

# ARCTIC BORDERLANDS ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

## Ninth Annual Gathering

### Inuvik, Northwest Territories

#### February 23 to 25, 2004

## SUMMARY OF GATHERING



About 40 people participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Gathering of the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op. The Gathering was chaired by the Borderlands Co-op President, Randall Tetlich. Participants attended from Whitehorse, Dawson City, Old Crow, Aklavik, Inuvik, Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, Fairbanks, Arctic Village, and Kaktovik. Observers came from Fort Providence, Hay River and Deline, with a special guest presenter from the University of Saskatchewan.

### MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2004

- A moment's silence was observed in honour of Bev Reitz, who passed away in December. Bev worked at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and helped to get the Co-op program started in Alaska. She attended three past gatherings and was a strong advocate for the program.
- Joan Eamer provided an overview of the history, the goals, and the operations of the Borderlands Co-op, explaining the expansion this year to include the following communities: Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvik (Gwich'in and Inuvialuit), and Tsiigehtchic.
- Mike Gill walked everyone through a virtual tour of the Borderlands Co-op website ([www.taiga.net/coop](http://www.taiga.net/coop)). The website contains all the past reports from gatherings and from the community monitoring, as well as indicators and other reference material. Copies of the entire website on CD-ROM were distributed and may be ordered through the Borderlands Co-op.

### TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2004

This day was mainly devoted to presentations of community reports by monitors and proved to be very interesting. Some of the highlights included:

- **Randall Tetlich** led off with the observations from the 20 Old Crow residents who were interviewed. The weather made it a good year for berry picking in the area. One person made traditional ice cream from soap berries. Even the fish tasted better this year and everyone reported that they got enough to meet their needs.

- **May Andre** of Fort McPherson reported that there had been 90 fires in the area last summer, and that fall came very late. Poor weather conditions throughout the fall and winter prevented most from getting out on the land.
- Tsiigehtchic monitor, **Anna May McLeod**, reported that many weather changes have occurred in the area, particularly hot days arriving earlier and longer days lasting later into August. Changes such as brush growing along the Peel and trees growing in bunches were also noted.
- **Eugene Pascal**, the Ehdiiat Gwich'in monitor for Aklavik, reported that the community had its usual mix of weather. The winter was very cold with lots of overflow and ice buildup, making it difficult to get out on the land, particularly for the elders. Once again, Aklavik hunters did not have good availability of caribou.
- Inuvialuit monitor, **Annie B. Gordon**, also from Aklavik, noted that the weather had been very unpredictable, leaving people wondering if the late freeze-up, deep snow and overflow were possibly a result of global warming. The dampness made it very difficult to dry enough fish to meet people's needs. It is also notable that the willows seem to be growing much more quickly, making it difficult to trap.
- **Kenneth Frank** delivered the Arctic Village report for **Mildred Allen**. This Alaskan community is seeing major differences in its climate from 40 years ago when the night skies were clearer and one could see greater distances because there was no haze. Permafrost is melting and lakes are drying up. It was a really good winter for harvesting caribou.
- Tuktoyaktuk's very first monitor's report to the gathering was presented by **Angun Gruben**. Due to the colder weather this past winter, the furs were prime, and in spite of the colder weather, the caribou were in excellent condition. There were changes in ice conditions observed.
- **Mabel Sharpe**, the Inuvialuit monitor from Inuvik, noted that the fall water levels were low in the Delta, but there was lots of deep snow during the winter, with overflow on the lakes and rivers. There are large increases in muskrats reported in the Delta.
- Inuvik's Gwich'in monitor, **Barry Greenland**, reported that many Inuvik youth do go out on the land go for recreational purposes and that people are seeing more snow machines flying by than snow geese. Barry noted that there are a few people from Inuvik who are full time harvesters and others who go berry picking and fishing.
- Although interviews were not conducted in Kaktovik, **Eddie Arey** reported his personal observation that the weather had been very unpredictable with many storms making it difficult to travel. Coho were caught near Kaktovik, which is very unusual, and there were plenty of polar bears around.

## **A few common observations among communities**

Unusual songbirds have been spotted, but you don't hear as many songbirds singing as you used to. Wolverine are rare; there are very few rabbits around this year; migration routes of the caribou seem to be changing but the animals are generally healthy. Loche livers appear to be normal. Most communities reported too much overflow making travel difficult. No shortage of mosquitoes around!

## **Wildlife Diseases and Climate Change**

Dr. Susan Kutz, a veterinarian from the University of Saskatchewan, is conducting a study of parasites in the ungulate populations. She is asking what problems may arise due to a changing climate. The Gathering offered her an opportunity to hear first-hand from the people who have knowledge of parasites that have always been present in wild animals, what diseases have occurred in the past and what the people see changing. Her presentation included slides on the lifecycle of lungworm, which are present only in muskox; and warbles, which are common in caribou. She noted that moose tick is becoming very common in northern Alberta and may be moving north. Susan said that she is interested in working with communities of the Arctic Borderlands region in the future to learn more from local knowledge.

## **Indicators of Ecological Change**

***Do we need new indicators to cover our expanded region?***

***Do we need new indicators to help track future changes caused by development?***

Mike Gill and Scott Gilbert discussed the current indicators being used, and asked for input. It was felt that tracking small aircraft overflights and helicopter activity on the land would be more useful than just statistics from airports. There was general agreement that work of other organizations not be duplicated but it should be gathered and used. The sea ice conditions are changing and everyone felt it was important to monitor that from a local level. People stressed that it is important to focus on what is unique about the Borderlands Co-op—consistently documenting information from people who spend time on the land, as the program has been doing for nine years.



## **Break-out discussion groups**

### **1. Social changes and impacts: Should these be included in the monitoring program?**

People agreed that it is important to do this, but that doing well is a big task and other organizations are addressing social impacts. There was concern that we might be trying to take on too much if we moved further into this area. It was suggested that a follow-up meeting of interested parties explore this question in more detail.

### **2. Borderlands Co-op as a Society and discussion on the information protocol**

Lindsay Staples led the discussion group and presented an organization chart, which everyone thought would be useful in booklet form. The information protocol developed from the discussion at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Gathering and at the Directors' meeting in November. It was discussed and slight changes were made.

### **3. How can we work together to improve our methods and the usefulness of the results we gather through community-based monitoring programs?**

Because we are an information organization, we need to concentrate on the programs we have established and continue to share our knowledge and results. There were many practical suggestions for making this work better.

## **Ten-year Summary Report**

The website and the many posters exhibited on the walls of the meeting hall were a strong indication of how much useful information has been gathered. Keeping it simple and relevant is important. It was recommended that funding be sought to produce a summary report that is a synthesis of community and science monitoring and make that report available to people of our region.

## **Board of Directors for the next year:**

Executive: Randall Tetlichy (President), Joanne Gustafson (Vice-President) and Carol Arey (Secretary-treasurer)

- Billy Day
- James Andre
- Kenneth Frank
- Fannie Greenland
- Danny C. Gordon
- Gary Kofinas
- Doug Larsen
- Anna May McLeod
- Ian McDonald
- William Teya
- Richard Wilson
- Tuktoyaktuk resident (to be determined)