

NATIONAL GATHERING OF ELDERS 2025

Contributed by Judy Joachim

Coming Home: Reflections from the National Gathering of Elders 2025

When I walked into the Edmonton Expo Centre on September 29, 2025, I could feel the energy before I even saw the crowd. Drums echoed through the hall, flags from Nations across Canada waved proudly, and thousands of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Youth and Leaders stood shoulder to shoulder. More than 7000 of us had come together for the **National Gathering of Elders (NGE)**, under the theme “Coming Home-Voices of the Elders”

It wasn't just a conference. It felt a homecoming.

The Power of Shared Voices

The Grand Entry set the tone- a sea of color, song and pride. Over the next four days, I witnessed Elders share their voices on everything from the health and wellness to climate change, justice and the survival of our languages.

One session that stayed with me was on **Artificial Intelligence and Language Preservation**. The speaker reminded us that if Indigenous people aren't part of shaping AI the internet will tell stories for us- and not always truthfully. He shared how the Welsh language, once on the brink of extinction, is being revived through partnerships with government, industry and fluent speakers, even using AI tools to teach and expand the language. It was a powerful reminder that our languages too can thrive if we take ownership of the tools shaping the future.



Healing on the Land

I also attended sessions on wellness that left me deeply moved. A husband and a wife team from the Northwest Territories spoke about the **Endacho Healing Lodge**, the first land-based trauma healing facility of its kind in the North. Their vision- a 24 bed, eight week residential program-is already changing lives, alongside their initiative to train Indigenous counsellors when they are needed. So far they have trained 27 counsellors.

At Saddle Lake Cree Nation, midwives are bringing babies into the world surrounded by culture, ceremony and love. Hearing about Traditional medicines stored at the All Nations Healing Hospital, rites of passage for youth, and the joy of birth celebrated in community reminded me of how healing happens when culture leads the way.

Justice Hard Truths

Not every conversation was easy. A justice forum intended to highlight RCMP reconciliation quickly shifted to the urgent issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). The room was heavy, but so was the determination to keep speaking truth, even when it's uncomfortable. That same spirit of solidarity was seen when Elders raised \$5,500 to support the family of Samuel Bird. Each day, prayers were offered for his safe return. When news came that his case had turned into a homicide investigation, the prayers did not stop. They grew stronger.

More Than an Event

What I carried home from Edmonton was not just notes from forums or memories of performances. It was the feeling of connection:

- Elders guiding youth with wisdom and love.
- Nations standing together in respect and solidarity.
- Communities reminding one another that healing, language, and culture are not just traditions — they are our future.

The Gathering reminded me that prayer is powerful, culture is medicine, and when we come together, we are stronger than the challenges we face.

With Gratitude

A heartfelt thank you to AWN for supporting 7 of us community members to attend. Because of that support, we were able to be part of something bigger than ourselves — a moment of renewal, learning, and hope. 2027 Gathering will be in Mississauga Ont.

Photo Credits: Brian McDonald

COMMUNITY INFORMATION



SOAK N SMUDGE

Spa Luxury at Home.

THE EXPERIENCE: Mix hand-picked flowers, Therapeutic Oils with soothing Himalayan & Epsom Salts to transform your Bath & Shower.

YOUR TAKEAWAY: Fragrant Bath Bombs & Shower Steamers + Aromatic Smudge Spray

HOLISTIC BENEFITS: Release Tension, Soothe Skin, De-Tox & melt away stress.

To register please call the office at 780-827-

5510

November 24 @ 6:00

AWN L&R Building

ASENIWUCHE ENVIRONMENTAL CORP
ACCOUNTING CLERK: AP/AR

We are seeking a detail-orientated and motivated Accounting/Administrative Clerk to join our team. This role is ideal for someone with strong organizational skills, excellent attention to detail, and a solid understanding of bookkeeping and office administration.

FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION COORDINATOR

This position is responsible for delivering a broad array of strength-based and family-centered services that teach, coach, and support families/caregivers to create new possibilities and achieve better futures together.

Please check out our website for further details or to see what other opportunities we have available!



<https://www.aseniwuche.ca/job-opportunities/> or scan the QR Code

SAVE THE DATE

November 29, 2025

1:00pm-4:00pm

AWN building 10003 99st

AWN Indigenous Christmas Market

AWN Community Artisans, if you would like to showcase and sell your crafts please register for a table free of cost,
email Nadine admin@aseniwuche.com or call 780-827-5510



AGC HALLOWEEN SNAP SHOT



On Halloween , the AGC had a staff costume party contest and potluck! Congratulations to the costume winners!



HAPPY MATERNITY LEAVE

On October 24th, we wished AWN's Land & Resources Intake Support Coordinator Molly Brill a Happy Maternity Leave.

Congratulations Molly on your growing family, enjoy your maternity leave and all the special moments it will bring, have a joyful baby break, we will miss you!



CARIBOU PATROL

Caribou Patrol is an Indigenous-led stewardship program, run by Aseniwuche Winewak Nation (AWN), that promotes caribou conservation within AWN's traditional territory. This grassroots program was started in 2012 in response to west-central Alberta's declining caribou herd populations.

The objectives of this program are to:

- Reduce the potential of vehicle collisions with woodland caribou on area roadways through road patrols
- Increase public safety by providing the public with wildlife road sharing information and tips.
- Enhance awareness of caribou management and wildlife road sharing through education and outreach initiatives for three specific user groups: the public, industry
- Collect data on wildlife sightings



RECENT ACTIVITIES

It has been a busy & rewarding month for us on the events front! On October 4th, we held our Calgary Zoo Lichen collection, joined by the parents and kids who are helping us provide enrichment for the zoo's caribou residents. Despite the seasons first snowfall arriving just as we set out, everyone's spirit's stayed high- and we managed to gather an impressive amount of lichen. A special Thank You to Jane McDonald for joining us and offering a heartfelt prayer to start the project off on the right foot.

On October 24th, 25th, 26th our group headed back to Calgary with the lichen we collected. We had the wonderful opportunity to meet the zoo's caribou close up, learn more about them and other North American wildlife, and then explore the zoo in smaller groups. Though it was a smaller team this year, the trip was a great success- and everyone had a fantastic time!



THE CARIBOU

We are starting to get more reports of caribou being seen around Highway 40 and our crews are back on the highway. Fall migration is probably close to starting if not already underway. Please make a note to be a little extra cautious when travelling between Grande Cache and Hinton for the next few weeks and please remember to report any caribou you see so we can make sure our crews are where they need to be to best protect our magnificent caribou.

CARIBOU TIDBIT: ANTLERS

Caribou are unique in the deer family as both male and female caribou sport antlers for part of the year. Male caribou shed their antlers in November or December, after mating. A bull's antlers can grow as much as 2.5 cm per day and can be up to 51 inches long. Male's antlers grow so rapidly that velvety lumps may be visible as early as March and the rack may be more than a meter long by August. Compared to their body size, caribou have the largest and heaviest antlers of all living deer species.

Female antlers are smaller than those of the male, reaching only 20 inches long, but they will often carry them until June, after they have given birth, to help them defend food sources while pregnant and nursing their calves. There are exceptions where 3-5% of caribou cows will never grow antlers at all.

Antlers play important role in the lifestyle of caribou. Besides a protective role used by both sexes, they are also used by the females for digging through the snow in the winter during the search for food to ensure better nutrition while they are pregnant resulting in healthier calves in the spring.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

We are planning for 2026 phase of our year so there aren't currently any upcoming activities.

Please watch our Facebook page in case something comes up before the next newsletter.

If you have an organization that is interested in having a presentation from Caribou Patrol, please reach out!