



Annual Report



April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018

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2017/18 at a Glance

This report highlights the activities of the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) over the period of April 2017 - March 2018. The year was a busy one for the Council and work progressed in a number of areas, including on the Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan, muskox management, and in communications and outreach. A number of multi-year projects were completed this year, most notably: *Inuvialuit Traditional Knowledge of Wildlife Habitat, Yukon North Slope*, *Yukon North Slope Inuvialuit Traditional Use Study*, and the *Framework for the Management of North Slope Muskox*. An important focus this year was continuing work on the Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan, which guides management on the Yukon North Slope. A major success in 2017/18 was finalizing a new implementation funding agreement with the Government of Canada, which secures Council funds for the next 10 years.



Who We Are

The Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)

The management priorities for the North Slope are the conservation of land, wildlife, and Inuvialuit traditional use of the area. To ensure these goals are met, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement established the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), also known as WMAC (NS) or the Council.

WMAC (NS) provides advice to governments and other agencies on all matters related to wildlife management on the North Slope. The Council is responsible for conservation management planning for the Yukon North Slope and advises on planning and management for Ivvavik National Park and Herschel Island - Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park. The Council also determines and recommends appropriate quotas for Inuvialuit harvesting of wildlife on the Yukon North Slope. To carry out these tasks, WMAC (NS) works closely with the Yukon, Northwest Territories (NWT), and federal governments, other co-management boards, the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee (HTC) and the Inuvialuit Game Council (IGC).





The Area

The Yukon North Slope

The Yukon North Slope is an area of land that stretches from Alaska to the Northwest Territories. It includes all of the land in the north Yukon that is drained by rivers and streams flowing into the Beaufort Sea, as well as islands, such as Herschel Island, and both the nearshore and offshore waters.

The Inuvialuit 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, fish, and connect with family.

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

The Agreement

Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA)

The area of land covered by the IFA, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR), 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 particular attention in the IFA. Chapter 12 of the agreement establishes a special conservation management regime for the region.

The IFA defines the Inuvialuit rights to harvest wildlife on the North Slope. 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 adversely affected.

The ***Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA)*** was finalized in 1984.

It provides a way for the Inuvialuit to participate in economic and social development and decisions throughout their homeland.

The agreement also protects and conserves Arctic wildlife and its environment.

The People

The Inuvialuit

Inuvialuit are Inuit of the Western Arctic. The land, ice, and water of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region make up the western portion of Inuit Nunangat (or homeland). The Yukon North Slope has been part of the Inuvialuit homeland since before memory, and this long history has been well documented.

The Plan

Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan



Along with the signing of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement came certain requirements and responsibilities, delegated to the Council. The Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan (WCMP) was one such requirement, and considerable collaborative work went into the first edition of the Plan (2003). The Plan provides direction for the conservation of wildlife, habitat, and traditional Inuvialuit use on the Yukon North Slope.

The Plan is a keystone piece of work for our Council. It offers guidance and information to our Council members, government, co-management organizations, environmental assessment bodies, Inuvialuit and other indigenous organizations, and the general public. It also helps to inform research priorities and projects.

In recent years, the Council and its partners have been gathering information and completing new research to inform a revision of the 2003 Plan. This latest edition is expected in 2019 and will provide refreshed guidance for the protection and management of this special region.

In order to complete this work, the Council has been working with partners, holding planning meetings, gathering data, focusing on new and emerging issues, and synthesizing and analyzing information and knowledge.

Traditional Use and Knowledge Studies

Two significant bodies of work to inform the plan have been completed: *Yukon North Slope Inuvialuit Traditional Use Study* (2018) and *Inuvialuit Traditional Knowledge of Wildlife Habitat, Yukon North Slope* (2018). Both reports have been printed and shared with participants and community members. They are also available digitally on the Council website.

Species-specific (caribou, moose, grizzly bear) habitat work is also underway and is expected to contribute valuable insight to Plan development in the new fiscal year.

WCMP Planning Work Includes:

- Meet and plan with partners
- Gather, collect, compile, synthesize, and analyze scientific information and Traditional Knowledge
- Develop planning tools
- Work with communities
- Liaise and consult

Implementation Funding

The Council has succeeded in securing a new IFA implementation funding agreement for the next 10 years.

The Council has been working actively on this file for several years in order to ensure our ability to meet our obligations under the IFA. The Council, along with other committees established under the IFA, receives implementation funds from the Government of Canada through the Territorial Governments. The increased and secured funding will ensure the Council can continue to do important work on the North Slope in support of its mandate.

Projects

Special Projects Funded by the Council

A portion of the WMAC (NS) budget is allocated to special projects, including wildlife management, community participation, traditional knowledge, outreach, and education. Below are the highlights of these special projects for 2017/18:

Website

WMAC (NS) has been working to update its digital presence. In early 2018, the Council launched a new website and Facebook page to better engage with partners, community members, researchers, and the public. New content will be developed in coming months to continue populating these outlets and increase communication with various audiences.



Harvest

The Council commissioned two internal reports regarding wildlife harvest in the 2017/18 fiscal year. The first is a review of the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee Grizzly Bear and Polar Bear bylaws and enforcement on the Yukon North Slope. This report explored the relationship between Total Allowable Harvest, quota setting, and HTC bylaw-making powers and bylaw enforcement for the two North Slope bear species. The second report is an analysis of the ability of the current harvest monitoring programs to collect and provide to managers the necessary information regarding Porcupine caribou harvest. Harvest data plays a critical role in the *Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd in Canada* and the associated implementation strategy. The results of this report have helped to inform new research from the Council.

Heritage

The Council also requested a comparative analysis of Pauline Cove (Ilutaq) Historic Zone (in Herschel Island - Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park) and other similar national historic parks and sites. The aim was to better understand the standard of conservation set out in the IFA with respect to the historic resources within the area and to explore the legislative and management frameworks of the park as they compare with other existing examples across the country. This work was timely, given the ongoing review of the *Herschel Island - Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park Management Plan*.

Muskox

The Council focused on a number of muskox initiatives this year, from a framework for management to graphic animations.

Workshop

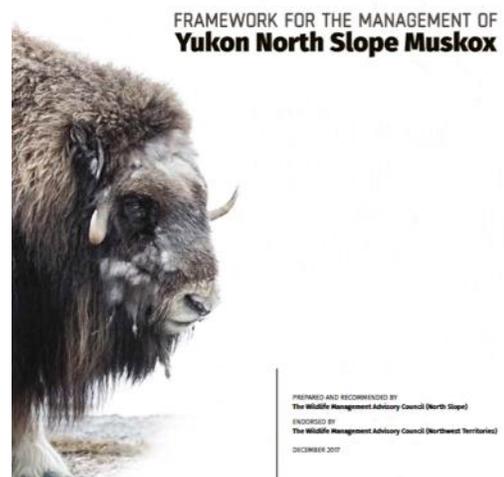
On November 27-28, the Council hosted a workshop in Aklavik with partner organizations involved in the management of Yukon North Slope muskox. Participants included the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, Wildlife Management Advisory Council (Northwest Territories), Environment and Natural Resources department of Government of Northwest Territories, Ehdiitat Renewable Resource Council, Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, and researchers. The topics included muskox management history, reviewing management objectives, discussion about a management framework, remaining steps to finalize a framework, review of outstanding questions, concerns, and information gaps to inform a research plan.

Framework for the Management of Yukon North Slope Muskox

The Council recommended the *Framework for the Management of Yukon North Slope Muskox* to Parks Canada and Yukon Government in the spring.

This framework is intended to provide guidance for the management of Yukon North Slope muskox. While this framework references and is informed by management conditions that apply to muskoxen in jurisdictions and areas adjacent to the Yukon North Slope, strategic directions within the framework are aimed more narrowly at the Yukon North Slope and those with direct management responsibilities in the area: Environment Yukon, Parks Canada, the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), and the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee. The management framework outlines management goals and directions. The management goals are to:

- provide opportunities for Inuvialuit hunters to harvest muskoxen while maintaining a healthy, productive and sustainable population;
- minimize any detrimental effects that muskoxen may have on caribou and caribou habitat and harvesting; and
- cooperate and share information about muskoxen among users to develop and implement management and research programs.



Muskox Research Plan

The Council developed a research plan to guide its research decisions regarding muskox in the Canadian range of the North Slope and Richardson Mountains over the next number of years.

Since muskox are found on Inuvialuit lands, Gwich'in territory, two territories, and in national parks, consultation among many agencies was involved. Interviews with Parks Canada, WMAC (NS), the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, Yukon Government, Northwest Territories Government, and the Aklavik community allowed the formulation of research priorities. Previous research done on muskox in and outside the region was analysed to determine whether any research priorities had already been sufficiently or partly addressed. Finally, the research plan was drafted, taking into consideration stakeholder priorities and previous work done in the region.

This research plan is designed to accompany the *Framework for the Management of Yukon North Slope Muskox*. While the framework provides directions to the management of muskox, this document aims to provide direction to research that will inform the management decisions.

Animation

The purpose is to visually show the history of muskox and describe their unique story on the Yukon North Slope through a short animation. Website graphics are also being generated to describe harvest, caribou interaction, and disease/parasites. This video can be viewed on our website and Facebook page.

Podcasts

Three more podcasts have been added to *The Living North* podcast series. To listen to the new episodes, visit the Projects page of the Council's website (wmacns.ca/what-we-do/our-projects) or iTunes. Our new

podcasts include: Muskox - A history of the herd, genetics, disease, what it takes to build a framework; Collaring - The positives and negatives of collaring animals for research and the tradeoffs between animal wellbeing and knowledge for management; Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan - What the plan is, and the work that is underway to rebuild and revise the plan.

IFA Platform

Searching the Inuvialuit Final Agreement has never been easier than with the new IFA platform: www.ifa101.com. This project generated a searchable, digitized IFA. It is complete and hosted on the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation website.

IFA-Funded Wildlife Research

Each year, WMAC (NS) reviews proposals for research projects related to wildlife management and ecological monitoring on the Yukon North Slope in order to ensure they support the goals of the IFA, wildlife conservation and management goals for the North Slope, and the interests and rights of the Inuvialuit. Research priorities are identified by the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, residents of Aklavik, the Inuvialuit Game Council, Environment Yukon, Parks Canada, and the Canadian Wildlife Service. The Council makes recommendations to Parks Canada, the Yukon Government, and the Canadian Wildlife Service for the support of projects on the North Slope through IFA research funds. WMAC (NS) assists, as required, in the implementation of recommended projects and monitors their progress through presentations and final reports from all agencies that receive funding.

The Council recommended IFA funding in 2017-2018 for the following research projects:

North Richardson Mountain Sheep Survey

Partners attempt to monitor the population size of this group of sheep every three to five years, when feasible. In addition, the *Draft Management Plan for Dall's Sheep in the Northern Richardson Mountains* calls for a survey every two years if the population drops below 500 observed animals. The previous survey of this population was completed in 2014. At that time, the population was estimated at just under 500 sheep. The survey funded in the 2018/18 fiscal year was completed to determine if populations have continued to decline, stabilized, or had increased over the past three years.

The results of this survey show the Dall's sheep population in the North Richardson Mountains currently above draft management thresholds. Had the population been stable or had it declined further, actions might have been warranted; however, it appears no immediate management action is required.

Muskox Composition Survey

Population estimates of muskox occur on approximately a five-year schedule on the Yukon North Slope. However, muskox populations are known to vary considerably from year to year, depending on adult survival and extreme swings in pregnancy rates. Productivity monitoring provides a simple method to understand better the population dynamics and trends



for this population. Planning activities currently underway are key to addressing appropriate management of the species on the North Slope and also to addressing significant concerns voiced by the community of Aklavik. Inclusion of Aklavik at all stages of project design is a part of the project approach.

This year the goal was to monitor muskox productivity using new and old methods (providing for a comparison) and to identify information needs and approaches to gathering this knowledge in collaboration with Aklavik and other management partners.

New protocols were tested for documenting calf productivity during Porcupine caribou photocensus flights in July. Surveyors photographed muskox from fixed-wing aircraft, using protocols developed in western Alaska, to obtain estimates of productivity for the population.

Muskox Collar Project

This project will assist in monitoring the muskox population to identify habitat use and to assess muskox-caribou interactions.

The project will refurbish and deploy several satellite GPS collars. Collars will be placed on cows located on the Yukon North Slope or in the Richardson Mountains. Collars will help biologists track muskox movements over the next four years.



Polar Bear Survey Support

An aerial survey for the Southern Beaufort Sea polar bear population was conducted in 2017.

A collaborative double-observer distance-sampling survey was completed on the Canadian and U.S. sides of the Southern Beaufort subpopulation zone in March-April 2017. The Canadian part of the survey also incorporated a biopsy darting component in order to collect additional information. The Centre for Research into Ecological and Environmental Modeling (CREEM) at St. Andrews, UK, has been involved in the survey design and will also be involved in analysis of the survey data.

Wildlife Use of Avadlek Spit

Yukon Parks initiated this project in 2016 to investigate wildlife use of Avadlek Spit and Orca Cove on Herschel Island. In 2017, the project was expanded to encompass other key sites and movement corridors identified by park rangers and community members as important to wildlife.

The project uses automated cameras to document the diversity and frequency of wildlife use of Avadlek Spit and Orca Cove.

In 2018, the Herschel Island - Qikiqtaruk project will be aligned with Parks Canada's remote-camera monitoring for grizzly bear occupancy in the Firth River valley of Ivvavik National Park. The combined data will enhance conservation and management of grizzly bears across the North Slope.



Mapping Ecosystems of Conservation Concern

This work builds on the Ecosystem Land Classification (ELC) work that has recently been done throughout the IFA region. It applies the ELC work to monitoring changing ecosystems and identifying those ecosystems most susceptible to change.

The habitat along the North Slope is in flux. Many plants and animals are intimately linked with specific habitat types and some of these habitats are known to be at greater risk than others. This project focused on ranking ecosystems based on vegetation associations and on delineating occurrences of conservation concern in the IFA region.

The effects of climate change, including the melting of permafrost and the increase of disturbance in low-lying areas of the Yukon coast due to increases in storm surges, threaten several habitats that are restricted to this narrow area. Several species that occur in Yukon only on this coast have been identified as at risk. There appear to have been large declines in such communities as those dominated by Dune Grass and Seaside Lungwort. This work is designed to identify the habitats that are at greatest risk in order to monitor and determine the level of declines in these habitats.

Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op

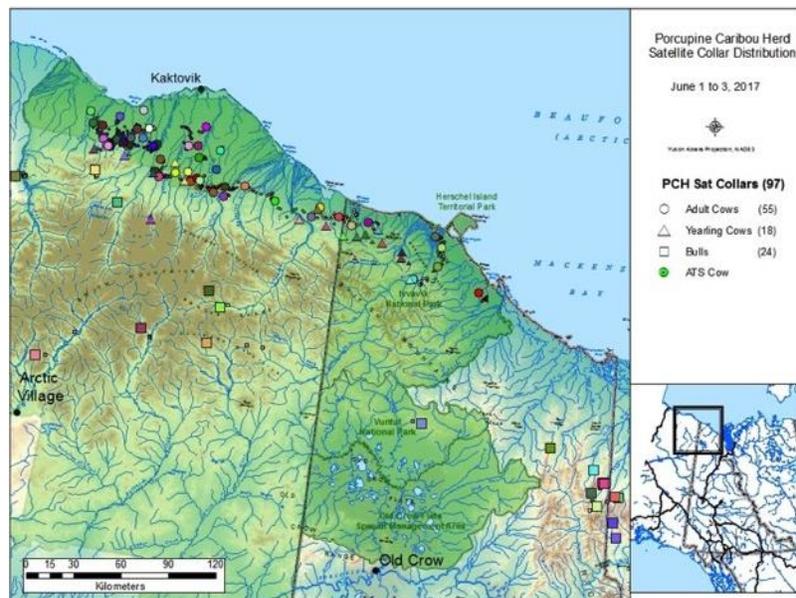
The Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op (ABEK) is a collaborative ecological monitoring program established in 1994. Goals of the program include: monitoring and assessing ecosystem changes in the range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and adjacent coastal and marine areas; encouraging the use of both science-based studies and studies based on local and traditional knowledge in ecological monitoring and ecosystem management; improving communications and understanding among governments, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and scientists with regard to ecosystem knowledge and management; and, fostering capacity-building and training opportunities in northern communities in the context of these goals.

The Council supported a strategic review of the monitoring program as well as analysis and product development.

Porcupine Caribou Herd Research and Management

IFA research funds supported several initiatives related to the Porcupine Caribou Herd. WMAC (NS) recognizes the collaborative nature of the research, monitoring, and harvest management efforts for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and thanks all partners for their ongoing commitment to caribou health and sustainability. All Porcupine Caribou Herd projects address actions in the WCMP “to continue to monitor species of importance to the Inuvialuit, particularly those sensitive to industrial disturbances.”

The Porcupine Caribou Herd Satellite Collar program is a multi-year program administered by Yukon Government in close association with partner organizations: Parks Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska



Department of Fish and Game, the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, WMAC (NS), the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board, and the Government of the Northwest Territories.

The program uses radio and satellite collars to locate the herd for different surveys (calf birth and survival, over-winter calf survival, and full composition counts) and to identify particular individuals in the herd to act as a sampling focus.

Porcupine Caribou Use of the Yukon North Slope

The primary objective of this project is to provide site-specific data on Porcupine Caribou use of the Yukon North Slope, particularly during sensitive periods in the herd's annual cycle. The collars also form the basis of monitoring and management of the herd. This project is providing quantitative data by increasing the number of GPS satellite collars deployed on both cow and bulls. Field crews deployed satellite collars over a period of several years by switching out traditional VHF collars.

Wildlife Monitoring with Remote Cameras in Ivavik National Park

Purposes of this project are to understand grizzly bear occupancy and habitat use along the Firth Valley. Other predators, such as wolves, wolverine, and lynx, are also captured. Predators have a strong influence on the health of prey populations, such as caribou and moose, which in turn influence plant communities. Healthy large carnivore populations are an indication that other parts of the ecosystem are healthy. Carnivore populations are therefore a meaningful measure of ecological integrity. This project continues the remote camera program to monitor large carnivore populations in the park. The long-term objectives are to:

- Understand current habitat use, distribution, and relative abundance of carnivore species in the Firth River corridor;
- Monitor changes in habitat use, distribution, and relative abundance over time that may be related to climate-driven changes in habitat conditions, and report on these trends as a measure of ecological integrity for State of the Park reporting; and,
- Capture candid photographs of wildlife in the park for use in videos or other media for Visitor Experience and External Relations programs.



Permafrost Active Layer Monitoring in Ivavik National Park

In northern Parks, climate change is one of the main stressors on ecological integrity. There is substantial evidence that climate change is impacting the active layer in permafrost environments, and that this warmer surface layer is leading to increased temperatures deeper in the permafrost zone.



This pilot project uses new innovative sensors called FrostLink sensors to collect active layer temperatures. Twenty-five sensors were installed in four different areas. Terrain at the installation sites was classified to facilitate the interpretation of results.

If the testing is successful, the sensors will be used to collect data on active layer dynamics in national parks across the Western Arctic.

Breeding Bird Survey

Ivvavik National Park (INP) monitors breeding birds as part of its measures of ecological integrity. “Breeding Bird Communities” is a unique measure that examines multiple avian species that rely on INP’s summer tundra habitat. The majority of birds monitored are migratory, so changes in species composition, density, and occupancy may not be a direct result of INP’s habitat. However, bird population and composition metrics can have a direct impact on INP’s summer tundra habitat through processes such as breeding, feeding, and nest building. Breeding birds are known to impact insect densities, seed abundance, and seed dispersal, and are available prey for predators.



The top five most common song birds recorded in INP are individually monitored in order to better understand INP’s species representation. These species common names are American Robin, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Common Redpoll, and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

Habitat Selection by Shorebirds Breeding on the Yukon North Slope

This project modeled shorebird habitat on the Yukon North Slope, and the data will be used in the Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan. Combining data from both the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM) and the Yukon Breeding Bird Survey allowed for a sufficient number of shorebird observations to model shorebird distribution and habitat selection on the Yukon North Slope for up to 10 species. Data for species with insufficient sample sizes could be combined into functional groups when modeling multi-species habitat use.

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:

- Participation in annual meetings for the management of polar bear, including a meeting of commissioners under the Inuvialuit-Inupiat Polar Bear Agreement, the Polar Bear Technical Committee, and the Polar Bear Administrative Committee.
- Participation in Porcupine Caribou Annual Harvest Meeting.
- Addressing matters related to screening of developments on the North Slope by the Environmental Impact Screening Committee.
- Review of the *Herschel Island - Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park Management Plan* (expected completion in late 2018). This was a scheduled review process. Updates to the Plan will address the evolving management environment on the island, including tourist traffic, Inuvialuit economic advancement, research, and climate change.
- Review of the *Ivvavik National Park Management Plan*. The Council participated on the steering committee and reviewed and recommended the final plan.

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.



Wildlife Management Advisory Council (Northwest Territories)

Like WMAC (NS), the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (Northwest Territories) was established under the IFA. It has a mandate to “to conserve and protect wildlife, habitat and traditional Inuvialuit use” in the NWT portion of the ISR. The two councils work together on matters related to the management of transboundary species such as polar bear, grizzly bear, and caribou. Maintaining a close relationship helps to create strong, informed, and integrated management decisions across territorial boundaries.

Herschel Island – Qikiqtaruk Territorial Park

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

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.

Sharing Information

The WMAC (NS) website includes information about the North Slope, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, and the Council. WMAC (NS) continually updates the site with all of its publications, meeting minutes, and other relevant information. Visit the website at www.wmacns.ca.

Meetings

Council Meetings

July 7-9, 2017 - Whitehorse, YT

September 26-27, 2017 - Whitehorse, YT

November 26, 29-30, 2017 - Aklavik/Inuvik, NT

February 28–March 2, 2018 - Whitehorse, YT

Other Meetings

April 22, 2017 - COSEWIC Meeting

June 9-12, 2017 - Inuvialuit Game Council

July 13, 2017 - Polar Bear Administrative Committee

August 22-24, 2017 - Inuvialuit-Inupiat Meetings

September 5, 2017 - Joint WMAC Meeting

September 7-10, 2017 - Inuvialuit Game Council

October 24-26, 2017 - Beaufort Sea Partnership Workshop

November 27-December 1, 2017 - Muskox Management Framework and Research Plan Workshop

December 5-8, 2017 - Inuvialuit Game Council

December 11-15, 2017 - ArcticNet

January 2018 - Polar Bear Range States

February 6-8, 2018 - Polar Bear Technical Committee Meeting

February 13-14, 2018 - Porcupine Caribou Annual Harvest Meeting

March 12-15, 2018 - Inuvialuit Final Agreement 101Workshop

Council Membership

Members

Danny C. Gordon
Inuvialuit Game Council

Ernest Pokiak
Inuvialuit Game Council

Todd Powell /Tyler Kuhn
Yukon Government

Dave Tavares
Government of Canada

North Yukon Regional Biologist - Mike Sutor (Yukon Government)

Chair - Lindsay Staples

Staff - Jennifer Smith & Kelly Milner

Alternates

Deon Arey/ Gerry Kisoun
Inuvialuit Game Council

Michelle Gruban
Inuvialuit Game Council

Matt Clarke
Yukon Government

Craig Machtans
Government of Canada

