“The Re-Birth of a Nation” the Kelly Lake Cree Peoples

THE REBIRTH OF A NATION
THE KELLY LAKE CREE PEOPLES

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Throughout this background paper, I will use the Cree people as an example because that is the culture that I am a part of and I was fortunate to be raised with the traditional teachings of the Cree. Therefore my combined knowledge base comes both from the oral history of the elders who raised me as well as from my education. I do not however, purport to speak on behalf of the Kelly Lake Cree Nation or the Rocky Mountain Cree Tribe.

**Introduction**

In most First Nation communities, anonymity is the basis for preserving traditional knowledge of the land. For most part, historic records refer to First Nations people in the most marginal terms and many of the artefacts in Provincial museums today are inconsequentially referred and labelled such as “Plains Cree arrow” but does not identify to whom it may have belonged or particular tribes to which it may have come from. The purpose of this background paper is not only to outline on the surface history of Kelly Lake Cree peoples but also to find out who these people were. A genealogy was developed not only for the Kelly Lake Cree Nation land claim but also for the close relations and more distant association with aboriginal families could be studied. The requisites in providing a basis of terms under Section 35 of the Constitution Act the term First Nation and Indian references to what is defined as “Aboriginal”. For the Kelly Lake Cree peoples I will use the term “Indian” and hope I will not offend any of my Cree relations.

**Methodology and Data Limitations:**

The purpose of the background on Kelly Lake was to determine the use and occupation of the area by the Kelly Lake Indians within the period of living memory. A variety of forms of traditional ecological knowledge and traditional land use information were sought. The location of hunting, fishing, and trapping resources, local family place names, the sites of residency, the travels of community members, and areas of preferred use were mapped through individual map biographies. The interview format was open-ended. This design allowed for elaboration of the meaning and importance of resources use as well as for the description of resources location.

In total there were 7 elders interviewed who are the representative body of each Indian family name of the Kelly Lake community. There is much more latter and current oral history that has not yet been documented on paper.
Kelly Lake is a Cree speaking community, approximate lineage 800 Cree speaking people, in northern eastern British Columbia, which formed a permanent Indian community in its current location (55°N 15°W) sometime near or before the turn of the 18th century. This date should be viewed as a point in a continuum of use and occupancy, and not as definitive of occupancy. What is being considered is a gradual movement from nomadic to more settled existence.

The successes that the Kelly Lake people share can be attributed largely to a recognizable Cree culture and language. The legendary stories of how their ancestors first came to settle in this area inspire the Kelly Lake people of a coming together of three tribes, the Iroquois, Cree and Beaver that have shaped the lifeblood into present day Kelly Lake Indians.

To date there is a total of 125 Cree speaking people who reside in Kelly Lake. Another approximate 675 are direct descendants from the distinctive Kelly Lake Cree peoples who moved to nearby towns, motivated to better their employment, housing, health care, and post-secondary education situations. The Kelly Lake Cree descendents reside in nearby towns such as Pouce Coupe, Dawson Creek, Chetwynd, Fort St. John, Hudson’s Hope, Moberly Lake, Prince George British Columbia and some as far as Calgary, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Edmonton, Whitecourt and nearby Grande Prairie, Alberta. (Insert: Kelly Lake Cree Traditional Territorial/Indian Settlement map)

**Indian Land Use and Background:**

Kelly Lake itself is located 1.6 kilometres inside the B.C. border, 56 kilometres south of Dawson Creek and 40 kilometres west of Beaverlodge, Alberta. Kelly Lake is circular in shape, and is about two kilometres wide and is fed by many underground streams. The Rocky Mountains are to the west of Kelly Lake. That is where the name Rocky Mountain Cree stems from As’in’i’wa’chi Niy’yaw Tribe. The Kelly Lake trapping grounds included watersheds of the Athabasca, Peace, Smoky, Kiskatinaw, Redwillow, Murray, Belcourt Creek, Sukunka and Wapati Rivers. The hunting and Indian Settlements are shown in pdf form within KLCN traditional sensitive use areas within this website.

The location of Kelly Lake was important for their ancestors, it offered nearby sufficient watersheds, mountains to the west, a rich and diverse animal population of moose, elk, bear, wolf, wolverine, lynx, beaver, mink, martin, hare, weasel, otter and waterfowl thrived in this environment.
The region’s carnivore and omnivore populations include grizzly bear, black bear, lynx, wolf, wolverine, marten, and coyote. Ungulate populations include moose, elk, caribou, mule and whitetail deer. Moose is still the principal meat hunted and was plentiful back in time however due to oilfield exploration the animal habitat of rabbits, wildfowl, and fish are becoming scarce. Fishing was done year round and ice fishing in the winter was important but the lake is polluted due to increasing oilfield activity. Dolly varden, rainbow trout, northern pike, and mountain whitefish are present in low numbers in many of the rivers and streams.

The major resources, nearby Rock Mountains, the Plains Cree Indian culture before European contact was based on hunting, fishing, gathering and inter-tribal trading. The social groupings generally consisted of small extended families or bands of 50 to 100 members, guided by men recognized for their skills in hunting, oratory, religion or medicine. It was a difficult life closely attuned to the seasonal environment. Families and bands travelled great distances on hunting and trading expeditions. *(Ian Getty 1998)*

The generations of men of Kelly Lake were expert hunters and trappers. The economic component of hunting, trapping, and fishing has declined as Kelly Lake Cree people continue to regain some control of areas important for hunting, tapping and gathering. When non-aboriginal people first ventured into the Peace River region of northeastern British Columbia, an Athabaskan-speaking people of Beaver, or Dene za, descent encountered them. To the west of the Beaver people lived the closely related Sekani, to the north the Athapaskan Slavey, and to the east the Chipewayans *(Riddington 1981)*. It is suggested that the Beaver moved into the Peace River region in the mid-eighteenth century after being driven out of their native Athabasca River region by the Cree (Knisteneaux). The Peace River assumed its name from the Treaty made between the two tribes at Peace Point. In turn, the Beaver pushed their new neighbors, the Sekani, further west into the Rocky Mountains. *(Fladmark 1975)*. By 1899, Algonkian speaking Suealteaux Indians from the Great Lakes area of Eastern Canada had arrived, and would make their home in the South Peace area *(Leonard 1995)*.

This account substantiates oral history of the Kelly Lake Cree peoples who inter-married with nearby tribes of north-eastern British Columbia who were, and still remain, hunters and gatherers. They were nomadic and thus they’re economic realization of land’s resources was balanced with its sustainable utilization. Oral accounts
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suggest that life prior to the influence of European contact in the South Peace followed the cycles of the seasons and of animal migrations, and the cultural patterns of resources utilization that had existed in the Eastern Slopes and Peace Region for thousands of years. Tools for both utility and survival were furnished from rock, wood and antler. Deadfall traps, snares and brush fences, designed for efficiency and mobility, were utilized to trap small mammals such as the hare and the beaver. An abundance of animals provided food, furs and hides. Fish were procured and cached for winter use. An acuminate knowledge of plants yielded both medicines and food. (Insert pictures of important plants, trails)

Historical Information

Ancestry of Kelly Lake descendants goes deep into the earliest stratum of Canadian history, which emerged from oral history of nearby tribes, fur traders, and guides from the Northwest Company in the early 1800s. Patriarchs of Chaughawaga Iroquois came west to the Rocky Mountains nearly two hundred years ago and embarked on a legacy of history of descendents, which formed the backbone of a growing community called Kelly Lake.

The location of important cultural resources areas and related archaeological sites in fact provide evidence that there was both aboriginal presence and traditional and cultural activities that occurred in the area prior to the 1800s.

Ten thousand years ago, during the late Pleistocene and early Holocene, as the Laurentide and Cordilleran ice sheets receded from the British Columbia landscape, small groups of people traveled along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Newly re-colonized flora and fauna often maximized along the shores of proglacial lakes and along major waterways, provided resources for hunter-gatherer population. Archaeological evidence of human occupation has been recovered from a number of sites in northeastern British Columbia. (Fladmark et al 1988; Kauffman et al 1990).

One of the major trading routes the Kelly Lake ancestors trekked, based on evidence that families squatted at Flyingshot Lake for a short time, and to what is now known as Grande Prairie, Alberta, a map shows inhabitants Adam Calliou along with his brother, William, and Esau with other close relations, Narcisse Belcourt, Celestine Gladu and Jean-Baptise Letendre, later chose to go north to Kelly Lake and some even as far as Jackfish Lake, B.C.
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In the history of Kelly Lake Cree peoples, the significance of Flyingshot Lake has become evident, as many of their ancestors were born there. In August 20, 1907, compiled from surveys done at Flyingshot Lake, several of these families mentioned in the official plan as occupants identified are mentioned later at Kelly Lake.

In the letters of a biologist, S. Prescott Grey, who conducted a survey from Jasper to Hudson’s Hope, B.C. in 1914 in a study of bighorn sheep. In his dairy he writes:

One Calliou, of Iroquois ancestry was reported to have travelled to Grande Prairie alongside Alex Monkman (which Monkman Park is named after this man) in 1898. In oral tradition, the Indians identified as the three settlers were descendents of Calliou Iroquois who were making their way back towards the Yellowhead Pass via Pouce Coupe, Beaverlodge, and Grande Prairie, Alberta. The three Iroquois Indians settled on a nearby lake, a round body of water about a mile across, fairly deep, with a gravel bottom and drains a shallow basin of about 60 square miles. It is both fed and drained by Steeprock Creek, and lies in a little pocket between and heights of land forming the watershed of the Kiskatinaw, Red Willow and Upper Beaverlodge Rivers.
Reports of a Alberta-B.C. Boundary Surveyor during the summers of 1920 and 1922 identifies a little lake southbound on the 120th Meridian of Longitude, (named Fritton Lake) which is known today as Kelly Lake, this lake lay just a mile to the west of the line at 55 degree 15 N. Latitude. Although nobody really knows why it was called Kelly Lake and there is no clear consensus about the origin of the lakes name, oral history tells us it may perhaps have been an altered form of “Calliou” lake, due to its first inhabitants of this community.

In Kelly Lake there was a frontier lifestyle and people were utilized for their knowledge of the land and their ability to speak Cree and other Indian languages. In the north, and out west near the mountains as well, the Kwarakwantha descendents of Louis Calliou raised horses and used them to make a living as guides and outfitters. These descendents became quite well known as early pioneers of Grande Prairie in the early 1900s.

Louise Calliou (1782-1854) (Iroquois name Kwarakwantha or Kariio) with present day descendent last names, which include Calliou, Callihoo, Callion and Callioux, oral history tells of over two centuries of thousands of living descendents throughout the Lac. Lesser Slave Lake, Kreskas Hills, Peace, Grande Cache and Kelly Lake, B.C. area.
It is evident that our people trekked a great deal west of the Rocky Mountains. It is noteworthy the Iroquois were in the area since 1790’s and were using the Yellowhead pass trading with other nearby Indian like the Ktunaxa and Shuswap Tribes. It was reported in 1803 by Peter Fidler, a mapmaker of the Hudson Bay Company fur trade, there were 110 Iroquois-Cree on the Peace River near the Rocky Mountains. This substantiates why our people began to migrate into
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the Peace from Jasper House in the early 1800s. Part of our history derives from Iroquois peoples coming to the Plains intermarrying with the Cree much largely due to the **Indian Relocation Act**, which was passed in 1830, this act encouraged the eastern tribes to trade their lands with the government for new lands on the Plains.

Thomas Karaconti Calliou, L'Iroquoise, b-1806 Jasper's House, (Alberta) died April, 1876 Fort Dunvegan, (Alberta), son, Louis Kwarakwentha Calliou L'Iroquoise, b-1782, Iroquois Village of Chaughawaga near Montreal, Quebec, d-1846 and Marie Katis of the Sekanaise Tribe (Montagnais Nation); married Lizette Karaconti. It is significant that after more than ten years of use by Louise Kwarakwantha and his band of people, David Thompson, would claim discovery of the Athabasca pass in 1811. On January 11, 1811, Thomas Iroquois showed David Thompson the mountain pass to the Columbia. At the junction of the Miette and Athabasca Rivers established for mountain traders and renamed Jasper House (Alberta) in 1813. The Iroquois had been using the pass for over ten years. After 1811, 75 of Louise’s people would trek to Fort Augustus, Alberta. Jasper's first house was located at Brule Lake then moved in 1830 to Devona Sidin.

**As mentioned in his notes by Dr. James Hector of the Palliser Expedition, ascending the Athabasca River toward Jasper House, recorded January 30, 1859:**

..found a camp, four tents of Iroquois...These.. were originally trappers in the service of the N.W. Company, and on the junction of that company the Hudson Bay Company (1821) they turned “freemen”...they all talk the Cree language besides their own, and have latterly intermarried a good deal with the Cree of Lac Ste. Anne.

Other families had drifted in, part of the westward migration of Indians who came as a result of the fur trade who were not Treaty Indians. There were other tribes who migrated to the Peace as well around the turn of the last century, the Saulteau families of Moberly Lake, B.C. who migrated from Manitoba. The Saulteau were not one of the original signatories of Treaty 8. They adhered to Treaty 8 in 1914.

**As told by Tribal Chief Cliff Calliou, May 2005:**

“**My father Johnny told me stories of how our ancestors who were Iroquois came to the west and intermarried with the Cree. There is oral history documented with the elders of both the Secwepemc and Ktunaxa tribes of B.C. around 1824 that tells about our Iroquois**
ancestors who traded with those tribes near Tete Jeune Cache, B.C. to what is now known as Mt. Robson area near Jasper National Park.

A significant number of their ancestors travelled through Lac. Ste. Anne near Edmonton, which later would become known as a Catholic pilgrimage, today Catholic Aboriginal people still regard this holy land. The Kelly Lake Cree peoples travelled to Lac. Ste. Anne to get baptized, married and some to bury their people.

As told by Cree elder Jeaudenais Gladue, 1993:

“Catholic priests came to Kelly Lake about forty years ago, but it wasn’t until Father Jungbluth built a church that people started to be Catholic. My father Urbain Gladue told me we came to Kelly Lake so the government wouldn’t try to force us to be reserve Indians.”

Most of the Kelly Lake Cree ancestors were from Jasper and went to Lac St. Anne to gather, visit their families, get married or baptize their children. An example of this:

Adam Calliou, born in 1851, Lac Ste Anne (Alberta) son of Thomas Karaconti Calliou, (1830-1874) and Mary Findley, who was born in 1827, Jasper House (Alberta). Adam married Christine Gladu in 1871 in Lac Ste Anne (Alberta), second marriage to Isabelle Letendre aka Mooshwan (1851-1883) and 3rd marriage in 1883, Veronique Gladu, who was born in 1857 Lac Ste Anne (Alberta).

Magloire Belcourt, born 1855 married Constance born 1860 and were in Lac Ste Anne in 1901.

Elder Archie Letendre, who is now deceased, 1980:

“ We are all related here, even some of our people inter-married with the nearby reserve Horselake who are Cree, and one woman who inter-married with Isidore Gladue came from the Beaver tribe who are part of the Saulteau people of Moberly Lake, B.C. The Indian agents never came this far, that was OK with us because we never wanted to be owned by the government anyway.”

Oral traditions also tell us that because the Indians had less contact with the missionary schools and missions, they found Kelly Lake to be a place of escape.
Elder Albert Hambler, April 2000:

“The Cree people hid here (Kelly Lake) so that we would be allowed to still speak our Cree language.” The Indians of Kelly Lake lived off the land their whole lives, hunting and trapping still today.”

In the 1960s, it was found that the British Columbia Government had put a timber “reserve” on the land, a prohibition against cutting any trees. The Indians could not get title to the land. Their elders have also said the government imposed a timber reserve on the forests to deny them the privilege of cutting logs on their own land to build or upgrade their log homes.

Elder Jeaudenais Gladue, April 2002:

“By the early 1900s our ancestors had built houses on the shores of Kelly Lake. I was born in 1924, and my father Urbain Gladue had his own land. Back then we called it a homestead. They used to build houses with log cabins.”

Living in a remote location, far from medical services, with no services except a school and execrably bad roads, the Kelly Lake Indians continued to live off the land, hunting and trapping. In the 1950’s, many elders were opposed to the effects of the Indian Agent, neither then nor later did the early settlers or government impose a reserve on the Kelly Lake Indians. By the 1960’s the government came in to Kelly Lake introducing the welfare system. The Indians of Kelly Lake were mostly of Cree ancestry, the families were given names by the Catholic church such as Gladue, Belcourt, Calliou, Desjarlais, Letendre, Gauthier and Campbell, these families descendents still remain in the Kelly Lake community. The other indication the Kelly Lake Indians roamed the area is the evidence of nearby lakes and watersheds which today are named after their ancestors, such as Belcourt Creek and Calliou Lake. Similarly mountains nearby mountains are named Mt. Gauthier and Mt. Hamelin.

Records shows the first students at Kelly Lake School in 1923:

6
Name/ Age:
Henry Belcourt 14
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Billy Gladu 14
George Hamelin 11
Colin Gladu 11
Adolphus Gladu 9
Alec Gladu 8
Sarah Campbell 14
David Gray 7
Alfred Campbell 9
Jimmie Letendre 6
Mary Belcourt 7
Josephine Gladu 6

Today oral history is an important influence in the guidance of their culture, and traditions of the Cree people.

As stated by Cree elder and Tribal Chief Cliff Calliou of Kelly Lake who talks about importance of spirituality:

“My great great grandfather Louise Calliou (Kwarakwantha) family was a headman from the Iroquois Confederacy- today we would refer to him as a Tribal Chief. In those days there is no distinction between what is a leader. If you are a born with a clan, that clan remains yours throughout your life. It is difficult because the government has told us we have to prove that we are Indian. We have always lived off the land since time immemorial, we have a culture and a language, and we still maintain our traditions. We have never given up our aboriginal rights and title to this land. Today we still hold ceremonies although the government took that away from our people, that is why our people hid from the government in Kelly Lake.”

Napoleon Thomas was an Iroquois-Cree headman of a large family who resided on the N.E. Quarter of Section 25, Township 78. He had been settled there since 1891, seven or eight years before the first white settler, Hector Tremblay, located in the Pouce Coupe vicinity. Some surviving members of the family are known as “Napoleon’s”, according to old Indian custom. Natives had no hereditary surnames until missionaries or treaty-makers, which often used the father’s personal name to designate members of a family group on treaty or church records, assigned them them. The Napoleon Thomas family have earned the title of "first settlers" and "old timers" of the Peace region. Several Iroquois-Cree descendants still live in the Peace area and others around Moberly Lake, B.C.

As testified by Dave Calliou, elder of the Kelly Lake community in 1979 he was 86 years old at the time:
Calliou: Well, as you know, each place that the Indians at that time, you still see it, each place that the Indians goes to, one place is Flying Shot, as you’ve got two families, that was where they settled. There was a lot of game and trapping south of there towards the Wapiti, and geese and ducks as you say.

You see, they flew across from.... There’s a string of lakes -- Bear Lake and Flying Shot, etc. There’s a string of lakes and these ducks and geese just flew across, and these people, stayed, O.K.? The white man came along and wanted to move in there, which they did. To get away from them we’d keep moving, keep moving. And that’s how they were moving.

Now, you’ll find them as far as the end of Moberly Lake, and you’ll find them at Kelly Lake. They can’t go any further, there’s no place else, and pretty soon they’ll be pushed out of there too, so that’s the whole story, that’s how they keep moving.

Changes over-time

In the 1960s, things started to change in Kelly Lake, which at the time was made up of log cabins, a one-room schoolhouse which was given to the church in 1925, previously owned by William Calliou (1852-1937), to accommodate for the increased student population in Kelly Lake.

In the 1980s, the Cree people became increasingly concerned about “aboriginal rights and title” to the land. One of the first devastating impacts was a large mine corporation, the Coal Division of Petro Canda, Monkman Pass Coal Project, south of Tumbler Ridge, later proved to have huge environmental impacts on Kelly Lake Cree traditional territory. In the year 2000 the community still had no telephones or running water. Currently with the increase in oil and gas activity, roads are being constructed, mountains to the west are being destroyed (coal mines), important hunting and trapping areas are being destroyed, as the community of Kelly Lake has become a major transportation route between Alberta and Tumbler Ridge, B.C.

Today the increase in traffic has led to a decline in game trails, important gathering areas, berry picking areas, and has reduced water levels in creeks and streams. With the recent resources development, oil and gas in the area, the community is fearful of losing its Cree traditional livelihood. What is more complicated any
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Traditional land use sites information and associated Traditional Ecological Knowledge is not being acknowledged as an equal tool of examining the damage in these areas.

**Domination of Organizations in Kelly Lake**

In the late 1960s aboriginal organizations appeared in Kelly Lake to explore the possibilities to address the needs of this isolated community. Some of the Indians motivated by indulgence moved toward being part of Metis organizations and Non-status Indian organizations. There may have been an interaction between Indians groups and Europeans beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century however a symbiotic relationship never surfaced nor was alliances with nearby tribes deemed necessary, as the Indians of Kelly Lake had proved to be self-sufficient. Their ancestors intermarried with both the Beaver and Iroquois Indians. The half-breeds may have been produced in the latter part of the 19th century but would not have thrived within Treaty 8 territory of 1899; at that time the half-breeds would have found it very difficult to secure a position of economic and cultural value within the Peace area.

**As stated by elder Galena Gladue:**

"Métis" was never a common term in the old days. It was only after the 1980s generation, that some of our women began marrying white men. These children today do not refer to themselves as Metis because in our Indian way if you speak your Cree langue and have a culture that is what you are. Your not going to be accepted by the white man even if your part of them. They will always see you as an Indian. All my grandchildren speak Cree and some of my great grand children are half-white. That does not make them Metis, they are proud to be Cree.”

Kelly Lake is an Indian community, Indians under the meaning of section 91 (24) of the Constitution Act 1867, and aboriginal persons within the meaning of section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982. Currently there are no direct descendants from the Red River Metis nor any genealogy has been found to substantiate Metis origin in Kelly Lake. What has been found is speculation from professional bias or interested scholars of Metis accounts who portray Kelly Lake Indians living a Metis lifestyle. What is more interesting in Gerry Andrews book, the Metis Outpost he writes, “Census data for them (Kelly Lake Indians) remain obscure.” *(Page 2 of the Metis Outpost, Gerry Andrews.)*

**As stated by Tribal Chief Cliff Calliou, May 2005:**
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“A long time ago our people didn’t write or speak English. They were asked to sign important documents with an X. The first white settlers to come here who have documented their given names by the Catholics came in the 1920s. There were many Indians who were cheated out of signing away their land; the Michel Reserve is a fine example of people being taken advantage of by the government paying Indian nominal fees for their land. It was fraud; our ancestors did not understand what they were signing.”

A majority of the existence of the Rocky Mountain Cree peoples came through a vast journey travelling from Jasper through the Rocky Mountains to the existing community in Kelly Lake. Some squatted at Flyingshot Lake but their stay was short lived after white settlers had flooded the Grande Prairie area in 1916. In Grande Cache area some of the descendants of their ancestors exist today, lineage of the Rocky Mountain Cree. This time maps the Cree, Iroquois and Beaver tribes forming inter-relationships that helped shape Kelly Lake. The fur trade was established in the Upper Peace River part of the Cree traditional territory in the 1700s. During the early 1800s, Chaughawaga Iroquois from Lower Canada came to the west to trade with the Beaver and Cree tribes. The story of the Iroquois free traders that arrived in the west in the early 1800s derives from this timeline and historical accounts of families who inter-married with the Iroquois establish this timeframe.

Political Synopsis:

The late 1960s and early 1970s also brought political activism to Kelly Lake. For instance, a chapter of the Union of British Columbia Métis and Non-Status Indians was formed in Kelly Lake in 1968. The organization changed its name to United Native Nations (UNN) and made its membership open to all Native people. Also about this time, the British Columbia Association of Non Status Indians (BCANSI) was formed in March 1969 in Vancouver by H.A. (Butch) Smitherman and three other Métis and one Non-Status First Nation person. This organization dealt with issues effecting the province’s urban Non Status Indians and Métis, specifically regarding increasing their levels of education, training and opportunity. Membership was open to those "unregistered person[s] of native descent, who [have] one quarter or more First Nations blood, but do not have...Indians treaty rights." This one-quarter provision was the same as that in the major prairie Métis associations, and the organization was also open to the spouses of those who were eligible.
Elder Mary Gladue in 1982:

“Just like in the 1950’s welfare was pushed on us. Not having signed a treaty, we were denied the benefits the Treaty Indians received. The elders did not want it because we had our own way of life. There were also other Indians coming here wanting us to sign up with them. We came here because we wanted to be left alone.”

Political Divisions within Kelly Lake:

There are currently 77 registered Bill C-31 Indians who are members of the Saulteau Band from nearby Chetwynd, B.C who intermarried with our people. There are two factions who make up the splinter group. The now defunct Kelly Lake First Nations Society and some members formed the Kelly Lake Metis Settlement Society. The two groups separated after realizing there were no benefits for off reserve Indians and more recently linked to the Metis Provincial of B.C.

In his book titled the Metis Oupost, a Manitoba schoolteacher named Gerry Andrews who grew up near the Metis at St. Boniface says, the “Kelly Lake genealogical tabulations are incomplete and partly speculative.” Page 296 the Metis Outpost.

Although some families from the community have been mislead and influenced by aboriginal organizations, the Kelly Lake Cree peoples continue to preserve their traditions and culture.

Elder Mrs. Davis, Saulteau Indian Band, Moberly Lake, B.C., July 2003:

There are currently some of our members who carry Bill C-31 cards who are from this band and live in Kelly Lake. Some of them tell people they are Métis too. They signed up for Bill C-31 with the Saulteau Band (Moberly Lake, B.C.) in 1995 because they thought it would help them to become status Indians. Having a status card does not help off reserve Indians. I think they know this now they made a mistake when they became Bill C-31.”

When the 1982 Constitution Act (Section 35-2, which states “In this Act, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada), included the Métis as one of three Aboriginal peoples, British Columbia’s Métis pulled out of the UNN.
Furthermore, the amendment of the Indian Act in 1985 allowed most Non-Status Indians to regain their status.

There are approximately 800 members of the present day Kelly Lake Cree Nation of the As’in’i’wa’chi Niy’yaw Tribe (Rocky Mountain Cree Tribe) who reside outside the community and are direct descendants of the Cree, Beaver and Iroquois peoples. In the history of Kelly Lake people, the significance of Lac Ste. Anne, Jasper House and Flyingshot Lake (outside of Grande Prairie, Alberta) has made us aware the nomadic nature of the Kelly Lake Cree Indians.

Present day Kelly Lake Cree Peoples

Present day, the Kelly Lake Cree People, a community of roughly 161 taken from 1996 Statistics Canada, have one school, which is owned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. This school is currently being utilized as the Community Centre functioning under the Kelly Lake Community Society. Since 2002, all Kelly Lake students now leave the community for grades K-12 because of B.C. government funding cuts to education. There are currently 6 children under the age of 5 who live within the community.
The Kelly Lake Cree Nation (KLCN) formed a reputable business in 1996, which employs 100% Aboriginal people in the Peace area and provides a source of revenue for the people of Kelly Lake. The traditional lands, in which they operate, play an inherent part of protecting the natural resources and guide the KLCN to an obligation to protect the territory. The traditional lands and ecosystem surrounding this community is central to the lives of the Kelly Lake Cree people. Their lands are rich with wildlife; nutritious food plants, and is a natural pharmacy for medicinal plants, which their people still gather. The Kelly Lake Cree Nation participates in the Environmental Monitoring program for First Nations communities’, which is part of a First Nations stewardship approach of “taking care of the land”. The Elders assist in collecting data on water quality, air quality, soil quality, biodiversity, and climate change. It is the hope that B.C. government decision-makers gather as much information as possible to make effective and sustainable choices in planning for their environment. This initiative was also hard-pressed by First Nations in the area due the increase in oil and gas activity within their traditional territories.

Currently there is several significant oil and gas proposed projects that will largely impact the Kelly Lake community.

**The Implications of Economic Development on Kelly Lake Cree traditional territory**

In more recent times Kelly Lake has made attempts to stand up and oppose oil and gas activity and express their concerns over the huge environmental impacts the community has sustained over the last four decades, government regulations do not make it easy for stakeholders to listen to what the community has expressed. Although billions of dollars of resources are being extracted from the Kelly Lake Cree traditional territory, in the past they have been promised economic growth for the community but economic prosperity has never come about for the community.

The Cree people didn’t simply seek out a living from the land; they thrived very well hunting and trapping for their families and even built homes in Kelly Lake from a rich forest that once was. The gifts of the mountains, the forest and the water that surrounds Kelly Lake has been provided for the Cree people which clearly express their relationship with their homeland. The deterioration of watersheds, riparian areas, loss of fish and wildlife habitat and other important cultural values; has their Elders concerned with the ever-changing environment. This is due to the increased resources extraction and it
remains clear the government does not respect their rights in protecting their traditional territory.

For the last four decades, intensive industrial logging, oil and gas, and mining driven by the global market have depleted the nearby mountains. When it comes to the abundance of “wildlife” in the area, the populations have decreased immensely within the last decade. Nearby watersheds are experiencing the lowest water levels within the last decade.

As Elder Mary Letendre stated, a traditional Cree elder, passed away 2004:

“Our elders have told us that it is important for us to take care of the lake. Water is a sacred element in our Indian way of life. Without clean water we cannot survive as a people. Since oil and gas started drilling around here, nearby creeks, rivers, and lakes have been destroyed. Some of the drinking water in this community contains gases in them. We know we need to respect the water, because it will take care of the land and this community but it is difficult to oppose Oil and Gas companies in this community. Some of our people look at the low paying jobs we may receive through the oil and gas companies but what they don’t want to deal with the on the grounds impacts that are destroying our way of life.”

As, the government regulates oil and gas drilling in Northeast British Columbia (B.C.) no concern is given to the land, history or culture of the Kelly Lake Cree people. The intention of the government has always been to take out as much coal, oil and gas for the future of B.C.’s thriving economy with no regard for the future of the land that the Kelly Lake Cree people still depend on.

The Kelly Lake Cree Comprehensive Land Claim
“The Re-Birth of a Nation” the Kelly Lake Cree Peoples

Twelve years ago, the Kelly Lake Cree Nation took their case to court, in consideration of protecting the land and natural resources, what was once was a land rich with natural beauty, and the sacred workplace of their ancestors where they once hunted and trapped. The Cree Elders tell us, “We need to protect our land.”

The Cree Nation are descendants of Indians who have lived on an area of land straddling the current border of the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia since time immemorial and at least since before *The Royal Proclamation, 1763* and the making of Treaty No. 8, in 1899. They seek a number of remedies, including several declarations regarding the existence of their aboriginal rights and the breach of trust, fiduciary, legal and equitable duties by the Crown. They also seek an order that they may adhere to Treaty No. 8 with a declaration of their rights and entitlements under that Treaty. Finally, the Cree Nation claim damages for alleged breach of duties owed to them by the government, damages amounting to $5.2 billion, an accounting for profits taken by the government from exploitation of resources of the Cree Nation, and interest.

The Kelly Lake Cree are currently pursuing a comprehensive land claim through the federal government process. The community of Kelly Lake was excluded from the Treaty 8 process of 1899 although it occurred within Treaty Eight geographical boundaries. In the past working relationships had formed between the Sekani tribe, McLoed Lake Indian Band who recently adhered to Treaty 8 in 2004. In recognizing the Kelly Lake Cree have an outstanding comprehensive land claim, it is clear they are supported as a nation by tribes whose territorial boundaries are claimed to overlap the Kelly Lake Cree territory.

Tribal Chief Cliff Calliou stated in his testimony at the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in November 19, 1992. The fundamental concern of Aboriginal people, as expressed throughout the hearings, was that the resolution of land and resources concerns — including the recognition, accommodation and implementation of Aboriginal rights to and jurisdiction over lands and resources — is absolutely critical to their goals of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Cliff Calliou made this linkage explicit in his testimony:

*A land and resources base must also be provided. A land base is seen as essential for the long-term survival and betterment of their nation. The absence of a land and resources base is the source of poverty, which exists amongst the Cree people today. Total control of their own land and resources will generate economic development to create employment ... .The Kelly Lake community is located within Treaty 8*
territory. It is time that negotiations proceed. This community is ready to pave the way for other communities similar to theirs to follow.

Cliff Calliou
Kelly Lake Community
Fort St. John, British Columbia
19 November 1992

Two years later in 1994, Tribal Chief Cliff Calliou acted on behalf of the Kelly Lake Cree Nation who are of the Beaver, Cree and Iroquois peoples, and the As’in’iw’achi Ni’hi’ya’wak Tribe (Rocky Mountain Cree Tribe)

First Nations of British Columbia have unextinguished treaty and aboriginal rights that may include aboriginal title a right to the land itself. (The Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, Wednesday, November 12, 2003.) Since Treaty rights was never issued to Kelly Lake Indians, nor any band or Metis organization can declare this community be recognized as part of any organizations. Since most BC is covered by First Nations traditional territory, the majority of the Province remains subject to outstanding aboriginal land claims. The Supreme Court of Canada in 1973 first recognized land rights based on Aboriginal title. Aboriginal title is based on an Aboriginal group’s traditional use and occupancy of that land. Comprehensive claims are negotiated in areas where Aboriginal title has not been dealt with by treaty or by other legal methods.

What little evidence is provided from professional bias, the Kelly Lake people remain a Cree speaking tribe who inter-married with the Iroquois and Beaver tribes in the early 1800s. We know today, in 1899, Scrip and Treaty commissions visited Lesser Slave Lake to issue treaty and take scrip applications. Professional bias portrays a different interpretation of how the Kelly Lake Indians came to settle in one area but it is the oral accounts from elders that indicate a clear depiction of how these people came to be.

As stated by Elder Mary Letendre in 2003:

“Our people roamed Jasper and the Rocky Mountains in search of good hunting and trapping areas. Some of our ancestors are buried in those areas and some of their children may have been born around those areas too. Our people never wanted to move to town but
without money- Kelly Lake never had good houses to live in until 1982. We lived off the land and that was good enough for us because as far as I could remember we always hunted and trapped. But that will be gone too one day. Back then we were made promises by Metis organizations and even United Native Nations to sign up with them because they said they wanted to help us. They never helped us and they would send us on these trips to go to meetings to vote for them."

Elders of the past have stated:

“We are Indians; we still have our Cree language and still have their culture.”

Future and Current Mining and Oil & Gas Projects in the Kelly Lake area

International oil and gas giant BP Canada is venture exploring in the Noel area of Northeast B.C. with the company centring most of its local efforts on operations near Kelly Lake.

Encana is proposing to build a new natural gas processing plant to remove hydrogen sulphide and carbon dioxide from gas produced in the Kelly Lake, Cutbank and Bissette area. The Steeprock Gas Plant will be located approximately 5 km from Kelly Lake; the proposed plant will be designed to process 198 million cubic feet per day of new raw gas. Pending Oil and Gas Commission approval, this plant is slated for construction October 2006.

Gateway Pipeline, Enbridge Inc anticipates construction in 2008 of a petroleum export pipeline beginning near Edmonton to a proposed terminal facility in Kitimat, B.C. Enbridge hopes to have the pipeline operational by 2010. Consultations are currently being undertaken with numerous affected First Nations groups, including the Kelly Lake Cree Nation.

NEMI Northern Energy & Mining Corporation, a western based coal company with strategically located metallurgical coal properties in northeast B.C. NEMI also has 50% interest in the Belcourt Saxon Limited Partnership that covers 50% hectares of known and prospective coal bearing land in northeast B.C. by Tumbler Ridge.

Western Canadian Coal development of Wolverine Coal Mine project is said to be a low ash hard coking coal and it is slated for operations July 2006. Wolverine-Perry Creek mine open-pit for the first eight years than slated for underground mining. WCC Also owns the
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Hermann Coal Mine, Dillon and the Brule proposed mines and 50% of the Belcourt Saxon partnership.

The Willow Creek Coal project by Pine Valley Coal Mining Corporation is a thermal and hard coking coalmine is slated to situate 45 km west of Chetwynd, B.C.

The Five-Cabin Property Coal Mine owned by Hillsborough Resources hopes to undertake construction in 2006.

Conclusion

Currently the Kelly Lake Cree traditional territory is an area of significant industry interest in Northeastern B.C. Although the Kelly Lake Cree people have had a long history of managing the natural environment, which is perceived as central to their sustenance and cultural heritage, as a nation the rightful share of income from natural resources, control over their own resources, influences the Kelly Lake Cree to seek constitutional protection for unique status and rights guaranteed within Treaty 8. It is evident that the Kelly Lake Cree Nation wants their constitutional rights recognized in order to protect their traditional lands and continue to be part of Northeastern B.C.’s booming economy.

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