

Column Four

The Algonquin Land Claim – Harvesting and Conservation

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Since time immemorial, harvesting has been central to the Algonquin way of life. The Algonquin traditional practices of hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering flora for medicinal, food and other purposes, reflect the history of Algonquins as a hunting and gathering society. These practices embody an inherent respect for the environment and a fundamental commitment to the sustainable management of resources which has been passed from generation to generation.

The right of Aboriginal peoples in Canada to engage in traditional activities that are fundamental to their unique histories, cultures and spiritual beliefs is recognized by the *Constitution Act, 1982* and upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada. Under this legal framework, the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) currently possess the right to harvest wildlife, fish, migratory birds and plants for domestic purposes 365 days per year. This right is subject only to measures necessary for conservation and public health and safety. As such, a Final Treaty will not create Aboriginal rights for the AOO but rather, it will clearly articulate what these rights are and how they may be exercised.

As stewards of the land and resources within their Traditional Territory, the AOO recognize the fundamental importance of protecting viable populations of flora and fauna for generations to come. Since 1991, the AOO have pioneered ground-breaking harvest management plans for moose in Algonquin Park and Wildlife Management Units surrounding the Park. These plans contain clear provisions which set out when and where the harvest by Algonquin harvesters can occur, what the total harvest is to be and who is eligible to participate through a tag system.

Harvest limits for moose and elk are established in cooperation with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), based on data that addresses wildlife conservation and the sustainability of wildlife populations. The AOO is the first Aboriginal group in Canada that has voluntarily enacted these types of harvest management practices.

Over the last decade the AOO, working in partnership with the MNR have become important players in moose aerial inventory surveys in Algonquin Park. This involvement expanded to elk aerial inventories beginning in early 2012. The AOO continue to work with the MNR to develop a coordinated approach to enable the effective participation of the Algonquins in the collection of data relating to fish and other wildlife across the Territory. To date, the data collected for both moose and elk have assisted in the development of the AOO annual harvest management plans.

The AOO recognize that sustainable harvests are fundamental not only to the Algonquin way of life but also to our neighbours living throughout our Traditional Territory. As demonstrated over

the past 20 years, the AOO are committed to working together to ensure the protection of viable populations of fish and wildlife for future generations.

This column is the fourth in a series providing insights into Algonquin history, the foundation for the land claim, elements of the Preliminary Draft AIP and next steps in the journey. The next column will focus on the Forestry component of the Preliminary Draft AIP. For more information visit www.tanakiwin.com.