

WHO SAYS THE LAND IS EMPTY?

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Companies that want to extract resources from the land will argue that the land is empty and therefore they are entitled through their government-given right to do what they want in Eeyou Istchee. People who live off the land will argue that the land is not empty and that they have the God-given right to protect it as long as possible for the use and enjoyment of its inhabitants and generations yet to come.

I personally do not understand how the land, plant life, fish, fowl and the animals can be ignored when it comes to assessing the impacts of any development in Eeyou Istchee. I can assure anybody from the experiences I have had with the animal kingdom during my limited periods of time out on the land that the land is far from empty. In addition to a greater appreciation of Eeyou Istchee, those experiences have also provided me with some insight into animal behaviour and have broadened my perspective on the extent of the connectedness between the land, man and animal.

When a two-year-old bear cub follows you around during a berry-picking trip and stops to eat berries when you stop to pick them, all the while looking in your direction every few minutes obviously checking up on you, you realize it is craving company because it is the first summer that it is on its own. Your initial fear turns to a sense of camaraderie with the animal.

When a baby fox sees you and starts running towards you, you realize that it has not yet lost its innocence or learned to fear man. Even though you are tempted to pet it like a kitten, you know you can't because it must develop a healthy sense of fear of man to protect itself.

When a young marten stands there and watches you intently while you spit firewood, you know its curiosity was stronger than its fear of man and that somehow it knew you were not going to harm it. You enjoy the moment but know that the second you stop what you are doing, you will break the connection and the marten will run.

When a lone caribou walks up to you while you are sitting in the middle of a skidoo trail, when it stops four feet from you, turns around and faces you directly and when it nods its head after you say "hello" to it, you acknowledge that its spirit and yours have connected and you appreciate and honour that precious moment.

When you see a mother bear or moose attack anyone that gets between it and its young, you realize that the capacity of animals to love is just as great as that of humans. When you witness these things you cannot help but attribute human emotions and feelings to animals and you realize that the impacts of development affect them just as much as they do us.

When you spend two weeks out on the land watching thousands and thousands of caribou migrating day and night north to their summer calving grounds, you simply cannot accept the claim that the land is empty. And when risky development is being proposed, such as uranium mining, you can't help but feel strongly obligated to do your part in trying to protect Eeyou Istchee, not just for mankind but for the land itself, the plant life and all the other inhabitants, be they animals, fish, or fowl. To allow it is too risky for all of us.

ONE EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS DEVELOPMENT

- UUPICHUUN (the first rapids or the first dam on the Fort George River [Chisasibistuk], where thousands of fish spawned every August, was an important fish fishing site for the Chisasibi people. Developers insisted building a dam there would not affect the spawning or fishing. This turned out to be false. Not only that but fish became contaminated with mercury and Chisasibi Cree were prohibited from eating fish.

UUPICHUUN BEFORE HYDRO DEVELOPMENT

(PICTURE TAKEN LATE 1960S)



UUPICHUUN

AFTER HYDRO DEVELOPMENT

(what is left of the rapids - 2014)



THERE WERE MANY OTHER
SERIOUS IMPACTS OF THE HYDRO-
ELECTRIC PROJECT ON THE LAND,
THE CULTURE AND THE CREE WAY
OF LIFE. SO WHO CAN BLAME US
FOR BEING WARY OF DEVELOPER'S
PROMISES OR ASSURANCES?

SOME INHABITANTS OF EYYOU ISTCHEE



INHABITANTS (continued)



INHABITANTS (continued)



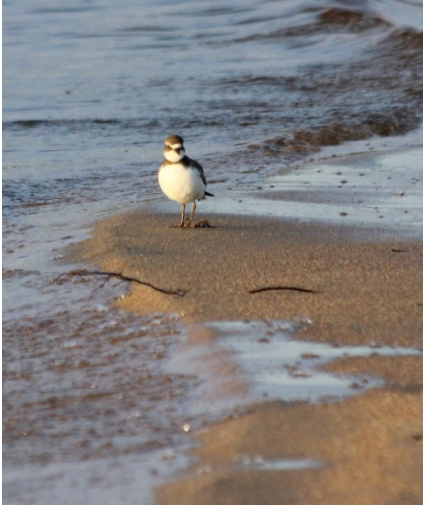
INHABITANTS (continued)



INHABITANTS (continued)



INHABITANTS (continued)



CARIBOU

- Caribou Herds declining
- George River Herd: 1980s: 700,000-800,000; 2010: 74,000; 2014: 14,200
- Leaf River Herd: 2001: 608,000; 2011: 430,000
- Major diet of caribou is lichen
- Lichen absorbs its food from the air, including toxic dust from radioactive fallout, and rain water
- Radioactive materials accumulate in meat and organs of caribou, which in turn gets into the systems of those who feed on them, such as, humans, wolves, ravens, sea gulls, grey jays
- Radioactive materials in human systems lead to cancer and birth defects



LICHEN



CLOSEUP



WILD MEAT



SOME FOOD FROM THE LAND

