

With a World of Heritage So Rich

Lessons from Across the Globe for U.S. Historic Preservation in its Second 50 Years

Managing Aboriginal Cultural Landscapes in Canada: Saoyú-?ehdacho National Historic Site of Canada

By Lisa Prosper

Introduction

Saoyú-?ehdacho National Historic Site of Canada (NHSC) is one of the first designated Aboriginal cultural landscapes in Canada. Almost twenty years after its designation, work on the first Management Plan is underway. This presents a timely opportunity to reflect on the incremental management processes employed to date at the site and the changing context in which the new Management Plan is being developed. More significantly, it is an opportunity to highlight the cooperative management policy that is in place between the Sahtú Dene and Parks Canada to co-manage the cultural landscape as an “integrated whole over all time”¹, and the policy to follow the Aboriginal tradition of consensus decision making to guide the work of the Management Board and the Parties. Together, these processes and policies suggest a best practice for sustainable approaches to managing Aboriginal cultural landscapes.

Description

Saoyú and ?ehdacho are two large peninsulas that reach out into Great Bear Lake in Canada’s Northwest Territories. Located in Canada’s sub-arctic, they rise gradually from the surface of Great Bear Lake to flat and wide summits. Covered with open boreal forest, their perimeters are ringed by a series of raised beaches formed by the rebounding of the land following the retreat of glaciers. It is on these raised beaches that a majority of the archaeological evidence of pre-contact occupation can be found. In 1997, the two peninsulas were designated as one national historic site in recognition of the inextricable relationship between nature and culture they represent for the Sahtúgot’ine (Bear Lake People). For the Sahtúgot’ine, Saoyú and ?ehdacho are places alive with the history, stories, and teachings of their people and inseparable from their cultural and spiritual well-being.²



Figure 1: Coast line and shore, Saoyú-ᑭehdacho NHSC. Image: Parks Canada / F. Mueller

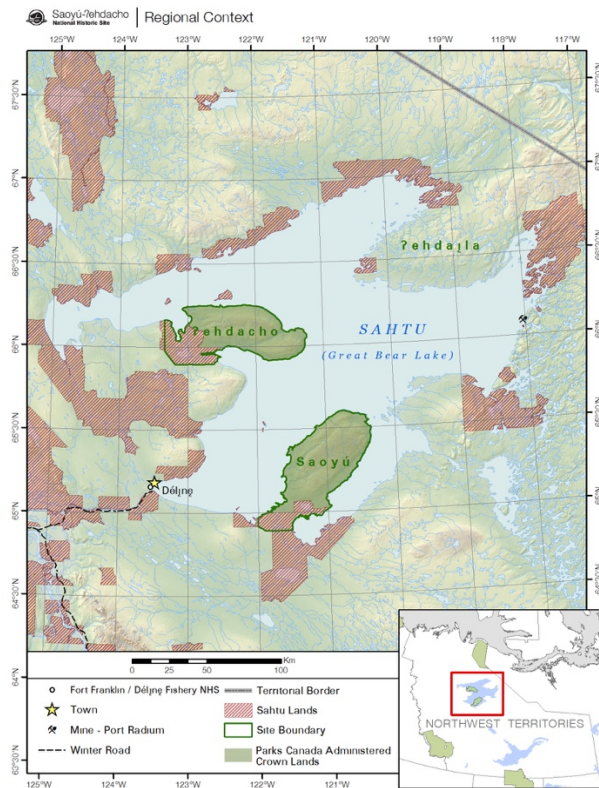


Figure 2: Saoyú-ᑭehdacho NHSC Regional Context Map, Image: Parks Canada.

Towards a Management Plan

Building Relationships

The new Management Plan under development for Saoyú-ᑭehdacho NHSC builds on a long and incremental process of relationship building between the Sahtú Dene and Parks Canada over the past twenty years. The process of working jointly on a number of formative and guiding

instruments (see table below) by the two main stakeholders, in cooperation with other interested partners such as the Northwest Territorial government, has strengthened the relationship among the various parties and contributed to the development of a shared understanding of the site over time. The preparation of each new instrument has provided the opportunity for additional meanings or values of the site to be articulated by the Sahtú Dene, the time and space for the organic (and unsolicited) expression of traditional knowledge to unfold, and the impetus to begin to formulate a management framework according to this deeper understanding of the site.

Date	Instrument Title
1993	The Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement
1998	Designation of Saoyú-ᑭehdacho as a National Historic Site
2000	Commemorative Integrity Statement
2005	'Water Heart': The Great Bear Lake Watershed Management Plan
2005	'One Trail' Report
2007	Protection under the Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy
2008	The Saoyú-ᑭehdacho NHSC Protected Area and Cooperative Management Agreement
2009	Appointment of the Management Board
2013	The Sahtú Land Use Plan
2014	State of Site Assessment
2015	<i>Draft Management Plan</i>

As a cultural landscape, Saoyú-ᑭehdacho is capable of supporting a complexity of values and interests and this incremental process of instrument creation has allowed these values to be more fully articulated over time. For example, an understanding of Saoyú-ᑭehdacho as a place of learning and healing as well as a sacred and living landscape is mutually confirmed in these instruments. Harvesting rights and rights to establish camps for harvesting are held alongside the recognition of the site's ecological value as a protected area. The instruments also reaffirm a common vision between the Parties and confirm that Saoyú-ᑭehdacho be managed as one whole entity. Accordingly, a cooperative Management Board has been agreed upon to preserve and protect the commemorative and ecological integrity of the site, and a policy of consensus decision making has been adopted.

Cooperative Management Board and Consensus Decision Making

The Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (1993)³ sets out the Déline Land Corporation (the holder of the Aboriginal title in the Sahtú territory), the Déline Renewable Resources Council and Parks Canada as the three parties responsible for the management of Saoyú-ᑭehdacho NHSC. The Saoyú-ᑭehdacho NHSC Protected Area and Cooperative Management Agreement (2008)⁴, based on the common vision agreed upon in the 'One Trail'

Report (2005)⁵, outlines the nature of the cooperative relationship between the three managing Parties and includes a set of management principles as follows:

- . that the Parties agree to cooperatively manage Saoyú-ʔehdacho as a whole;
- . to preserve, present and protect the heritage of Saoyú-ʔehdacho including Sahtúgot'ine traditional knowledge;
- . to contribute to the cultural well-being of the community of Déline and provide for and support the exercise of ecologically-sustainable cultural practices on the part of the Sahtúgot'ine including the exercise of participants' harvesting rights, the Sahtúgot'ine elders passing of heritage on to the younger generations of Sahtúgot'ine and the establishment and operation of teaching and healing camps at Saoyú-ʔehdacho;
- . and to include Sahtúgot'ine traditional knowledge in Saoyú-ʔehdacho management decisions.

The Agreement also sets out the composition of the Management Board (formed in 2009) as having three members from the Sahtú Dene (two from the Déline Land Corporation and one from the Déline Renewable Resources Council) and three members from Parks Canada. The Agreement further states that the Management Board shall make its decisions by consensus which is based on “listening, mutual respect and reconciliation of different perspectives into one coherent whole”.⁶

Articulating Values

The Commemorative Integrity Statement (2000)⁷ following the designation of Saoyú-ʔehdacho as a National Historic Site identifies the heritage values of the site as the cultural values of the Sahtú Dene expressed through the wholeness and environmental quality of the landscape that supports traditional lifestyle and land use activities, as well as the interrelationship between landscape, oral history, and the blending of the natural and spiritual worlds that defines the Sahtú Dene as a people. Oral traditions are identified as playing a significant role in keeping the history of the Sahtú Dene alive and in maintaining the importance of these lands to their people. The careful articulation of these values has assisted in the shared understanding of the site, and has meant a clearer path forward for the identification of management priorities.

Implementing Programs and Investing in Infrastructure

Since 2009, and despite not having a Management Plan in place, the Management Board has implemented programs and invested in infrastructure based on the expression of values in the Commemorative Integrity Statement (2004), the articulation of a common vision in the ‘One Trail’ Report (2005) and the identification of management principles in the Saoyú-ʔehdacho NHSC Protected Area and Cooperative Management Agreement (2008). To date, it has approved funding for annual cultural knowledge camps at Saoyú-ʔehdacho that affirm and support the transmission of traditional knowledge and traditional lifestyle activities from Elders to young people; it has invested in the building of a traditional log cabin to support the cultural knowledge camp; it has hired a Parks Canada site manager and a local management trainee; and it has supported other community led projects that focus on active transference of knowledge and perpetuation of traditional lifestyle activities. These activities have begun the preservation and cooperative management work of Saoyú-ʔehdacho on the ground resulting in a positive and legible expression of the co-management framework while creating some momentum toward the completion of a formal Management Plan.

Setting Management Priorities and Strategies

The most recent instrument to contribute to the development of a Management Plan for Saoyú-ʔehdacho is the State of Site Assessment (2014)⁸ that identifies the priorities and strategies for the management of the site as a reflection of the values already articulated in the earlier instruments. This first set of management priorities include Sahtúgot'ine well-being, the health and protection of the land, understanding, and awareness. These have been translated into five key strategies in the Draft Management Plan (2015)⁹ as follows:

- support Déline's Elders, and other, in their efforts to pass Sahtúgot'ine Heritage on to younger people;
- protect the land and its natural and cultural resources;
- research, monitor and document Traditional and scientific Knowledge of Saoyú-ʔehdacho;
- share the significance of Saoyú-ʔehdacho locally and nationally;
- develop the capacity of Sahtúgot'ine individuals, organizations and businesses.

In part, because of the long term investment in relationship building and deep understanding and articulation of the site achieved through the incremental processes and cooperative management policies developed over a twenty-year period, the Draft Management Plan has been reduced in size from the traditional 50-100 pages to 15-20 pages rendering it a more effective and useful document.

Conclusion

The protection and co-management of Saoyú-ʔehdacho has been identified as integral to the cultural well-being of the Sahtúgot'ine. A responsibility given to them by their ancestors, they retain their identity and preserve their culture through the fulfillment of these responsibilities. In accordance with these beliefs, the Sahtú Dene must play a central role in the management of Saoyú-ʔehdacho. Saoyú-ʔehdacho NHSC, therefore, is significant not only because it recognizes the interrelationship of the Sahtúgot'ine and the land, but also because of its incremental management processes, cooperative Management Board and policy of consensus decision making. Joining these different perspectives together in the management and care of Saoyú-ʔehdacho reflects both the shared commitment by the Sahtú Dene and Parks Canada to care for Saoyú-ʔehdacho on behalf of the Sahtúgot'ine and all other Canadians. Together, these processes and policies suggest a best practice for sustainable approaches to managing Aboriginal cultural landscapes and contribute to the ongoing process of reconciliation underway in Canada between its indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.



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¹ Saoyú-ᑭehdacho Draft Management Plan (2015), <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/nt/Saoyu-ehdacho/site/plan.aspx>, accessed June 2016, pg. 1.

² Commemorative Integrity Statement (2000), <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/nt/Saoyu-ehdacho/site/cis.aspx>, accessed June 2016.

³ The Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100031147/1100100031164>, accessed June 2016.

⁴ The Saoyú-ᑭehdacho National Historic Site of Canada Protected Area and Cooperative Management Agreement (2008), <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/nt/Saoyu-ehdacho/site/agr.aspx>, accessed June 2016.

⁵ Nesbitt, Tom. 'One Trail' Report (2005), <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/nt/Saoyu-ehdacho/site/sentier-trail.aspx>, accessed June 2016.

⁶ Saoyú-ᑭehdacho Draft Management Plan (2015), *op cit.*, pg. 9.

⁷ Commemorative Integrity Statement (2000), *op cit.*

⁸ State of Site Assessment (2014) as discussed in the Saoyú-ᑭehdacho Draft Management Plan (2015), *op cit.*

⁹ Saoyú-ᑭehdacho Draft Management Plan (2015), *op cit.*