

2011

ENR Inuvik Region - TK Newsletter - Volume 1, Issue 1



Midway Lake – Keelen Simpson/GNWT

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What's Inside?

This Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) Traditional Knowledge newsletter reports on the work being done by staff in the Inuvik Region to implement the Government of the Northwest Territories Traditional Knowledge (GNWT TK) policy. It highlights the work by Renewable Resource Officers and Conservation Officers who, with other partners such as the schools and community, are involved in designing and delivering authentic youth traditional skills camp experiences.

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Who are the people of the Inuvik Region?

The Inuvik region is home to both the **Inuvialuit**, in the north, and the **Gwich'in**, in the south, however, the area was historically and traditionally shared by both cultures.



Summer Sunset - 11:08 pm on 3 August 2011 – Keelen Simpson/GNWT

The **Inuvialuit Settlement Region** extends from the Alaska/Yukon border east to the NWT/Nunavut border, with the south boundary encompassing Inuvik and Aklavik while bordering the **Gwich'in** and **Sahtu Settlement Areas**.

Environmental knowledge and survival skills still play an important role and local fish and wildlife are still a large part of the diet in modern Inuvialuit culture.

Spring and fall provide the hunting season for geese and muskox and summer for whaling and fishing. Caribou hunting is done in fall and winter.¹

The **Gwich'in Settlement Region** extends from the mountain headwaters of the Peel and Arctic Red Rivers in the south, to the Mackenzie Delta in the north, east to the Anderson River and west to the Richardson Mountains.

The cultural and economic importance of hunting, fishing and trapping continues to exist in modern **Gwich'in** culture, with caribou, moose and whitefish being staples of their diet.²

¹ "Modern Inuvialuit Culture." *Inuvialuit Regional Corporation*.

² "The Gwich'in." *Gwich'in Tribal Council*.

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Robert Alexie Sr., Elder

Robert, a Teet'l'it Gwich'in, was born and raised in the Gwich'in Settlement Region and has become a well known and respected elder in the Gwich'in community.



Robert Alexie Sr., Nitainlaii Park – Keelen Simpson/GNWT

Robert has been working as an elder, with Daryl English, in Conservation Education programs since 1998, when they first attempted a snowmobile trip from Fort McPherson to Mayo, Yukon.

Robert expresses concern of the loss of cultural and traditional knowledge and practices as youth disengagement is increasing and the knowledge holders are aging. However, Robert's passion for living off the land coupled with his commitment to passing on his and his people's knowledge to the youth

has made him an asset to the continuation of Traditional Gwich'in Knowledge and to ENR's Conservation Education programs.

Robert feels there are youth who want to get out and be on the land and take part in cultural and traditional practices, but they do not know the land or have no way to get out on the land. He finds the hunting and trapping programs facilitated by GNWT provide opportunities for those youth. The programs give the youth the skills they will need if they choose, in the future, to go out on the land on their own. Skills such as: how to observe one's surroundings, how to locate a good spot for a fire or camp, what parts of the animal are good to eat. Robert has observed

"If we don't do this, how will people know?"

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that after developing a skill, the youth are anxious to go out again the next day and build on that newfound knowledge and gain more experience.

Recalling how he was taught when he was a youth and personal experiences he has been in, he would like for the youth to have the full experience of what it is to be out on the land. These programs are a great way for youth to develop independence and leadership skills and Robert would like to see more of that among the youth in the programs. Skills such as having the youth 'leading' when travelling between locations, cooking for themselves rather than bringing a cook along and having the majority of their food come from what they have hunted, trapped or gathered themselves are Robert's suggestions to make these programs a *true* experience of the traditional lifestyle.

Robert expressed much appreciation for the programs facilitated by the GNWT and hopes they continue and even become more frequent. There are many opportunities throughout the year to practice traditional Knowledge and the more often these cultural programs are implemented, the more opportunities for the youth to gain and conserve the traditional knowledge of their people.



Robert Alexie Sr. implementing a conservation education program. – Daryl C. English/GNWT

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Fort McPherson - Tetlit Zheh

Chief William Koe

Chief William Koe and the Tetlit Gwich'in Council are aware of the loss of Traditional Knowledge and skills among youth and have taken a holistic approach to addressing the issue.

Chief Koe not only wants the youth to learn how to live off the land, but also wants them to gain knowledge about environmentally sustainable practices to preserve the land for future generations. He is a fan of the programs the GNWT is facilitating, and hopes to see them expand and continue.

Community initiatives such as Fort McPherson and the Tetlit Gwich'in provide an excellent opportunity for ENR to provide any extra assistance required to ensure the promotion and conservation of TK is carried out to its fullest.

Language: At a recent Strategic Planning Committee Meeting, the elders expressed their concern over the loss of language among the community. In response, the band pays retired teachers to go to the band office and teach language classes. Also, an initiative has been implemented within the Band Office to use the Gwich'in language whenever possible.

Hunting/Trapping/Fishing: Annual trips with youth take place where they not only learn how to effectively hunt, trap or fish, but also learn:

- the elders' ways of cutting caribou and which parts are good to eat;
- how to skin and clean a caribou;
- how to make dry meat and dry fish;
- how to make stews with the meat and bannock; and,
- the importance of quickness and cleanliness.

Land: On the land excursions are also planned and organized to take the youth out and show them the land, teach them the traditional names of various locations, show them where the elders traditionally travelled and where favorable spots to

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camp are, where traditional trails are, and where traditional landmarks are, to avoid getting lost or disoriented.

Skills: Other skills that may be overlooked are also taught. Sewing, for example, is a useful skill if something gets torn when out hunting. Being able to identify what trees or wood is good for fires and how to chop wood are not only useful skills for out on the land, but can also provide youth with a reasonable income if they decide to collect wood for other people.

Johnny Kay

Johnny is the Executive Director of the Tetlit Gwich'in Council. He finds TK very important and the diffusion of it instills pride. Not only pride of culture in the youth, but also pride for elders in seeing their traditions and culture being alive and healthy. He feels that the programs should always have an elder involved, as it is good for them to see the traditions being passed on, and even if we can't get all the youth involved, those few that do participate and appreciate what they are learning are valuable.

Johnny believes in the TAKT/H programs facilitated by the GNWT and is happy that the government is taking the steps in this area to build relationships with the various groups with which it facilitates the programs.

Johnny recounted many of the valuable life skills he learned from his father while being out on the land and knows these skills are essential for today's youth.

Patience was learned when waiting for animals; *budgeting* was learned by understanding the work that had to be done to get the desired return; and, most importantly, *respect* was learned in all interactions with the environment, especially when learning the importance of respecting the animals so they will respect you.

Practical skills are also learned when participating in the programs, such as learning how to walk in snowshoes, developing the skill of working in a team, being able to "read the water" and navigate along a river, or understanding what is going on by paying attention to the behavior of animals.

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Mable English

Mable English was born in Fort McPherson and has spent her life living between there, Inuvik and on the land. Mable finds, however, that living traditionally and on the land is *life* for her. She was born in the bush and for her it is home. She can go back to it, with ease, at any time.

Mable finds life on the land to be very spiritual. She feels better, breaths better and eats better while out on the land. It is a way to balance life and connect to the environment - "get grounded".

Mable believes life on the land is beautiful and the tradition should be and needs to be taught. She stated that there is a lot to teach the youth, such as how to be a leader, how to get advice from elders, and how to live, and that they can learn this by experiencing life on the land. It can also provide them with a way to learn the language, as many of the plants and wildlife discussed were referred to both in Gwich'in and English.



Mable English tending to the smudge, Midway Lake – Keelen Simpson

One aspect of the Take a Kid Trapping/Harvesting that Mable finds to be of much use and very important is the survival skills it equips the youth with. After participating in the program, if one of the youth is somehow stranded, the program has provided them with the knowledge to identify a spot to set up a tent, how to set up a tent, how to identify a spot for a fire, and so on.

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Mable emphasized that the land is not only for food, but also medicine, "the land is a pharmacy." She is a TK holder in the area of plant use for medicinal purposes and has presented at informational sessions on traditional plant use. Throughout the conversation a smudge was going to keep the mosquitoes away and a few herbal remedies were mentioned:

- Boiling spruce gum for a cold;
- Chewing a willow leaf and applying it to a wasp sting; and,
- Boiling birch for an ulcer.

It is very important to go back to the land and get **grounded**.



Mable English gathering traditional medicine. – Daryl C. English/GNWT

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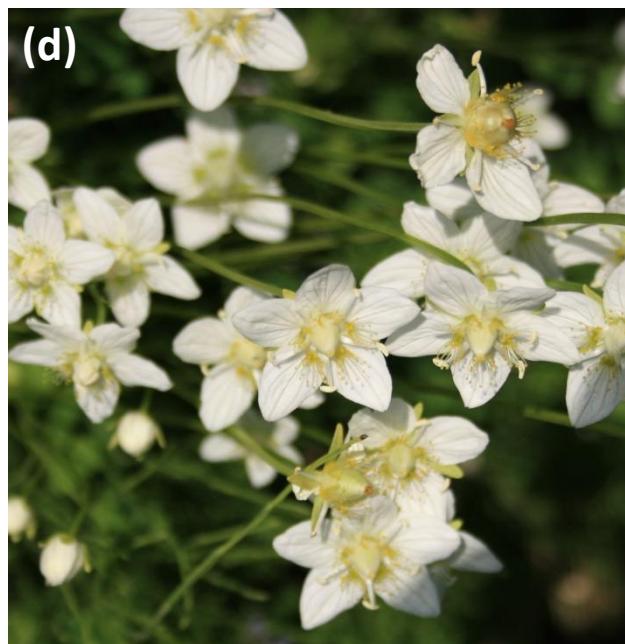
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Plants of the Inuvik Region



- (a) Yellowberry/Cloudberry - *Rubus chamaemorus*
- (b) Blueberry - *Vaccinium uliginosum*
- (c) Fireweed - *Epilobium angustifolium*
- (d) Northern grass-of-Parnassus - *Parnassia palustris*



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Tuktoyaktuk - Tuktuuyaqtuuq

Lila Voudrach

Lila has been working as a Renewable Resource Officer since 2008 and also volunteers with the Tuktoyaktuk Canoe Club. Lila grew up travelling on the land with her grandfather, who taught her to respect and value the land and wildlife. Lila has done a lot of work within Tuktoyaktuk in assisting with the planning and facilitation of TAKT/H programs.

Lila really values the importance of elders in effectively carrying out these programs. They are the ones that hold the knowledge and know how to survive on the land with only that knowledge. The recent program put on by Mangilaluk School employed elder David Nasogaluak to take the youth out muskrat trapping. For Lila, having David involved really drove home the importance of having elders participate in the programs.

Finding that some elders are no longer as able to go out on to the land as they have been, Lila hopes to find ways to ensure their continued participation in future programs. She believes this could be done by adjusting the program so that the TK portion is conducted in the community beforehand. This would allow for the elders to have that invaluable interaction with the youth and pass on TK and answer any questions the youth may have.

"I do it for the youth."

longer as able to go out on to the land as they have been, Lila hopes to find ways to ensure their continued participation in future programs. She believes this could be done by adjusting the program so that the TK portion is conducted in the community beforehand. This would allow for the elders to have that invaluable interaction with the youth and pass on TK and answer any questions the youth may have.

Lila is very enthusiastic and optimistic about the TAKT/H programs and their value in passing on Traditional Knowledge and skills and appreciation for the land. She also sees their value in relation to her position as an RRO, the programs teach the youth to be responsible trappers and harvesters, which results in a reduction of over-harvesting and waste.

Lila has a lot of fun with the programs and wants to continue being involved with them and promoting them to the various community groups that may wish to submit proposals to put them on.

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Inuvik - Inuuvik



Lawrence Rogers

Lawrence was involved the TAKT/H programs before he began working for ENR. He remembers well his time spent as a youth out on the land with his father and brothers, observing and learning trapping techniques. *"If you don't actually go out and do things, you'll never learn."* He maintained this approach and the importance of transmitting traditional knowledge into fatherhood, ensuring his sons went out on the land with him whenever possible. Lawrence also has experience creating television programs showcasing his brothers (who he says "have PhDs in trapping) and son trapping and living off the land. This idea of filming traditional practices that could possibly be used in future TAKT/H programs as the media component may engage a broader population of the youth.

Jimmy Kalinek

Jimmy is a seasonal Fire Crew Member with ENR who has also worked on the TAKT/H programs. When not working, Jimmy spends much of his time on the land, mainly harvesting caribou, but also geese and moose, as well as fishing and whaling. Going out on the land has allowed Jimmy to learn some of the Inuvialuktun language. He is a member of the Inuvik Drummers and Dancers, which also gives him the opportunity to learn the language, as well as allowing him to interact with elders and learn traditional stories. Being only 30 years old, Jimmy can serve as a role model and mentor for youth who want to become more involved in traditional practices.



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Aklavik - Aklarvik

RRO Ian McLeod facilitated two TAKT/H programs in the 2010/2011 year. These programs are funded by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI). One of each trapping and harvesting was conducted in conjunction with Moose Kerr School.

Take a Kid Trapping Program - Moose Kerr School³

From December 6th to 17th, 2010, 10 students from Moose Kerr School had the opportunity to participate in a Take a Kid Trapping program. RRO Ian McLeod facilitated the program, enlisting the assistance of young, local trapper, Samuel McLeod, to act as Youth Leader in the program. Two elders participated in the Program, Danny C. Gordon and Joe Arey, the latter of which was sponsored by the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee.

Daily Activities

Travelling was done by snowmobile and snowmobile

safety was stressed throughout the program. The youth observed moose and sheep in their natural habitats. Beaver houses were checked and many beaver traps were set up, one small beaver was caught during the program. RRO Ian had set up traps prior to the program, one in which a lynx was caught. The participants learned how to dispatch a lynx and reset the trap. The students went ice fishing twice and caught 10 inconnu and 2 Northern pike on the second trip.

Due to extreme cold, the third day was spent inside with elder Nellie Arey and watching trapping videos. Nellie taught the youth the traditional method of



Aklavik Take a Kid Trapping Program Dec 2010

³ Ian McLeod. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. GNWT. 2010 ENR Aklavik TAKT Activity Report. Dec 2010.

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preparing and stretching a wolverine pelt. Samuel McLeod also skinned and stretched the lynx that was caught on day two.

The seventh day was spent with elder Jo Arey. He took the participants out to his trap line, where they found a mink that was caught.

On the last day, the youth were split into two groups. One group went with Danny C. Gordon to learn how to make tools. They had the choice of making a hunting knife, fish hook or ulu. The other group went into the ENR shop and learned about snowmobile maintenance and learned to make wolf, wolverine, lynx and fox fur stretchers.

Summary

Attendance of the participants was good, and they were enthusiastic throughout the program. The extreme cold temperatures cancelled one of the days and required another day to be spent inside. The elders found the youth to be well behaved and respectful and were happy to see a program being put on that promotes trapping awareness and TK.

Ian was pleased with the outcome of this program and looks forward to improving it and continuing it in the years to come. He finds these programs to be a valuable opportunity for the youth to learn about harvesting traditional food and to learn more about their culture, heritage and traditional knowledge.

Take a Kid Harvesting Program - Moose Kerr School⁴

From February 7th to 14th of this year, 10 students from Moose Kerr School had the opportunity to participate in a Take a Kid Harvesting program. RRO Ian McLeod facilitated and implemented the program in conjunction with Herschel Island Park Rangers Samuel and Edward McLeod. The elders that participated in the program were John Carmichael and Richard Ross, both Gwich'in from Aklavik who were sponsored by Ehdiitat Renewable Resource Council to take the youth out for a day.

⁴ Ian McLeod. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. GNWT. *Aklavik Take a Kid Harvesting Program Activity Report*. Feb 2011.

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Daily Activities

Over the six days the youth were able to participate in and enjoy many activities. The program began with a safety lecture and introduction to the land. For wildlife, Dall sheep were seen on the first day, on the second day two youth shot a muskox each, which were then harvested, and on the third day a mink was found when checking the trap lines.

The weather was not the best and low visibility and high winds caused day four's activities to be cancelled. At -43°C day five was too cold for even the wildlife to come out and the day was spent traveling, searching for wildlife and warming up. The final day was spent with the elders, learning about the different uses of forestry products, what types of trees to cut for firewood and a demonstration on how to build a dead fall trap for martin and wolverine.

Summary

Despite the cold weather, Ian found the participants showed enthusiasm for the program and the skills they were learning and felt attendance was good. The elders found the students to be well behaved and respectful. Firearm and skidoo safety were stressed throughout the program. Trapping and hunting safety issues and concerns were addressed prior to the start of the program, and trapper related legislation and international agreements on trapping were addressed during the trap line visits.



Aklavik Take a Kid Harvesting Program Feb 2011

Ian was pleased with the outcome of this year's program and looks forward to improving it and continuing it in the years to come. He finds these programs to be a valuable opportunity for the youth to learn about harvesting their traditional food, their culture, heritage and TK.

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Thank you to Daryl English for the work he does as a Conservation Education Officer. His planning, coordinating and facilitation of programs gives the youth a chance to interact with their elders and learn and participate in TK and practices.

Also, thank you, Daryl for assisting in the development of this Newsletter by coordinating the interviews and assisting in the information gathering.

For Reports on the Conservation Education Programs that have taken place, visit:

http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/_live/pages/wpPages/education.aspx

For more information on the Take a Kid Trapping Program, visit:

<http://www.iti.gov.nt.ca/fursagriculturefisheries/kidtrapping.shtml>

Funding Traditional Knowledge Research

The Government of the Northwest Territories may provide, upon request, support to communities, aboriginal governments, and aboriginal cultural and research institutions that wish to conduct studies or projects related to traditional knowledge in the Northwest Territories. Such support might include: providing funding, data and information, assisting with literature reviews, assisting with program design or assisting with access to government or non-government funding. More information may be obtained by contacting the Traditional Knowledge Coordinator at (867) 867-2009 or bea_lepine@gov.nt.ca

To send us your comments, suggestions and photos for future newsletter, or for further information, please contact:

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