



Council of Yukon First Nations

# Ross River Dene First Nation **Cultural Orientation** and Protocols **Toolkit**



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# **ROSS RIVER DENA COUNCIL SPECIFIC CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND PROTOCOLS**

## **1.0 History**

The Kaska Dena have lived in an area over 240,000 sq. km in southeast Yukon, southern Northwest Territories and north-western British Columbia for tens of thousands of years, long before recorded history. The territory extends from MacMillan Pass on the Yukon/NWT border in the north, to the Kwadacha in the south and from Little Salmon Lake, YT in the west to Fort Nelson in the east.

While the Kaska have always seen themselves as one Nation, provincial and territorial borders now separate Kaska families. The Kaska have been divided into Bands by the Indian Act and the traditional groups are now referred to as First Nations.

The Kaska First Nations include Dease River First Nation at Good Hope Lake, BC, the Daylu Dena Council at Lower Post, BC and the Kwadacha First Nation at Fort Ware north of Prince George, BC. In the Yukon there is the Liard First Nation at Watson Lake and the Ross River Dena Council at Ross River.

The place that became the community of Ross River is situated where Ross River meets the Upper Pelly River. The Pelly flows another 250 km north and east from there to meet the Yukon River at Fort Selkirk.

### **Early and Pre Contact with Non-First Nations**

Poole Field was a trader on the Upper Pelly from 1903-1913. (Cruikshank, 1976) He learned through stories and observation that the people on the Pelly River formed three distinct groups: those who lived on the Lower Pelly River area, (known today as the Selkirk First Nation) those who lived at the headwaters of the Pelly, south and east of the Lapie and Ross Rivers and in the Francis Lake area, (known today as the Kaska), and those who lived in the mountains at the headwaters of the Macmillan and Ross Rivers, in historic times called the Knife Indians (known today as the Mountain Slavey).

As the community of Ross River is on the Upper Pelly River, the people who settled here are mostly of Kaska or Mountain Slavey origin. The Kaska traditional territory consists of 93,000 square miles of beautiful, rugged, resource-rich land. It covers about 25% of the Southeast Yukon, adjacent areas of Northwest Territories and about 10% of B.C. The Mountain Slavey people lived in the Selwyn Mountains which formed the headwaters of the Pelly and Ross Rivers.

The confluence of the Ross and Pelly Rivers was always a major crossroads for travellers coming north from the Upper Liard River and those travelling east over

the mountains to points on the Mackenzie River. The area served as a meeting place for native peoples who would gather there in the late summer. (Kagan, 1998) The first inhabitants of the Ross River area may have been Northern Tutchone speaking Pelly River Indians. In 1886, after they "were massacred by hostile people from the east, some Kaska moved in to fill the gap". (Field, 1957)

People of the Ross River area lived a nomadic lifestyle, making a living from the land, following the animals with the circle of the seasons. Snowshoes, moose skin boats, snares and fish traps are just some of the wonderfully designed tools they used. (Ross River Dena Council) Hunting and fishing were the main activities of the people. They used snares for hunting big game, including moose, sheep and caribou. They used nets in the rivers to fish spawning salmon, spears to get them through the ice in winter and fish traps to catch both salmon and grayling in small tributaries. Trapping was secondary to hunting, though the furs were important for clothing.

Moose were hunted in the Upper Pelly area until the early 1800's when they were replaced by caribou until 1870. "Poole Field was told by the oldest men that when they were young, there were no moose in the area, only caribou." (Cruikshank, 1974) These would have been woodland caribou from the Cassiar region of BC. The caribou were gone by the 1900's and they were again replaced by moose. The people had to learn to hunt caribou (they used bows and arrows, spears, snares, deadfalls and large fenced caribou surrounds) and then they had to relearn how to hunt moose.

Very different hunting techniques are required to hunt caribou and moose. "The ability of Indian people to shift their economic base from moose to caribou and back shows great adaptability on their part. They had to develop technology and social organization which would allow them to survive when there were changes in animals." (Cruikshank, 1974)

When the moose returned, they prospered, and the Upper Pelly/Liard/Francis Lake area became known as one of the best moose country in the continent of North America. While moose or caribou meat were the mainstay in the winter months, fish was the staple in the summer.

### **Times of Rapid Change (1840-1920)**

Soon after 1800, traders came to the southeast Yukon. Forts were established in the Kaska's territory on the Upper Liard and at Dease Lake. Robert Campbell of the Hudson's Bay Company established two trading posts close to what is now Ross River, Fort Frances on Frances Lake in 1840 and Fort Pelly Banks on the Upper Pelly in 1846. These areas were likely important trading centres before the posts had been built. After Fort Frances was looted by the Chilkats in 1851 and Pelly Banks accidentally burned in 1850, they remained places of trade.

"The fur trade rapidly attracted large numbers of white trappers and led to over trapping... in 1903 Sheldon commented on the abundance of marten and lynx on

the Macmillan River. Three years later, trappers in Dawson told him that the Macmillan had been "trapped out". (Sheldon, 1911, p. 92-93)  
This new commercial activity changed the pattern of life for the local people in numerous ways. For example, it provided them with new tools and the ability to build permanent residences and wooden boats and it afforded them more sled dogs which allowed them to carry heavier loads and stockpile goods for longer periods. The preference of the Hudson's Bay Company to deal with one Chief rather than individuals meant that patterns of leadership began to change. Trapping commercially also had the damaging ecological affect of animals being trapped right out of an area when the price of fur was high.

The mountains of the Upper Pelly gained fame among big game hunters. "Undoubtedly, this was putting a great deal of pressure on traditional land use patterns... By 1908 Keele learned that game was disappearing from this region..." (Cruikshank,1974) These and other ecological upsets had huge impact on the subsistence base of the people.

### **Settling at Ross River and Modern History**

In the summer 1901 a permanent settlement was begun at Ross River when Tom Smith used a shallow-bottomed steamer to move his fishing camp from the Lower Pelly. As many as fifteen First Nation families wintered there that year. When Smith sold the post it was renamed "Nahanni House" and the new owners travelled up the Ross River to set up a smaller post at three small lakes known now as Lewis, Field and Sheldon Lakes. By 1914, over a thousand people were gathering at the settlement in late August. The Indian Bureau began sending a doctor and a deacon was also assigned to the settlement. In 1916 a flu epidemic ravaged the settlement taking with it many lives.

When petroleum was discovered at Fort Norman in 1920 which brought new trading posts to the area, many of the Mackenzie River people returned east. The 20's and 30's proved to be difficult times. A severe drought led to severe forest fires which swept up the Pelly River to Ross River in 1920 followed by locusts plaguing the area the next summer. However, the settlement persevered.

World War II was the beginning of a new era. It brought with it the construction of the Canol Highway and a pipeline project to carry oil from Norman Wells, NWT and of course many soldiers and construction workers. "The old settlement of Ross River on the Pelly's east side at the mouth of the Ross was abandoned, and the modern town of Ross River was begun on the west bank." (Kagan, 1998)

Though there were many changes in the ecology of this area with the coming of white men, the Kaska and Mountain Slavey were for quite a time able to adapt to the changing economic and cultural situation and still lead their traditional nomadic lifestyle. "The serious decline in the 40's and 50's in the fur market led to an increased need for wage employment... as the people by then had come to rely on money. People began to leave their family groups to seek work. Soon there was a

school in [Ross River], and the patterns of young adult families going out in the bush in the winter were broken forever.” (McDonnell)

## **Residential School**

The Ross River Dena attended residential school, just as most other First Nations across the country. Before the children were taken away from the security of their families and community, the people lived life in harmony with the land and had strong cultural beliefs and values. Children were happy. They understood who they were and where they fit into the community and family structure.

The goal of residential schools was to assimilate. To strip away their connection with language, family structure and culture and replace it with something else that in no way reflected or supported their traditional way of life. On top of this, devastating harm was inflicted on many of the children at residential school including physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Today many of the survivors and their families are healing from their experiences and working to build a strong Nation once again.

## **2.0 Current Status in Land Claims, Self Government**

The Kaska Dena are in negotiations with the Federal, British Columbia and Yukon governments on land rights. For purposes of negotiations the Kaska Nation is represented by the Ross River Dena, the Liard First Nation (Watson Lake) and the Kaska Dena Council.

They are working on a number of agreements including:

- First Nation Final Agreements in the Yukon (Ross River Dena & Liard First Nation)
- Self Government Agreements in the Yukon (Ross River Dena & Liard First Nation)
- Transboundary Agreement into the Yukon, including self-government provisions
- Transboundary Agreement into the NWT
- Transboundary Agreements in BC (2) and treaty in BC

While negotiations continue, the Kaska communities receive program dollars from the federal government.

## **Treaty Negotiations**

Agreements related to energy and mineral development, forestry and tourism have been signed between the Kaska, Canada and British Columbia. These agreements give the Kaska opportunities to participate in management and benefit from resource related development on the Kaska traditional territory while negotiations continue.

## **Ross River Dena Governance and Structure**

The RRDC is governed by a Chief and Council whose responsibilities and authorities flow through a constitution and who are elected every four years. The council consists of one chief, one deputy chief and three councillors. Chief and Council report to the General Assembly which is an aggregate of all the citizens from whom they get their mandate on an annual basis.

### **3.0 Communications and Relationships**

In a small community, relationships are close and everyone knows one another. It means the community is able to come together in times of need and work toward the common good. It also can mean personal disagreements or conflicts are felt on many levels in the community. To prevent misunderstandings, contact the Health and Social department with contentious issues. It is important to get to know and understand family networks/dynamics.

Communications within the First Nation government can be challenging as the Health and Social department is situated in a different building than the other departments. Efforts have to be made to ensure regular communication.

The capacity of the First Nation government is stretched to the maximum with numerous service/program priorities and self government and land claims negotiations on-going. It means that staff members are often travelling to attend meetings and therefore not in Ross River. It's important to plan meetings and coordinate work in advance to assure people's availability.

### **4.0 Specific Cultural Values and Beliefs**

Ross River is a blend of cultures: Kaska, Dene, Northern Tutchone and Gwich'in. The Dene came from the Fort Norman, NWT and settled with the Kaska, the Northern Tutchone came from Carmacks area and more recently the Gwich'in from northern Yukon. All these traditions have blended together making for a rich combination of culture that is based in the shared connection to the land. Any differences that remain in values and cultural ways is respected by the community.

The ways of the Ross River Dena have been passed down from generation to generation. Historically they were nomadic people, travelling and covering a lot of territory which required strong survival skills and the willingness to work and support each other as a community.

The Ross River Dena harvest and respect the land and its resources. Traditional ways are practiced and are much more prevalent when the people are out on the land, especially during the hunting and gathering season.

The people want their youth to learn all they can in regard to respecting the land and harvesting traditional foods. The Elders encourage the young leaders to work together and be helpful to one another to continue an ethic that was so strong in early history.

## **Language**

The Kaska language is one of the most advanced languages in the Yukon and is still spoken at the community level. It is an Athabaskan language that is closely related to languages spoken in neighbouring areas: Tahltan, Tagish, Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone, Sekani, Beaver and Slavey.

### **5.0 Birth & Death**

The birth of a baby is an exciting time for community members. A baby is welcomed by all community members, especially the Elders.

Death is a sacred time. The protocol is for the First Nation to assist the family with the funeral arrangements and initiate the legal aspects of the process. The First Nation government office is closed as a show of respect. The family takes the lead with the decisions for a potlatch. Community members help and support the family with the funeral. Resource people are welcome to attend.

### **6.0 Potlatch Traditions**

A potlatch is a traditional practice of the Ross River Dena and a spiritual time. Potlatches are for all special times when a community needs to come together. It is a traditional way for the community to celebrate with joy and also a time for grieving and finding closure. The Wolf and Crow clan system is followed, where if a Wolf clan member passes on the Crow clan takes responsibility for the funeral and the potlatch and vice versa.

Community members and resource people are welcome and encouraged to attend potlatches. It is best to contact a staff member at H & S department or the family that is hosting the potlatch. People dress casually and one can expect to meet and be among many people. The potlatch consists of prayer, presentations by community members and a huge meal. It is an honour to attend and an opportunity to get to know people at these special times.

### **7.0 Marriage**

The Ross River Dena have many family groups with inter-marriage relationships and like most other First Nation communities, there are many extended family members. Historically people travelled from other northern communities to marry in Ross River and so there are family connections throughout the north.

The community members follow the traditional law of marriage. The Kaska have two matrilineal moieties, known as Wolf and Crow. A wolf clan member cannot marry within their moieties and a crow clan member cannot marry another crow clan member. This is a traditional way of keeping the family lines clear.

Most marriages are held at the local churches in town and some are held privately. The wedding potlatch is a big celebration with everyone in the community invited.

## **8.0 Traditional Laws**

There were many traditional laws that were strictly followed for many generations. These were demonstrated by the people and passed down through stories and legends. The laws covered harvesting practices, family structure and behaviour and how to show respect to other members of the clans and community. As a resource person, over time and as trusting relationships are built, you will learn some of these laws.

## **9.0 Traditional Health and Healing**

Seasonal activities such as food gathering are critical to community members and are key to family wellness. Fishing, hunting and berry harvesting times are of high importance and the First Nation supports people's ability to participate in these traditional activities.

March is one special time that the Kaska Dena families go out on the land and do traditional activities. This is a good time to pre-arrange a visit to a traditional camp out on the land and get to know the people in their element.

## **10.0 Protocols**

### **10.1 Approaching Elders for advice or teachings**

When an Elder speaks, it is respectful to be patient and listen carefully. Elders take time when they speak and there are often pauses as they convey their thoughts. Wait until the speaker shows they have made their point before speaking. It is recommended to talk with the Director of Health and Social in advance of meeting with Elders.

The Elders enjoy sharing their knowledge and do so with a sense of humour which is a way of expressing their appreciation for your services.

### **10.2 Accessing and sharing traditional knowledge**

First Nations use the term traditional knowledge to describe information passed down from generation to generation. It is held sacred and treated with the highest respect. This information may be rooted in: storytelling, ceremonies, traditions, ideologies, medicines, dances, arts and crafts or a combination of all these.

Traditional knowledge is known to communities as the foundation or base of all key information from the past and can be blended into all departments within the First Nation. Elders are getting older and so an emphasis has been placed on documenting their knowledge so it will not be lost to the community.

There are policies to protect this sacred knowledge that must be followed. Contact the Heritage department for further information.

### ***10.3 Home visiting & invitations***

Home visits are normally done with a staff person and/or a family member(s) included. It is protocol to contact the appropriate Health & Social staff person prior to a home visit. A family or community member may be needed to translate for the Elders and other community members.

### ***10.4 Speaking/meeting with individuals of the other gender***

When meeting with individuals of the other gender have a staff member from H & S department attend with you. This is the protocol when dealing with children as well.

Each person reacts differently to people that they don't see on a regular basis. There are cultural differences on ways to converse with the male gender. It is most important to have a Health & Social staff person with you.

To show respect to citizens, especially of the male gender, it is important to explain the plan and process for the visit so they are clear of what will happen.

It is disrespectful to touch personal belongs of the men of the community unless they give you permission.

### ***10.5 Meetings***

The community has regular public meetings on a variety of subjects. Notices are usually posted around town. If a meeting is posted publicly, all community members can attend. If the meeting is for First Nation members only, it will be noted.

Interagency meetings are held monthly which are helpful as part of the strategy to deal with social concerns.

### ***10.6 Dealing with conflict and confrontations***

To prevent conflict and confrontation with a community member, it is recommended to check in with the Director of H & S before meeting on issues or concerns that are contentious or could be misunderstood.

When a conflict or a confrontation occurs with a member of the community, it is most important to contact and involve the Director or Manager of the H & S department. Allow them to assist in further discussions with the person(s) until a resolution plan is arranged and agreed upon. Inviting an Elder to assist with finding resolution is an option.

When a conflict or confrontation occurs between two First Nation government employees, an attempt should be made to resolve the situation between the two staff members. If that doesn't work, then the supervisors should be brought in. Having effective communication among staff is critical for the First Nation to be able to effectively serve the community.

### ***10.7 Expected Behaviour***

In a small community it is important to always be aware of your actions and behaviours, both socially and professionally. Healthy role models are critical to the community. It is expected that role models will demonstrate good judgement, self respect and always hold their position in high regard, including after hours.

Resource people must be willing to put forth the effort to gain respect and trust from the people. The advice is to go slow, be patient, be observant and be aware of what is happening in the community. Resource people are hired and brought in for a reason and that is to work with people who have been traumatized and so they must keep in mind who they are working with. Remember the community is very small and trust must be developed over time. Communication is vital – when either giving or receiving information.

The RRDC staff and Elders are willing to spend time with resource people and work closely with them until they feel comfortable. The staff invites resource people to visit their offices, ask questions to get a good understanding of the issues they are working with. It would work well to begin by meeting with the staff that deal with community issues on a daily basis and learn how to blend into the community in a positive way.

The dress code is to be comfortable, modest and casual.

The traditional regalia worn by citizens is homemade and beautiful. This is evident at gatherings and other public events. Traditional rules are practiced where no one touches sacred drums, clothing or items unless approval is given by the owner.

## ***11.0 Community People, Health and Social Well-being***

### ***11.1 Population and Demographics***

The town of Ross River has a population of around 367 with the majority being First Nation. RRDC's registered population with INAC as of December 2008 was a total of 483 citizens with 335 living in the community and 148 living elsewhere. The population was made up of 241 females and 242 males. (Registered Indian Population by Sex and Residence, December 2008, INAC).

### ***11.2 Education***

The Ross River School offers grades K-10, with about 70 students. There is a Community Education Liaison Coordinator on staff as well as a Kaska language

teacher. Students must go to Faro, Watson Lake or Whitehorse to complete grades 11 and 12.

There is a Yukon college campus, where continuing education programs are offered, with other special programs that are planned with the First Nation. As well, members of the community attend the main college campus in Whitehorse or other institutions for more specialized education.

### ***11.3 Health and Well-being***

The health and well-being of the Kaska is tied closely with culture – with their connection to the land and traditional activities like hunting, trapping, fishing as well as sewing, dancing and stick gambling.

### ***11.4 Health and Social Strengths***

The people take pride in their language and the fact that many people of all ages continue to speak fluently. The language is a critical part of the culture that supports health and healing.

The Ross River Dena revived a unique style of drumming and singing – the Ross River Drummers are well known and travel all over the Yukon and elsewhere to perform. As well, Ross River is well known for stick gambling. Each year there are stick gambling championships where First Nations from all over the Yukon come to participate.

The strength of the RRD comes from the connection to the land and the knowledge of culture and traditional ways. The people are encouraged to spend time on the land. Seasonal activities like hunting, making dried meat, berry picking and trapping bring balance and an opportunity to pass on traditions.

### ***11.5 Community Challenges and Issues***

Funding for long-term programs and capacity is the number one challenge. It's very difficult to meet the needs of the community when program funding is inadequate as well as tied to program use that does not necessarily suit the needs and priorities of RRDC.

The Health and Social department is often overwhelmed by the volume and severity of community issues. The on-going negative impacts need to be understood. Not only are people recovering from the coming of the missionaries, the building of the North Klondike Highway and the Canol Road, and of course residential school, but also from being uprooted from 'Old Ross' to where Ross River is now. Resource people are encouraged to meet with staff to discuss the community issues and work together to make improvements.

One on-going issue is the lack of support and aftercare services. People are sent outside for treatment, when they come home they don't receive the support they need to be successful in staying sober.

The children need support and encouragement to stay in school. Education of the youth is critical to building a healthy community.

**12.0 Community Health and Social Services Staff**

Ross River Dena Council – Main Phone	867-969-2278
Health & Social Programs – Margaret Thomson Centre	867-969-2722
Director of Health and Social	ext. 204
Reception	ext. 201
Community Wellness	ext. 202 & 203
Family Support Worker	ext. 205
CELC	ext. 206
Home and Community Care	ext 207
CHR	ext. 208

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                 [www.cyfn.ca](http://www.cyfn.ca)  
                 [www.eco.gov.yk.ca](http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca)  
                 [www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca](http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca)  
                 [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/index-eng.asp](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/index-eng.asp)

# Appendix 1: ROSS RIVER DENA COUNCIL COMMUNITY PROFILE



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This community profile is for the Ross River Dena Council, a Yukon First Nation located in and around Ross River, Yukon. The purpose of the community profile is to provide some background information on the community.

## 2.0 YUKON FIRST NATION CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND PROTOCOLS

### 2.1 *Yukon Context*

#### **Geography**

Yukon Territory is in the extreme northwest corner of Canada. It is bordered by the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alaska and the Arctic Ocean. The territory is 483,450 square km (186,661 square miles), about one third the size of Alaska. Landforms in the Yukon are mainly plateaus bordered and crossed by mountains. The highest range is the Elias Mountains in the southwest where the highest peak in Canada, Mount Logan rises 5,951 metres (19,524 feet) above sea level. The Yukon and Peel rivers drain virtually all of the territory and in the far north, the tundra stretches 160 km southward from the Arctic ocean.

#### **Economy and Transportation**

Mining has historically been Yukon's chief industry and remains important along with tourism. Gold, along with zinc, lead and silver are the mineral of interest and exploration and mining contribute significantly to the Yukon economy. Air travel is used to access Whitehorse and flights are also available to Dawson City and Old Crow (the only fly in community). The Alaska Highway and north and south Klondike Highways are heavily used and all communities other than Old Crow are situated along these highways.

#### **Population / Demographics**

The population of the Yukon was 28,674 in 2001 (Census 2001) and has risen to 34,157 by June, 2009 (Yukon Bureau of Statistics Monthly Statistical Review August 2009). This is the highest population on record. The overall population increased 2.6% from June 2008 to June 2009. Thirteen of seventeen communities in the territory showed population increases during the same period. Whitehorse has 71% of the population with 25,636 people with the remaining people distributed throughout 16 other communities. There are slightly fewer women than men – males 17,407 and females 16,750. Persons under the age of 15 years accounted for 16.7% of the population, while 8.2% of the population was aged 65 or over. The 2006 Census recorded 7,580 Yukoners (23%) as being of Aboriginal identity. According to Statistics Canada, 3,665 of that total were aboriginal males

and 3,915 females. The percentage of the aboriginal population aged 15 and over was 72.8% and 18.2% under the age of 15.

## **Health and Social Status**

The overall life expectancy has risen from 73.4 years in 1994 to 75.7 years in 2006. Yukon female's life expectancy is 77.7 years and for males, it is 74.0 years. Life expectancy at birth is lowest for Aboriginal males in the Yukon with an average of 8.8 years less life expectancy than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Aboriginal males also had the highest increase in life expectancy of 7.3% or 4.6 years from 1994 to 2006. Aboriginal females had the second highest increase of 4.5% or 3.2 years.

The Canadian Community Health Survey (2006) for Yukon aboriginal people reported that 47.4% of self-rated their health as very good or excellent (2396 responses) and 65.7% self-rated their mental health as very or excellent (3319 responses). 21.5% of people over 18 years reported that they had quite a lot of life stress (978 responses). 69.4% felt a strong sense of belonging to their local community (3509 responses).

The Yukon Bureau of Statistics reported the Yukon labour force at 17,500 in October 2009 and of that 16,400 were employed with an unemployment rate of 6.3%. Federal, territorial, municipal and First Nation governments employed a total of 7,000. Private Sector employed 7,300 and 2,100 reported as self-employed.

## **2.2 Ross River Location and Infrastructure**

Ross River is the home of the Ross River Dena. It is 360 km northeast of Whitehorse, near the junction of the Campbell Highway and the Canol Road and at the confluence of the Pelly and Ross Rivers.

In Ross River there is a K-10 school, library, Yukon College Campus, Health Centre, daycare, recreation centre, swimming pool.

## **2.3 Business and Government Services**

### **Business**

In the 2008 Business Survey conducted by Yukon Stats Bureau, of a total 2,855 businesses in the territory, Ross River reported 12 with 36 employees.

Services for the community of Ross River are provided by a number of businesses. They include Dena General Store (grocery, gas, bank, post office), Ross River Service Centre (groceries, hardware and other supplies), Jackfish Lake B & B, TND Motor Hotel, as well as other construction, mechanics, welding, equipment rental and outfitting businesses.

Government services provide the largest share of jobs for the community. Accommodation, food services, recreation, wilderness guiding, outfitting and

tourism all provide some jobs with some employment linked to services needed by mining exploration companies. With the coming of the long-term Faro Mine Closure project, economic benefit is expected for the community.

Many people in Ross River combine the wage economy with subsistence activities like hunting and fishing to make their living. Some see trapping as their main area of work and many do arts, carving, and beadwork.

### **First Nation Business**

Yukon First Nations have continued to increase their economic development activities. First Nations consortiums have invested in businesses as diverse as major hotels, office buildings, and a manufacturing company. In 2008, Yukon First Nations owned 12 businesses and Yukon First Nation Development Corps owned an additional 19. As well, many individual First Nations people own and operate small businesses. In 2008 they made up 5.7% of sole proprietor and partnership businesses in the Yukon. (Yukon Bureau of Statistics Business Survey, 2008).

The Kaska traditional territory is rich in natural resources, and the Kaska are working cooperatively with industry and government to create opportunities for new investment and economic development. Forestry, oil & gas, tourism, and mining initiatives are currently being pursued. RRDC is looking to develop small business operations in fields like outfitting and guiding as well as accommodation and food services.

RRDC carries out its economic development activities through the Ross River Development Corporation whose office is in Ross River.

### **Faro Mine Closure – Economic Opportunities**

The Faro mine is an open-pit lead zinc mine that was in operation by three different mining companies between 1970 and 1997. Anvil Range was the last owner of the Faro Mine and in April 1998 went into receivership. The federal government became responsible for interim care and maintenance of the mine as well as its closure. The cost to maintain the site has averaged about \$10,000,000 per year.

In 2009, consensus was reached between Canada, Yukon Government and the affected First Nations on a Closure Plan for the Faro Mine Complex. The plan addresses issues of human health and safety and environmental protection as well as maximum socio-economic benefits for the affected First Nations which includes the Ross River Dena. The overall estimated cost for the project is \$450-\$590 million. Implementation of the closure plan is expected to commence in two to three years once the regulatory and environmental assessments are completed and the project receives final approval.

Up to this point, the RRDC have never seen meaningful economic benefit from the mines operation. But what RRDC has experienced is environmental damage in their traditional territory. With this agreement, the First Nation is ensured jobs and

business opportunities. The major construction phase will last fifteen years, followed by an adaptation phase (monitoring, treatment, testing) that will last for another 20-25 years. The monitoring and treatment will be required for many decades beyond that.

### **Yukon Government Services**

The Yukon government provides a full range of services from education, health and social services, environmental services, economic and community development. Please visit [www.gov.yk.ca](http://www.gov.yk.ca) for more information.

### **Government of Canada Services**

Over time, federal responsibilities for many services including fisheries, mine safety, intra-territorial roads, hospitals and community health care were transferred to the Yukon government. In October 2001, the Yukon Devolution Agreement was concluded enabling the transfer of the remaining province-like responsibilities for land, water and resource management to the Government of the Yukon on April 1, 2003. As a result, the presence of the Federal Government in the territory has diminished.

Services provided in Ross River include police services, postal services, and environmental protection. Please visit [www.canada.gc.ca](http://www.canada.gc.ca) for more information.

### **Non-Government Services**

**Many Rivers Counseling Services** – is a Whitehorse-based organization that offers non-emergency counseling for individuals, couples, families and groups in Ross River. A counselor is assigned to Ross River and makes visits to the community every other week.

**Alcoholics Anonymous** – meetings are held in the community.

**Child Development Centre** – is a Whitehorse-based organization providing early supports and services to Yukon children from birth to school age, particularly those whose needs are special. Outreach workers visit Ross River.

**Blood Ties Four Directions** – Whitehorse-based organization that provides outreach services educating people and supporting those with blood born diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C.

### **First Nations Services**

The First Nation provides a range of services to the community including health, education, heritage, lands and resources and others. The services are funded directly by the federal government.

The RRDC Health and Social department administers a list of programs: Health Promotion, Elder Care, Home and Community Care, Alcohol/drug Treatment

Referrals, Social Development, Social Assistance, Youth Leadership, Funerals and Potlatches.

The Kaska Dena Environmental Youth Camps are open to Kaska youth between ages 13-19. The camps are a leadership development program designed to give youth a deeper understanding of land management and resource issues in their homelands.