportunities related to the transportation infrastructures under study. More specific objectives of this research include:

- Collect traditional knowledge regarding the area to inform and improve the design of the potential infrastructures.
- Identify valued sites and sensitive areas to be protected from potential development.
- Gather concerns and recommendations in relation to the proposed infrastructure, as well as concerning the LGA process in general.
- Assess preliminary potential impacts from the construction and operation of the infrastructures.

- Identify any potential cumulative effects from previous project impacts as well as in light of the potential infrastructures.
- Propose solutions to potential conflicts and alternate options.

It is important to keep in mind the following limitations regarding this component of the study:

- Novelty of the Grande Alliance study and approach for land users for whom this consists of the first contact regarding the infrastructure components under study;
- Relatively short time allotted to conduct the interviews and the study;
- Difficulty to obtain data from past studies or projects (e.g. sites of special interest to the Cree identified during forestry management exercise, as per the Paix des Braves);
- Difficulty to reach and meet all the potentially affected land users;
- Reluctance from certain land users to participate in the study because they do not want their participation to be interpreted as consent to the proposed infrastructure or to LGA;
- Reluctance from certain land users to share specific information about their activities;
- “Consultation fatigue” of certain land users who have shared their knowledge repeatedly;
- Potential loss of precision due to translation (Cree-English/English-Cree).

It should be seen as a first general picture of the land and resources use in the study areas, to be completed in future stages of the process, rather than a complete list of land use features and recommendations. Indeed, it should be noted that the approach adopted by the LGA team is very innovative in engaging land users and community members from the start of the planning process, before the final infrastructure design. If some of the proposed infrastructure works go ahead, engagement with community members will continue and data will be refined.

The present report presents the results of the Cree Land Use Study conducted in the community of Oujé-Bougoumau.

2. METHODOLOGY

The approach and methodology adopted for the Cree land use study, as well as the consent forms and interview grid were reviewed by and discussed with the CIOs.

2.1 STUDY AREAS

The study areas encompassed in the community of Oujé-Bougoumau are as follows (see Map 1):

- Potential Grevet-Chapais railway alignment: The study area defined for the potential Grevet-Chapais alignment consisted originally of a one km buffer zone on either side of the existing Grevet-Chapais trail, extending from Franquet to Chapais. Following first discussions with Waswanipi tallymen and land users, in November 2021, the original study area was extended to a 5 km buffer to take into account cumulative impacts of past development projects. Therefore, three additional traplines were included in the Cree land use study: two from Waswanipi, and one from Oujé-Bougoumau.
- Route du Nord: one km buffer zone on either side of the road's centerline and it extends from the start of the road, in Chibougamau, to its connection with the BDH, around km 275 of the BDH.

During the interviews with tallymen and land users, if land use activities or features were reported outside the study areas, they were noted as well.

The table below indicates the traplines in Oujé-Bougoumau potentially touched by each infrastructure.

Table 1 Traplines in Oujé-Bougoumau Potentially Touched by LGA Phase 1 Infrastructures

Infrastructure	Number of traplines	Trapline Intersected
Grevet-Chapais Railway	2	O54
		O58
Route du Nord	2	M57/O57
		O55

2.2 DATA ACQUISITION AND PROCESSING

2.2.1 Literature review

At the beginning of the study, a review of existing information was conducted. General search by key words was carried out as well as search in specific databases, including:

- Hydro-Québec projects that were subject to an environmental impact assessment (Cherloc);
- Projects evaluated by the COMEX;
- Québec environmental assessment registries (MELCCFP and Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement);
- Canadian impact assessment registry (Government of Canada).

More than 200 documents, concerning at least 40 projects achieved between 1977 and 2021, were consulted. This literature review allowed to collect information about known valued sites and sensitive elements, mainly along the Rupert River on Waskaganish and Nemaska territories. Some information regarding Cree land use near the

communities of Waswanipi and Nemaska was also available. However, the literature review also revealed that little information is available for several sectors under study, including:

- Around the community of Wemindji and along the access road;
- Along the Billy Diamond Highway between Matagami and Waskaganish;
- Along the Grevet-Chapais roadbed, except for Lake Opawica area;
- Along the Eastmain access road.

2.2.2 Land user interviews

At the beginning of the study, traplines that could potentially be touched by the proposed works and infrastructures were identified. The VEI team then asked each CIO to validate the identity of each trapline's tallyman and to identify other land users or knowledge holders who should be invited to participate in the Cree land use study. In collaboration with the CIOs, VEI organized information sessions for tallymen and land users in each community potentially affected by LGA Phase 1 infrastructures (eight communities). Tallymen were invited to bring their family members and land users with them. General information on LGA as well as more specific information about Phase 1 studies and the infrastructures that could potentially go through the local traplines were presented and discussed with the attendees.

Sometime after the information session, the tallymen were invited to an individual land use interview in which their family members and land users were also welcomed to participate. The interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions, and were conducted mostly in Cree by one of VEI's Cree Liaison Officers and VEI's anthropologist. Large paper maps were used to locate land use features and information shared by the participants. Prior to starting the interview, the participants were asked if they had questions about LGA, and information about LGA and specific infrastructures was presented to those who had not assisted to the information session. The interview questions touched upon the following themes:

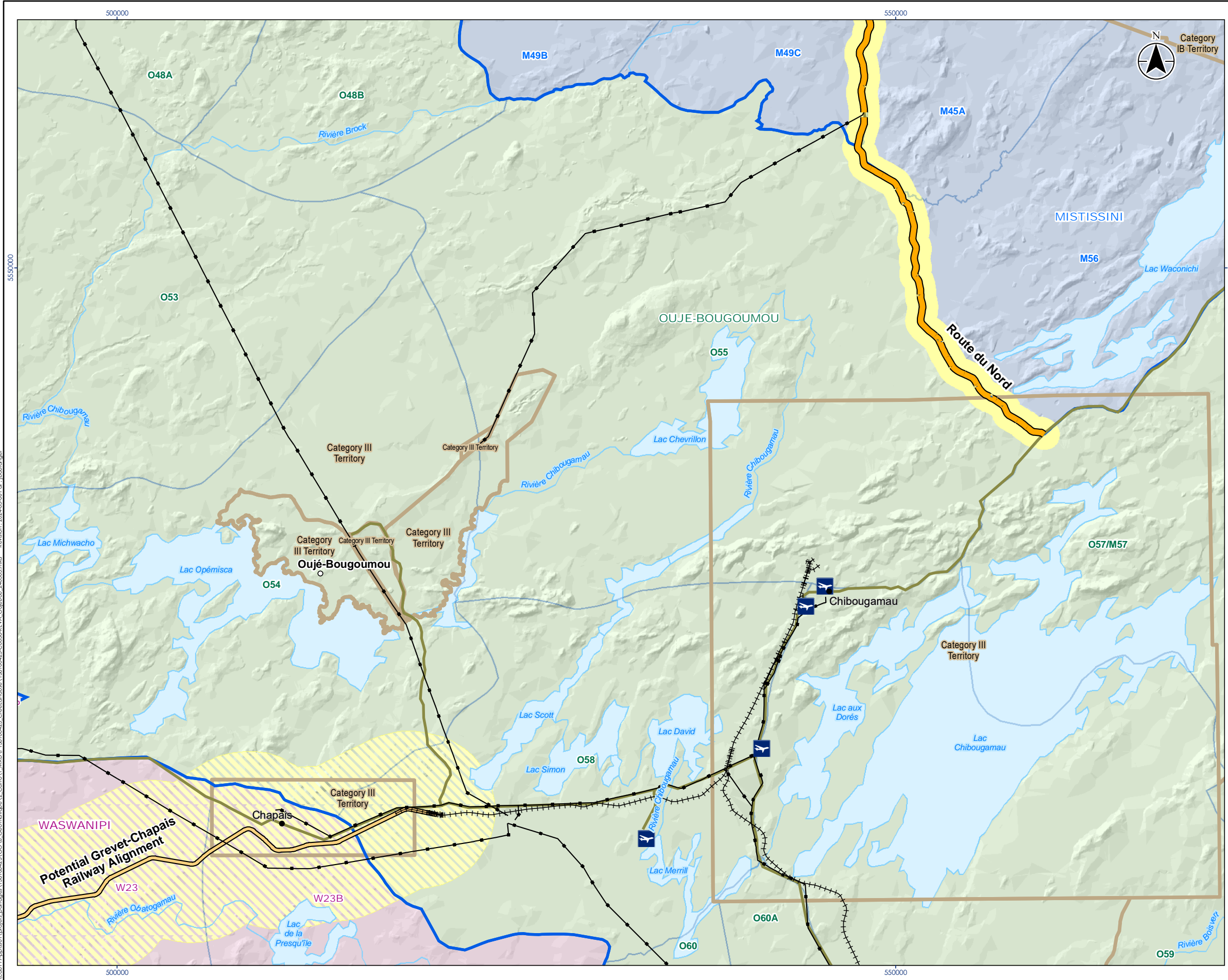
- Description of land use activities and features
 - Harvesting activities (hunting, fishing, trapping, and berries, plants and wood gathering);
 - Habitations sites (camp, cabin, seasonal campsite, tent frame, camping area, house, store, old trading post, old campsite and other building);
 - Trails and travelways (ATV/snowmobile trails, forestry roads, path, boat landing and portages);
 - Social and cultural sites (community, gathering, knowledge transfer, historical, archeological, ceremonial, burial or sacred site, picnic area, landmark).
- Environmental information concerning the study area (traditional ecological knowledge)
 - Wildlife:
 - Species present in the study area, quantity, quality, and potential issues.
 - Trails and migration routes, with special attention to roads and alignments crossings.
 - Calving/kidding areas.
 - Other areas used by moose or caribou.
 - Beaver lodges/ponds.
 - Goose hunting ponds.

- Fish:
 - Species present in the study area, quantity, quality, and potential issues.
 - Presence of fish, and species, in each watercourse along the alignments.
 - Spawning and rearing areas.
- Water Resources
- Wetlands, bogs, swamp areas
- Invasive species and changes observed in the last 25 years.
- Condition of the existing infrastructures
- Potential effects and recommendations.

Once the interviews notes were compiled, the information collected was integrated into a GIS database specifically created for Phase 1 feasibility study, so it could be shared with the technical and the archaeological teams (note that access was limited to a small number of people).

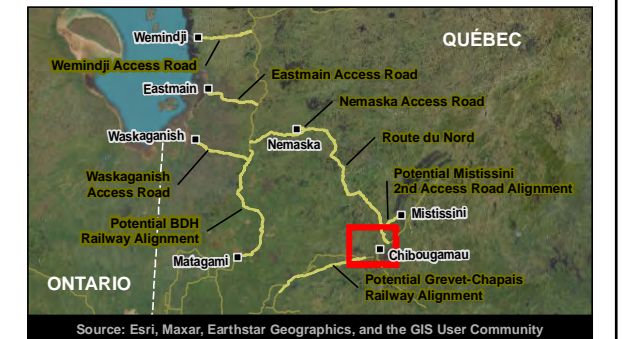
Validation interviews were organized with the study participants, so they can review the data collected, verify its accuracy, and add precisions if required. The georeferenced database was also used during the validation process, to make sure the land use information was properly located. The interview notes were also read with the participants to validate the accuracy and clarify some information, if needed. The validation process also offered the land users an opportunity to share additional data or express additional concerns and recommendations.

It is important to note that some of the information collected is not presented in this report or is mentioned with very few details to preserve confidentiality and respect its sensitive nature. However, it will be provided to the CDC along with relevant non-disclosure agreements.



Map No. 1
 Title Cree Land Use Study Areas in Ouje-Bougoumou
 Client/Project Cree Development Corporation
 La Grande Alliance – Feasibility Study
 Phase 1
 Project Location 158100425-C0058 REVA
 Eeyou Istchee, Québec Prepared by Johanne Boulanger on 2024-03-06
 Verified by Marie-Hélène Côté on 2024-03-06
 Independent Review by Julie Massicotte on 2024-03-06

- Human Environment Components**
- Cree Village
 - Locality
 - ✈ Airport
 - ▭ Category I, II or III Territory
 - Power Line
 - ++++ Railway
- Study Components**
- ▬ Route du Nord
 - ▬ Potential Grevet-Chapais Railway Alignment
 - ▭ Study Area – 1 km Buffer on Each Side of the Route du Nord
 - ▭ Study Area – 5 km Buffer on Each Side of the Potential Railway
- Trapline Limit and Community Name**
- ▭ Trapline Limit
 - ▭ Mistissini
 - ▭ Ouje-Bougoumou
 - ▭ Waswanipi
- Hydrography**
- ▭ Body of Water
 - ▭ Watercourse
- Road Network**
- ▭ Road Network



Notes

1. Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
2. Geotechnical Investigation: Stantec, 2023
3. Road Network: Adresses Québec, 2021
4. Hydrography: GRHQ, 2017
5. Orthoimagery: ESRI-World Imagery, 2017

0 4 8 km
 1:250 000
 (At original document size of 11x17)

3. COMMUNITY PROFILE

Oujé-Bougoumou is located on the shore of Lake Opemiska and can be accessed by the highway Route 113, and then using the Oujé-Bougoumou Road on approximately 25 km. Between 1920 and 1970, the Oujé-Bougoumou people were forced to relocate seven times, but in the early 1990s an enormous creativity was unleashed and applied to the construction of a new village (OBCN, 2015). Oujé-Bougoumou's territory is divided into 13 traplines covering 10,568 km² (CMEB, 2022).

As of August 2022, the Cree First Nation of Oujé-Bougoumou had a total registered population of 938, with 791 members living on reserve, 126 living off reserve, and 21 living on other reserves or Crown land (CIRNAC, 2022).

The LGA Phase 1 infrastructures located on Oujé-Bougoumou territory are:

- The eastern end of the potential Grevet-Chapais railway;
- The southern section of the Route du Nord study area

3.1 ISSUES AND VISION

In 2017, the Eeyou Planning Commission undertook a consultation process with Oujé-Bougoumou community members. The results are presented in the "Report on Community Input on Land Use Planning Goals" (EPC, 2017) and included information on the community's values, issues and vision for the future. Some of it is summarized below:

The Assinica Park, located at the north of the community, is highly valued not just by the families who have traditionally hunted there, but by an entire community which sought to protect part of it. This area is valued, among other things, because it is nearly unimpacted by the mining and forestry activities compared to the southern part of its territory where there had been so many impacts.

Issues that Oujé-Bougoumou faces:

- Impacts of forestry
- Impacts of mining
- Health of water
- Access to traplines
- The trapline system
- Role of tallymen
- Non-Cree occupation of the territory
- Non-Cree community expansion
- Cultural loss
- Overharvesting

Elements of an Oujé-Bougoumou vision for the future:

- Environmental protection
- Cree-led development
- Better forestry and mining practices
- Larger role in governance

- Ensuring a resilient Cree culture
- Regulation of harvesting
- Reform of traplines

4. RESULTS

The interviews provided a general idea of the land use taking place along the existing Grevet-Chapais trail and the Route du Nord as well as their surrounding areas, rather than a complete picture. The number of land users of the study areas, the frequency of their visits and quantity of resources harvested were not estimated since it was not in the scope of the Cree land use study carried out as part of the LGA Phase 1 Feasibility Study.

The land and resources in the study areas are used not only by the tallymen, their family members and land users, but also by other Cree and non-Cree land users. Forestry companies as well as snowmobile and ATV clubs currently share the use of the existing Grevet-Chapais trail. It is also an important artery where residents of the region, Cree and non-Cree, circulate by snowmobile, ATV or vehicle on some sections.

During the interviews, tallymen and land users explained that when the Grevet-Chapais railway was built, the Crees moved their camps and activities away from it. Then, when the railway was decommissioned, they gradually came back in the area and established camps in proximity to the Grevet-Chapais trail to take advantage of the ease of access. Several non-Crees have started to frequent the area and build cottages around the waterbodies for the same reason.

The interviews also provided a general idea of the land use taking place along the Route du Nord and in its surrounding areas, rather than a complete picture. While being relatively recent on the territory, modern roads are widely used by the Cree population. In terms of transportation routes, they have overtaken rivers. The RDN is not only important to connect the community of Nemaska with “the south”, but also to facilitate access to the southeastern part of Eeyou Istchee Baie-James, and potentially to the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, by members of other Cree communities. Additionally, the presence of the RDN provides an easy access to the traplines intersected by it. The fact that most land users do not live from the land anymore and occupy paid jobs partly explains the growth in importance of modern roads, as they provide faster access. Major changes in important rivers’ hydrology and ice cover, following hydroelectric development in the last decades or due to climate change, also contributed to the increase in use of modern roads. Since it is now more dangerous, complicated, or sometimes impossible to navigate on some watercourses as well as to travel by snowmobile, roads offer interesting alternate options.

4.1 CREE LAND USE

The potential Grevet-Chapais railway would return to service the decommissioned railway line between Grevet (Lebel-sur-Quévillon) and Chapais over approximate of 225 km. It crosses 13 traplines belonging to the following Cree communities: Washaw Sibi, Waswanipi and Oujé-Bougoumou. The potential Grevet-Chapais railway crosses two traplines in Oujé-Bougoumau (O54, O58). On November 30, 2022 and July 18, 2023, VEI conducted land use interviews with the tallymen of the both traplines intersected by the Grevet-Chapais railway

The Route du Nord is a 407-kilometer, gravel road connecting Route 167 in Chibougamau to the Billy-Diamond Highway. The road has opened access to the Nemaska community and the forestry industry. It is crossing 22 traplines across the territory of four Cree communities (Mistissini, Nemaska, Oujé-Bougoumou and Waskaganish). RND crosses two traplines in Oujé-Bougoumau (O55 and M57/O57). On November 30, 2022, VEI conducted land use interviews with the tallyman of the trapline M57/O57. VEI was not able to meet with the tallyman of trapline O55.

4.1.1 Trapline O54

The LGA Phase 1 infrastructure located on trapline O54 is the potential Grevet-Chapais railway.

The tallyman took part in a group interview with another tallyman from Oujé-Bougoumou. He reported a moose yard and the presence of speckle trout in Lake Springer. Lake Laura is polluted now, like most of the lakes in the area. The tallyman mentioned that it was polluted by forestry activities.

4.1.2 Trapline O58

The LGA Phase 1 infrastructure located on trapline O58 is the potential Grevet-Chapais railway.

An old settlement was located by the northeastern shores of Lake Laura. The tallyman's parents and their family were using it in the 1970s.

The tallyman reported a moose yard used all winter on the south side of the Grevet-Chapais trail, in the Lake Laura area. This area is also used for goose hunting and fishing, mainly walleye, whitefish, and pike. Other land users, from Oujé-Bougoumou and elsewhere are goose hunting there too. There are a lot of geese on the Grevet-Chapais trail, in proximity to the lake. The tallyman reported rabbit trapping and partridge hunting in the area north of Lake Laura, "but it's all cleared cut now, even on the other side of the road (113)". He deplores that people are poaching on his trapline and some non-Native people are chasing the moose by snowmobile.

The Grevet-Chapais trail is not used that much by the tallyman, as he has snowmobile trails in the bush, and also uses some forestry roads. The tallyman finds that there is too much traffic on his trapline, especially in the study area, as the Grevet-Chapais trail is used as a provincial snowmobile trail in winter, and as an ATV trail in the summer. Users (snowmobiles, ATVs, and trucks) do not always follow the trail.

4.1.3 Trapline M57/O57

The LGA Phase 1 infrastructure located on trapline M57/O57 is the Route du Nord.

The tallyman indicated during the land use interviews that they already have less access to their traplines than before because of the snowmobile trails, ATV trails. The snowmobilers and ATV associations do not want the Cree land users to travel on the trails where their fathers used to travel before. They have other negative impacts from development on their territories such as encroachment from potato farms, blueberry farms, non-native municipalities expanding, building on their traplines without consent. They sought legal advice from Gowlings to go through that.

Almost at the junction of route 167 and Route du Nord is located the former settlement, historic site where the tallyman's family used to go every summer and do blueberry picking. The area was burned before, so there were lots of berries. Now, there is a lot of vegetation, so they don't do blueberry picking anymore. There is a Nibiishii office in the area too. The other side of the road (at km 0), is a goose hunting area. The tallyman and his family members cleared a goose landing corridor there. It is a very swampy area, so it is a good place for goose hunting although there is a lot of traffic nearby. This stream is also an old canoe route. "We used to paddle on that river." "It's a good river for paddling and also you will see a million geese." The old portage was crossing the road near KM 0 of RDN. This Old portage was used by the Hudson Bay Company to portage their supplies, from the river to Lake "Oreille". It was also used by the Crees before the roads were constructed. The tallyman and his family members have tried to preserve the old portage; they have identified it as a protected area on the forestry maps that they did. The lake nearby, the Lake Oreille is fishing area where he fished a lot when he was young.

Brook trout sanctuary is located in the stream at km 262 of route 167, which connects with Lake Waconichi (outside of the study area). It is a good thing that there is a sanctuary because the brook trout population seems to be declining due to the salt used on the roads (that runoff and enter into the streams).

4.2 COMMENTS, CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 Grevet-Chapais Railway

The Cree land use study participants shared information regarding the potential Grevet-Chapais railway. Comments, concerns and recommendations concerning its potential upgrade and paving are presented in the table below:

Table 2 Comments, Concerns and Recommendations – Grevet-Chapais Railway

Alignment / Conception
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Grevet-Chapais trail is used as an artery to access the territory. The new railway would impact the access to trails on traplines, and consequently the use of the land. For some, the conversion of the Grevet-Chapais trail into a railway is not an issue as other trails and forestry roads are used on the trapline. Recommendation to reinforce the roadbed because of the heavy minerals that could be transported.

4.2.2 Route du Nord

The Cree land use study participant shared a wealth of information regarding the Route du Nord. Comments, concerns and recommendations concerning its potential upgrade and paving are presented in the table below:

Table 3 Comments, Concerns and Recommendations – Upgrade and Paving of Route du Nord

Alignment / Conception
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paving the RDN was welcomed. Economic boost in the region would be good. "If it creates employment, I don't really oppose to development. However, there needs to be some sort of balance with the community."
Operation / Maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns on potential impacts of calcium used for maintenance on sturgeons as they are very sensitive to development.

5. REFERENCES

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