

Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op

Sixth Annual Gathering
Aklavik, March 1-3, 2001

Summary of the Gathering

About 50 people came to the meeting, which was chaired by Robert Charlie, the Co-op president. People attending the gathering included Gwich'in and Inuvialuit representatives from Aklavik, Old Crow, Fort McPherson, Arctic Village, and Kaktovik. There were also government and co-management board and committee representatives from Inuvik, Whitehorse, Fairbanks and Yellowknife.



The out-of-town participants stayed with relatives and friends, with billets, or at Bessie's or Charlie's Bed and Breakfast. John and Annie Banksland brought us lunches and snacks throughout the day, and the Aklavik Drum Dancers entertained us on Friday evening.



Thursday

OVERVIEW OF THE ARCTIC BORDERLANDS ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

- √ Joan Eamer talked about the Co-op's beginnings, its development, and recent activities. She explained how the Co-op has developed over the years to use science and local and traditional knowledge to help us all understand what is changing in the environment.
- √ The Borderlands Co-op covers the range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd as well as coastal and marine areas. The issues identified by Co-op participants are: climate change, development and contaminants.



- √ The Co-op is not a government organization and it doesn't make the types of policies and decisions that government and co-management organizations make. Its purpose is to pull information together and look at what is changing, and communicate this information to the organizations that make these decisions.
- √ The Co-op conducts interviews each year in Aklavik, Old Crow and Fort McPherson to find out what local elders and hunters have observed. These interviews are conducted by community members.





PUTTING OUR INFORMATION TOGETHER

- ✓ Mike Gill talked about the sources of knowledge the Borderlands Co-op uses and showed how science and local knowledge can work together to give us a better understanding of the environment.



- ✓ Mike went through some of the results that have been put together into a synthesis report called "Taking Stock – what have we learned so far?". This report is still being worked on and people can contact

the Co-op to get a copy.

- ✓ Mike's presentation got a very lively discussion going. People talked about what they see when they are out on the land and about the reasons for some of the changes shown by the indicators, like warming temperatures and fewer salmon. People talked a lot about going beyond just recording changes to finding solutions.

PRIORITIES

- ✓ Aileen Horler reviewed the priority items from last year's gathering in Old Crow and described how we followed up on them.

LOCHE LIVER STUDY

- ✓ Joan Eamer presented the results of the contaminants analyses of loche livers that were collected by elders and school children in Aklavik and Fort McPherson as part of a Borderlands Co-op project. The experienced elders and fishers decided if livers were good or bad quality and these were compared for levels of contaminants.

- ✓ There was no difference in the contaminants levels between the good and the bad livers. The levels of contaminants were lower than in most Yukon samples.

- ✓ Organochlorines (like DDT and PCBs) were measured, as well as metals. This study was done because people had often said in the interviews and at the Co-op gatherings that they were concerned that more bad livers are found now than there used to be. People throw these dark or spotty livers out. The tests done by the Co-op showed that the bad livers have the same amount of fat as the good livers. We talked about what else might cause these differences and what more we could do to look at this.

COMMUNICATIONS

- ✓ Gary Kofinas presented the Borderland Co-op's communication strategy and we discussed ways of improving communications.

THE FUTURE OF THE PORCUPINE CARIBOU HERD

- ✓ In the late afternoon people from Aklavik joined the meeting and soup and bannock were served.
- ✓ Don Russell gave a slide show on the Porcupine Caribou Herd. He described the herd's movements through the yearly cycle over the range in Alaska, Yukon and the Northwest Territories.
- ✓ Don discussed the results of many years of research and monitoring that show how climate and development can affect caribou condition, how many calves are born, and the survival of the calves.





Friday

REPORTS FROM THE COMMUNITIES

- ✓ Gary Kofinas started the community-based monitoring program reports by describing how the community researchers conduct interviews with elders and others, such as hunters, who are experts on the land. A form is used that has questions about berries, fish, caribou, other animals, weather and other observations.
- ✓ This is the first year that interviews were done in Arctic Village, Alaska. Johnny Edwards did the interviews and Edward Sam gave the report.
- ✓ Roxanne Koe reported on peoples' observations from her interviews in Fort McPherson.
- ✓ In Old Crow, Shirley Kakfwi did the interviews and prepared a report, which was read by Deborah Robinson.
- ✓ Danny Greenland reported on the interviews that he conducted with the Aklavik Gwich'in.
- ✓ Annie B. Gordon presented her report from the Aklavik Inuvialuit.
- ✓ There were no formal interviews done in Kaktovik; Lee Kayotuk and Eddy Arey from that community reported on conditions and changes in their region.

DISCUSSION OF METHODS

- ✓ Gary Kofinas described the workshop that was held just before this gathering to look at the methods used for community-based monitoring.
- ✓ We broke into three groups to discuss how we could improve the hiring practices, the interviews, and community review of the results. We came up with lots of good suggestions that will help with future years.

Some examples of observations based on the community reports:

- Poor ice, open water, and lots of water on the ice in many places is making it hard to get out on the land. Can't get out as early in the fall as people used to.
- The cranberries were very poor last year all over, but other berries were mainly good.
- There was good fishing in lots of places, but not so many salmon around Old Crow.
- Caribou weren't around Aklavik this fall. They were scattered back in the mountains and people had to get moose meat. Hunters in Fort McPherson had to travel a long way for caribou.

ARE THE CROW FLATS AND THE COASTAL PLAIN DRYING OUT?

- ✓ Elizabeth Malta gave a presentation on the Old Crow Flats and the wetlands on the Yukon North Slope. She used photos from satellites to look at changes in amount of water in the lakes. There has been some drying in the Crow Flats since the early 70s, and not much change on the North Slope since 1986. The photos don't go back further than that.
- ✓ People talked about what they had seen - the drying in Crow Flats is known from local people.

ELDERS ROUNDTABLE

- ✓ Danny C. Gordon, Stephen Frost, Charlie Snowshoe, Billy Day, John Carmichael and Edward Sam talked about ducks, geese and swans. They told about geese changing where they go during migration and how there are fewer of some ducks in some places, and more swans. Several people told about how they miss hearing many small birds singing in the spring.



Saturday

PRESENTATIONS

- √ Brief presentations were given by participants about programs and projects:
 - Inuvialuit Harvest Study, Catherine Pinard
 - Oceans Community Monitoring (Tariuq), Marlene Bailey
 - Rat River Charr, John Carmichael
 - Caribou and radioactive contaminants, Edward Sam
 - Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board, Leslie Wakelyn
 - EMAN-North (Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network), Leslie Wakelyn
 - Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board, Robert Charlie
 - Yukon Game Guardians Program, Barney Smith

DISCUSSION OF INDICATORS

- √ Mike Gill and Joan Eamer reviewed the Borderland Co-op's indicators of change. Highlights of these in print form were available at the gathering. The indicators are all on the Borderlands Co-op web site (www.taiga.net/coop).
- √ Most of the indicators are up to date and nine new indicators were developed this year - three of these for contaminants.
- √ We discussed indicators that could be developed related to oil and gas activity and indicators for the marine and coastal environment.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

- √ This is the business meeting for the non-profit society that operates the Borderlands Co-op. The sources of funding and the budget were presented and discussed.
- √ Directors for the next year are: Robert Charlie (president), Joanne Gustafson (vice-president), Joan Eamer (secretary-treasurer), Ron Larsen, Stephen Frost, Carol Arey, Barney Smith, Joe Tetlich, Richard Voss, Gary Kofinas, Billy Day, Lee Kayotuk and Fanny Greenland.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

- √ We reviewed the action items developed over the past three days and made decisions about priorities for next year.

CLOSING REMARKS

- √ Thanks to the organizers and the people of Aklavik for their warm hospitality.
- √ Many people commented that this was an interesting meeting with lots of important information shared and that they looked forward to keeping involved with the Co-op.

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Photos by Gary Kofinas and Donald Andre

This summary was produced on March 5, 2001 for Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op participants to use when reporting back to their communities and organizations. Proceedings of the Gathering will also be produced.