



For Immediate Release

December 15, 2023

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Yukon Government Hold Community Consultations on Nun Cho Ga

On Monday, December 4, and Tuesday, December 5, 2023, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Yukon Government co-hosted two community meetings to consult with TH citizens and update members of the general public on the latest developments with Nun Cho Ga, the 36,000-year-old baby mammoth unearthed from Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Traditional Territory on June 21, 2022. Nun Cho Ga is the best preserved and most complete mummy of a mammoth found to date in North America.

The discovery of Nun Cho Ga (Hän for "Big Animal Baby") represents a tremendous moment in Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's timeless relationship with our ancestral lands, and an opportunity to reconnect with our traditions. It also represents the possibility for giant leaps forward in our understanding of the geological history of the Beringia region and has attracted the interest of scientists in the Yukon and around the world. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Yukon Government have been working together on understanding Nun Cho Ga's story for over a year, and it has been vital that we move forward together in a good way, respecting Nun Cho Ga as a relation and a teacher.

On the morning of December 4, team members from the Nun Cho Ga project gathered to light a sacred fire and hold ceremony to ask for wisdom and guidance in the days ahead. Prayer cloths were laid down, tobacco was offered, and an opening prayer and song were led by Nyla Klugie-Migwans, Yukon First Nation Heritage Advisor. Later that day, 17 TH citizens gathered in Äät Nëhëjël (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Community Hall) and six citizens joined online via Zoom to hear presentations, ask questions, and provide direction on Nun Cho Ga's future. Citizens heard presentations from Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Director of Heritage Debbie Nagano, Yukon Government representatives including Paleontologist Grant Zazula, Assistant Paleontologist Elizabeth Hall, Conservator Valery Monahan, and Brian Groves, Senior Manager, Heritage.

Following those presentations, citizens broke into smaller groups to discuss important topics surrounding Nun Cho Ga, including stewardship, education, research, and protocols. Citizen comments and directions were facilitated by Mark Nelson of Cambio Consulting. Note-takers recorded input, and an on-site illustrator, Whitehorse-based Esther Bordet, was also there to provide a visual record of the conversations.

On the evening of December 5, members of the public were invited to Äłät Nēhējēl to hear the same presentations from the previous day. Attendees of both events were advised that Nun Cho Ga has been kept frozen since her discovery and that Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has submitted an application to the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) in Ottawa for conservation treatment. The Canadian Conservation Institute is a special operating agency of the federal Department of Canadian Heritage that provides research, information, and services regarding the conservation and preservation of cultural artifacts and heritage. Upon acceptance/approval from CCI, Nun Cho Ga will be transported to Ottawa. This decision was directed by a committee of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Elders, who carry the wisdom of our ancestors and have been involved in Nun Cho Ga's care since she was discovered.

We have much to learn from Nun Cho Ga, and planning for her future will be a collaborative process between Yukon Government, the scientific community, and other stakeholders, led by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and guided always by the principles of Tr'ëhudè (living in a good way).

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Backgrounder/Info sheet

- On June 21, 2022, miners working on Eureka Creek uncovered a frozen, near complete, mummified baby woolly mammoth while excavating through the permafrost.
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Elders named the mammoth calf Nun Cho Ga, meaning “big animal baby” in the Hän language.
- Nun Cho Ga is the best preserved and most complete mummy of a mammoth found to date in North America.
- Nun Cho Ga has been kept frozen since her discovery and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has submitted an application to the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) in Ottawa for conservation treatment (cleaning and vacuum freeze-drying).
- Upon acceptance/approval from CCI, Nun Cho Ga will be transported to Ottawa. When conservation treatment is completed, she will return home to the Yukon in her preserved and stabilized state. While in Ontario, and prior to the preservation process, Nun Cho Ga may also be transported to McMaster University in Hamilton, where CT scanning and tissue sampling for DNA analysis may occur. Discussions are underway between Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Yukon Government Palaeontology and researchers at McMaster University regarding this work.

- Research is currently underway at the University of Calgary by the Geological Survey of Canada on permafrost samples recovered from the discovery site. This includes ancient pollen analysis and environmental DNA (eDNA) to reconstruct vegetation and climate conditions during the time of Nun Cho Ga's life.

Quick facts

- A quick examination of the woolly mammoth suggests she is female and roughly the same size as the 42,000-year-old infant mummy woolly mammoth "Lyuba" discovered in Siberia in 2007.
- Geologists from the Yukon Geological Survey and University of Calgary who recovered the frozen mammoth on site suggest that Nun Cho Ga died and was frozen in permafrost during the ice age. Subsequent analysis of radiocarbon (¹⁴C) from Nun Cho Ga confirm it died roughly 36,000 years ago.
- These amazing ice age remains provide an extremely detailed glimpse into a time when Nun Cho Ga roamed the Yukon alongside wild horses, cave lions and giant steppe bison.
- The discovery of Nun Cho Ga marks the first near complete and best-preserved mummified woolly mammoth found in North America. A partial mammoth calf, named Effie, was found in 1948 at a gold mine in interior Alaska.

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