

6th Northern Aboriginal Seminar

The "Plan Nord" and the 50% Challenge

Setting the milestones to achieve a new conservation and development model in Quebec

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DThe 6th Northern Aboriginal Seminar was held from August 9 to 13, 2010, at Mushuau-nipi, on George River, some 250 km northeast of Schefferville. More than a historical site, Mushuau-nipi has been gathering place for the Innu for as long as they can remember, in particular to hunt caribou. During the seminar, Serge Ashini-Goupil and his people of Aventure Ashini(1) have immersed us into the Innu ancestral lifestyle. Caribou and salmon occupied a place of honor on the menu.

Organized jointly with the PEW Environment Group and the Canadian Boreal Initiative (2), the seminar was aimed at determining the conditions to a successful conservation and development model in Quebec within the framework of the Plan Nord. Let us recall that the Government of Quebec had committed to shield 50% of the land covered by the Plan Nord from industrial activities (forest, mining, energy), of which 12% will be dedicated to the preservation and creation of protected areas.

Plan Nord is defined as a development and conservation project covering the whole of Quebec situated north of the 49th parallel, including Nunavik but not Anticosti

Island and the northern part of the Gaspé Peninsula. The area it covers accounts for almost 72% of the Quebec's entire land base or a total of 1.2 million square kilometers. That is twice the surface area of France.

A working document published by the *Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune* on November 6, 2009, defines the vision of the Plan Nord as an approach to sustainable development leading to an exemplary project integrating energy, mining, forestry, tourism, transportation and wildlife development, and promoting the growth of local communities in a way consistent with their culture and identity.

About thirty persons attended the seminar, representing Aboriginal circles, the mining and forest industry, non-governmental organizations (Greenpeace, Nature Québec and other NGOs), academicians and the Associated Deputy Minister for the Plan Nord. We were pleased to hear that the representatives of the participating NGOs consider Raglan as a model mine, mostly because of the Raglan Agreement, which includes profit-sharing measures, encourages the selection and hiring of Inuit workers and businesses, and makes provision for environment monitoring.

Several conditions were defined during the seminar (conservation of 50% of the land), including the following:

- We must not repeat the mistakes of the past.
- The Plan Nord must be a project in which the entire Quebec society, north and south, must become involved.
- We must initiate an integrated planning that factors in development and conservation variables.
- We have to strike a balance between economic, environmental and social.
- We must have a good knowledge of our environment and of conventional and Aboriginal science (biodiversity, cultural value, energy/forest/mining potential) in order to make enlightened decisions with regard to land development and conservation and to get the most of it on a sustainable basis.
- We must encourage and facilitate the involvement of the Aboriginals beyond mere consultation.
- We must use a different approach with the Inuit, Cree, Naskapi, Innu, Algonquin and Atlitikamek to meet the challenge of accommodating the dissimilarities between these Nations.
- We must make room for flexibility in our final conservation and development choices so that future generations can adjust and tailor them to their needs.

The conclusions of the 6th Northern Aboriginal Seminar will be presented in the coming months to the Discussion Table for the Plan Nord Partners so that the initiated process can move forward.

1 - <http://www.ashini.com/fr/innu/>
2 - <http://www.borealcanada.ca/index-f.php>

