



**Jack Blake:** Grade 6 student at Chief Julius School in Fort McPherson won top prize during the school's Heritage Fair.

photo courtesy of Stewart Chisholm

## Seeds of knowledge

*Jack Blake shares traditional wisdom during Heritage Fair*

by **Kassina Ryder**  
Northern News Services  
**Tetlit'Zeh/Fort McPherson**

Jack Blake knows a lot about traditional plants. The Grade 6 student at Chief Julius School in Fort McPherson says his father and grandmother taught him about local plants and their uses, all of which Blake incorporated into his Heritage Fair project earlier this school year.

His work earned him the top prize and Blake is now expected to participate in the regional Heritage Fair in the spring.

"I had to go out on the land to study the plants," Blake said. "I learned stuff about plants from my dad and my grandma and from the Internet."

Blake said his project included information about Labrador Tea, which has a variety of traditional uses.

"There are two types, a short one and a tall one," he said. "You could use them when you have a cold and when you have a fever, you can sip some."

Blake also learned about roots used to make tobacco pipes and where to find them.

"You take it out of the ground, in the root you carve a bowl," he said. "You have to make a hole in the middle. It's usually found in swampy places."

For his presentation, Blake said he created an information board with literature about each plant and how it was traditionally used. He even had samples to share so

students and teachers could experience the plants' functions firsthand.

"I also gave the people who came around some spruce gum so they could chew on it," he said. "You'll absorb vitamins and all the nutrients in the spruce gum."

Blake said spruce gum was sometimes used as a natural bandage. It was spread onto a cut to keep out infection and promote healing.

Spruce was also used to make tea, he added.

"You boil it so you could drink the juice," he said. "It's good for fever and say you get sick with something, you could just use that."

Blake said once he started learning about plants, he took every opportunity to get out on the land to learn more. During a school trip on the land at the beginning of the school year, Blake said he spent most of his time hunting for plants.

"Our whole school had an out on the land trip so I used that time to study the plants," he said.

Blake said he enjoys learning skills passed down through the generations.

"It's a part of my traditions and my grandpa and his dad and stuff," he said. "They used to use the plants for medicine and they still use it for medicine today."

Blake said he is especially glad that his grandmother and his father are pleased about his interest in traditional plants and medicines.

"They were happy that I wanted to learn about the plants," he said.

### NORTHERNER

# Closer to new park

*Significant milestone between Lutsel K'e First Nation and Parks Canada*

by **Paul Bickford**  
Northern News Services  
**Lutsel K'e/Snowdrift**

Negotiators have initialed a draft agreement on most issues related to establishing a Thaidene Nene national park reserve around the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.

The significant milestone between Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation (LKDFN) and Parks Canada took place in Lutsel K'e on Nov. 13.

It means negotiators have agreed on most subject matters for Thaidene Nene – which means Land of the Ancestors – and are prepared to recommend the draft agreement to their respective parties.

Steven Nitah, the negotiator for LKDFN, said the draft agreement spells out the relationship between the First Nation and Parks Canada.

"That's about 90 per cent of it," he said, adding it covers issues such as the type of governance body to be created, division of responsibility, training programs, hiring policies and infrastructure. "All those types of discussions have been completed."

The two outstanding issues to be finalized are finances and the boundary of a new national park reserve.

"We just have to go define the boundaries where this relationship will apply and the money to run it," Nitah noted.

As for why a draft agreement was initialed even though there are still things to be worked out, he said it is to show the significant progress that has been made and the agreement defines the relationship between the two parties.

The boundaries of the pro-

posed national park reserve will be somewhere inside the 33,000 square kilometres of land that have been withdrawn from development.

"The remaining work will be completed and will be part of the ratification process," said Nitah, adding such a significant decision requires a referendum-type process by the membership of Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation.

Official negotiations between LKDFN and Parks Canada began in 2010, and Nitah said the talks proceeded relatively quickly. As a negotiator, he said he is pleased by the initialing of a draft agreement.

"A lot of work went into it, a lot of energy, a lot of imagination and a lot of haggling," he said. "It's good to get to this point."

While official talks only began several years ago as part of overall Akaitcho Territory negotiations, the idea of a national park reserve has been discussed in one form or another for about 40 years.

LKDFN Chief Dora Enzoc welcomed the initialing of the draft agreement in a statement at the event.

"The protection of Thaidene Nene has been a decades-long dream for the Lutsel K'e Denesoline," she said. "Our elders and the leadership have long maintained that we have a responsibility to protect this area of our territory to ensure that our way of life can be maintained in the future."

"I look forward to reviewing in detail the draft agreement with the membership of the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, and hope to receive a mandate to sign a final Thaidene Nene Establishment

Agreement in the coming year."

Nitah said a major part of the draft agreement is the understanding that LKDFN and Parks Canada will work together on the project.

"Lutsel K'e is just not signing an agreement with Parks Canada and handing over all the responsibility of the planning, the management and operations of Thaidene Nene," he said. "It will be done jointly through a governing body, and the implementation of the plans as created through this governing body will be the responsibility of the parties to the agreement, who are Lutsel K'e and Parks Canada."

Nitah added there will also be an effort to ensure all interests are respected, including the GNWT, the Northwest Territories Metis Nation and the NWT Chamber of Mines.

"We want to talk to all the people that are going to be impacted by this agreement," he said. "Parks Canada has a responsibility to talk to people, as well."

Kevin McNamee, director of the Protected Areas Establishment Branch with Parks Canada, called the draft agreement a significant milestone in the effort to protect

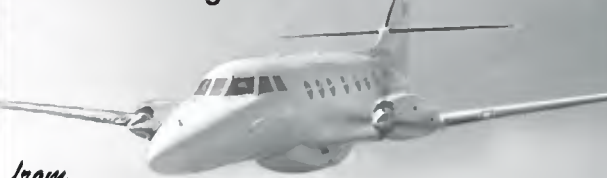
Thaidene Nene.

McNamee said, over the next several years, Parks Canada will seek to complete public and stakeholder consultations, finish negotiations with the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, conclude negotiations with the Northwest Territory Metis Nation, and reach agreement with the GNWT and federal government departments on a boundary for the proposed national park reserve.

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