

IN MEMORIAM

Patricio “Pat” Cabezas



With Pat Cabezas' passing on the day after Christmas, Albertans lost a long-time supporter of Indigenous Peoples and their rights for a healthy environment.

Pat's journey didn't start in Canada. He was raised in Santiago, Chile and suffered through the Pinochet years. As a youngster amid the turmoil, he made the decision to strike out on his own and head north through the western side of South America and Central America and over to Cuba before finally landing in Toronto. With the intent to stay in Canada only for a short while, he ended up staying for a lifetime. He first enrolled in English classes and went on to study chemistry. He went to Seneca College, University of Toronto, and University of Waterloo.

Upon graduation, he came west to work for Proctor & Gamble in Grande Prairie. Pat was in his element in the forests and wetlands of northern Alberta. For a brief time, he went to the Peruvian Amazon, again working with Indigenous Peoples and striving to protect the environment. Although he was a consultant for the oil and gas industry, environment and Indigenous Peoples were always top

of mind. In any process, he wanted to make sure that the “neighbours” concerns were fairly dealt with and that they were involved and supportive.

I first had the pleasure of Pat's company and insights in the mid 1990s when I was asked to map the boundaries of the Hay-Zama Lakes complex. I stayed at Pat's place in Rainbow Lake. He later told me that he didn't know what to make of me, as an ardent advocate for the environment in the company of an employee of Mobil Oil. Still, we hit it off and we knew what we had to do. Pat re-invigorated the Hay Zama Committee, an eclectic mix of Dene Tha' leadership and representatives of the oil and gas industry, government, and conservation organizations, including Alberta Wilderness Association.

Little did we know what was to come but there were many “firsts” for Alberta. After some tough negotiations, and a bit of cajoling Alberta Energy into compliance by Pat and Chief Ahnassay with the assistance of the Hay Zama Committee, we developed guidance to ultimately end new oil and gas activity in this sensitive area, dedicated under the



Chief James Ahnassay (Dene Tha'), Wulji (Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve), Pat Cabezas during the study tour on the occasion of the twinning of the Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park with Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve.

Ramsar Convention as an internationally significant wetland.

For the first time in Alberta history, time and area limits were placed on exploration and development. Some areas were immediately shut down and reclaimed. In the end, with Pat's persistence and guidance along with the strong support of the Dene Tha', a Wildland Park was created and oil and gas exited ahead of schedule. The land still needs lots of healing but things are heading in the right direction. For his effort, Pat was recognized with one of Alberta's prestigious Emerald Awards, joining the ranks of individuals like Martha Kostuch, whose memory is honored in AWA's annual lecture. Ever humble and gracious, Pat always said his Emerald Award was for all of us on the Hay-Zama Committee.

Pat was also an ardent supporter of AWA's call to twin the Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park with Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia, another Ramsar site. He graciously bowed out of a field tour to Dalai Lake, in order to allow Chief Ahnassay and others to attend.

At the height of the caribou controversy, Pat coordinated Alberta's Boreal Caribou Committee before going to work directly for the Dene Tha' First Nation's NDeh Corporation.

Pat stood up for what he believed in and made a big difference in northwestern Alberta for both Indigenous Peoples and for the Hay-Zama Wildland. He is already sorely missed. I often reflect on morning coffees and sushi nights with Pat and our banter on global and environmental matters. Rest in peace my good friend.

– Cliff Wallis