

Newsletter

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation



January/February 2024



Vuntut Gwitchin
First Nation

Council Resolutions passed in January and February 2024

In January and February, Council passed eleven resolutions covering a number of areas. Council implemented a more user-friendly way of numbering Council Resolutions similar to the one used by the General Assembly. “CO”, for Council is followed by the current year, and then a number starting with 01 for the first resolution of the year.

Resolution CO2024-01

Approval of Job Evaluation Plan

Resolution CO2024-02

Revised Housing Policy

Resolution CO2024-03

Appointments to the Health and Wellness Committee

Resolution CO2024-04

Appointments to the Hiring Committee

Resolution CO2024-05

Appointments to the Enrollment Committee

Resolution CO2024-06

Leave from Council

Resolution CO2024-07

Endorsement of Revised Vuntut National Park Management Plan

Resolution CO2024-08

Yukon First Nation Energy Working Group

Resolution CO2024-09

Amendments to the Self Government Financial Transfer Agreement

Resolution CO2024-10

Organization of Vuntut Gwitchin Government

Resolution CO2024-11

Appointment of Executive Director

Council Resolutions are available on the Council page of the vgfn.ca website.

Organization of Vuntut Gwitchin Government

At a Council meeting held on February 21, 2024, Council passed Resolution CO2023-10. The resolution provides direction to the Executive Director to begin implementing some changes to the structure of the Administration in collaboration with department Directors and Managers.

These changes are designed to help the government improve delivery of programs and services to Citizens and the community of Old Crow.

First Appropriations Act 2024–25

Ronda Jordan, our Director of Finance, presented the *First Appropriation Act 2024-25* to the community at a public meeting held in Old Crow in January. This first reading was followed by a community meeting in Whitehorse in February. The budget was the result of a lot of hard work by the Executive Director and department Directors regarding plans for the 2024/2025 fiscal year (April 1, 2024 March 31, 2025).

The government’s expenditures are estimated to be just over \$28 million, and revenue is estimated to be just over \$32 million for the 2024-05 fiscal year. This budget anticipates the hiring of a number of staff as the Administration works to implement the new organizational structure mentioned above.

Council passed the *First Appropriation Act 2024-25* at a final reading in Old Crow on March 19. The *Act* is available on the vgfn.ca website.

Amendments to the VGFN Self-Government Financial Transfer Agreement

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation is set to receive an additional \$1,000,000 for Fiscal Year for 2023/2024 and \$250,000 for Fiscal Year 2024/2025 to the base of our Financial Transfer Agreement. These additional funds will go to support education, language programming, family violence prevention programming, and capital infrastructure.

Mahsi’ choo to our negotiating team for securing this additional funding!



Sliding fun at the Slough! **See the community photo galleries on pages 7-14.**

Committees

Disbursement Committee

The Disbursement Committee met in January and February. In these meetings, the Disbursement Committee continued discussions regarding the allocation of housing units and considered a request for post-secondary education funding.

The Committee made recommendations to Council regarding the allocation of a number of modular homes to be allocated once Occupancy Permits are received and a recommendation to Council regarding the allocation of education funding.

Recommendations from the Disbursement Committee are brought forward to Council for final decision through Council Resolution.

Mahsi' choo to the Disbursement Committee for their dedication and hard work!

Executive Committee of Elders

The Executive Committee of Elders met a number of times in January and February to discuss ongoing community concerns, most importantly, the ongoing mental health and substance abuse crisis.

The Committee discussed the critical importance of supporting opportunities for increased spirituality, seeking opportunities for increased youth connections and supporting culture and education, particularly at Chief Zzeh Gittlit School.

They also discussed planning for an Elders Summit to be hosted later this Spring. Dates have been set for April 22-24, 2024.

Council has established a number of new Committees to support Vuntut Gwitchin Government and advise Council. A Call Out for an Expression of Interest was posted a number of times throughout the Fall. These Committees will establish a Terms of Reference which is brought back to Council for endorsement through Council Resolution.

Mahsi' choo to all those who expressed interest.

Health and Wellness Committee

Over the past year, Chief and Council have prioritized the health and well-being of Vuntut Gwitchin Citizens. As part of this, the Health and Social Services Department is developing a Community Wellness Strategy to help guide and inspire these efforts.

Chief and Council has established a Health and Wellness Committee as an advisory body to Council, to support the Health and Social Services Department as it works to implement the Strategy (Resolution CO2024-03, Appointments to the Health and Wellness Committee).

Hiring Committee

The government is taking a number of steps to ensure hiring processes are fair and inclusive. As part of this effort, Chief and Council established a Hiring Committee to support the Human Resources team in the hiring process.

We believe that it is important that a broad range of perspectives are included when evaluating potential candidates for jobs with VGFN (Resolution CO2024-04, Appointments to the Hiring Committee).

Enrollment Committee

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Citizenship is a fundamental right and responsibility. Our Constitution states that that Citizenship “shall be determined by the Citizenship Code of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation through the authority of the Review Council.”

While Council is prioritizing establishment of the Review Council, we recognize that this will take some time as it will require legislation that establishes its jurisdiction and operations. In the interim, Council has established an Enrollment Committee to support the Enrollment Officer in enrollment including a review of the Citizen List to identify instances of dual enrollment (Resolution CO2024-05, Appointments to the Enrollment Committee).

Did you know?

Dual enrollment as a land claim beneficiary is not permitted under the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement.

Updating the Housing Policy

Housing plays a vital role in the healthy well-being of our community. Housing Policy had been in place since 2006 and has some gaps in policy and operational requirements, and it was not in compliance with the *Yukon Residential Landlord and Tenancies Act*, which is required.

VGFN Housing will engage with all tenants and come up with new landlord-tenancy agreements based on the Yukon Tenancy Agreement Template.

Under the new policy, there is a requirement for tenants to be residents in Old Crow to promote efficient use of the housing stock. If a tenant has left the community and taken up residence somewhere else, the new policy provides VGFN a way to repossess the house and disburse it to someone else who needs it and will use it. There is clearer support for Elders in the Elders’ Housing Program section, which provides for housing supports specifically for Elders.

The updated VGFN Housing Policy is available on the vgfn.ca website.

Intergovernmental Meetings

Border Mobility

January 16 and January 24 (online)

Chief Frost, Councillor Reti, and VGFN legal counsel Kris Statnyk participated in sessions hosted by the Government of Canada regarding long-standing international border issues to inform changes to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and other policy changes.

Guided by the *Gwich'in Nation Accord Gwiyiinji ILak Hah T'igweedi'yaa Sriinatr'igwihee'aa* (We Will Act With One Mind To Make Things Right) and a Resolution of the General Assembly regarding “Acknowledgement, Commemoration and Redress for the 1911-1912 Surveying and Demarcation of the International Border Between Yukon and Alaska,” the delegation raised the significant adverse impacts that the border has had on our Nation and our inherent, aboriginal and treaty rights including our right to self-determination.

We want to ensure that all Citizens belonging to Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation under our Constitution and that are

beneficiaries under the Final Agreement can meaningfully exercise and enjoy their inherent, aboriginal and treaty rights within our Traditional Territory regardless of their eligibility for status as a Canadian citizen, permanent resident or 'Indian' under Canadian law.

We have called for the Government of Canada to begin to consult and cooperate directly with our Nation and other affected Gwich'in on a permanent and ongoing basis to fully implement our inalienable political, social, economic and cultural rights and responsibilities as Gwich'in.

The Yukon River Panel

January 18- 25, Whitehorse

The Yukon River Panel, which makes recommendations to management entities on both sides of the U.S./Canada border concerning the conservation and management of salmon originating in Canada, met in Whitehorse in January. Stanley Njootli Sr, Jeffrey Peter and Elizabeth MacDonald participated in the week of meetings as Vuntut Gwitchin representatives and technical advisors.

Mahsi' choo to Roger Kyikavichik and Peter Frost for joining Deputy Chief Harold Frost Jr. in providing testimony to the Yukon River Panel regarding the realities we are facing with our salmon.

The next Yukon Review Panel meeting will be proceeding April 6 -11 in Anchorage and we will ensure we have a delegation participating that will continue to focus attention on the impacts of the decline of salmon.

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Annual Harvest Meeting

February 12-13

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation had a number of participants at the Porcupine Caribou Management Board AGM this year in addition to our PCMB Board Members. This was coordinated by the Natural Resources Department.

At the meeting, all users groups supported a "Green Zone" designation. Under this designation, there are no aboriginal harvest restrictions. While continuing to emphasize the respectful "Take what you need" harvesting practices that Gwich'in have followed since time immemorial, this designation means that people can continue to hunt for what they need. Licensed hunters receive a maximum of two bull tags. (Harvest Management Plan)

Meeting with the Northern Chiefs

February 15

Chief Frost met with the Chiefs of First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation and Gwich'in Tribal Council, to discuss a number of priorities to Northern Nations including arctic security, airport security, stewardship of our lands and resources, and community wellness.

The Northern Chiefs continue to commit to working collaboratively on issues on joint concern including by bringing a joint voice to meetings with the territorial and federal governments.

Yukon Forum

February 16, Whitehorse

On February 16, Chief Frost participated in the Yukon Forum held at the Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre in Whitehorse. The Yukon Forum is a regular meeting between leaders of Yukon First Nations, the Government of Yukon, and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

The leaders discussed a number of important issues including declining salmon, community wellness, and residential schools and burial sites. Chief Frost emphasized the need for a coordinated approach to addressing the governments of Canada and the United States regarding the state of our salmon and the need for a stock rebuilding plan.

Chief Frost also spoke regarding community wellness and the continued need for wrap-around supports particularly around the ongoing work of the Yukon Residential Schools and Missing Children Project and the Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of Cassandra Warville, Myranda Aleisha Dawn Tizya-Charlie, Josephine Elizabeth Hager and Darla Skookum later this Spring.



The Yukon Forum. February 16, 2024.

Land Claims Agreement Coalition (LCAC) Leadership Meeting and Meetings

February 26-29, Ottawa

Chief Frost participated in the LCAC Leadership Meeting from February 27-28 and additional meetings with the Government of Canada from February 26-29.

The Land Claims Agreement Coalition was formed in 2003 by modern treaty signatories with the objective of working together to ensure that comprehensive land claims, and associated self-government agreements are respected, honoured, and fully implemented. During the two-day meeting, LCAC Leadership discussed a number of joint challenges and priorities in implementation of our modern treaties, including:

- establishing an independent oversight mechanism for modern treaty implementation as an independent agent of parliament;
- amendments to the *Interpretation Act* which would address all potential inconsistencies between Canada's laws and policies and Indigenous Peoples' section 35 rights by making it clear that enactments should be interpreted in a way that does not abrogate or derogate from these rights; and
- improving the federal policy around dispute resolution, including referral to arbitration.

While in Ottawa, Chief Frost and the VGFN team (Stephen Mills, Liz Staples and Ashlynn Frost), met with the Parliamentary Secretary of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Indigenous Secretariat of Public Safety Canada.



LCAC Leadership Meeting

Gordon Foundation and LCAC Youth Treaty Simulation

February 24 and 25, Ottawa

Mahsi' choo to all the youth who expressed interest to participate in the Gordon Foundation and LCAC Youth Treaty Simulation. These names were brought forward to Council and Ashlynn Frost was randomly selected as the youth representative for Vuntut Gwitchin.

Ashlynn participated in the Treaty Simulation on February 24 and 25 which was a hands-on learning event to experience the realities of negotiating and implementing part of a modern treaty. Following the Simulation, Ashlynn joined the delegation in the other meetings in Ottawa the rest of the week.



Ashlynn Frost represented the Vuntut Gwitchin at the LCAC Youth Treaty Simulation in Ottawa on February 24-25, 2024.

Community Safety Planning with House of Wolf and Associates

In December 2023, Council met with Gina Nagano, the founder of Shëzo Zhúr (House of Wolf) and Associates. House of Wolf works with Indigenous communities to develop attainable ways to improve safety through proactive social infrastructure development and assistance.

Gina Nagano developed the Kwanlin Dün First Nation's Community Safety Officer program, and has worked extensively with a number of other Yukon First Nations and with Indigenous nations across Canada.

VGFN contracted House of Wolf to develop a Community Safety Plan including a Community Safety Officer Program. The contract timeline is from December 1, 2023 to July 1, 2024, and is paid for through a Tri-Partite Agreement with Yukon Government Public Safety.

House of Wolf will be coming to Old Crow in the coming months to conduct community and staff engagement. The team will be delivering the following to VGFN upon completion of this contract:

- Final Report on their Community Assessment
- Final Report on their Crime Prevention through Environmental Design
- A plan focused on enhancing emergency preparedness and disaster resilience, rooted in VGFN's law, culture, values, and priorities.
- A five (5) year strategic plan for implementation.

Since December, House of Wolf has been busy:

- reviewing relevant VGFN documents;
- reviewing and analyzing 3 years of RCMP Old Crow detachment data; and
- reaching out to VGFN Directors.

A House of Wolf team will be in Old Crow from April 28 to May 4, 2024. While visiting, they will be working on:

- one-on-one community engagement sessions with VGFN staff, partners, and others;
- a group community engagement;
- subdivision site visits, photographs for Environmental Design and an operational review of VGFN.

Emergency Management Planning

VGFN is working towards the development of an all-hazards emergency management plan.

This work is currently being led by Deputy Chief Frost and VGFN's Policy Department. In addition, VGFN has applied for funding for fire smarting and provided a letter of support for Yukon First Nation Wildfire's application for funding to provide wildfire training in Old Crow.

Old Crow Dogs

There continue to be complaints about loose dogs in Old Crow that cause problems for some citizens, especially elders and children.

There have been incidents of dog bites and a few residents have told Council they continue to feel unsafe in town due to some of the loose dogs being aggressive. Last year, VGFN put up notice that loose dogs will be sent to the animal shelter in Whitehorse.

Coming in April

Coroner's Inquest

April 8-25, Whitehorse

The Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of Cassandra Warville, Myranda Aleisha Dawn Tizya-Charlie, Josephine Elizabeth Hager and Darla Skookum is scheduled to start on April 8 at the Gold Rush Inn in Whitehorse.

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, the Selkirk First Nation, CYFN, the Yukon Government and the non-governmental organization Connective Society will be participants to the Inquest.

Chief and Council have directed the Health and Social Services department to identify the wrap around supports required in Old Crow and Whitehorse for this time.

Stay tuned for details concerning these important upcoming events:

Elders Summit

April 22-24

Education Summit

Dates to be confirmed

Caribou Days

April 18-20

Teechik Game Guardians Winter Road Patrol

Photos by Karl Hogue

January and February | Natural Resources and Heritage Department





Sliding Fun at the Slough

Photos by Gyde Shepherd

February | Health and Social Services Department





Addictions Awareness Week

Photos by Jocelyn Tsetso and Kylie Bruce

February | Health and Social Services Department



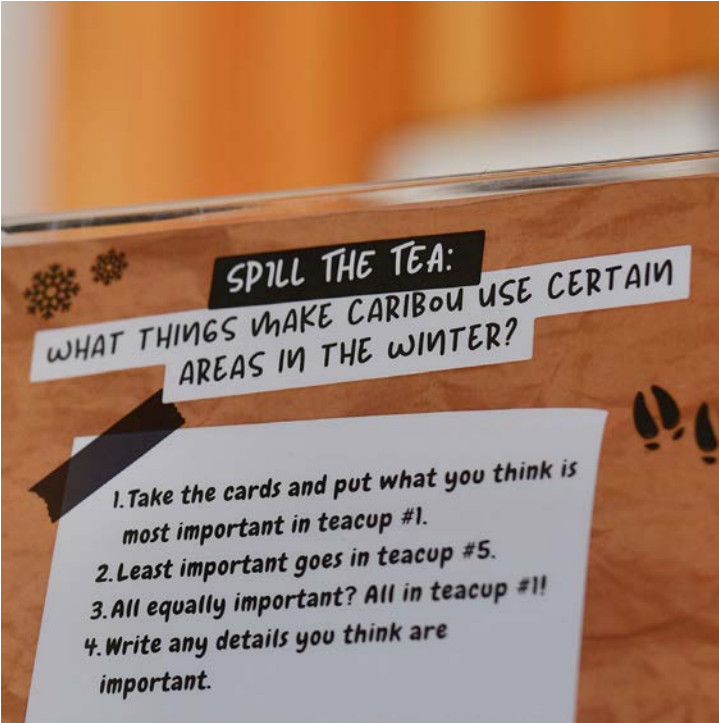


Research Roundup 2024

Photos by Jocelyn Tsetso

February | Natural Resources and Heritage Department





The Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Project



For two decades, Van Tat Gwich'in Elders have directed oral history projects to record their knowledge and life stories on the land. Elders and youth connected out on the land resulting in a trained local research team of interviewers, filmmakers, photographers. The community now has an extensive oral history archives including film footage, translated interviews, indexes, historical and contemporary photos, sites, trails and place names.

Here are quotes from community participants talking about their experiences working with Elders on the land.



Jane Montgomery

I participated in the Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Project from the beginning. I enjoyed heading out on the vast beautiful land we have. My role with the project was to interview the elders on the land.

The elders were so happy to go to their camp they haven't been for so long. Before heading out on the land there was always a seminar held with the participants, the interviewers, film and camera crews. We were fortunate to complete the oral history project while our elders were with us. They were so happy to fly back to their camp after not going there for so many years. One of the project we work on was mapping where we brought elders together to help. Because of their knowledge we have a Gwich'in placename map."

To honour the legacy of our parents, grandparents and ancestors is that by recording oral histories and long ago stories, these stories live on and become accessible in the age of technology for future generations. It preserves the stories, so information isn't lost as it is passed down. There is so much material that was collected, I want to recognize the elders that are no longer with us a big mahsi' choo.

Our elder Robert Bruce Jr. sat on the Heritage Committee, he was knowledgeable in our traditions and was very helpful. When he walked into the heritage meeting he always says: "Khan t'akhwa'in." (hurry you guys), and he laughs. We dearly miss him in our meetings.

—Jane



Mary Jane Moses

In the early years, from 2000 to about 2008, we had many of our elders with us and were able to take them back to their beloved homelands where they shared their stories with us, a special time of sharing experiences, knowledge and teachings. A book was published by VGFN and Shirleen Smith in 2009, highlighting those very stories of our beloved elders. Sadly, by the time the book was published, only a handful of elders were left.

When we brought our elders to the land, we brought the knowledge holders and our youth also participated, the youth were trained on the video camera and other aspects of the project. I for one am very proud of the Vuntut Gwitchin and the pride they took in overseeing community driven projects year after year.

We will continue to honour our ancestors by passing on of the valuable traditional knowledge, the culture ways of knowing, the traditions and language. This is what makes us proud Vuntut Gwitchin. The message has to be carried to future generations.

I have been so enriched and inspired on this journey with the Vuntut Gwich'in Oral History Project and I encourage community members to stay involved with future projects. Community + Participation + Teamwork = Success.

—Mary Jane



Marion Schafer

In my point of view the project gave people an opportunity to go out on the land and talk about the history of the land. At the end of the program a slideshow is presented back to the community.

When our past Elders were alive, they knew the land very well. They were experienced on the land because they lived off it. The legacy continues with the work Brandon does with the legends from long ago and stories from the Elders.

—Marion



Briana Lord

The Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Project brings people together, from youth to elders, out on the land whether it be for an afternoon or for a week. During this time, people are able to connect, share stories and wisdom, and learn about the area they are at. The elders were able to go back to where they spent part of their lives, had camps, spent time with family, and had travelled to. I always thought that was really special. As well as the stories and knowledge that has been passed on are priceless.

The Oral History Project can continue to honor the legacy of our ancestors and knowledge holders by continuing the work that has been done. To keep continuing conducting interviews, sharing stories and knowledge that has been passed on, travelling our vast territory, and letting our youth and next generations know how important and strong our heritage and culture is.

—Braina



Sophia Flather

The Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Project was a timely and worthwhile project for our community, and remains so. It was started at a time of great change and cultural shift, and I feel the changes becoming more rapid all the time. In the community, it is common prophecy that hard times are coming, and we will need to return to our cultural practices.

There is so much information held for us within the Oral History Project from our people who grew up in a different time, where they were immersed in our way of life. And to have so many interviews in dinjii zhuh k'yuu from first generation speakers is so precious. We now always have the opportunity to bring the Oral History Project to life in many ways such as living our culture, practicing what we learn in the interviews, building curriculum from the interviews and cultural knowledge.

Into the future, I think we can honor this by bringing our culture to life as much as we can! The work day disrupts our culture in many ways so if we can do deeper cultural projects (ie. longer time on the land, in language immersion, different stages to projects (ie. making trails then bringing people out then bringing kids out). Then also turning our cultural information into curriculum to do our own education on the land. And continuing to gather interviews as we are constantly changing, and everyone has so much to offer.

—Sophia



The delegation in Washington D.C. celebrating the 63rd Anniversary of the designation of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge with Senator Ed Markey (Mass.), advocate for protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in the U.S. Senate and sponsor of S.282 Arctic Refuge Protection Act which would designate the Coastal Plain as wilderness (Dec 6, 2023).

NEWS RELEASE

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, Gwich'in Tribal Council and First Nation of Na-cho Nyak Dun carry united message to Washington D.C. regarding permanent protections of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

December 13, 2023

Leaders from VGFN, Gwich'in Tribal Council and First Nation of Na-cho Nyak Dun were in Washington D.C. last week advocating for the USA to fulfill its international commitments to protect the Porcupine caribou herd and its critical habitat in Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit—the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Speaking on behalf of our Nations who have stewarded the lands of the Porcupine caribou herd for a millennia, the delegation met with representatives of the Administration and Congress to deliver the unified message to protect the sacred lands of the Coastal Plain for the physical, cultural and spiritual survival of our people and future generations.

The delegation was joined by representatives of the Government of Canada in meetings with the Director of the Bureau of Land Management, the agency mandated to administer the Oil and Gas leasing Program in the Coastal Plain and currently undertaking its environmental assessment, and the Director of the Canada Office within the U.S. Department of State, which leads the U.S. in foreign policy issues and supports the implementation of commitments made between the Government of U.S. and Canada. In these meetings the delegation brought forward the joint

perspective of the Parties of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement that drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is unsustainable. The delegation highlighted the work that has been done to protect the herd and its habitat in Canada and spoke to the cross-border impacts of development in the Coastal Plain and the need for consultation with our governments and the implementation of the International Agreement on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou.

This work in Washington corresponded with advocacy work being undertaken by our Gwich'in relatives in Alaska. Collectively our delegations brought a powerful voice regarding the need for permanent protections of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

“As Gwich'in we are intimately connected to Vadzaih; our fates are intertwined. It is critical that the Government of the United States acknowledge that what happens in the Coastal Plain of Alaska has implications for our Nation, and for user communities on both sides of the border. We will continue to use every opportunity we can to express our concerns regarding drilling in the Coastal Plain and to international commitments to protect the Porcupine caribou are fulfilled. As we have done for decades, we will continue to work collectively with the Parties of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement to protect the herd and its habitat for future generations.”

—Chief Pauline Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

