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## Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA)

Les enjeux de la filière uranifère au Québec

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

6211-08-012

- COTA was established in 2000, pursuant to the treaty obligations set out in sections 28.4 and 28.6 of the JBNQA, with a mission to develop and implement a collective vision for a world-class sustainable tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee in harmony with Cree culture and values, and in partnership with Cree communities, institutions and businesses.
- A separate organization, Eeyou Istchee Tourism, was established by COTA in 2007 to fulfill the role of a regional tourism association (RTA) by supporting, promoting and developing the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee.
- Eeyou Istchee has enormous potential for tourism development, which brings three key benefits to the region: job creation, better understanding of culture, traditions and heritage, and higher feelings of belonging.
- A momentum has been created and COTA is currently undertaking studies and implementing various plans and projects to develop this industry.
- COTA is targeting those markets interested in an authentic aboriginal tourism experience, through which they can learn how the Cree live in their natural environment.
- COTA can only offer such authentic experiences to tourists if there is a natural and intact ecosystem to use not only for tourism experiences but also to carry on the Cree way of life for future generations of Cree people.
- COTA therefore supports the Grand Council's opposition to uranium mining in Eeyou Istchee because sustainable Cree tourism development depends on an intact natural environment.
- Uranium development may have short term benefits, but it could also tarnish public perceptions of Eeyou Istchee as a viable natural tourism destination and damage Cree parks and protected areas, thereby diminishing the long term, sustainable tourism potential of the region.
- Overall, COTA opposes uranium mining in Eeyou Istchee not only because it is bad for the tourism business, but also because it is contrary to the values of COTA and the Cree Nation.

## 1. History of COTA

The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) was incorporated on December 7, 2000 as a non-profit corporation under Part II of the Canadian Corporations Act. The actual process that eventually led to the creation of COTA, however, began over 35 years ago during the negotiations for the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA).

The negotiations leading to the JBNQA provided the platform for gaining control over tourism development in Eeyou Istchee. With the signing of the Final Agreement in November 1975, the legal framework for this control became a reality and paved the way for the creation of COTA as a treaty obligation under sections 28.4 and 28.6 of the JBNQA.

## 2. Economic and social impacts of tourism

Tourism is an export industry and as such it is capable of bringing dollars from outside of the province and outside of Canada to stimulate and grow the economy of Eeyou Istchee. Although the majority of the visitors currently come from Quebec, the future potential includes visitors from the rest of Canada and Europe. According to the ATR Associées report entitled Catalyseur de l'économie touristique dans toutes les régions du Québec (2014), in 2011, 12.4 billion dollars was generated from tourism, with 30% being generated from visitors outside of Quebec. Also the tourism industry generated 1.5 billion dollars in revenues for the government of Quebec and tourism was the 4th industry in the province in terms of exports.

Our target market, those who are interested in an aboriginal tourism experience are looking for a unique experience. They want to learn about and participate in the Cree way of life and better understand how we live in the natural environment. Activities could include learning how to make certain arts and crafts, traditional cuisine and construction of traditional structures.

Tourism is more than outfitting, in fact in Canada, there are over 400 different jobs in tourism and there are 1.66 million people working in tourism-related occupations and that number is projected to be 1.95 million by 2015 (*source: CTHRC Youth ppt, 2011*). These types of tourism jobs will be important for Eeyou Istchee due to the high number of youth in the Cree population. Also, Cree youth will be encouraged to learn from the Elders in order to be able to share their knowledge with visitors. In a study conducted by Aboriginal Tourism Quebec, 3 of the most important benefits of Aboriginal tourism in Quebec were: job creation, better understanding of the culture, traditions and heritage and higher self-belonging.

### **3. Potential impacts of uranium mining on the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee**

This document outlines the history, overview and projects that are currently underway to develop tourism in Eeyou Istchee. The amount of effort at the individual entrepreneur, community and regional levels is remarkable. There is a momentum that has been created in Eeyou Istchee and many people are excited to learn more about tourism and get involved.

As discussed in the following sections, visitors want to learn about the Cree Way of Life out on the land. In order for the experience to be authentic it is important there be a natural and intact ecosystem to use not only for tourism experiences but also to carry on the Cree way of life for future generations of Cree people. Therefore, sustainable Cree tourism development depends on an intact natural environment. It is for these reasons that COTA supports the Grand Council's position on uranium mining in Eeyou Istchee.

We, the Cree Nation, have serious concerns regarding the prospect of uranium exploration and mining in our territory. Uranium exploration, mining, milling, refining and transport, and uranium mining wastes, create unique and grave risks for human health and the environment, both today and for thousands of generations to come. It is our responsibility to protect Eeyou Istchee for future generations of Cree people who will continue to live off the land, hunting, fishing and trapping, in perpetuity.

"The Cree Nation stands united against uranium mining activities on our lands," said Grand Chief Dr. Matthew Coon Come. "The profits from uranium mining are short-lived, but the tons of tailings that will inevitably be left behind will remain toxic and radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years. This imposes an unacceptable burden on future generations."

In the tourism industry, perception is everything. How the various target markets perceive Eeyou Istchee can make the difference between a potential client booking a fishing trip or cultural stay or deciding to go elsewhere. If potential visitors perceive that uranium mining is going forward this would have a strong negative impact on the future of tourism. This was already experienced with the Rupert River diversion project when clients at tradeshow expressed their belief that the fishing was no longer good for the entire length of the Rupert River. Many efforts by Hydro Quebec were made to mitigate this perception but it was still a very real impact of the project. Instead of growing the customer base and putting energy in to attracting new clientele, we were focussed on improving the perception of the quality of fishing for both new and existing clientele.

Conversely, the Cree Nation has been clear on their stand against uranium mining and this stand reinforces the Cree values and Cree way of life that tourists are looking to experience.

Unlike uranium mining that offers high profits in the short term, sustainable tourism development that respects the Cree culture and the land offers the possibility for future generations to earn a living from the land in the many diverse employment opportunities that tourism provides.

The development of Cree parks and protected areas is also a very important part of creating a sustainable tourism destination in Eeyou Istchee. One of the main priorities of visitors seeking an aboriginal experience is to visit protected areas and heritage sites. Therefore, COTA is concerned that uranium mining activity that is in close proximity to the parks or waterways flowing through the parks would have a negative impact on the ecosystems within the parks. Also there could be detrimental impacts on the fauna that may live not only in the park but also that may migrate out of the park boundaries. Therefore, COTA is opposed to uranium mining in Eeyou Istchee because it is contrary to the values of COTA and the Cree Nation.

#### **4. COTA's Mission and Objectives**

##### **Mission**

COTA's mission is to develop and implement a collective vision for a world-class sustainable tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee, that is in harmony with Cree culture and values, and that involves a partnership among Cree communities, institutions and businesses.

##### **Objectives**

###### **Implement Section 28.6 of the JBNQA**

Section 28.6 of the JBNQA provides that COTA will:

- Provide marketing, booking, and promotion services, where necessary, for Cree outfitting operations;
- Provide business, management, accounting and professional services, where necessary, for Cree outfitters;
- Conduct feasibility studies related to the establishment of individual outfitting or a network of outfitting facilities.

###### **Community Awareness and Capacity Building**

- Place a priority on increasing awareness of tourism as a sustainable economic development opportunity.

- Increase the capacity of local and regional institutions to provide services by improving access to information.
- Support and undertake training and skill development initiatives that recognize Cree skills and industry standards.
- Support and encourage human resource development related to tourism.

### **Industry Development**

- Promote partnerships among Cree businesses, communities, and institutions.
- Represent the interests of COTA members at meetings with governments, commissions, other organizations, and non-native developers.
- Support the development of Cree tourist products that exceed market standards by creating quality standards and by recognizing success with awards.
- Ensure the participation of the Cree Nation in the development and promotion of tourism and outfitting activities.

### **Communications**

- Ensure effective communications with Cree stakeholders including Tallymen, governments, communities, and industry.
- Promote COTA's vision, objectives, activities, and accomplishments.
- Promote a positive image of the membership.
- Develop alliances and coordinate with other tourism and indigenous organizations to work toward common goals.
- Serve as a liaison between Cree tourism and outfitting operators, the tourism industry, and the markets they serve.
- Incorporate current technology to increase the ease and efficiency of communications and reduce the associated costs.

### **Marketing**

- Increase market share by researching the feasibility of regional projects that promote the communities.
- Conduct product development and market research that include visitor statistics and product inventories.

### **Financial Development**

- Actively seek funding and other resources from governments, the private sector, and other sources.
- Develop, where appropriate, revenue-generating activities.

## **5. History of Eeyou Istchee Tourism (EIT)**

On August 15 2007, the Government of Québec granted regional tourism association (RTA) status to the Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA). Given the considerable difference between the RTA and COTA in terms of roles and responsibilities, a decision was made to create a separate organization, namely Eeyou Istchee Tourism to provide for proper fulfilment of the RTA's mandate.

Eeyou Istchee Tourism (EIT) was the 22nd Regional Tourism Association (RTA) to come into being in Québec and the third to share the administrative region of Northern Québec. EIT is designated to represent the Cree communities of the Eeyou Istchee tourism region.

As set out in the formal agreement between EIT and the Government of Québec, the role of the RTA is to promote tourism operators, support the development of new products, make information more readily available to tourists, and cooperate with other RTAs in creating a Québec-wide tourism policy.

## **6. Objectives of EIT:**

- Position and promote Eeyou Istchee as a key destination for First Nations tourism, outdoor and adventure tourism, and outfitter services.
- Support the development of marketable tourism products and the upgrading of existing products with a view to contributing to regional economic growth and development of the tourism industry.
- Enhance regional tourism infrastructure by facilitating access to information relating to tourism products and services.
- Develop a tourism industry based on the principles of sustainable development and designed to have a positive impact on youth, elders and cultural life in the region.

Dues-paying COTA members are automatically members of EIT. Some of the additional benefits for our members include a listing in the Eeyou Istchee Baie James Tourism Guide, access to Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement program funding to develop their businesses, and eligibility for the international and cooperative marketing programs.

## 7. COTA Membership Study 2012

It is important that the programs and services that COTA and EIT offer meet the needs of the tourism operators in Eeyou Istchee; therefore, in 2012 COTA worked with Dr. Robert Palmer to conduct a Membership Study. The primary focus of this research project was to achieve the following research goals:

- Determine current state of tourism providers in Eeyou Istchee
- Identify programs/associations that tourism providers currently utilize or plan to utilize in the future
- Identify what programs/initiatives will be of value to members of COTA and/or future members to support tourism development.

In order to obtain the greatest amount of information in the most efficient manner, semi-structured focus groups were utilized as the primary data collection tool. One on one interviews were also used in certain situations with key parties.

The major needs of tourism providers in Eeyou Istchee are identified in the diagram below. As a result, COTA and EIT have expanded existing programs and created new programs to respond to these needs.

**Figure 1: Major Needs of Tourism Providers in Eeyou Istchee**



## 9. Overview of COTA's tourism development approach and ongoing projects

Unlike in regions to the south, the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee is in the development and growth phase. There is exciting work and coordination being done. COTA and EIT are working hard to coordinate and structure tourism development at the regional level and create an environment where individual communities and businesses can prosper. There are 3 key areas that we are focusing on to lay the groundwork required for the Cree Nation to develop a sustainable tourism industry. The challenge is to have all 3 areas develop at the same time because without one of the three areas it will be difficult for the others to succeed. The figure on the following page outlines the overall approach.

**Figure 2: Overall development approach**





The following section will provide a short description of some of the projects that COTA and EIT are working on as they relate to the figure 2.

### **Tourism Air Access Development Master Plan**

Eeyou Istchee Baie-James has enormous potential for tourism development. All but one Cree community is accessible by road; however, affordable air access is a requirement for the development of a successful tourism industry in the region. Accordingly, in June 2012, a mandate was issued to conduct an in-depth analysis of the current state of air travel to the region and within it. The information collected as part of this analysis has been used to create a Tourism Air Access Development Master Plan.

The Plan, which was completed in December 2013, presents a realistic and viable air-access model that will be used to help guide the decision-making process for tourism development throughout the region, including access to specific and remote locations.

The objective of the Tourism Air Access Development Master Plan was to establish a vision and development scheme for the tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee Baie-James. It included:

- A detailed review of current transportation options
- An assessment of existing airport services
- An analysis of available tourism products
- Recommendations for an air-access platform
- Detailed analysis of the required infrastructure
- Marketing opportunities and target markets for each opportunity

The Plan also details a number of recommendations, including:

- Implementation of a Destination Management Company to handle the development of tourism packages
- Infrastructure improvements at Chibougamou-Chapais Airport
- Implementation of air connections
- Consolidation of existing products
- Continued development of flagship products to appeal to a broader range of visitors (caribou safaris, Cree cultural stays, National parks packages, and polar bear watching tours)

### **Product Development Coaching (2012-2015 and 2014-2016)**

In early 2012, in response to its member survey, COTA launched the Product Development Coaching program. This is a 3-year (2012-2015) initiative designed to provide 4 Cree entrepreneurs with support to start or upgrade and enhance their tourism products. It is also designed to help them create market-ready tourism offerings that are specifically designed to meet the needs and expectations of travellers to the region. A second group of 4 entrepreneurs have recently begun a second coaching program with similar objectives.

#### **Training programs offered to the entrepreneurs**

In addition to the coaching programs, COTA has also organized several training programs to help the entrepreneurs become accredited guides with the Adventure Ecotourism Québec (AEQ) and obtain the liability insurance required. The programs include:

- Snowmobile Guide Training
- Canoe level 1 and 2 - calm water
- Canoe swift and white water rescue
- Advanced wilderness and remote first aid

#### **Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement (2012-2015)**

The Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement reflects a shared willingness by Tourisme Québec, Eeyou Istchee Tourism, Cree Regional Authority and Société de Développement de la Baie James, to work together with local partners and businesses in an effort to optimize tourism investment in accordance with regional priorities. The main objective is to support and stimulate development, renewal, and efforts to structure the regional tourism offered in Eeyou Istchee. Funded projects will enhance, develop, renew, consolidate, and diversify the region's tourism offer.

#### **The Destination Management Company (DMC) (2014-2016)**

By centralizing the sales, marketing and packaging of the various tourism experiences in Eeyou Istchee, the DMC will provide the support required by the small independent operators. They will be able to focus on running their operations without always having to respond to information and booking requests within the 24 hour period that is required of market and export ready products.

The project is in the pre-commercialisation phase. During this phase, the DMC's operating structure will be defined and the most effective means of packaging and marketing regional tourism products will be defined. The project includes:

- Benchmarking tourism packages on the basis of available and potential tourism products and target customer groups
- Determining the sales level required to ensure that the DMC is profitable
- Engaging in discussions with tourism lodging operators and tourism outfitters and operators to establish the DMC as the leading tourism product and service marketer in the region
- Identifying needs with respect to promotional and transactional tools as well as best practices in this regard