



Annual Report

April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010

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The Yukon North Slope

The Yukon North Slope is an area of land and sea stretching from Alaska to the Northwest Territories. It includes all of the land in the north Yukon where the rivers and streams drain into the Beaufort Sea. It also includes islands, such as Herschel Island, and both the near shore and offshore waters.

The Yukon North Slope region has no roads or towns and there are few signs of development. However, there are many seasonal hunting camps used by the Inuvialuit.

The Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic have a special connection to this land. They have relied on the region's wildlife for hundreds of years. While most Inuvialuit now live in nearby communities such as Aklavik and Inuvik, many return to the North Slope on an annual basis to hunt, trap and fish.

Inuvialuit Final Agreement

In 1984, the Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic signed a land claims agreement with the Government of Canada. The Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) provides a way for the Inuvialuit to participate in economic and social development and decisions in the north. The agreement also protects and conserves the Arctic wildlife and their environments.

The area of land covered by the IFA, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, includes a large area in the NWT called the Western Arctic, parts of the Beaufort Sea and the Yukon North Slope.

The Yukon North Slope receives special attention in the IFA. Chapter 12 of the agreement establishes a special conservation management approach for the region.

The IFA defines the Inuvialuit right to harvest wildlife in both the North Slope and the Western Arctic. These rights may only be restricted for conservation or public safety. If development occurs, the IFA has a wildlife compensation system that helps to restore wildlife populations and habitat and to assist Inuvialuit when their harvesting activities are disrupted.

The Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)

The management priority for the North Slope is the conservation of the land, wildlife and Inuvialuit traditional use of the area. To ensure these goals are met, the IFA established the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), or WMAC (NS).

WMAC (NS) provides advice to governments and other agencies on matters related to wildlife management on the North Slope. The Council was responsible for preparing a wildlife conservation and management plan for the Yukon North Slope and advising on park planning

and management. The Council also determines and recommends appropriate quotas for Inuvialuit harvesting of game on the Yukon North Slope. To carry out these tasks, WMAC (NS) works closely with the Yukon, NWT and federal governments, other co-management boards, the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee and the Inuvialuit Game Council.

Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan

WMAC (NS) developed the Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan as required by the IFA. The Plan provides direction for the conservation of wildlife, habitat and traditional Inuvialuit use on the Yukon North Slope.

Volume 1 of the Plan is an environmental overview that provides an introduction to the land, its people and resources. Volume 2 of the Plan is intended for those with management, conservation and resource use interests on the Yukon North Slope. It is a frame of reference which WMAC (NS), governments, the Inuvialuit, and other agencies can assess priorities and work on the Yukon North Slope. Volume 3 includes the Yukon North Slope Wildlife Population Status Reports. For more than 30 species included, these reports provide information on: estimated population size, population distribution and range, unique characteristics of the population, management concerns, information gaps, and management of the population.

The Plan can be found online at <http://www.wmacns.ca/conservation/wcmp/>. Hard copies are available from the WMAC (NS) Secretariat.

Projects and Research

Wildlife Research Funded Through the Inuvialuit Final Agreement

Each year WMAC (NS) reviews research proposals for projects related to wildlife management and ecological monitoring on the Yukon North Slope, consistent with the goals of the IFA. After reviewing the proposals, the Council makes recommendations to support appropriate projects with IFA implementation funding. If required, the Council will also recommend that projects receive IFA implementation funding support from Parks Canada, the Yukon Government, and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Recommendations made by the Council are based on priorities identified in the Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan, the Yukon North Slope Long Term Research Plan, and other plans that apply to the North Slope. Research priorities are also identified by the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, community meetings in Aklavik, the Inuvialuit Game Council, and Environment Yukon, Parks Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

The Council monitors the progress of all recommended projects by requesting presentations and final reports from all agencies that receive funding. The following programs were recommended by the Council and occurred in 2009-2010:

Herschel Island Monitoring Program

The Herschel Island ecological monitoring program represents over two decades of work to measure and track ecological change. The program relies on the integrated involvement of the Herschel Island rangers to ensure standardized data collection, data management, and to expand the program to include projects related to ecological change and wildlife use of the Park. The program now consists of 11 related projects ranging from thaw slump monitoring to breeding bird surveys to documenting vegetation phenology. Additionally, an important new initiative is to implement airstrip monitoring to assess the impacts of airstrip use and maintenance on wildlife.

In the 2009 field season the following monitoring activities took place: CANTTEX vegetation surveys; new ranger training in vegetation monitoring; daily weather observations; annual breeding bird surveys (early and late June) in habitats around Pauline Cove; annual Raptor survey in mid-June and mid-July; Black Guillemot population and nest monitoring through the summer season; wildlife observations for comprehensive wildlife database; permafrost and snow-depth monitoring; impact monitoring for cruise ship visits; harvest data and visitor user statistics; slump monitoring for rates of erosion; airstrip monitoring for bird, vegetation, and wildlife use to avoid impacts from aircraft use.

The long term data set is currently being analyzed so that a comprehensive report can be produced. Specific reports on each of the monitoring activities will also be prepared.

Yukon North Slope Grizzly Bear Research Project

Yukon Government, Parks Canada, the Aklavik HTC and WMAC (NS) are working together on a six-year study to learn more about grizzly bears on the Yukon North Slope. The study is designed to look at grizzly bear population size, birth rate, death rate, where bears can be found at different times of the year, and how they move around. In order to obtain this information, the project has employed various techniques, including a DNA mark-recapture study, GPS and radio collaring, Inuvialuit observations and formal traditional knowledge interviews.

The 2009 field season had researchers conduct telemetry surveys in May and June, complete den surveys with the assistance of Billy Archie of Aklavik, as well as collect biopsy samples from four males, which will be used for genetics work. Seven hunters from Aklavik took tracking units with them on their grizzly bear hunts in the spring time. DNA (hair) samples collected in 2008 were submitted for analysis in order to gain an understanding about diet. Blood samples were also sent to the lab in order to assess stress levels which can provide insight into the relationship between environmental factors and reproductive rates for the population.

A preliminary population analysis will be completed by March 2010, field work completed by September 2010, and a final demographic and population analysis should be complete by March

2011. A final report that merges scientific and traditional knowledge is anticipated to be produced in late 2011.

Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op

The Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op was founded in 1994 when representatives from several different community groups, agencies, and governments began a collaborative ecological monitoring program. The initial focus of the monitoring is on climate change, contaminants and regional development within the range of the Porcupine Caribou herd. Co-op activities include the tracking of science-based and community-based indicators, and include annual community interviews targeting environmental change.

This past year, for the first time since the Co-op began, annual community interviews were replaced with workshop style reporting sessions. The Co-op re-directed most of its efforts toward program improvement and analysis of results collected to date:

- Geospatial interview results were digitized and a report was produced containing recommendations for future data collection;
- An ecological monitoring inventory was completed in order to better understand and coordinate monitoring efforts in the range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and to help determine the focus of future surveys.
- A monitoring review workshop was held in February 2010 with program partners to inform how future monitoring will be coordinated, processed, and utilized in decision making.
- The University of Alaska Fairbanks completed an analysis of 10 years of Arctic Borderlands' data and produced a report that included recommendations for future programming.
- In place of an annual gathering, the Co-op sponsored a community reporting tour – the chair, program director, and support staff travelled to most communities involved in the program, providing an opportunity to exchange information. Co-op activities were reviewed, and communities had the chance to speak about changes observed on the land and in the community over the past year.



Co-op board meeting (Whitehorse February 2010) Photo: Michelle Christensen

Aklavik Harvest Data Collection

The objective of this project is to contribute to a program run by the Aklavik HTC to document the harvest of moose, caribou, and sheep in the Yukon and NWT by Inuvialuit hunters in Aklavik from April 2009 to March 2010.

Door-to-door interviews were conducted in April 2009 in Aklavik by an interviewer hired by the HTC. The time period covered was April 2008 to April 2009. GNWT has verified the data entry and is currently working on the report.

A total of 62 households consisting of 99 harvesters were interviewed. This resulted in 127 records in the dataset for all species reported. There were 186 caribou reported in the dataset; 23 cows of the 186 caribou (12%) were reported.

The raw dataset will be finalized and reviewed by the HTC.

Harvest data is a critical piece of wildlife management but is often very challenging to collect. This program has now been operating for 6 years and has added important data to the original Inuvialuit Harvest Study. This dataset may one day be critical to demonstrate the importance of harvested species to Inuvialuit hunters.

Porcupine Caribou Herd Satellite Collar Program

The Porcupine Caribou Herd Satellite Collar program is a multi-year program whose partners include a number of government agencies and co-management boards in Canada and the United States.

This year, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge purchased or refurbished 9 satellite collars for deployment on Porcupine Caribou (PCH) in March 2009. At the end of the capture session in Alaska and Yukon, there were a total of 15 adult female caribou with satellite collars. Of these, 8 were animals recaptured in March 2009 so they were fitted with new collars and 1 was a new animal to the program. The remaining satellite collared caribou are scheduled for recapture in future years.

The collars are programmed to transmit on a predetermined schedule. As calving approaches the frequency increases; collars transmit every 2 days in the spring leading up to calving and into the post-calving period. For the remainder of the year, the collars transmit once per week. Location data are sent electronically through a satellite service, and are automatically archived into a master database for all YG satellite projects.

Periodically, YG staff produce and distribute maps of locations. Generally, distribution of 'real time' maps is limited to operational level management biologists and organizations as well as policy personnel to provide them with current information so they may plan activities such as enforcement patrols, open check stations and time hunting closures.

Beaufort Sea Polar Bear Traditional Knowledge Study

This project proposes to gather local and traditional knowledge related to the population status of polar bears, climate change and the influences that climate change has had on polar bears and their habitat in the Southern Beaufort. Traditional knowledge studies in the region have not focused on this species, yet there is a rich history of using this species for subsistence and, in the last several decades, for Inuvialuit-guided commercial sport hunts.

This project complements existing and proposed efforts (population survey, harvest monitoring, coastal bear survey, and denning survey) to understand how climate change may be affecting polar bear habitat and population status. National committees are interested in acquiring more local and traditional knowledge on this species, so that the information can be incorporated into reports and used to assist with management decisions.

The information from this study will be used to determine status of polar bears and develop management guidelines for harvest.

This past year a full program proposal was developed to bring together partners. Interviews were conducted in Ulukhaktok, Aklavik, and Inuvik. In the coming year maps from interviews will be digitized and transcripts from interviews will be coded into a database. Next year interviews will take place in Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, and Sachs Harbor. As required follow-up interviews or workshops may take place in 2011 or 2012.

A final report summarizing traditional knowledge will be written in 2012 following analyses and information from the report will be integrated into management reports.

Where to Roost in the Arctic Food Web? Tundra Breeding Short-eared Owls

The Short-eared Owl is listed as Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Although the species is widespread in Canada, loss of grassland habitats in the south and conflicts with other uses of open habitats have been identified as potentially leading to population declines.

Little is known of the status and ecology of the species in the arctic, where it is a summer breeder. This project is stimulated by the need for better data on population density and factors limiting population growth throughout its range. This work was possible because of an existing investigation of raptor nesting density and reproductive success at Komakuk Beach, Ivvavik National Park, and at Herschel Island (Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park), as part of the Arctic Wildlife Observatories Linking Vulnerable EcoSystems (ArcticWOLVES) International Polar Year project in 2007-2009. The larger ArcticWOLVES project provided the majority of the funding and logistical support for this work.

Researchers have made recommendations regarding visitor access to the tundra during sensitive periods, and have made a number of interpretations regarding the geographic distribution of the owls on the North Slope and their role in the whole predator community.

Short-eared Owl

Photo: Frank Doyle

Field work for this project is complete and results are expected to be published in the Canadian Field-Naturalist shortly.

Porcupine Caribou Rut Composition Count

The Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, the Department of Environment, Government of Yukon, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service- Arctic National Wildlife Refuge conducted a composition survey of the Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH) on their winter range during October, 2009.

At the time of the survey the PCH was distributed over a large geographic area extending from the foothills in the upper Coleen River drainage, Alaska, south-east, to the Ogilvie Mountains, Yukon Territories. The survey was flown near the peak of rut to take advantage of the mixing of bulls, cows, and calf caribou.

Caribou groups were located by radio-tracking collared caribou (both bulls and cows) from fixed wing aircraft. Radio collared caribou were located and 30 different groups were identified. From these groups composition information was collected. A total of 6,897 caribou were classified of which 6,000 were adults.

Initial results from pooled group data show a population calf:cow ratio of 21 calves per 100 cows and a bull:cow ratio of 40 bulls per 100 cows. Due to collar distribution (more collars on females than males) substantial heterogeneity in the ratios were observed at both the group and the regional scales (i.e., Alaska vs. Yukon). In taking these biases into consideration it is estimated that the bull:cow ratio is 42 to 46 bulls per 100 cows and the calf:cow ratio is 22 to 24 calves per 100 cows.

Information about the composition of the PCH will be helpful for computer population modeling and in assessing the effects of a bull dominated harvest on the herd.

Muskox Genetics

Samples from Yukon North Slope muskoxen (including samples collected in the NWT portion of the Richardson Mountains) have been collected in order to compare genetic relationships of several muskox populations across North America. Feces and hair samples were collected and sent for genetic analysis over the 2008/09 winter. The results of the genetic sampling have found distinctions between three groups (Mainland, Archipelago, and Greenlandic). The positive identification of group by origin may allow for future monitoring of populations.

Projects Funded by WMAC (NS)

A portion of the WMAC (NS) budget is allocated to special projects including wildlife management, community participation, traditional knowledge, outreach and education.

Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op Spatial Data Review

This year, the Council undertook a review of the Arctic Borderlands Community Monitoring Program's geospatial database. The Borderlands program has been collecting community data for over ten years. In November 2007 WMAC (NS) hired Symbion Consultants to review Borderlands' non-spatial data. The review determined the capabilities of the database regarding data manipulation, output generation, the complexity and efficiency of output analysis and the applicability of the output for supporting the management decisions of the WMAC (NS). The Council then made a series of recommendations based on this review.

Over the last year WMAC (NS) has engaged again with Symbion Consultants in a review of Borderlands' spatial data using the same template of analysis as was used in the non-spatial review.

A report and recommendations are expected by fall 2010.

Grizzly Bear Traditional Knowledge Report

A component of the IFA-funded grizzly bear research project was a traditional knowledge study. Interviews with Aklavik Inuvialuit grizzly bear harvesters were conducted in the summers of 2006 and 2007. A report which summarizes traditional knowledge was printed in spring 2009 and distributed to the community of Aklavik, as well as made available on the WMAC (NS) website.

Porcupine Caribou Traditional Knowledge Report

The purpose of this project was to collect traditional knowledge from Aklavik Inuvialuit about Porcupine Caribou. WMAC (NS) worked with the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee and conducted interviews in the winter of 2008/2009. The report was printed and distributed in fall 2009 and has been made available on the WMAC (NS) website. It is hoped that information collected will serve to inform future strategies for the conservation of Porcupine caribou.

It is an important time to record the knowledge held by Aklavik Inuvialuit and others, especially the wisdom of the Elders. We are grateful to the Aklavik experts who participated in this study and shared their knowledge so openly.

Yukon North Slope Wildlife Atlas

As part of its communications program, the Council worked to reproduce a collection of maps that was produced in the late nineties documenting a variety of values: geopolitical areas and ecoregions; wildlife habitat; vegetation and terrain; coastal; geophysical; and cultural, conservation and traditional land use. In some cases, where possible, more updated information was collected. As digital copies become available they will be posted to the WMAC (NS) website.

Other Council Activities

The Council dedicates much of its time to reviewing and providing advice on research, management plans, policies and legislation affecting conservation and development on the Yukon North Slope. The Council has been involved in the following initiatives over the past year:

- Canadian Polar Bear Non-detrimental Finding
- Yukon Government's permitting requirements for wildlife-related research
- Yukon Government's Porcupine Caribou Herd Conservation Management
- Porcupine Caribou Harvest Management Plan
- Proposed up listing of Polar Bear from Appendix II to Appendix I on the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)
- Yukon Species At Risk Act
- Parks Canada's proposed interim guidelines regarding the use of firearms for protection in Northern National Parks and National Park Reserves and proposed amendments to the National Parks Wildlife Regulations
- Federal Species at Risk Act – Polar Bear listing
- Proposed investigation and remediation of the former Stokes Point Dew Line Site (BAR-B), Ivvavik National Park.

Working Together

WMAC (NS) continues to work with its partners toward the conservation of wildlife, habitat and traditional Inuvialuit use on the Yukon North Slope.

Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee

WMAC (NS) works closely with the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee (HTC) to ensure the harvesting needs and wildlife concerns of the Aklavik Inuvialuit are addressed in the Council's decisions. Through meetings with the Aklavik HTC, WMAC (NS) has provided information and shared ideas on wildlife management on the Yukon North Slope.

Herschel Island Territorial Park

WMAC (NS) works with Yukon Government, Parks Branch on wildlife research, management and ecological monitoring in Hershel Island Territorial Park.

The Chief Park Ranger for Herschel Island – Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park attends regular Council meetings to provide updates on activities in the Park. Staff at Herschel Island provide updates to the Council in the spring and fall related to that year's activity.

Parks Canada and Ivvavik National Park

WMAC (NS) works with the Parks Canada Western Arctic Field Unit on wildlife research, management and ecological monitoring in Ivvavik National Park.

The Western Arctic Field Unit is an active partner in the Yukon North Slope Grizzly Bear Research Project. Christian Bucher, a Parks Canada employee, currently sits on the Council as the Government of Canada member.

The Stokes Point Steering Committee is a group that meets to discuss the ongoing clean up and monitoring at Stokes Point. WMAC (NS) alternate member, Evelyn Storr, is a member in the group. Over the past year the activities of the Stokes Point Steering Committee included Committee meetings to review the final site assessments and contract hiring. The steering committee has allowed for community involvement from the first stages of the assessment to the recommendation and implementation stages.

Species at Risk

WMAC (NS) reviewed and provided comments to the federal Minister of Environment regarding the legal listing of polar bear under the federal Species at Risk Act.

The Council also participated in a consultation with Yukon Government on the development of species at risk legislation for the territory.

Sharing Information

The Council's website includes a host of information about the North Slope, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, Council activities and a North Slope Traditional Knowledge database. WMAC (NS) continually updates the site with all of its publications, meeting minutes, and other relevant information. Visit the website at <http://www.wmacns.ca>.

WILDLIFE WATCH. This newsletter shares information about activities on the Yukon North Slope that may be of interest to the community. *Wildlife Watch* is available online at <http://www.wmacns.ca/resources/newsletters/>.

COMMON GROUND. The Council contributes to this Inuvialuit Joint Secretariat newsletter twice per year. *Common Ground* provides a summary of the activities of the Inuvialuit renewable resource boards and committees and is available online at <http://www.jointsecretariat.ca/news.html>.

Meetings

Council Meetings

June 6-7, 2009

Marsh Lake, Yukon

September 19-21, 2009

Whitehorse, Yukon

December 8-10, 2009

Aklavik, NWT

February 16-18, 2010

Whitehorse, Yukon

Teleconferences

April 15, 2009

July 20, 2009

Other Meetings

Access to Genetic Resources and Sharing
the Benefits of Their Use in Canada
Information Session

May 14, '09

Whitehorse, YT

Yukon Environment Forum

May 21, '09

Whitehorse, YT

2030 North Conference

June 1-4, '09

Ottawa, ON

Convention on International Trade in
Endangered Species Planning Meeting

September 3, '09

Iqaluit, NU

Joint IGC/WMAC NS/WMAC NWT/
Yukon Government Meeting

September 21, '09

Whitehorse, YT

Joint WMAC NS/NWT Meeting

September 22, '09

Whitehorse, YT

Porcupine Caribou Herd Cumulative
Effects Assessment Project Update

September 22, '09

Whitehorse, YT

Technical Review of Yukon Species
At Risk Act

October 30, '09

Calgary, AB

3rd International Bear-People
Conflicts Workshop

November 15-17, '09 Canmore, AB

Convention on International Trade in
Endangered Species Planning Meeting
Canada-US Polar Bear MOU

November 18, '09

Inuvik, NWT

Oversight Group Meeting	November 19-20, '09	Inuvik, NWT
CircumArctic Rangifer Monitoring And Assessment Network Meeting	December 4-6, '09	Vancouver, BC
Inuvialuit Game Council Meeting	December 11, '09	Inuvik, NWT
Polar Bear Technical Committee Meeting	February 2-4, '10	Ottawa, ON
Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op – Review Meeting	February 11-13 '10	Whitehorse, YT
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES): 15 th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties	March 13-25, '10	Doha, Qatar

The Council also participated in a number of ongoing meetings including Polar Bear Technical Committee, Polar Bear Administrative Committee, and CITES preparation teleconferences.

Council Membership

Members

Danny C. Gordon
Inuvialuit Game Council

Ernest Pokiak
Inuvialuit Game Council

Doug Larsen
Yukon Government

Christian Bucher
Government of Canada

Chair

Lindsay Staples

Staff

Michelle Christensen
Resource Person

Alternates

William Storr
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