Tłı̨chǫ Management Proposal – Tree Planting

1. Applicant Information
Project Title: Reforestation on Tłı̨chǫ lands
Contact Person: Tammy Steinwand
Organization Name: Tłı̨chǫ Government
Address: 127 Donda Tili Behchokǫ̀ NT. X0E 0Y0
Phone/Fax Number: 867-392-6381
Email: tammy.steinwand@tlicho.ca

2. Management Proposal Summary	
Start Date: June 1, 2026	Projected End Date: March 31, 2031
Length: 5 years	Project Year __1__ of __5__

Provide a summary description of your management proposal (350 words or less).

The Tłı̨chǫ Government is planning a five-year reforestation initiative (2026–2031) to restore ecosystems damaged by increasingly frequent and severe wildfires across Tłı̨chǫ lands. These fires disrupt vital migration corridors for boreal wildlife, including Tǫdzı and Ekwǫ̀, and threaten both biodiversity and the cultural foundations of Tłı̨chǫ life.

Building on the successful 2025 pilot project—where 1.5 million seedlings were planted, 35 Tłı̨chǫ citizens trained in environmental monitoring, seed collection, and sustainable forestry and 60 seasonal jobs were created, the initiative is set to scale up. Over five years, 12 million seedlings (Black and White Spruce, Tamarack, Birch, and Aspen) will be planted across fire-affected areas. Early priorities include fire-smart planting around Behchokǫ̀, large-scale reforestation west of James Lake, and regeneration of burned caribou habitat near Wekweètì.

The project emphasizes community-led stewardship. Training and employment for Tłı̨chǫ citizens will expand, ranging from tree planting and monitoring to specialized roles such as seed collection, trucking, and camp operations. Partnerships with Aurora College and the Northern Alberta Institute of

Technology will provide accredited training, and local schools will integrate forest ecology into science curricula—creating pathways for youth to pursue careers in sustainable forest management.
Key outcomes include:
•Restoring wildlife habitat and supporting biodiversity recovery.
•Enhancing climate resilience through carbon sequestration and fire-smart forest planning.
•Providing green jobs and skills development for Tłı̨chǫ citizens.
•Advancing research on ecosystem regeneration in collaboration with governments, Elders, and academic institutions.
To safeguard genetic integrity, all seedlings will be grown from locally collected seeds matched to specific seed zones, with strict measures to prevent the introduction of outside species or pests. Monitoring will track tree survival and growth over 1, 3, and 5 years, with responsibilities gradually shifting to the Tłı̨chǫ Government as forests reach “free-growing” status.
Through this initiative, the Tłı̨chǫ Government is taking decisive, community-driven action to heal fire-scarred lands, restore caribou habitat, and ensure that forests, and the culture they sustain, thrive for generations to come.

Please list all permits required to conduct proposal.

This project requires, and has obtained, both a land use permit and water license from the Wekeezhi Land and Water Board.

3. Background

Provide information on the affected wildlife species and management issue.

Tłı̨chǫ lands and Mǫwhì Gogha Dè Nı̨ı̨tłèè have experienced significant forest fire activity over the past decade. Many thousands of hectares have been burned in recent years. TG recognizes that forests are fire dependent for regeneration, but recent fires have been more frequent and more intense than Tłı̨chǫ Elders report experiencing in the past. As the effects of climate change continue to be felt, continued fire activity is expected in years to come. Fire activity is disruptive to important migration corridors for Tǫdzı, Ekwǫ̀ and habitat that supports bio diversity. It will help us determine how reforestation relates to ecosystem regeneration. Based on preliminary research, including guidance from the United Nations Decade on Restoration (https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/Interactive/tree-planting-and-ecosystem-restoration-crash-course) and others, it is our hope that this project will generate many long-term benefits including reestablishing habitat for wildlife, increasing bio diversity, and insuring that forests are healthy and thriving in a way that will protect animals and the Tłı̨chǫ culture, language and way of life into the future.

During the summer or 2025, the Tłı̨chǫ Government ran a pilot project through which 1.5 million seedlings were planted in areas along the access roads to Behchokǫ̀ and Russell Lake, as well as an area to the West of James Lake. Trees were planted within a 3 week span concluding on July 28th. The original plan was to plant 1 million seedlings however seedling growth in the greenhouse was more successful than anticipated and the decision was made to plant the additional 500,000 seedlings rather than risk letting them die. We learned many lessons though the pilot project and are confident that we

will improve our communications and contingency planning going forward. A great deal of training and local capacity building took place during the pilot project. 35 Tłı̨chǫ citizens were trained in Environmental monitoring, seed collection, tree planting and sustainable forest management. This summer the pilot project created employment for 60 Tłı̨chǫ people in positions directly related to tree planting as well as jobs that supported the program. Based on the outcomes from the pilot project, we are eager to expand the program, putting all of lessons learned into practice going forward.

4. Description of Proposed Management Action

Describe the proposed management action, including implementation, location and Tłı̨chǫ Citizen involvement.

Tree Planting

The management action proposed through this project includes the planting of 12 million seedling over the next 5 years on Tłı̨chǫ lands. At present, in order to hit our planting targets, we plan to plant 2.5 million seedlings in 2026, 2.4 million seedlings in 2027, 2.3 million seedlings in 2028, 2.2 million seedlings in 2029, and 1.9 million seedlings in 2030.

Locations priorities will change over the lifetime of the project based on new fire activity. We have 3 primary locations currently identified for planting in 2026 and 2027. In 2026, we hope to plant approximately 200,000 Deciduous and 500,000 Coniferous trees around the community of Behchokǫ̀ as part of fire smart planting efforts approved by Behchokǫ̀ Chief and Council (see Map 1). We also plan to plant approximately 1.8 Million Trees in an area west of James Lake (See Map 2). Due to fire activity in 2023 near Wekweeti, the Chief of Wekweeti has requested that we plant trees in areas burned in 2023 which are in Caribou migration corridors (see Map 3). After preliminary research, we assume that we will be able to plant 1 Million trees on the south side of Snare Lake across from the community of Wekweètì in 2027. Other locations are currently being assessed and identified.

For example, the 2025 fire which caused the evacuation of Whatì may also be an area where the Whatì Chief and Council requests tree planting (see Map 4). Fire activity, especially near communities, and the will of community Chiefs and Councils will help guide our focus on areas to prioritize for reforestation. We will update WRRB as sites are selected and, as part of our project plan, we can commit to consulting with Archeologists and Biologists to review each site before it is approved for tree planting.

There is currently enough accessible area recently effected by forest fires on Tłı̨chǫ land, to hold more than the 12 million seedlings we have funding to plant. The question that has yet to determined by Tłı̨chǫ Government and community leadership is, where are these seedlings most needed to meet to community and regional goals. When those priority areas are identified, we will conduct Archeological, Biological and Sylvicultural studies to determine which areas are appropriate to plant.

Tłı̨chǫ Citizen Involvement

Training

Training and Capacity building is a key focus of this project. The hope is that, following this funding cycle, Tłı̨chǫ citizens will have the training and experience needed to run large scale reforestation

projects with minimal external support. In the coming years, training needs may include: Environmental monitoring, Camp Cook training, A-Z Trucking, Firearms Safety, Predator Defense. We also intend to work closely with high schools to include forest ecology as part of the science curriculum. There has never been an opportunity for young Tłı̨chǫ people to consider a career in forest management, but due to the long-term nature of this project, we are looking at opportunities for students, currently in grade 9, to consider sustainable forest management as a viable career upon graduation. Through a partnership with Aurora College and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, in 2025 we successfully ran a pilot project module as part of an accredited course in Sustainable Forest Management. We will continue to maximize training and capacity development opportunities throughout this project.

Employment

Planting activities in the summer of 2025 created 60 jobs for Tłı̨chǫ citizens. These jobs included: seed collectors, truck drivers, tree planters, wildlife monitors, camp cooks, security guards, camp maintenance staff, drummers, cultural workshop leaders, archeological assistants, bus drivers and videographers who documented the project. As local capacity and experience increase, more job opportunities will become available. We are looking at internship positions for Tłı̨chǫ citizens to travel south to work with our industry partners throughout the year to gain training and hands on experience outside of our planting project activities.

What are the desired outcomes of the proposed management action?

The desired outcome of this project include:

1. Supporting forest and ecosystem regeneration to rebuild habitat for Tǫdzı, Ekwǫ̀, and other animals.
2. Combatting the effect of climate change through natural carbon sequestration through tree planting.
3. Supporting the recovery from forest fires in the areas near Behchokǫ̀, Edzo, Whatì and Wekweètì following fire activity in the summers of 2023 and 2025.
4. Creating green jobs for Tłı̨chǫ Citizens in the region.

What, if any, outcomes may be incidental to the management action?

Introduction of new genetic materials

The potential of introducing new genetic material to the landscape as a result of this project is a concern that was raised by community Elders at the beginning of the program. As such we will continue to take measures to mitigate the risk of introducing new genetic materials to the region through this project. TG will be planting trees, grown from seed stock exclusively gathered from Tłı̨chǫ lands. We are cognizant that there are different seed zones represented throughout Tłı̨chǫ lands. For each planting area, we are collecting seeds from the seed zone where the seedlings will eventually be planted. Wekweètì, for example, is in a different seed zone than Behchokǫ̀ and Whatì. Any seedlings that will be planted in and around Wekweètì will come from seeds collected from the Wekweètì area. Beyond seed collection, we have also mandated that our project partners take precautions to avoid the inadvertent introduction of new genetic materials through this project. Seedlings that are currently

grown in Alberta are treated to remove any insects that may be living on the seedlings before transport. Tree planters are made to sanitize boots and equipment upon crossing the NWT/Alberta boarder to avoid introducing any new materials that may be inadvertently attached to the footwear or equipment.

Research

TG is eager to work with partners to use this opportunity to study how forests regenerate following tree planting versus forests left to natural regeneration after a fire. We are aware that, historically, forests have regenerated following fires as was the case with the Tibbitt Lake Fire in 1998. Recently, University of Alberta researchers have found that, in the Tłı̨chǫ region, over the last 27 years, changes to our climate have resulted in an inability for forests to fully regenerate naturally following forest fires (see attached). This project provides an opportunity to study how natural regeneration has changed since 1998 and how human interventions effect post-fire regrowth compared with natural regrowth given our current climate reality.

To that end, we have connected with researchers at Aurora College and researchers at Wilfred Laurier University who are eager to help us develop and run a long term study, looking at post fire regeneration. We are currently developing a detailed proposal and will submit a separate application to the WRRB outlining our full research parameters, methods and aims as soon as that proposal is complete. In broad terms, this study would include identifying a 'control' area where trees would not be manually planted. Researchers could then analyze and compare the forest's regeneration based on vegetation species diversity and density among trees and other plants in the forest ecosystem. Additionally, as stated below in section 5, purpose of the project is to support the regeneration of habitat preferred by Tǫdzı, Ekwǫ̀ and other animal life in the region affected by forest fires. As a first step in understanding how our project effects the behavior of animals in the region, we intend to conduct a 'snow track' survey this winter to gather baseline information about animal prevalence and behavior in areas where we have planted new trees as well as in a control area that will not be planted. We plan to run this research for the duration of the project to help better understand how tree planting activities effect animal behavior in the post fire forest ecosystem. We can commit to working with WRRB Board members and Staff to develop a schedule to present our research findings regularly throughout the project.

What monitoring, if any, will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the management action?

Monitoring

Tłı̨chǫ Government has been working with, and intends to continue to work with independent environmental consultants to monitor trees for viability on a 1 month, 1, 3 and 5 year schedule. Detailed maps (See attached audits of the trees planted in 2025 with separate funding from Tree Canada and 2 Billion Trees) of each planting block outline how many of which species of tree have been planted in a given area. Monitoring activities follow each year's planting season to assess how trees are faring in the short, medium and long term.

TG is aware that currently, water levels in Wek'èezhìı are at record lows following a sustained period of drought in the NWT. The volume of water used in this project have been presented to the Wek'èezhìı Land and Water Board and a water use license has been obtained without any concerns being raised regarding out project's overall water use. We also recognize that we are in a peak population cycle for Snowshoe hare which may impact seedling growth and survival. Through out monitoring activities, we will assess the impacts that Hare populations have on our seedlings. We have built contingencies into our project to allow us to replant areas that fall below the acceptable viability rate of 80%.

Tłı̨chǫ citizens will be involved throughout the monitoring process and will learn how to assess, report on, and maintain the new growth forests. After 3 years of growth, trees are considered "Free Growing" and the monitoring and maintenance activities will become the responsibility of TG.

5. Rationale for Proposed Management Action
Describe the purpose of your proposal and how it will address the management issue. The purpose of the project is to support the regeneration of habitat preferred by Tǫdzı, Ekwǫ̀ and other animal life in the region which has been affected by the increase in frequency and intensity of forest fires due to climate change. We are interested in learning more about the effects of 'whole-ecosystem' regeneration on animal life in our region. By planting 12 million trees on Tłı̨chǫ lands, it is hoped that we will support the return of Tǫdzı, Ekwǫ̀ and other animal life so that they thrive as they once did in those areas. The regeneration of forests on Tłı̨chǫ lands is essential for Tłı̨chǫ to be able to practice and pass down to future generations, the Tłı̨chǫ culture, language and way of life. In the face of increased fire activity, the TG feels compelled to take and active role in protecting and supporting life on our land.
Describe alternatives to the proposed management action and reasons for why these were rejected. While historically, forests have regenerated following fires, a study and report, commissioned by the Tłı̨chǫ Government, and conducted by researchers at the University of Alberta, was released in 2024 (attached). The report found that in the past two decades, Forested areas on Tłı̨chǫ lands have reduced by nearly half (p.19). Since 2010 we have seen a significant increase in the area of Tłı̨chǫ land that has burned (p.5). Until 2014, forests were able to regenerate fully following forest fires, but since 2014, forests have not regenerated fully following fires (p.26). This has led to a significant increase in grass and shrub cover in traditionally forested areas. Findings from this study suggest that human intervention may be needed to support forests regenerate after fires. Tłı̨chǫ Elders have asked that TG take steps to support the regeneration and creation of Tǫdzı and Ekwǫ̀ habitat. Natural forest regeneration on Tłı̨chǫ lands includes the growth of Jack Pine first which

are not preferred by Tǫdzı and Ekwǫ̀ . Where conditions are right for spruce, after 50-80 years the Jack Pine die, allowing for the growth of Black Spruce, White Spruce and other species preferred by Tǫdzı and Ekwǫ̀. By planting Black and White Spruce, Tamarack, Birch and other native plant species immediately after a fire, the time needed to create and restore Tǫdzı and Ekwǫ̀ habitat may be reduced by 50-80 years, and overall the forest may regenerate more quickly. It is estimated that the forest fires in 2023 alone burned 130 million trees on Tłı̨chǫ land. That number does not account for fires in subsequent years. With this project planting 12 million trees, the vast majority of forest will continue to be left to natural regeneration. Fire activity over the past decade near all of the Tłı̨chǫ communities, has also led the TG to look seriously as 'FireSmart planting', (planting deciduous trees close to communities as a natural fire break) to help protect our communities. FireSmart planting has been requested by Tłı̨chǫ leaders as part of this project.

6. Consultation

Describe any consultation undertaken in preparation of the management proposal and the results of such consultation.

In May of 2025, a presentation was made to WRRB by DCLP director, Tammy Steinwand, outlining the final plan for planting in the summer of 2025. In that presentation, TG laid out plans to plant 1 million trees in July of 2025. Once planting began we found that we have 1.5 million viable seedlings which needed to be planted or we would risk the seedlings dying unnecessarily. We planted the extra 500,000 seedlings in good faith, with the understanding that tree planting is a net benefit. We planted the extra seedlings by increasing the planting density of the blocks previously approved in our planting prescription which had been cleared for planting following an archeological survey. Silviculture experts on our team felt that the increased density would more accurately mimic the tree density of the pre-fire forest and would not impact tree growth or the likelihood of survival. We did not, however seek approval from WRRB before planting the seedlings and that was an oversight on our part.

In August of 2025, following the 2025 planting season, one of our project partners, David Tonken, met with WRRB staff and board members to recap the summer's activities. At that meeting, concerns were raised. David brought those concerns back to the TG and we hope to address those concerns in this proposal.

In preparation for our next planned planting, TG has consulted with Community Elders, Chiefs and Council in Behchoko, and Wekweètì for guidance as we develop our planting prescription. This includes information on areas where tree numbers and species will be most impactful for Tǫdzı and Ekwǫ̀ habitat. We have scheduled meetings with community leaders in Whatì and Gamètì as well.

We have consulted Samuel Hatche, Landbird Biologist for Environment and Climate Change Canada, to review planting plans, timing and locations. Samuel and his team have suggested steps we can take to minimize any impact on land birds through this project and we are integrating Samuel's recommendations into our project plan.

We understand that any major changes in our project plan, including site locations, timing of work and numbers or species of trees planted, needs to be presented the WRRB for review.

7. Communications Plan

Describe the management proposal's communications activities and how the Tłı̨chǫ communities will be informed of the proposal and its results.

Working with project partners and communications staff at TG, regular updates about this project will be posted on the TG website and social media pages. TG will also be hosting community consultation sessions regularly and will continue to seek the guidance from Tłı̨chǫ Elders and Tłı̨chǫ Citizens and other community residents during each stage of this project.

8. Relevant Background Supporting Documentation

List or attached separately to the submission all background supporting documentation, including key references, inspection/incident reports and annual project summary reports.

WRRB presentation PPT
2025 Tree planting audit report from Tree Canada
2025 Tree planting audit report from 2 Billion Trees
U of A Tłı̨chǫ Wildfire Report
Map 1 James Lake area proposed planting blocks for 2026
Map 2 Behchokǫ̀ area proposed planting blocks for 2026
Map 3 Wekweètì fire map from 2023
Map 4 Rough map of 2025 Whatì fire

9. Time Period Requested

Identify the time period requested for the Board to review and make a determination or provide recommendations on your management proposal.

We are hoping to plant the next round of seedlings during June and July of 2026. Since this is project involves long lead times to grow seedlings and put logistical plans in place, we are hoping that the board can make a determination or provide recommendations at your meeting on December 16 and 17, 2025

10. Other Relevant Information

If required, this space is provided for inclusion of any other relevant project information that was not captured in other sections.

11. Contact Information

Contact the WRRB office today to discuss your management proposal, to answer your questions, to receive general guidance or to submit your completed management proposal.

Jody Pellissey
Executive Director
Wek'èezhìı Renewable Resources Board
102A, 4504 – 49 Avenue
Yellowknife, NT X1A 1A7
(867) 873-5740
(867) 873-5743
jpellissey@wrrb.ca