

Newsletter

VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION

JUNE 2026

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Vuntut Gwitchin
First Nation

Quarterly Update for the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

ISSUE #3 • JUNE 2026

MESSAGE FROM COUNCIL

Drin Gwiinzii Shilak Naii',

I hope all is well and you are all enjoying the warmer weather. Spring has been a busy and meaningful time for Council and our Administration, and as we move into summer, we want to update you on the important work happening across our Nation.

Spring Break-Up & Emergency Preparedness

Our spring break-up this year went well on May 8 with ice flowing on the Porcupine River. We only had some localized flooding on the west side of the airstrip which required a precautionary evacuation of some homes. The situation was resolved about five hours later when the ice jam downriver broke, taking care of the flood risk.

Once again, our emergency response activities prepared the community well. I would like to acknowledge our Emergency Response Coordinators, Jeffrey Peter and Amy O'Rourke, who worked with our Policy Director Rodney D'Abramo to prepare the community for this annual event.

Vadzaih Choo Drin

We just finished Vadzaih Choo Drin 2026 (Caribou Days) on May 18. Once again, it was a wonderful celebration for the community with a number of events and activities organized by our great team at VGFN.

Unfortunately, we have no caribou at this time, which highlights the need for continued advocacy and direct action to protect the Porcupine Caribou herd and its calving grounds and habitat.

Traditional food is becoming increasingly more difficult to acquire, and we must take note of everything that is happening in our environment, particularly with the continued severely low salmon stocks. We are in challenging times, and we must do what we can to work together to overcome these hardships.

This is why activities such as our recent Culture Camp for students at Chief Zzeh Gittlit School, and the work to get the Mountain Camp operating to provide health and wellness programs, are so important.

On-the-land programs and supports such as these help us deliver in a manner that reflects our Gwich'in values, protocol, and traditions. The solutions to our challenges in the future can be learned from how our Nation survived in the past.

Celebrating Our Community

It was great to see Elder and former Chief Roger Kyikavichik dancing at the Vadzaih Choo Drin celebrations. As some of you know, Roger has been battling illness this winter and is now doing much better. Elder Roger, we want you to know how much we appreciate and honour you and everything that you continue to do for our community and Citizens!

We also recently celebrated graduation ceremonies for our high school students in both Old Crow and Whitehorse. This year, we had our highest number of Grade 12 graduates, with twelve young Citizens achieving this important milestone.

We are also proud to recognize several post-secondary graduates this year. These young Citizens are our future, and it is important that we continue to acknowledge their achievements, lift them up, and honour them as they deserve.

Events & Gatherings

Since our last newsletter in March, we have held a number of important gatherings, including:

- The Justice Forum
- Culture Camp at Whitefish Lake
- The Spring Carnival
- Vadzaih Choo Drin

Council Movements

On May 22, Councillor Hal Frost resigned his position on VGFN Council.

We would like to thank Councillor Frost for his time and many contributions on Council - including two years serving as Deputy Chief.

Chief and Council remain committed to carrying out our work serving our Citizens and Old Crow until the remainder of our term in January 2027

Mahsi' choo,
Message from Chief and Council



Vuntut Gwitchin
First Nation



Smart Planning Saves VGFN Nearly \$900,000

Elders Home Loan Paid Off Six Years Early

On April 1, 2026, the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation made its final payment on the loan used to finance construction of the Victoria Blake Memorial Elders Home.

This fully satisfied the remaining balance of \$1,878,115.14 and closed the book on the \$7 million loan entered into with First Nations Bank of Canada in November 2022. VGFN will save over \$900,000 in interest costs that would otherwise have accumulated over the remaining six years of the original loan term.

This outcome was made possible through deliberate, multi-year planning. Council and Administration prioritized additional principal payments through each Appropriations Act, including a significant \$3 million payment made in April 2025.

Each decision was made to use Nation resources in the most responsible way possible, freeing up future funding capacity for programs and supports that benefit Citizens.

Victoria Blake Memorial Elders Home

The Elders Home remains an important gathering place and source of culturally meaningful care and connection in Old Crow.

Paying off the loan early strengthens the Nation's long-term ability to continue supporting this facility and the Citizens it serves.

BEFORE FINAL PAYMENT

- * \$7 million loan entered in November 2022
- * Remaining balance of \$1,878,115.14 as of April 1, 2026
- * Interest costs projected over remaining six years

AFTER FINAL PAYMENT

- * Final payment completed April 1, 2026
- * Loan fully paid off
- * Over \$900,000 in future interest costs avoided
- * More future funding capacity for Citizen programs and supports

KEY FINANCIAL DECISIONS

- * Additional principal payments prioritized through Appropriations Acts
- * \$3 million principal payment made in April 2025
- * Multi-year planning supported early payoff

This achievement reflects the kind of accountable, forward-looking governance that VGFN Citizens can be proud of — decisions made not for today alone, but in the interest of future generations.

For further details, see Council Resolution #10 at vgfn.ca/council/council-resolutions

Community Justice Forum Held in Old Crow

Conversations on Justice and Safety

On March 25, 2026, the Health, Social Services and Justice (HSSJ) department hosted a community Justice Forum at Darius Elias Community Hall.

The event brought together Citizens, VGFN staff, and partners for a day of learning and discussion focused on Community safety, restorative approaches, and how VGFN can shape programs that reflect Gwich'in values.



The day opened with Deputy Chief Gladys Netro, who shared reflections on what community safety has looked like in Gwich'in culture, how it has changed over time, and the importance of reconnecting with the land, culture, and community.

Katriel Villacorta, VGFN's Justice Coordinator and Indigenous Court Worker, provided an update on the department and her work supporting individuals navigating the legal system, covering restorative practices, wraparound supports, advocacy, community safety, and the relationships being built with partners across the region.

Presentations and Discussion

The forum also included presentations from Sabrina Cruz-Mendez (Crown Prosecutor), Wendy Burgess (Yukon Government Victim Services), Kris Statnyk, and Lindsey Brown (Old Crow's probation officer).

Topics covered included the Canadian criminal system, victim services, the Administration of Justice Agreement, community corrections, diversion, restorative practices, and the role of a strong local committee.

The day closed with a circle discussion where participants reflected on what safety means in their community, how diversion and restorative approaches could be better supported, and what role a local committee could play. It was a meaningful gathering that reinforced the importance of building a system that truly belongs to the community.





LAND GUARDIANS HARVEST FISH FOR THE COMMUNITY

In May, the Land Guardians set nets in front of Old Crow to harvest fish for the community.

The first net was set on May 13 — a 4-inch mesh net, 100 feet long and 6 feet deep. The first check brought in 34 fish: 9 whitefish, 10 coneys, 10 sucker fish, 4 pike/jackfish, and 1 louche/burbot. A second check later that evening added 14 more fish. The net was pulled when ice started coming down the river.



The net was reset on May 19, this time with a larger 6-inch mesh net 100 feet long and 10 feet deep. Two checks on May 20 brought in 16 more fish before the net was pulled again as Crow River ice came down the slough.

In total, the Land Guardians harvested 64 fish — whitefish, coney, sucker, pike/jackfish, and louche/burbot — all cut and distributed to community members.

Students Learn on the Land at Whitefish Lake

Hands-On Cultural Learning for Youth

Students from Chief Zzeh Gittlit School spent time on the land at Whitefish Lake this spring, taking part in hands-on cultural learning through a series of Culture Camp sessions organized for different grade groups.

Students in Grades 6–9 attended from March 30 to April 2, where they helped set traps, dried meat, checked and reset traps, learned about the geography of the area, painted, and supported daily camp tasks. During their time on the land, Students harvested two muskrats, learned how to skin one, and had the chance to taste the meat and rendered fat.

Grades 4–5 attended from April 7–8 and returned to Old Crow with homemade bows. Students in Grades 1–3 took part in a day trip, checking traps and watching a muskrat being skinned, and each got to keep a muskrat foot.

Even younger children joined a day trip that included skinning a hare and sledding.

Learning from the Land

Culture Camp offers students something that can't be replicated in a classroom: the experience of being on the land, contributing to real tasks, and connecting with the practices, skills, and knowledge that are at the heart of Van Tat Gwich'in identity.

These experiences help ensure that traditional knowledge is passed forward to the next generation through doing, not just teaching.

The Tëechik Guardians supported the Department of Education and Training's Culture Camp, reflecting the strong connections between cultural learning, land stewardship, and community wellbeing.



Vadzaih Choo Drin Brings Community Together

Honouring Culture, Youth, and Caribou



This year's Vadzaih Choo Drin (Caribou Days) brought Citizens and guests together on May 15–17 for a meaningful weekend of celebration, learning, and connection.

Throughout the gathering, participants took part in cultural activities, games, shared meals, performances, storytelling, and conversations about the importance of Vadzaih (Caribou) to Van Tat Gwich'in identity, way of life, and future generations.

The event created space for cultural learning and participation through activities such as the Gwich'in Man and Gwich'in Woman competition, as well as hide softening with Christine Creyke.

Youth were involved throughout the weekend, taking part in games, activities, and discussions that highlighted the importance of passing knowledge, stories, and cultural values forward.

A Gathering with Purpose

Elders and community leaders shared reflections on the ongoing responsibility to protect Vadzaih and the land, reinforcing why Vadzaih Choo Drin continues to be such an important gathering for VGFN Citizens and the community of Old Crow.

The weekend served as a reminder that caring for the Caribou is inseparable from caring for Citizens, and that both depend on the land being healthy and whole.

Vadzaih Choo Drin is a living expression of the values and relationships that define the Van Tat Gwich'in, one that grows stronger with each generation that participates.



Crow Mountain Camp Continues to Grow

Building a Place for Community Connection

Much work has gone into the Crow Mountain Community Camp over the past several months, and the Nation is proud of the dedicated Citizens who have helped bring this project to life.

William Greenland has been on site supporting the crew and sharing guidance drawn from his experience with land-based camps.



"When we first started on the Mountain camp, it was immediate excitement, and along the way there have been many questions about can we do it," said Greenland. "But there have been many good prayers and support from the community."

All Are Welcome

The camp is a place for the community to come together and reconnect, the way things used to be. "You don't have to know how to build, just come up," said Joseph (Jojo) Bruce, camp building lead.

"We have a few guys working up there now, and you can see them shine every time they go to work. Feeling good about themselves and the future of their family and friends," Greenland added.

"When we work on the camp, we do it with the best of our intentions, knowing this will be a good place for our people to come together as a community, to grow and recognize the strength and courage they already have."

— William Greenland

Considerable progress has been made on the main cabin, which is expected to serve as a central gathering point once the camp is fully operational. All are welcome to contribute, whether that means helping with the build, sharing a story, or simply stopping by.

Anyone interested in contributing to the project is encouraged to reach out to Joseph (Jojo) Bruce.

Community News & Notes



SREE VYÀA POWERS OLD CROW WITH COMMUNITY-OWNED CLEAN ENERGY

VGFN's community-owned solar facility, Sree Vyàa, has been operational since August 2021 and represents a milestone for Old Crow that goes well beyond clean energy. For the first time in over 50 years, the community was able to shut off its diesel generators during peak solar production.

The facility reduces diesel use by approximately 190,000 litres per year, cutting emissions by roughly 750–780 tonnes of CO₂e annually, a meaningful step toward Old Crow's goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.

Sree Vyàa is community-owned and operated, reflecting VGFN's commitment to self-sufficiency and responsible stewardship of the land and environment. It is important to note that the facility does not influence Yukon electricity rates, which are regulated separately by the Yukon Utilities Board.

OLD CROW VOICES AT ARCTIC SCIENCE SUMMIT IN DENMARK

Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW) in Aarhus, Denmark brought together Indigenous knowledge holders, researchers, and policymakers from around the circumpolar world.

Shae Garrett-Charlie and Christine Creyke represented Gwich'in Council International at this year's summit, where they helped bring Gwich'in perspectives to international discussions on Arctic research, climate change, and the future of northern communities.

Shae and Christine participated in an Indigenous Knowledge Holders Workshop on Climate Change Impacts, and joined a panel discussion on Indigenous Knowledge and Ethics in Arctic Research, held in a traditional Sámi lávvu. Christine also spoke on the Triple Planetary Crisis panel during an Arctic Council Chairship event.

Their participation helped ensure that Gwich'in voices and Traditional Knowledge were included in conversations about the Arctic's future, and the impacts these decisions have on the lands, waters, wildlife, and people of the Van Tat Gwich'in Traditional Territory.

JOHN TIZYA CENTRE CACHE RENOVATION

Vuntut Gwitchin carpenters have been renewing the John Tizya Centre (JTC) cache ahead of spring programming.

Work includes a new roof, rafters fitted with fish drying poles, window shutters, and covered seating, thoughtful additions that will support workshops, meat and fish cutting and smoking, and cultural connection close to the river. The renovated cache will serve as a gathering space where traditional skills and knowledge can be practised and shared with Citizens of all ages.

JOIN THE FIRE DEPARTMENT



The Old Crow Fire Department is actively recruiting new members. Training takes place every two weeks, no experience necessary.

Interested? Contact Jeffrey Peter to find out more.



ENGAGEMENTS AND MEETINGS

Recent activities and gatherings since the last newsletter:

- * **March 10 — Reading of 2nd Appropriations Act for 2025–2026**
- * **March 23–25 — Community Energy Systems Course**
- * **March 24–25 — CIRNA Regional Gathering, Whitehorse**
- * **March 26 — Emergency Management Forum**
- * **April 4–8 — 2026 Spring Carnival**
- * **April 8–9 — Elder & Youth Gathering**
- * **April 14–16 — Research Round-Up**
- * **April 20–21 — Lateral Kindness Workshop**
- * **April 22 — Vuntut Development Corporation AGM**
- * **May 7 — CYFN Regional Health Survey**
- * **May 9 — Entrepreneurship Workshop**
- * **May 10 — Mother's Day Brunch**
- * **May 12 — Housing Policy Update**
- * **May 13 — Housing Warehouse and Assembly Shop Update**
- * **May 15 - 18 — Vadzaih Choo Drin 2026**

STAFF ADDITIONS

The following appointments have been made recently with the VGFN Administration.

- * **Riley Smith** - Strategic Communications Advisor
- * **Theode Kasper** - Manager, Housing & Infrastructure
- * **Michel (Micko) Robichaud** - Project Manager
- * **Tanya Lalonde** - Social Worker
- * **Lance Nagwan** - Interim Natural Resources Director
- * **Ashlynn Frost** - Interim Enrollment Officer

THANK YOU, LOUISE CREYKE

Health Programs Manager

We extend our sincere thanks to Louise Creyke for her dedicated service as Health Programs Manager.

Louise's commitment to the health and wellbeing of VGFN Citizens has made a lasting difference in our community, and her contributions are deeply appreciated by Council, Administration, and the Citizens she has served. We wish her all the best going forward.



Jobs, Council Meetings & Legislation

CURRENT JOB POSTINGS

- * **Fire Department Members**
- * **Natural Resources Director**
- * **Custodian Coordinator**
- * **Caribou Coordinator (Part-Time)**
- * **Intergovernmental Coordinator**
- * **Project Lead Hand**

To apply for any of these positions, you can send your resume and cover letter to jobs@vgfn.ca.

Applications may also be dropped off at the Sarah-Abel Chitze Administration Building in Old Crow or Waterfront Station Office in Whitehorse.

Please include the name of the job you are applying for in the subject line of the email or cover letter.

While we appreciate all applications, only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

Since the March newsletter, Council Meetings have been held on:

- * **March 11, 16, 23**
- * **April 10, 27**
- * **May 27**

Summaries of these meetings are posted at the Sarah-Abel Chitze Administration Building in Old Crow on the Bulletin Boards.

UPCOMING WORK/LEGISLATION

- * **Housing Policy and Tenancy Agreement** – in part to reflect changes to the Yukon Residential Tenancies Act.
- * **Elections Law** – in preparation for General Election in November 2026
- * **Dog Management Policy** – guidance on how to deal with nuisance and dangerous dogs in Old Crow
- * **Review Council Law** – to establish Review Council for VGFN as outlined in Constitution
- * **Lands and Resources Act** – to govern the management of lands and resources in VGFN Traditional Territory
- * **Business License Act** – Currently under development.

SUMMER EVENTS

YUKON UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION

JUNE 6

Congratulations to all 2026 graduates. VGFN is proud of every Vuntut Gwitchin Citizen crossing the stage.

CHIEF ZZEH GITTLIT SCHOOL GRADUATION

JUNE 8

Congratulations to the graduating class of 2026! We celebrate your achievement and look forward to seeing you continue to go forward in a good way.

LAND GUARDIANS COMMUNITY FISH CAMP

JUNE 8-12

The Tëechik Guardians will continue harvesting freshwater fish for the community from open water until the arrival of Chinook. As part of that work, a community fish camp is being held the week of June 8–12.

At the fish camp, the Guardians will host focus groups to talk through salmon harvest management options for the community.

YUKON FIRST NATIONS GRADUATION CEREMONY

JUNE 12

Celebrating First Nation graduates from across Yukon. Congratulations to all Vuntut Gwitchin graduates being recognized.

ENROLLMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

JUNE 20

The Enrollment Committee will meet to discuss citizenship matters. Citizens with enrollment questions are encouraged to reach out to VGFN Administration.

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY

JUNE 21

June 21 is a day to honour the history, heritage, cultures, and achievements of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across Canada.

2026 CYFN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JUNE 23-25 | DUKE MEADOW

The annual General Assembly for the Council of Yukon First Nations brings together First Nations leadership and Citizens from across Yukon to discuss shared priorities, governance, and the future of self-determination in the North.

CANADA DAY

JULY 1

Wishing all Citizens a safe and enjoyable Canada Day.

BIENNIAL GWICH'IN GATHERING

JULY 21-28 | TEETŁ'IT ZHEH

The Biennial Gwich'in Gathering brings together Gwich'in people from across the territory for a week of cultural celebration, connection, and shared purpose.

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COMMENTS?

YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT!

Please let us know if you would like to let us know how we are doing in relation to a particular policy, program, service or activity undertaken by VGFN Chief and Council, Committees or Administration. You can provide feedback by:

- * Approach our staff directly and if required escalate to our Managers or Directors; or
- * Email us at comments@vgfn.ca
- * Submit online at our website at www.vgfn.ca

We aim to respond to comments promptly. If we require more time to respond, we will let you know.

If no resolution occurs through the methods above, feel free to approach the Executive Director/Associate ED or a member of Chief and Council.



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