

DECLARATION of the UNITED DENE

We, the Dene, of Denendeh, declare our independence as a distinct people. We reside upon lands gifted to us by the Creator and intend to live life as we always have, as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows. We unite with our Dene relatives in the north, and in the east, south and west of us. We are told of times when all of our people once lived together as one, before migrating to all parts of the land. Though our footprint spans across the miles, we continue to be bound by common blood and land relatives, stories, legends, history, ancestors, values, principles and language. Our cooperative processes of decision making honour our inherent ties to each other, Creator, ancestors, animals, land, water, air and environment.

When Denendeh was created, we were placed here to support our land relatives. Our sacred Dene Laws were born from an agreement made with them. Together it was agreed to care for one another, be respectful, helpful, to share what we have and to take only what we need. Ceremony is used to acknowledge and honour our land relatives and to breathe life into this Agreement. We, the Dene, have been given the sacred responsibility to ensure the survival of the lands, and all it holds, and we will act upon its behalf as required.

Our stories, legends and fables are sacred to us. Our ancestors used story to teach Dene history, laws, customs, beliefs, practices, values and principles: embedding them into the lands, for our generational retention and recall. Our Dene legends tell us of powerful people who used medicine to protect us, our lands and our way of life. Through story we can recall giant beaver pelts nailed to rock, sacred arrows shot deep into the waters and a fire that continues to burn to this day. It is these stories that remind us we are a protected people, guided by Creator and the ancestors who continue to work to ensure our history and identity, as Dene, is solidified into the lands for all eternity.

Our lands carry the sacred blood of our ancestors. Those fortunate enough to walk with us, amongst our ancestors, shall walk with reverence, abiding by and having respect for our strict Dene Laws, as we do. We, the Dene, do not separate ourselves from the land, waters, air, animals and environment. Our lands akin to our body, our waters akin to our blood. We are as the land is: when it is healthy, we are healthy. We were born from this earth, and at Creators choosing, we shall return to the earth to take our sacred place amongst our ancestors.

We have effectively managed our people, waters, animals, relationships and lands since the beginning of time. Our governing processes include leaders, Elders and community members working cooperatively to make decisions for all. Our lands are a gift that we will not compromise. Those who do not understand, interpret or relate to our lands in the same way, are not qualified to make decisions, for us or our lands without our participation.

We have complex governing systems of trade, negotiations and dispute resolution. We made agreements with our land relatives and with several different Nations, Dene and non-Dene, which were either written in the lands or in text. We have survived the epidemics and residential schools, which has resulted in the erosion of our culture, ceremony, economy, language and values. With the strength and resilience of our Elders, we stand together as a protected people. We sign agreements to create partnerships in order to benefit our people and protect our way of life. Our communities, leaders, Youth and Elders together define our agreements; our agreements do not define us.

We, the Dene declare ourselves independent Nations who have and will continue to assert our right of self-determination. Together we stand unified in supporting strong communities, healthy and sustaining lands and waters, honouring all of our relations and agreements, and working in cooperation for the benefit of all.

March 31, 2021