



Wildlife Watch

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (NORTH SLOPE)
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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2005 Yukon North Slope Research Results

WMAC(NS) reviews proposals for research projects related to wildlife management and ecological monitoring on the Yukon North Slope. Some of these projects are funded through the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. Projects supported by the Council are recommended to Parks Canada, the Yukon Government Department of Environment, and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Recommendations are based on research priorities identified in the Yukon North Slope Long Term Research Plan, the Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan, the draft Canadian North Slope Muskox Management Plan, the Muskox Management Workshop (Aklavik, October 2001), the Porcupine Caribou Management Plan, the ISR Grizzly Bear Management Plan, meetings with the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, community consultation at public meetings in Aklavik, and research priorities identified at the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op Annual Gatherings.

WMAC(NS) monitors the progress of all recommended projects and requests reports from all agencies that receive funding. This newsletter summarizes the results of the recommended research projects that were conducted on the Yukon North Slope in 2005.

Porcupine Caribou Herd Satellite Location Program

Caribou are being located using two different types of collars. One type uses radios and the other uses a satellite to track the caribou. Sixteen caribou are currently fitted with satellite collars. These collars automatically report the location of the animals and provide biologists with regular information about the timing and routes of the migrations. This is a cooperative project between a number of wildlife agencies and boards. More information about this project can be found at www.taiga.net/satellite/index.html

Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op

The Arctic Borderlands Co-op was founded in 1994 when representatives from several different community groups, agencies and governments started an ecological monitoring program. The focus of the monitoring is on climate change, contaminants and regional development. Co-op activities include the tracking of ecological indicators and community projects. The Canadian Wildlife Service coordinates Co-op activities in partnership with community and government agencies in the region.

The Co-op's annual community-based monitoring project continued for its tenth year

in Aklavik. A local researcher was hired to conduct interviews with 20 Inuvialuit experts to find out about the conditions and changes they observed during the year. An additional 20 Gwich'in experts are also interviewed in Aklavik. Other communities participating in the monitoring are Old Crow, Arctic Village (Alaska), Tsiigetichic, Tuktoyaktuk and Fort McPherson. The Co-op's 10th Annual Gathering will be held in March 2006 to report on the Coop's findings and exchange information. A summary of the Co-op's activities can be found at www.taiga.net/coop



Muskox Ecology Studies

In 1999, the Yukon Government and Parks Canada began a program to study muskox on the Yukon North Slope. Since then, biologists have used aerial surveys, composition counts, satellite tracking, samples from captured muskox and community observations to learn more about these animals.

The study provides information on the size of the muskox population, the numbers of males and females and their ages. It also provides information about where the muskox like to live at different times of the year and how much they move around. Good estimates of population size and trend are necessary to consider a harvest on such a small population.

In July 2005, biologists completed their final survey and composition count of this six-year study. Roland Selamio represented the Aklavik HTC in the fieldwork. A total of 110 muskoxen were counted in the survey area over four days. Of this total, 12 were calves and 10 were classified as being one year old. Herd productivity (the number of calves born in a year) was estimated at 29 calves per 100 females. This level was the second lowest of the eight productivity estimates made since 1993. The only muskox still wearing a satellite-radio collar was captured so that the collared could be removed. Information on the muskox ecology studies can be found at www.taiga.net/wmac/species/muskox/index.html

2005 Yukon North Slope Raptor Survey

Parks Canada and the Yukon Government surveyed the Yukon North Slope in mid-July to document the number of peregrine falcons and other species of raptors breeding in the region. Raptors, especially peregrine falcons, are often used as indicators of ecosystem health. This survey formed part of the Canadian Peregrine Falcon Survey, a national effort to monitor the status of peregrine falcon populations in North America every 5 years. Peregrine falcon surveys have been conducted on the Yukon North Slope since 1972.

A helicopter was used to survey the coastal and foothills areas of several drainages including the Malcolm, Trail and Babbage rivers. Herschel Island was also surveyed. The Firth River was surveyed by raft from Margaret Lake to Nunaluk Spit. Aklavik resident Judy Selamio took part in the helicopter surveys in Ivvavik National Park.

Breeding pairs of peregrines with chicks were found in about half of the known nesting areas in Ivvavik National Park. Golden eagle, gyrfalcon and rough-legged hawks were also

observed during the survey. Information from Ivvavik will be combined with similar information collected in areas of the Yukon North Slope that are outside of the park to give an overall count for the area.

Aklavik Harvest Data Collection

The objective of this program is to collect information on the harvest of moose, caribou, sheep, and furbearers (spring only), in the Yukon and NWT, by Inuvialuit residents of Aklavik. Regular harvest reporting is important to assist in the management of wildlife. It is also important in order to assess wildlife compensation claims in the ISR.



Harvest reporting for some species is done using seals and tags, and by mandatory reporting for species under quota. This program is needed to regularly record the harvest of a number of other species.

2005 was the fourth year this program operated in Aklavik. The Yukon Government, in partnership with the Aklavik HTC, contracted a local person to conduct recall interviews in spring and winter. Harvest information recorded includes species, date, location, sex and maturity of the animal, and the hunter's name. All information that could identify the harvester is kept confidential.

Yukon North Slope Grizzly Bear Research Project

The Yukon Government, Parks Canada, the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee and WMAC (NS) are working together on a six-year study to learn more about grizzly bears on the Yukon North Slope. As part of this research project, a radio-collaring and tracking program began in the summer of 2004. Thirty bears are currently fitted with collars. Biologists conducted regular tracking flights over the summer and fall of 2005 using a fixed-wing aircraft to locate the bears and retrieve the information recorded by the radio collars. The information collected is used to learn about habitat use and to see how far and how fast each bear is moving. The flights are also a good way to check cub and adult bear survival. Other fieldwork in 2005 included on the ground assessments of seven dens in the spring. More information on the grizzly bear research project can be found at www.taiga.net/wmac/species/grizzly/index.html

Rare Plants and Animals along the Beaufort Sea Coast

For three weeks in late July and early August, the Yukon Government and Parks Canada traveled along the Yukon coast by boat to look for and collect rare plants, butterflies, birds, snails and small mammals. Aklavik resident Danny C. Gordon provided great assistance to the field crew for a portion of this study.

The objective of the study was to gather some baseline inventory information that is important for monitoring environmental change in the area. Most of the work was done at Shingle Point, Clarence Lagoon, Kay Point and Ptarmigan Bay. Researchers spent a short time at the Blow River Delta and at Komakuk DEW line station. King Point and Stokes Point were not well surveyed due to bad weather.

Although previously known to grow in other areas of the territory, 25 species were recorded on Yukon coast for the first time, including some mosses, lichens and aquatic plants. Arctic pennycress, a globally rare plant, was found at a few locations. Some plants reported as common in the past have disappeared from Kay point, Nunaluk Spit and Clarence Lagoon. This may be due to increased disturbance by storms. Arctic marsh sedge was found during the survey. It was previously only known to grow near the Dempster Highway. Researchers also found large areas of polar grass. The species found in Ivvavik were very different than those species east of the Babbage River.

Breeding Shorebird Survey

In June, the Canadian Wildlife Service conducted a survey of birds on the Yukon North Slope. The objective of the program was to document the number and location of nests, and to estimate overall numbers of shorebirds and other tundra birds. The work was timed for when birds were laying eggs and doing courtship flights. The survey was conducted on foot, with support from a helicopter.

The area was divided into study plots. Nine shorebird species were counted nesting in these plots. Thirty-two other kinds of birds were counted. Researchers were impressed by the high diversity of birds that they saw. The

survey was part of an Arctic-wide monitoring program. These surveys, repeated every 10 years, are an excellent way to carry out long-term monitoring of shorebirds and other tundra birds within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

Herschel Island Fieldwork

A number of programs are in place to monitor vegetation, wildlife and permafrost on Herschel Island. The Herschel Island Rangers are responsible for carrying out many of the long-term monitoring programs. These programs are important in order to learn about changes to the ecosystem. Fieldwork also included a study of slugs. This study is examining the role of climate change on disease and parasites in arctic and subarctic populations of caribou, muskox and sheep.

Vegetation Change Measurements

Significant changes in vegetation have been recorded on the Yukon North Slope over the past 20 years. Fieldwork continued over the summer of 2005 to document and monitor vegetation at selected locations on Herschel Island and the coast plain of Ivvavik National Park. Measurements are being taken in order to learn about changes to the ecosystem and to assist in figuring out why this is happening.

Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)

Inuvialuit Game Council: Members: Danny C. Gordon and Ernest Pokiak; Alternates: Evelyn Storr and Lawrence Amos
Government of Canada: Member: Ron Larsen, Parks Canada; Alternate: Wendy Nixon, Environment Canada

Government of Yukon: Member: Doug Larsen, Dept. of Environment; Alternate: Dorothy Cooley, Dept. of Environment
Chairperson: Lindsay Staples
Secretariat: Michelle Sicotte

For more information, please contact us at:
P.O. Box 31539, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 6K8
Phone: (867) 633-5476 Fax: (867) 633-6900
Email: wmacns@web.ca Website: www.taiga.net/wmac