



Wildlife Watch

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (NORTH SLOPE)
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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Yukon North Slope Research 2005 – 2006

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. Reports on the



Council's recommendations are conveyed to the Inuvialuit Game Council, the Aklavik HTC, WMAC(NWT), the Government of the Northwest Territories' Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development and the Environmental Impact Screening Committee.

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 status reports and final reports from all agencies that receive funding. This newsletter summarizes research projects that were supported and recommended by the Council for 2005-2006.

2005 Yukon North Slope Raptor Survey

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

The total survey area covers all coastal drainages (including the lower reaches of the Firth, Malcolm, Trail and Babbage rivers) up to 30 kilometres inland. Herschel Island will also be surveyed. Helicopters are used to do the surveys, except for the Firth River where it will be done by river raft. The survey will begin by concentrating on areas where raptors have been recorded in the past, expanding, as possible, to new areas.

Muskox Ecology Studies

Yukon muskox are being studied and monitored in several ways. Aerial surveys, composition counts, satellite tracking, samples from captured muskox and community observations all contribute to what we know about these animals.



For several years biologists have completed aerial surveys of muskox in the Yukon North Slope survey area. These surveys provide information on the size of the muskox population, the numbers of males and females, how many calves are born each year, and how many live to be a year old. Good estimates of population size and trend are necessary to consider a harvest on such a small population. A spring survey will take place in April. Another one will be done in July.

The satellite tracking program began on the Yukon North Slope in 1999 in order to learn more about where the muskox like to live at different times of the year and how much they move around. This

program will end in July when biologists remove the remaining satellite collar.

The muskox ecology studies on the Yukon North Slope are conducted by the Yukon Government Department of Environment and Parks Canada. A representative of the Aklavik HTC participates in the fieldwork on a regular basis. Information on the muskox ecology studies can be found at www.taiga.net/wmac/species/muskox/index.html

Rare Plants and Animals along the Beaufort Sea Coast

This summer, Yukon Government biologists, with the assistance of Parks Canada, will spend time on the Yukon coast looking for a variety of rare plant and animal species. Efforts will concentrate on finding rare plants, butterflies, birds, slugs (that may carry caribou parasites) and mice. Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan and the Yukon North Slope Long-term Research and Monitoring Plan both recognize the importance of learning more about rare species. These two plans also identify the coastal zone as a priority area for getting more information. This study will gather some baseline inventory information that is essential for monitoring any change in the area.

Herschel Island Fieldwork

Fieldwork will continue on Herschel Island over the summer. A number of programs are in place to monitor vegetation, wildlife and permafrost. Long-term monitoring is important in order to learn about changes to the ecosystem that may be caused by climate change. The Yukon Government will also be conducting a survey of snails and slugs on the island as part of a study with Dr. Susan Kutz (Western College of Veterinary Medicine, Saskatoon). This study is examining the role of climate change on disease and parasites in arctic and subarctic populations of caribou, muskox and sheep. It is common for parasites found in these animals to spend part of their life cycle in snails and slugs.

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. The study will focus on bears between the Firth and the Blow Rivers. Projects included in the study will provide information on population size, birth rate, death rate, harvest levels, where bears live at different times of the year, and how much they move around. It is important for wildlife managers to have this information when they are determining the conservation requirements of this population and in reviewing harvest quotas.

A radio-collaring and tracking project began in the summer of 2004. More collars will be put on the bears in May and June 2005. Biologists will do regular tracking flights every two weeks over the summer and into the fall. They use a fixed-wing aircraft to locate the bears and retrieve the information recorded by the radio collars. This information 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. Also this summer, biologists will be experimenting with a method to count bears from an airplane.

The traditional and local knowledge component of the grizzly bear project began in February 2005. The Yukon Government and WMAC(NS), in consultation with the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee and local harvesters, are now drafting a three-year workplan that outlines a program for community involvement. Local knowledge and involvement is an important part of grizzly bear management in the ISR. Harvesters and community residents can contribute important information about bear activities, numbers and distribution that is key to the success of this study. More information on the grizzly bear research project can be found at www.taiga.net/wmac/species/grizzly/index.html

Porcupine Caribou Herd Satellite Location Program

Caribou are being located using two different types of collars. 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. The location of these collared caribou can be followed on www.taiga.net/satellite/index.html



Vegetation Change Measurements

Significant changes in the vegetation have been recorded over the past 15 to 20 years on Herschel and the coast of Ivvavik. Fieldwork will continue over the summer to document and monitor vegetation on the Yukon North Slope in order to learn about changes to the ecosystem.

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. A Gathering is held each year to report on the Coop's findings and exchange information.

The Co-op's annual community-based monitoring project will continue for its ninth year in Aklavik. A local researcher in each community will conduct interviews with community experts to find out about the conditions and changes observed during the year. The Canadian Wildlife Service coordinates this project in partnership with community and government agencies in the region. A summary of the Co-op's activities can be found at www.taiga.net/coop



Aklavik Harvest Data Collection

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. A program is needed to

regularly record the harvest of a number of other species.

The objective of this program is to collect information on the Inuvialuit harvest of moose, caribou, sheep, and furbearers in the Yukon and NWT. 2005 is the fourth year this program has been operating in Aklavik. The Yukon Government, in partnership with the Aklavik HTC, will contract a local person to conduct recall interviews in April and December. Harvest information recorded includes species, date, location, sex and maturity of the animal, and the hunter's name. All identifying information will be confidential.

Breeding Shorebird Survey

In June, the Canadian Wildlife Service will conduct a survey of shorebirds breeding on the Yukon North Slope, Mackenzie Delta, and Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula. A crew of four will count birds in 12 survey plots in Ivvavik National Park and 6 plots elsewhere on the North Slope over 4 days. Surveys will be conducted on foot, with support from a helicopter. The objective of the program is to document distribution and nesting densities of breeding shorebirds and to estimate overall numbers of shorebirds and other tundra birds, as 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.

Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)

Inuvialuit Game Council: Members: Herbert Felix 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
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