



Wildlife Watch

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (NORTH SLOPE)
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Volume 6, Number 2

January 1996

Group To Track Environmental Changes

A new Northern Yukon Ecological Knowledge Co-operative has been formed to coordinate scientific and traditional information about environmental change in the northern part of the territory. The Knowledge Co-op was developed by the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) and Environment Canada, along with other agencies and communities in the northern Yukon.

It will be part of a Canada-wide network keeping track of changing patterns in the environment. Climate change, contaminants, ozone depletion, and development are just some of the factors that could affect the land and resources of the northern Yukon.

Changes seen in North

Already people who live in the region have noticed lower lake and river levels, earlier spring break up, shifts in the distribution of some animals, and higher levels of snowfall.

In addition, scientists have found that chemicals transported from distant industrial areas are building up in Northerners' traditional wild foods.

Are these changes part of a long-term trend? How do they affect northerners who make their living from the land? How will they affect future generations? What can be done to protect the land, the

wildlife, and the people who depend on both?

Information that will help answer these questions must come from scientists and elders, wildlife managers and hunters, from many different sources. The Knowledge Co-op's job is to pull that information together so that it's available to everyone interested in the questions and the answers.

Small Change in Climate Has Big Impact

One of the Knowledge Co-op's first jobs will be to bring together information that will help us watch and understand global warming.

A small rise in the average year-round temperature could have serious effects on important habitat like Old Crow Flats and the range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Many people in the northern Yukon depend for their living on the Porcupine caribou and the



muskrats and waterfowl of Old Crow Flats.

World warming trend noted

According to some preliminary studies, the world may have been warmer

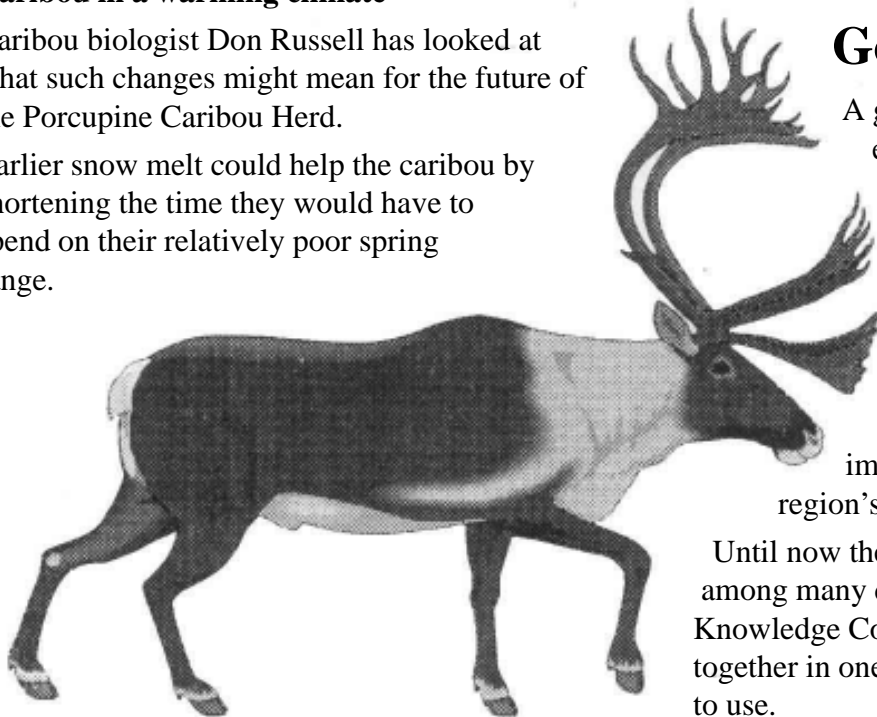
last year than at any time since records have been kept.

If the warming continues, as many scientists expect, the northern Yukon could experience much higher winter snowfall, earlier snow melt, and a slight increase in summer temperatures.

Caribou in a warming climate

Caribou biologist Don Russell has looked at what such changes might mean for the future of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Earlier snow melt could help the caribou by shortening the time they would have to spend on their relatively poor spring range.



But the rich plant growth that now comes at calving time, when the cows need it most, would come earlier in the spring. This might 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 in order to escape the insects.

Heavier snowfall might mean the caribou have to use more energy when digging for lichens. Increased snowfall could also drive them away from snow-prone areas that are rich in lichens.

Trend could harm caribou

Russell concludes that global warming could make the land less able to support caribou and lead to a drop in the population of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

With so much at stake, it's important to know what changes are happening and what effect they are having on the northern environment.

That information will help managers protect the caribou and their habitat.

Knowledge Co-op Has Good Foundation

A great deal of information already exists about the northern Yukon. For years, scientists have been studying the plants and animals, the land and the climate.

Combined with native people's long familiarity with the land, this information is a good foundation for tracking ecological trends and improving our understanding of the region's health.

Until now the information has been spread among many different locations and people. The Knowledge Co-op will bring the information together in one place so that it is available for people to use.

Dawson meeting starts process

At a 1993 meeting in Dawson City, representatives of the Inuvialuit, Vuntut Gwitchin, Tetlit Gwich'in, government, and co-management organizations discussed ecological approaches to resource management.

Participants at the meeting saw a need to assess the general ecological health of the region and to monitor long-term trends.

They decided to support the idea of developing a co-operative group to meet this need.

Now, through the Knowledge Co-op, scientific and traditional knowledge can be gathered together and

shared by researchers, managers, and communities.

Co-op plan goes to communities

In April 1995, community consultations were held in Aklavik, Old Crow, Inuvik and Fort McPherson. The early break-up of the Porcupine River, the previous year's deep snows around Aklavik, and concern about contaminants in country foods were all discussed.

People at the community meetings were generally in favour of the idea of a Knowledge Co-op. They were also interested in developing ways for their own communities to contribute and use information through the Co-op.

Linked With Other Agencies

The Northern Yukon Ecological Knowledge Co-operative will have ties with both national and international efforts to monitor environmental change.

One such effort is the national Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network being developed by Environment Canada. The Northern Yukon's Taiga Cordillera is one of the dozen monitoring regions chosen by Environment Canada to represent Canadian ecozones.

Parks Canada is also establishing ecological monitoring and management of Canada's parklands, including Ivvavik National Park and Vuntut National Park in the northern Yukon. The agency has already produced a handbook for ecological monitoring in northern national parks.

Internationally, several organizations, including UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Reserve Program, have organized similar monitoring programs around the world. Their goal is to follow and understand the trends of global change.



One American initiative is closely linked with the goals of the Knowledge Co-op. The U.S. National Science Foundation is funding a four-year study that will attempt to look at the sustainability of northern communities under global change. The focus will be communities within the range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Communication Is Key To New Co-op's Success

The Knowledge Co-op will be a centre for information of all kinds about the environment and ecology of the northern Yukon.

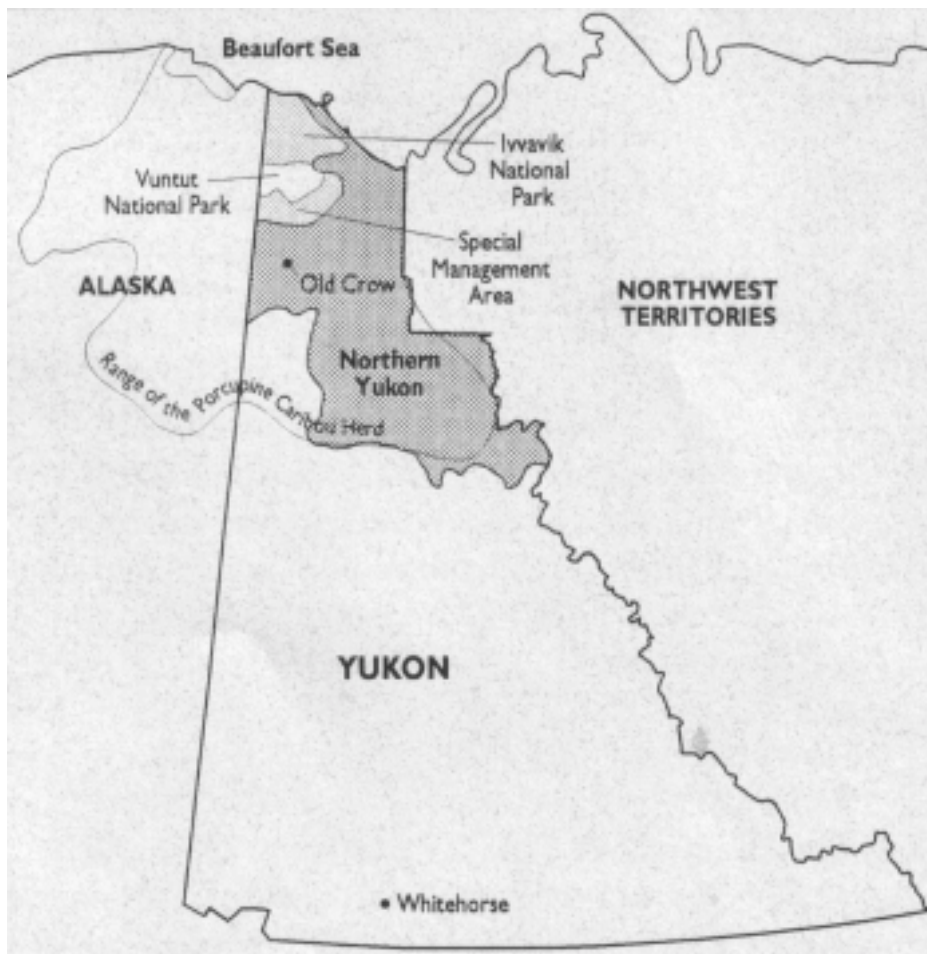
Scientists will use it to talk to each other and to non-scientists. Communities will use it to find information and, in turn, to let researchers know what information they need.

The Co-op will also bring together information to give a broad picture of the northern Yukon's ecological health.

These ambitious goals rely on good communication. The Co-op plans to set up a World Wide Web site on the Internet. People anywhere in the world will be able to reach it by computer and share the growing pool of information about the northern Yukon.

The Co-op will also use more traditional methods,





A workshop in Whitehorse in February 1996 will review the progress so far. The workshop will also look at ways to keep track of research and information, review feedback from the communities, and establish a work plan for the coming year.

Some projects are already under way. On behalf of the Co-op, WMAC(NS), in partnership with Environment Canada, is preparing a directory of northern Yukon research.

WMAC(NS) will also prepare the Co-op's first annual report and organize a second round of community consultations planned for the spring of 1996.

such as an annual report, meetings, community presentations, and newsletters or bulletins like this one.

New Northern Knowledge Co-op Starts Its Work

The Co-op is currently being co-ordinated by WMAC(NS) and Environment Canada. Right now, it is focusing on three environmental trends important to the northern Yukon: climate change, contaminants, and development.



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
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