

Community Voices

Chief Mel Grandjamb -

What are your earliest memories of Moose Lake?

When I was maybe nine or ten, I went with my Dad and my uncles out to the trapline. It was minus 70. I don't even remember what clothes we had. We didn't have the fancy parkas we have today. We took a dog team and that's how we did it for the next two or three years. You had to pack everything you needed for a month— staples like salt, sugar, tea, your clothes, food for us and the dogs. A chocolate bar was a major treat. I spent a lot of time at Moose Lake, Tar Creek, up where CNRL is now. In my family, the emphasis was on hunting and trapping.

What's your experience been in the oil sands?

I went to high school in McMurray and then two years of college to become a Certified Engineering Technologist. I was trained mostly in construction. When I got back to McKay in '86 or '87, I went back into the wilderness, back to Moose Lake. Working for the band, I helped build the first two of the new cabins.

Eventually, I went to work for Syncrude from '98 to '03 on the construction side. I worked to open roads, build out sites, on the north mine hydro transport line, and Aurora 1 until they made first froth. I learned a lot of skills I brought back to Fort McKay.

There's going to be development and we have to learn to share in its benefits without giving up who we are. We have to manage together.

How has Moose Lake been important to you as you got older?

I introduced a young offenders program at Moose Lake. We took at-risk Indigenous youth out of the city, where they were headed for detention centres, into the bush. We stayed at the old camp, and we had an Elder, first aid, a counsellor. Their punishment was getting back to reality, back to basics, back home. Moose Lake brought those boys back *home*.

Why are you asking for responsible development?

We have to maintain the core essentials at Moose Lake, make sure the berries and plants are the same as they were 100 years ago. That's important. Maintain habitat not just for moose but for lynx and wolf. Even the air and rain at Moose Lake are important. They're different. It's 800 feet higher and everything is clean. You can drink fresh water and eat the fish off the lake. Home is always back in Moose Lake.

Some Elders stay there a month at a time now. I'm hopeful that in 10 or 20 years people are going to be able to live there year-round again. We've got a communications link. I want to put in a windmill, get some power. People might be able to use electric heat. But we've gotta protect it.

We need *responsible* energy development that respects our Treaty rights and traditional land uses. *Inspired by our past, invested in our future.*