

Naomi Owens, BIT

Director of Treaty & Lands Department,
Saulteau First Nations

To what do you attribute your interest in biology, and when did you first become aware of your interest in the discipline?

As a child, I grew up on the Saulteau First Nations reserve. All of my family had great respect for nature, natural functions of predator-prey dynamics, and the cycle of harvesting medicinal and edible plants. My family introduced me to the circle of life and how we play a small part in harvesting what we need with respect and proper protocol. Protocol included spiritual lessons and certain harvesting times. These teachings were the basis of my interest and set a solid baseline for further learning.

In order to practice these teachings, my family and community set up hunting, fishing, and gathering camps throughout spring to fall. From a very young age, I have been experiencing the great outdoors in all aspects, from hauling water to skinning moose.

When I reached high school, I had a wonderful biology 11-12 teacher. She introduced me to the science of nature and I was fully hooked! With a combination of my culture and a science perspective, this equated to outstanding comprehensions. She also taught me that it was possible to pursue a career in biology, so from there I made it my life-long goal to achieve my biology degree with a strong focus on wildlife.

What is your academic background?

Once I graduated from high school, I didn't have all the pre-requisites to apply for

university. Therefore, I looked into alternative programs and applied to the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology; here I achieved a Natural Resource Technology Diploma. With this diploma, I worked for a few years and then decided it was time to reach for my ultimate goal. I applied to the University of Northern BC and the University of Victoria. I got accepted to both and chose UVic. In 2008, I graduated from UVic with a Bachelor of Science with a major in general biology, finally achieving my goal!

During my last year of university, on a summer job consisting of snorkel surveys on the Pine River, a fellow senior biologist of the College suggested I apply to become a BIT.

What do you do on the job and what are your favourite aspects of the work?

I am the Director of Treaty & Lands Department for the Saulteau First Nations (SFN). This job has a large management component with staff oversight, completing fiscal budgets, annual work plans, and ensuring that we are following our Land and Resource Engagement Policy.

Our department reviews and corresponds with five industry sectors: 1) oil and gas 2) mining 3) forestry 4) wind energy, and 5) hydroelectric dams. We also work with various ministries and government agencies with regard to permitting, licenses, lease, and tenure applications. We also work on environmental assessments, where we have developed an effective First Nations Independent Technical Review team with other neighboring Treaty 8 First Nation groups. Our main objective when working with proponents and government is to ensure our Treaty Rights and environmental

concerns are recognized and protected to the best of our ability.

Our department also works on various projects including our SFN membership, which definitely is a favourable aspect of my job. These projects include the Caribou Pen and Twin Sisters Native Plants Nursery that were both established in partnership with West Moberly First Nations. Our SFN membership plays a critical role in the coordination and function of both projects and business.

Which practice area is beyond the scope of your current work that you would most like to become involved in, or what would your ideal biology-related job or project be?

I love my job and the great opportunity I am given to represent my community. At times, this job can get very political due to various sensitivities of proposed or current projects, *i.e.*, location, a flawed process, lack of capacity, or a difficult company to work with. These issues can make our job difficult at times and that is partly why we developed our Land and Resource Engagement Policy (LREP). LREP provides a process where we categorize our level of engagement; our Chief and Council are provided with adequate information in order to make informed decisions.

The rate and pace of industrial development in the Peace Region is staggering. The ideal situation in my line of work would create an improved balance between economy and environment. A landscape that has time to rejuvenate, heal and provide the necessary natural resources to the economy. The race for industrial competition is ultimately a loss for the environment at its current pace. 

Katherine Capot-Blanc Trainee (RBTech)

Lands and Resources Coordinator,
Fort Nelson First Nation

To what do you attribute your interest in biology, and when did you first become aware of your interest in the discipline?

I knew I would end up working in the Natural Resource sector since a young age. My family used to own a logging truck company in New Hazelton, where I spent many hours in logging trucks looking at clear-cuts and re-planted stands. I was always interested in knowing how the resource sectors worked, and how I could make things better for the environment after the impact from industry. I also had great science and biology teachers in high school that helped me realize the various types of biology work out there and understand that I didn't just have to stick to one subject or practice.

What is your academic background?

I have a diploma in Natural Resources and Environmental Technology (NRET) from the College of New Caledonia (2011). This two year program helped me develop good knowledge of the many aspects that go into land and resource planning and management. I opted for a shorter education period to allow me to quickly enter into the work force and earn the valuable experience I have gained thus far. Since my time away from formal education, I have received my Project Manager level certification in the Canada Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) as well

as my Pesticide Applicator Certificate, which are both of use in my current role at Fort Nelson First Nation (FNFN) as the Lands and Resources Coordinator. I plan on returning to school in a couple years to continue my education.

What do you do on the job and what are your favourite aspects of the work?

My job focuses on liaising with external governments and other partners to develop land and resource management solutions for the protection of FNFN treaty rights. I also lead operational engagement, provide technical analysis, and lead land management initiatives which include compliance monitoring, site assessment, and restoration activities. I enjoy my job because I'm constantly doing something different every day and there's never a dull or boring moment. I get to work on various projects ranging from oil and gas development, reclamation, invasive plants, prescribed burning, and an array of wildlife projects. The best part of my day is when I can combine scientific and traditional use information in order to create a holistic picture of the landscape or animal species I am reviewing.

Which practice area is beyond the scope of your current work that you would most like to become involved in, or what would your ideal biology-related job or project be?

To me, there is nothing better than seeing a project evolve from an idea to become a



real, finalized project that makes a positive change to/for the environment.

“I enjoy projects where I have the opportunity to work with other biologists and scientists and to be mentored under them and exposed to their fields and scope of practice, as well as build my own professional network and community of practice.”

I look forward to obtaining more on-the-ground biology skills, such as wildlife collaring and inventory work. 