A group of students supplied with just a small backpack filled with the essentials, heading off into the Boreal Forest to complete their 24-hour Winter Survival course from the Traditional Teaching Program were beaming from ear to ear when we met up with them.

The backpack contained the bare necessities; a shovel, some food, an axe, some matches, a whistle, head lamp and bevy blanket.

Justin Bourque, Owner of the Traditional Teachings Inc., has spent the 2018/19 school year offering his Traditional Teaching Program at Bill Woodward School in Anzac. The pilot program has been supported financially by industry in the region including Syncrude. The goal is to have the pilot turned into a regular academic offering at the school worth credits.

“This winter module is about survival and what to do if caught, with little supplies, in the cold,” says Bourque. “We are teaching the students the basics for surviving in the cold. Shelter is always the first concern and we have taught these youth how to build Quinzees.”

The program also consisted of a trapping and hunting module, traditional berry and medicine gathering, winter survival program, and next up is a fishing unit. Kids enrolled at the school have an opportunity to get back to their roots and live off the land.

“This program is about teaching life skills from hunting to tracking as well,” says Bourque. “Each Friday, I spend the day with the kids in the school where we go over teachings in the classroom. We then move the students outside several times a year to practice what they have learned.”

“The kids love it. They are having a blast and are learning many new skills that will benefit them for a lifetime,” adds Bourque. “These are skills they can continue to pass down to younger generations and ensure the traditional way of life remains strong for our communities.”
2019 BEAVER CREEK BISON HARVEST

Bison are a respected animal and a true gift from the Creator. When hunted or harvested, the animal is always to be fully utilized.

Syncrude along with Fort McKay First Nation, which manages the Beaver Creek Bison Ranch, partners to complete a harvest of several animals.

“When we complete a harvest, many details are taken into account. We aim to respect the animals and the people who are involved,” says Mel Boostrom, Community Relations Specialist. “This harvest is just as much a spiritual event as it is a harvest for meat”.

The harvest was hosted on February 20, a cold -20 day, north of Fort McKay. Two beautiful animals were harvested. The event kicked off with an Elder’s pray and smudge by Clara Mercer. The hunter and Skinner then completed their tasks.

“It was a great day, and the appreciation for the bison could be felt among all in attendance,” adds Boostrom. “The bison meat has since been shared with the community.”

PROUDLY REPRESENTING THE REGION

Nearly 4,000 Indigenous hockey players gathered in Edmonton from April 4 to 7 for the annual Native Youth Provincial Hockey Tournament. Players are recruited to roughly 250 teams, many of them formed specifically for the tournament, representing dozens of First Nations and Metis communities from across Alberta.

Wood Buffalo Native Youth Hockey Club entered six teams this year, from Initiation to Midget. Syncrude once again sponsored the club, ensuring a great weekend of hockey for all players participating.

Spring is in the Air

Below is the first bison calf born at the Beaver Creek Bison Ranch in 2019 located at Syncrude’s Mildred Lake site.

As of May, there have been 55 calves born.
HOME AWAY FROM HOME

McMurray Métis Elder Massey lives off the land and spends the majority of his time working his family's trap line located 62 kilometres south of Fort McMurray. Known legally as Alcide Joseph Floyde Boucher, Massey is the name he prefers and the name used by everyone who knows him.

He is a quiet, stoic man who has seen many changes in the region. “When I arrived in this place, it was a small town with only gravel roads,” says Massey.

As a traditional land user, Massey is adamant about preserving his way of life. He is proud when speaking about his adventures in the boreal forest.

By memory, he lists off all the animals he traps, what time of year they can be trapped and how he skins the animal. He also explains that several species need to be assessed and tagged by Alberta Fish and Wildlife before a sale. He also reflects on berry picking during the summer, or how he enjoys watching his beautiful dog Buck cool off in a nearby beaver pond.

His presence and storytelling is engaging and encourages Métis members to get back on the land.

“I’ve spent many days with Massey in the bush,” says Carmen Wells, regulatory manager for McMurray Métis. “Whether he is teaching me how to lay the traps or skin an animal, it’s always a positive experience and each time I learn something new that connects me to my culture.”

As Carmen tells her story, Massey laughs with enthusiasm. “Yes, we could barely skin that animal together,” he says. “It was a tough job, but we did it!”

Massey routinely offers his assistance when the McMurray Métis provides the annual trapping course to its members. As well, he is always willing to offer advice or a helping hand on trapping and hunting techniques.

As an Elder and Knowledge Holder with the Local, Massey is admired and well respected. “We’re a community and we take care of each other,” says Carmen. “Members of the association will deliver wood to Massey on their way out of town or even purchase basic groceries for him. It’s important we support him.”

So important that McMurray Métis built a traditional trapper’s cabin next to the main administration building, reserved for Massey and Buck as a place to stay while in Fort McMurray.

“We use it when we come to town for my mail or sometimes doctor appointments,” says Massey. “It’s our home away from home. Buck loves it here and gets so excited when I get picked up to come to town.”

When not in use, the cabin serves as an interpretive site with pictures of hides and older traps on display. It is also used for the monthly Cree Coffee Chat, an activity designed for members to come together and share information.

“Lots of folks stop by to chat and visit when I’m in town,” says Massey. “The location of this cabin is good and allows me to continue to stay connected.”
Mildred Lake Extension - Public Hearing

The Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) conducted a hearing on the Mildred Lake Extension from January 22 to January 29, 2019. The final arguments were presented on March 27, 2019 in Calgary. Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation was the sole intervener on the MLX project.

The hearing's commission are expected to render a decision 90 days after closing arguments.