

## Caribou – Vadzaih

Drin gwiinzii – Shoozrii Mary Jane Moses vahzii. Old Crow gwizhit ti'hch'uu.

Caribou is what I grew up on in my childhood days and it still a big part of my life today as an elder. Caribou is an important food source, it is part of my Gwich'in identity, culture, traditions and history. Caribou, vadzaih is what connects me to the land.

Our people from long time ago have followed the seasonal rounds of harvesting from the land. They harvested and gathered food and lived off of the land which sustained them. Our generation today, we still follow that same pattern. The land continues to feed us spiritually.

Living with the caribou is what keeps us strong as a nation. I'm very grateful that we are still able to eat caribou meat. Twice yearly and in between we get the opportunity to hunt and harvest caribou from the land. We are so fortunate that caribou migrate close to our community, for that we say Mahsi' choo to the Creator for the good traditional foods that the land provides for us to feed our families.

Most importantly when speaking about our one important food source the caribou is that we can't ever forget the teachings of our parents, grandparents and our ancestors of how they took care of the land so that the land in return would provide our food sources of caribou, moose, fish and good clean drinking water. It all comes full circle and we honor and respect all that the land provides. The traditional teachings keeps us focused and strong as Gwich'in people, we can't ever forget that. We need to really listen to the stories passed down from our elders, embedded in those stories are the deep rooted values of culture, language, traditions and heritage, this information has to keep passing down so that our great great grandchildren can benefit from what was had in the past up till today, that they'll have that food source in the future. We need to continue to speak as one voice, continue to be proud Gwich'in upholding our true ties to the

land and animals to find meaningful balance in the world where everything is equal.

Our life with the caribou and all of nature is shaped by the land and environment we live in, by the ecosystems, by climate changes we see happening at a fast rate all over the north. We have to adapt and conserve where and when necessary and take from the land and waters only what we need always conserving for future generations. The balance always has to be entered in.

It's good to be on the land, to be able to ground ourselves from a fast paced society. It's refreshing to be on the land, to be quiet by ourselves, it's a spiritual regeneration where we feel good inside, we eat good traditional foods, we de-stress and its such good medicine to be out in mother nature.

The land is one of our best teachers and healer. Mahsi' choo we are caribou people, we came from strong people, our ancestors who taught us the skill sets of the land. Mahsi' Choo to our ancestors who left us their legacy of being one with the land, respecting & sharing with all. Let's follow that trail they blazed for us, let's walk together, side by side, stronger united to speak strong for the survival of our unique way of life with the caribou, vadzaih for long into the future. Our young people need to step forward and take their place to continue the legacy of our ancestors, to always look out for our people, ensuring they have all the needed resources in front of them, to walk proud as a Gwich'in Nation.

Thank you to everyone involved with this vigil for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Mahsi' choo for the support from all Gwich'in across borders, we need to stand together with one strong united voice, advocating for our own well-being and that of the caribou.

Hai' Shaagwich'in kat. Gwiinzii adik'anootii.

mjmoses

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*Mary Jane Moses*