

TRAPPER TRAINING AND FIRE ECOLOGY PROGRAM 2005

By: **DANNY BEAULIEU - Renewable Resource Officer II**

INTRODUCTION

From January 11 to February 25, 2005, RWED, North Slave Region ran the fourth year of the Trapper Training and Fire Ecology Program at Bliss Lake. Preparation for the North Slave Trapper Training and Fire Ecology Program for 2005 included construction of a 12x16 cabin by the fire crew for Elders. As well, fish were hung in October. Meetings were held with the RWED officers to discuss the program and activities for the winter. To run the program, RWED North Slave Region provided use of the Bliss Lake camp; six snow machines, six toboggans, 60 Traps, 50 marten boxes, fishnets and other trapping and fishing equipment.

This year, participants came from the Sir John Franklin High School, North Slave Young Offenders, Yellowknife Correctional Centre (YCC) and Mildred Hall School. A four-day trapper training and fire ecology program was run twice with each group and once with YCC.

The intent of the Trapper Training Program was to teach youth and adults to trap and learn about land survival techniques and traditional knowledge. The program also includes assessing the effects of fire on the local furbearer population by comparing the catch between a trap line set in a burned area and one set in the green area. As well, the marten carcasses were collected for later DNA evaluation and stomach content analysis to see if there are differences due to habitat.

Specific objectives were:

- ◇ Conduct year four of a five-year study on the return of fur bearing animals in the burn area
- ◇ Record data
- ◇ Teach respect for the land and animals

- ◇ Hunt caribou and make dry meat
- ◇ Trap mink, marten, lynx and fox
- ◇ Survive on the land
- ◇ Maintain equipment
- ◇ Skin, flesh, stretch and dry pelts
- ◇ Use firearms safely
- ◇ Set nets and make dry fish

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

RWED Officers :	Danny Beaulieu Janice Ziemann Patricia Handley Roger Fraser	Yellowknife Dettah Yellowknife Yellowknife
Trapper Trainer:	Edward Doctor	Ndilo
Elders:	Modest Sangris Therese Sangris	Dettah Dettah
Camp Cook:	Therese Doctor	Ndilo
Sir John Franklin School:	16 Students	
Millard Hall School:	20 Students	
NSYF	8 participants	
YCC:	6 participants	
Chaperones:	15 for the groups	

FOUR DAY TRAPPER TRAINING AND FIRE ECOLOGY PROGRAM

On Monday, food and supplies are bought for the camp, fuel for the snowmobiles. The four-day program is run Tuesday to Friday as follows:

Day 1

- travel to Camp
- chainsaw safety
- cut wood
- get the camp ready
- set nets for fish
- fire safety
- discuss fire ecology (studies)
- demonstrate how to handle quick kill traps safely

Day 2

- set or run marten and mink traps (unburned)
- hunt and clean caribou
- set rabbit snares
- teach respect for land and animals (Elder)
- teach map reading and use of GPS
- make dry meat

Day 3

- set or run marten and mink traps (burn)
- run nets
- clean fish and make dry fish
- cut wood
- skin and stretch furs
- discuss wildlife act and regulations (trapping & hunting)
- after dinner conduct fire feeding ceremony

Day 4

- break camp
- gas up snowmobiles and load toboggans
- travel home

ACTIVITIES

TRAPPING

Conducted by: RWED Officer, Edward Doctor

The students were first shown the different types of approved humane traps and snares that meet the requirements of the Agreement on International Humane Trap Standards. Students were shown how to make sets to trap different types of furbearers and took notes on the techniques they were shown. They checked traps along the trapline and learned how to reset any traps where animals were caught or the trap was sprung. Trapped animals are brought back to the cabin and the students are taught how to skin, stretch and dry the hides. They also learned about shipping fur to auction houses and what factors are considered in grading and setting the price for fur.

FIRE EFFECTS ON TRAPPING

Conducted by: RWED Officer

The students were taught about the role fire plays in a boreal forest, starting with the components that make fires start, and what the different factors are that determine how fire is going to behave in an area. To investigate the effects of fire on fur bearing animals, 21 traps were set along two 10 km trap lines set in the burned and unburned areas, respectively. The number, type and location of each animal caught were recorded. The marten and mink traps were set in the second week of January and picked up in the last week of February. During the seven weeks, we caught two mink, five marten and one wolverine in the burned area and two mink and seven marten in the unburned area. Like the previous year, equal amounts of fur were caught in the burned and unburned areas. Track counts were conducted to determine relative abundance of furbearers and their prey (i.e. mice, squirrels, rabbits).

FIREARM SAFETY AND CHAINSAW SAFETY

Conducted by: RWED Officer

Firearm safety was explained and shown to the students. The proper ways to hold, store and load a rifle were demonstrated. All students had a try at shooting a rifle at a target. The students were taught how to use the chainsaw safely before cutting wood.

HUNTING

Conducted by: RWED Officer, Edward Doctor and Modeste Sangris

They were taught how to approach the caribou, so they don't run and where to shoot the caribou. We would hunt caribou on the trap line and shoot one caribou with each group. The students learned how to skin, gut caribou and to put the guts on land. Once back at camp Therese showed them how to make dry meat.

WILDERNESS SAFETY AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Conducted by: RWED Officer and Elder Modeste Sangris

Wilderness safety included giving the students some examples of what equipment would be needed or useful if out in the bush for either short or long periods of time. The students were shown how to build a lean-to and cutting new trails. They were showed how to start a fire using materials found in the bush and then required to make their own fires.

The students were shown how to set a fish net under ice and identify the different species of fish in Bliss Lake. They were also taught to make dry fish.

The last evening, we had the feeding of the fire ceremony. The ceremony is a thanks to the Creator for safe travel and use of the land for food and shelter.

MAPPING AND GPS

Conducted by: RWED Officer

Mapping and GPS are very important when travelling on the land. The students were taught the correct way to use a GPS. Maps were used to mark the trap lines in the burn and unburned trap lines and GPS was used to mark the locations of all the trap sets (Appendix A).

SAMPLE COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Conducted by: Dean Cluff (Regional Biologist)

Tissue samples were obtained from all carcasses collected during trapping training activities. Samples for monitoring environmental contaminant loads will be shipped to

a laboratory for analysis. Genetic samples (DNA) will be stored for future genetic diversity studies. Sex and age ratios, reproductive rates, specific parasite loads, and diet will be assessed from examination of carcasses. The results will be provided to the Yellowknives Dene Band.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

**Conducted by: RWED Officer, Edward Doctor
and Modeste Sangris**

Students helped cut wood for the stoves in the cabin and tents. They were taught how to gas up and put oil into the snowmobiles as well as how to drive snow machines properly and hitch up and load toboggans. Some students did not have experience driving snow machines, and as a result there were a few accidents and damage to snow machines. Students learned how to identify tracks made by different animals.

PROJECT SUMMARY

This program provides an excellent introduction to winter trapping, fishing, survival techniques and an opportunity for students to become involved the research portion of the program, by assenting the affects of fire on the local furbearer population. All students received a certificate of recognition. The students showed interest and appreciation for what RWED had to offer. Each participant felt it was a worthwhile project and that it should continue.

There is genuine interest and need for this program as the same organizations who participated in the first year came back to participate in the next three years. Other groups have also expressed interest and it will be a challenge to accommodate them all.

Again there was little difference in the amount of fur caught in the burned and unburned areas and this information will be passed on to local trappers next year during the fall workshop.

RECOMMENDATIONS

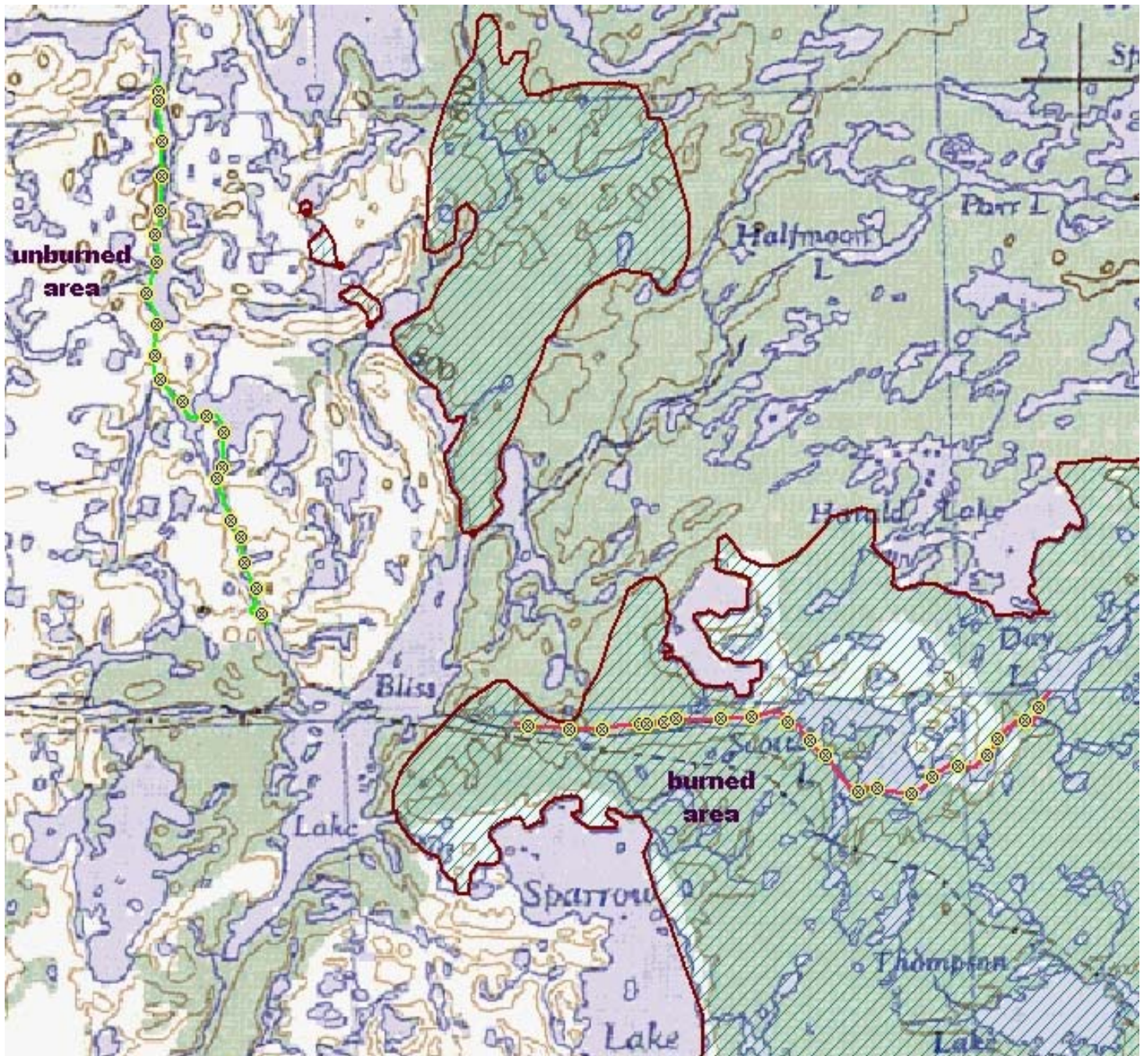
- 1) RWED staff should meet with elders prior to the onset of the program and duties and activities that elders will be responsible for should be discussed and agreed to.
- 2) One other activity to consider for next year is preparing caribou hides, Elders could teach this activity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RWED and DIAND for funded the Trapper Training Program 2004/05 that was held at Bliss Lake. I would like to thank all the North Slave Region, RWED Officers Roger Fraser, Trish Handley and Janice Ziemann for their support and advice.

Thanks to Elder Modeste Sangris, who provided everyone with interesting and priceless traditional knowledge. His ability to communicate this information to the youth was greatly appreciated.

Thanks to our Trapper Trainer Edward Doctor for the use of his trapping area, his knowledge on trapping and his ability to travel on the land. He made setting traps and traveling on land fun for the students.



Appendix "A" Trap lines and trap locations in burn and unburned