



**We are Dënezhu. The people of this land.**

**We are Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. The people of this river.**

We have occupied this territory for all time. Our enduring relationship with our land is our heritage. Our stories are written on the land and our place in this world is created, understood, and owned through these stories.

When our world was different than it is today our culture hero Tsà' Wëzhè travelled our territory and brought order to the world. He established relationships with our non-human relatives and formalized our responsibilities to them and to each other.

His journey and the agreements he made are Tr'ëhudè, our way of life, our law. Living our law by engaging with our land brought our society into existence and has shaped our culture and created our identity. Central to this is the requirement to uphold a reciprocal relationship with the land and all living things and to maintain the integrity of our homeland as an interconnected entity.

This is the essence of our existence as Dënezhu.

**When we live Tr'ëhudè we sustain what is most valuable to us.**

#### **Our Identity as Dënezhu**

We are people of this land. It has shaped us for generations and we have cared for it as it has cared for us. The land itself brought our worldview into being. It teaches us that we are an essential part of a bigger environment. We understand ourselves and our place in the world in relation to all other beings. This is the foundation of our identity.

Our society is born out of this landscape. It demands that we remain mobile, that we occupy a vast territory, and that our communities remain fluid. It requires us to fulfil obligations to each other, to our non-human relatives and to the land itself. These responsibilities are reflected in our core relationships and our code of conduct. They are embedded in our language and in the ways that we declare our relatedness with each other and the land.



Our cultural practices and our technology are formed by our land. We have learned how to live with this landscape by responding to the challenges that it presents. Our non-human relatives, especially the salmon and the caribou, are our teachers. We live with them and we live like them. We journey as part of a dynamic and fluid community. As we move through our territory we concentrate and disperse as the land requires.

Our wealth is in our stories, our songs and our connections with each other. Our strength is in our knowledge. We have the wisdom inherited from our ancestors as well as an openness to adapt and move forward in a good way.

### **Our Families, Our Community**

Our measure of wealth is in the strength of our relationships with each other and with our land. We identify as individuals and as a people based on the ties that we have with our relatives, both biological and fictive. Our relationships with others are maintained through an on-going responsibility to take care of each other. This is one of our core laws. It is embedded deeply in our social organization and is applied to our close relatives and community members as well as to others who share this land. We know that we will always be supported and held up by our people as dictated by Tr'ëhudè. We also strive to conduct ourselves well to avoid bringing hardship or shame upon our relatives.

Our sense of relatedness and our responsibilities toward others extends beyond the human world. We are equally connected to, and have responsibilities for, our non-human family. Our language reflects our respect for animals. We acknowledge them. We speak to them, and about them, as one would a family member. Our survival requires us to kill living beings. Our cultural practices and ceremonies require that we do so in a good way. This is how we reconcile our love and respect for our animals with our hunting way of life. We maintain a respectful and balanced relationship with all beings who share this land.

### **Our Traditions**

Our traditions thread through the various manifestations of our culture. They reflect what is important to us, those things that we value most. We have many ways to celebrate who we are. We sing, we dance, and we tell stories. We honour our language with our efforts to revitalize it.



We recognize our lands by naming our places and by hanging our stories on them. We practice ceremony when we acknowledge what we value, when we conduct ourselves well, when we sustain each other and when we celebrate our identity as Dënezhu.

Our traditions grow as we do. They stay alive because we are open to expressing ourselves in many ways, old and new. Our existence as Dënezhu is sustained because we remain true to our traditions while adapting to our environment. Our land keeps us vital by challenging us to live in the best ways that we can. When we live Tr'ëhudè we celebrate our identity and experience the joy of knowing who we are in this world.

### **The Integrity of Our Land**

Our land lives and breathes. It is alive with power. Our land is the earth, the water, the sky, the stars and the wind. It is the people and the animals, the fish and the plants. It is a life force. Our land shapes our world. Our beliefs, thoughts, and actions are responses to the land itself and in return the land provides for us. We work together to maintain this reciprocal relationship.

It is our law to care for the land as it cares for us. We live in balance with its rhythms and respond to its demands. We make our decisions, from the smallest to the most complex, with the future health of the land and ourselves in mind. We know that the smallest action can cascade outward in time and space and will impact the integrity of the land as a whole. In turn our beliefs, thoughts and actions also cascade outward and impact our wellness as a community.

It is the land who teaches us to always be aware of our impacts and to consider our role in sustaining our whole selves and our communities.

### **Our Knowledge, Our Wisdom**

Our culture is a mature culture. It has grown and evolved within this land. It is shaped and refined as we respond to challenges and reflect on their lessons. Our long-standing relationship with our land leads us toward wisdom.

In our culture we recognize and respect the knowledge that all of our people practice. We ensure that everyone has the space and the support to learn through experience and to



determine their own path to wisdom. We are open to multiple ways of knowing and being. We share our thoughts and our skills and continually seek to build upon them by learning from others. It is not our place to judge the authenticity or validity of another's experiences. We believe there are many truths and perspectives and together they make us stronger.

### **Our Purpose**

Living well on our land is the central challenge of our lives. Sustaining ourselves in this demanding environment requires knowledge and energy and constant movement. Our culture is built upon our relationship with the land and with the beings that keep us alive. We find animals. We know them and we hunt them. We feed ourselves and acquire everything we need. We build confidence in our ability to live on into the future. We do all of this while raising our children and caring for our Elders. We have faced many challenges and we will continue to face challenges. Ours is a culture that embraces movement, through time and through space. Our purpose is to continue living our law and applying it in the face of new challenges. This is how we ensure a future for those who will come after us.

### **We sustain what is most valuable to us by living Tr'ëhudè.**

#### **We Live in Harmony and Balance**

Our reciprocal relationship with the land and with each other is fundamental to our existence as Dënezhu. It is the lived expression of Tr'ëhudè. The purpose of reciprocity is the maintenance of relationships. Our existence depends on the principle of mutual benefit gained through an active, long-term exchange of goods, energy, thoughts, ideas, and more. It involves sharing, acknowledgement, gratitude, and humility, all of those principles that ensure our survival. The legacy of relational sustainability is an intact homeland that will continue to support our people. Reciprocity is harmony and balance realized.

#### **We Build and Practice Respect**

In our world respect surrounds our thoughts and actions. Everything is done with respect. Our way of life generates a habit of keen attention to our surroundings. We are always aware and thinking about how to build and maintain respect as we move through space and time. The relational nature of our culture drives us to think about how our thoughts and actions impact



others, including the land. This continual practice of engagement builds a tapestry of respect upon which our lives depend.

Respectful behavior is shown in many ways. At its foundation is a sense of humility, gratitude, and acknowledgement. We demonstrate respect by carefully controlling our own actions and by determining how to behave in a manner that will be perceived by others as respectful.

### **We Are Humble**

We are fortunate to be a part of this land. It is our greatest teacher. The land shapes our way of being in many ways. The land is powerful. Although it cares for us it also constantly reminds us that we are one small part of a greater life force. To think otherwise would jeopardize our survival as Dënezhu. It is humbling to know our place in this world and wise to understand that our success depends on this modesty. Thinking and acting in humble ways maintains balance within our community, our families, and ourselves.

### **We Care for Each Other, We Cooperate**

We recognize that our wealth is in the relationships that we maintain with each other and the land. Caring for each other and cooperating as a community are fundamental to our well-being and are a central principle in Tr'ëhudè. When we care for others by thinking of their needs, by sharing food and resources, we are building social capital. This is essential in a land where one simply cannot survive alone. Every thought and action can have impacts through time and space. We take care to maintain harmony with others so that when we need them they respond in kind.

### **We Show Gratitude**

We are thankful for all that our land, our animals, and our people provide. We are aware of the many ways that the land and our relatives hold us up. We show our gratitude by acknowledging the gifts that we receive, big and small. These acknowledgements are reflected in our ceremonies as well as in more subtle everyday thoughts and actions. We choose our words carefully. We walk lightly on the land. We recognize the plants and animals that sustain us. We are grateful to be Dënezhu.



### **We Adapt, We Survive**

Our stories, our technology, and our practices all focus on overcoming the challenges that we face as we move through our time on this land. We are forward thinking. We make decisions that ensure a future for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We have endured because we are a strong and knowledgeable people. We know who we are. We are not afraid to welcome new ideas and ways into our lives. We have faced many trials and move forward with our culture and our land wrapped around us. We determine our own future. We endure.

### **We Move, We Journey**

A defining feature of our culture is movement through both space and time. Our foundation stories tell us about the importance of journeying, of never staying still. One of our most important culture heroes is Tsà' Wëzhè, the Traveler. He journeyed through our lands, always moving forward. We do the same. We live like our animal relations, the caribou, the salmon, and all of the others. As we navigate through our land we care for it and we care for each other. We survive. We journey forward through time. We acknowledge our past but we do not live there. We learn from our ancestors as we continue to move forward. Our Elders tell us that Tsà' Wëzhè is still traveling, still going forward. And so we continue our journey as Dënezhu.

**Tr'ëhudè keeps our land and ourselves whole. We live it every day.**

### **Our Future**

Our identity as Dënezhu is born out of our land and shaped by our relations with our home, our animal relatives, and each other. The integrity of our culture and of our land depend upon this relationship. They are intertwined.

Our existence as Dënezhu is our inherent right.

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