

Lesser Slave Lake NORTH COUNTRY COMMUNITY Association

(incorporated under Alberta Societies Act in 1980)

2023 Reflections on the past, present and future...

North Country Community Beginnings (50 years ago):

"Spring 1973 saw the arrival of a new group of 'homesteaders' to the Jousard area . . .". So begins the "Hill History" section in the **Lakeside Pioneer** book published in 1986 by the Jousard Homesteaders. Seven friends from Edmonton who had met volunteering with the Alberta Service Corps chose the idealism of being back-to-the-landers in remote northern Alberta. *"The first summer saw the crew working at building a chicken coop, cultivating the fields and acquiring an assortment of goats, chickens, geese and guinea pigs,"* the history book continues. *"None of the seven had any farm or construction experience. However, they learned a great deal from various errors. The first Thanksgiving was celebrated with a beautiful harvest of golden vegetables, homemade saskatoon wine and a homegrown roasted goose."* Two more friends joined the group the following summer and construction began on additional houses at what is today widely known in the Lesser Slave Lake area as "Hippy Hill". The group worked with each other and people in surrounding areas in many endeavors: organizing the High Prairie Farmer's Market in 1975, establishing a wood-working shop that produced wooden toys, introducing the first herbs/arts and crafts store, teaching in local schools, not to mention surviving in solely wood-heated dwellings sans electricity through a northern Alberta winter. So begins the community of North Country. . .

North Country School (NCS) (1978-2006):

The vision of an alternate, unique education facility that the founders of North Country had was fulfilled in the establishment of an accredited K-12 private school in 1978, with classes conducted in parents' homes on a rotating basis for the first 3 school years. In 1980, an old two-story, wood-heated house in Jousard was acquired for North Country School and moved to "The Hill" for an established location. All work to move the house and transform it into a new school building was done by volunteer labor fuelled with the desire for a positive, child centered, parent directed school. In 1996, the society purchased their first piece of land, 15 acres just west of Jousard. North Country School was moved from "The Hill" to this new location. An additional building was also acquired to provide more space for students, monthly meetings of the society and other community events. North Country School was one of a kind in Alberta – family based, solar powered, wood heated, a hot lunch program students were actively involved in preparing on a wood stove, and an individually based curriculum for each child, emphasising music and the arts. Through the years of operation, the school enrolment ranged anywhere from 7-35 students each year, included supervision of home-schooling families in the region, required 1-3 certified teachers, aides, a bus driver, and family volunteers. Our school not only provided educational opportunities for North Country families but served the needs of many families in the Lesser Slave Lake area for many years.

North Country Fair (NCF) (1979-now):

North Country Fair began as a dream of celebrating the Summer Solstice with music, drama, color, art, crafts, and reverence for Earth. In the beginning years, NCF was held in locations near Jousard or Faust until settling in at Spruce Point Park from 1984 to 1989. In 1990, the Fair was moved to the hamlet of Jousard where it remained for 15 years. In 2005, the leap was made to host NCF at our own land in the Driftpile River valley where it has happily been since!

Land purchases:

The first piece of land that North Country purchased was 15 acres just west of Jousard. This site served as a base for the Society, community events, and a home for North Country School from 1996-2004. This land was sold in 2006.

In 1999, the decision was made to purchase 9 quarters of land south of Driftpile from a fellow named Jack Lischka. He chose to sell his farm to North Country because he trusted we would respect the land and the life it sustains. Jack could envision the dream we had at that time to create a home for the school, an outdoor facility for NCF and other presentations, summer workshops and potential community events. We talked of youth camps, picnic areas, playgrounds, organic gardening spaces, demonstrating alternate energy and our Society's mandate of responsible environmental stewardship. Jack was particularly impressed by our level of volunteer commitment, especially seeing people of all ages-grandparents to toddlers-involved and inspired in community endeavors. We are grateful for this Land and what it gives us.

Riparian Project (2000-2010):

In partnership with both provincial and federal agencies, North Country received grants for a 10-yr riparian project that involved restoring vegetation along the riverbanks, fencing, sampling water, monitoring fish habitat and demonstrating solar watering systems for cattle operations.

North Country continues in the spirit of the riparian project by planting trees, testing of the Driftpile River (conducted by the Lesser Slave Watershed Council), monitoring erosion, and committing to preserve and protect the northern Boreal Forest.

Alternate Energy and Environmental Initiatives (1996-now):

In 1996, in partnership with the Regional Environmental Action Committee, North Country became a solar demonstration site for the Lesser Slave Lake area. At that time, the school and community building were located at the property in Jousard and completely powered by this relatively new technology. This initiative continued until 2004.

Here at the Land, North Country has created a solar-based system to reduce the use of generators and related fuel consumption required for NCF and other facility use. In 2015, this system was connected to the electrical grid as a micro-generator, furthering our goal of net-zero energy consumption each year.

North Country is also committed to waste management practices of composting and recycling; striving to reduce materials ending in a landfill. An incredible effort is made during the Fair to sort and separate all garbage with this in mind. Promoting environmental awareness and respect for the Land has earned NCF the reputation of a clean, green gathering.

Astral Harvest (2008-2019):

As the infrastructure for the Fair was established, it became possible to rent the facility for other music events. Astral Harvest, a world-class electronic festival, provided the opportunity for North Country to fulfill its mandate of bringing diverse entertainment to northern Alberta and allowed more people to experience the Land and all it has to offer.

North Country continues to make available its space for public rentals. We have been honored to host weddings, memorials, reunions, workshops, craft markets in addition to other music events over the years. The Land is the perfect venue for any summer activity.

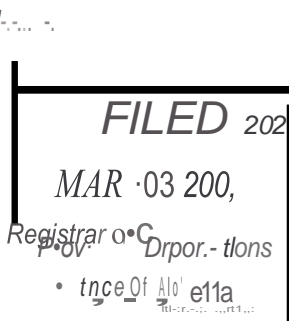
North Country Family Acoustic Music Camp (2021-now):

Our 3rd annual family music camp was held August 3-6, 2023. Each year, the clinicians have been exceptional and provided an educational, fun experience for all who attended. North Country is committed to expanding our music camp as well as additional summer workshop activities, youth camps and other seasonal gatherings.

OBJECTS

Lesser Slave Lake North Country Community Association

1. To help meet the social, educational and recreational needs of members of the Association and surrounding community.
2. To use Association lands, buildings and infrastructure for the good of the community including, but not limited to, one or more educational facilities, libraries, playgrounds, camping areas, picnic sites and areas suitable for workshops.
3. To provide and arrange for musical, dramatic and other entertainments and to arrange for lectures and other public gatherings on social, environmental, political or economic **issues** or on other issues the Association decides appropriate.
4. To promote organic gardening and responsible sustainable agriculture.
5. To demonstrate and promote the use of alternate energy systems.
6. To help foster opportunities for volunteer involvement.
7. To encourage responsible economic opportunities in the Lesser Slave Lake area.
8. To conserve, restore, reclaim, preserve, research, monitor, promote and encourage appreciation of the northern boreal forest.
9. To help foster respect for self, family, community and Earth.



Sunday Gate Sales & Other Donations Since 2015

2015 Peace River Outreach

2016 Sangudo Community School
High Prairie Children's Resource Centre

2017 Sucker Creek Women's Shelter
Driftpile Lunch Program

2018 High Prairie Municipal Library
MAT in Slave Lake (Homeless Shelter)
High Prairie Food Bank
Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre (Food Bank)

2019 FASD High Prairie (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders)
High Prairie Food Bank

2020*

2021*

2022 Animal Rescue Centre Slave Lake
Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre (Food Bank)

2023 Kokum's Outreach
High Prairie Food Bank
Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre (Food Bank)

* No North Country Fair due to COVID