



# Wildlife Watch

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (NORTH SLOPE)  
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## Grizzly Bear Researcher Wraps up Field Work

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For the past three summers, biologist Grant MacHutchon has been tracking eight radio collared grizzly bears as they roam the Firth River valley in Ivvavik National Park.

MacHutchon's study of how the bears use their habitat will help park managers avoid the conflicts between humans and grizzlies that have arisen in other wilderness areas.

The research is funded by Parks Canada, Inuvialuit Final Agreement implementation funds, and the Environmental Innovation Program of Canada's Green Plan.

### Firth valley popular with visitors

The Firth River valley was chosen for the study because of its popularity among hikers and rafters.

In the spring of 1993, eight bears were captured and fitted with radio collars. At the same time, MacHutchon began a detailed survey of habitat in the valley.

Over the next three summers, the bears were tracked from the air once or twice a week to determine what habitat they used at different times through the season and what food they found there.



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### Bear Quota Increased

The Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) recommends increasing the quota for the grizzly hunt in Ivvavik National Park to three bears.

The quota has been kept at zero during a three-year study of bears in the park. Field work for the study is now complete.

At its September meeting, MMAC(NS) recommended a total harvest of eight grizzly bears in the 1995-96 season. Three bears may be taken from the park, and five from the area east of the Babbage River.

To ensure public safety, areas of the park that are popular with tourists will be closed to hunting from June 15 to August 31. These include Komakuk Beach, Stokes Point, Nunaluk Spit, and the Firth River Valley.

MacHutchon and his assistants, including several Inuvialuit Parks Canada staff, visited locations on the ground to confirm the bears' activities, describe the sites, and collect scats.

In addition, backpacking crews of two or three spent up to 24 hours at a time following and observing bears on the ground.

### Elders and hunters consulted

In the fall of 1993, MacHutchon met with Inuvialuit elders and hunters to gather traditional knowledge of the bears and to discuss his research project.

"Inuvialuit have a wealth of knowledge about the ecology and behaviour of grizzly bears on the Yukon North Slope through living, travelling,

hunting, trapping and prospecting in the area,” he says.

A healthy grizzly bear population benefits both hunters and recreational users, McCutcheon adds. For tourists in Ivvavik, grizzly bears are an important part of the wilderness experience.



### Report to be ready in spring

In three years, MacHutchon has learned a lot about the bears of the Firth River valley. However, before he can complete the study, he has a huge amount of information to analyze over the winter. His report will be finished and handed over to Parks Canada in the spring of 1996.

### New Group Will Study Environment's Future

What will happen to the North Yukon if the global climate becomes warmer? What will happen if more pollutants from far away affect the quality of country food?

These are important questions, but the answers won't come from one person or one study. They will come from many different sources - from scientists and elders, from managers and hunters, from people who have studied the North Yukon for many years and from those who have lived there even longer.

WMAC(NS) is helping to set up a network to collect information from all these sources. The North Yukon Ecological Science Cooperative will track and report on the health of the entire North Yukon ecosystem — the plants, animals, land, climate, and human impact.

A recommendation for such long-term monitoring of the ecosystem is contained in WMAC(NS)'s Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan.

The new cooperative will also be part of a larger network linking study regions in all parts of Canada. Organizers of the Yukon cooperative will hold a workshop early in the new year to get the monitoring process started.

### Why Worry About Global Warming?

Global warming is one of the long-term trends the North Yukon Ecoscience Monitoring Cooperative will watch.

If the earth's climate becomes warmer, as many scientists expect, the North Yukon could see higher snowfall, earlier snow melt, and increased summer temperatures. Caribou biologist Don Russell has looked at what that might mean for the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Although earlier snow melt would shorten the Caribou's time on their spring range, it could also force the animals to calve further north or earlier in the season.

A slight increase in summer temperatures could bring a large increase in the mosquito population, forcing the caribou to move more often during their peak feeding times.

Heavier snowfall might make it harder for the caribou to dig for lichens and even drive them away from snowy areas that are rich in lichens. Russell concludes that global warming could make the land less able to support caribou and lead to a drop in caribou numbers.

With so much at stake, it's important to know whether the change is really happening and how the caribou and their habitat can be protected. Coordinating that information will be a job for the North Yukon Ecoscience Monitoring Cooperative.

#### Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)

- **Inuvialuit Game Council:** Danny C. Gordon; Herbert Felix; Alternates: Billy Archie, and Carol Arey
- **Government of Canada:** Joan Eamer, Canadian Wildlife Service; Alternate: Alan Fehr, Parks Canada

- **Government of Yukon:** Brian Pelchat, Renewable Resources; Alternate: Dorothy Cooley, Renewable Resources
- **Chairperson:** Lindsay Staples
- **Secretariat:** Aileen Horler

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