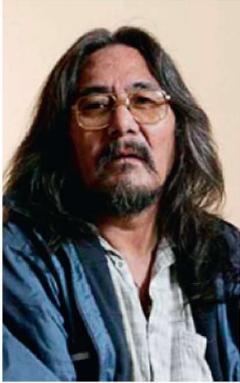


In Memoriam



Penote (Pen) Michel
June 24, 1954 – August 1, 2006

Pen (pronounced Ben to an English speaker) was, from an early age starting in the 1970s, heavily involved in assertion of Innu self determination and rights. He was amongst the first to do so after Labrador Innu were forced to establish a more settled life in Sheshashit and Utshimaisits/Natuashish. The transition from a formerly nomadic life to a largely sedentary one was, and continues to be, a very trying experience for the Innu. Progress towards recognition of the right to self determination has been painfully slow. Equally slow has been the struggle towards solving socioeconomic issues plaguing the Innu since they began life in permanent settlements starting in the 1960s.

In the field of conservation, Pen was often involved in protest hunts for woodland caribou. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in the late 1960s, did not recognize Innu hunting rights especially for those residing in Sheshashit. Consultation and discussion was not the early provincial approach. People who had spent generations living a nomadic hunting life were expected to suddenly adapt to permits and licenses, quotas and seasons. Given the wide cultural and language divide between the Innu and government, most Innu struggled greatly to make a transition from one world to another. Pen, with a handful of others from his generation, worked tirelessly to stand up for his people in that struggle.

Complicating questions around conservation and Innu traditional ways was a large influx of non-Innu into Innu territory starting in the early 1940s. Flooding of immense areas of habitat in the upper Churchill River basin, a railroad from Quebec, and a road across Labrador combined to give better access to better equipped hunters of all backgrounds. These forces, taken together, have proven to put unsustainable pressure on sedentary woodland caribou. Issues around newly resident moose and associated larger wolf numbers have also put pressure on sedentary woodland caribou. Finally, migration of large numbers of migratory George River caribou into threatened sedentary woodland caribou range and resultant demands by hunters have all conspired to further threaten sedentary woodland caribou.

Pen struggled, time after time, to bridge the divide from the world of his people, who see hunting caribou as a right, and also see population problems with sedentary caribou as problems created by someone else's doing, to the world where the very real peril of Labrador's sedentary caribou has been identified by the Province. Collectively, we still have not resolved those issues, but the two worlds and ways are hopefully closer to coming to a common understanding because of the many times Pen intervened between them, and actively worked, in a respectful and understanding way, to ensure that all points of view were valued whether Innu or non-Innu. For this we deeply appreciate, acknowledge, and miss the efforts of Penote Michel.

