

Summary of ABEKS 2017 community tour

Background

ABEKS strives to visit each participating community at the end of monitoring season every year. The meetings typically include a presentation by the community's monitor, a data summary of the year's survey results and an opportunity for validation of the data by community members. This is also an opportunity for each community to express concerns with the program and to provide direction for future investigation using the database.

2017 was an unusual year for the co-op. ABEKS operates on a 'shoe-string' budget which just covers the cost of monitoring and administration. Analysis and reporting are additional expenses which, in the past, have required project funding to complete. Under pressure from one of the co-op's key funders, we were asked to develop a strategic plan, investigate option for changing our governance structure and report on the strengths and weaknesses of the data. Budget limitations restricted our ability to conduct community monitoring alongside these other tasks, however, the ABEKS board of directors recognized the importance of communicating all of these projects to communities. This year's community tour invited RRC and HTC members and, in some communities, the general public, to a presentation on the 2016 data analysis projects, a summary of the new strategic plan and an introduction to the process being developed to address harmonization with other monitoring programs (new possibilities for governance).

We visited all participating NWT and Yukon communities (Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, Inuvik, Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic and Old Crow). Attendance varied from community to community and was somewhat dependent on the availability of honoraria for participants. ABEKS does not have a budget that can cover honoraria for all RRC and HTC members and the expectation in communities is that, when honoraria are not paid meetings should be open to the public and consultation should not be expected. Conducting public meetings creates an opportunity for engagement with more of the community but does not guarantee that RRC and HTC members, who are integral to determining the future direction of the co-op, will attend.

Below is a summary of attendance and general comments made in each community. It is worth noting that we did not have a minute taker in most communities and our records likely do not document the detail involved in general conversation.

Overview of presentation

The discussion covered the following:

- Review of 2015/16 monitoring and availability of community monitor reports;
- Update on 2016/17 monitoring;
- Review of 2016 species and governance structure reports completed with ECCC project funding and their implications for the future of ABEKS;
- Strategic planning, purpose, new goals and work plan items for 2017;
- Harmonization – the need for a new governance structure and steps towards figuring it out;

- What's ahead in 2017/18

[The power point presentation that was used can be found here.](#)

Tsiigehtchic – March 13, 2017

Present:



Anna May McLeod, Community monitor
 James Andre, ABEKS chair
 John Norbert, Elder, RRC board member
 Ben ?, Community recreation coordinator
 Toni Letendre, youth worker

Thanks to Julie Ann Andre for the delicious soup and bannock!

Discussion:

General conversation focused on the importance of ABKES to the community. Participants expressed a sense of ownership of the program as well as fatigue with multiple survey based studies coming through the community.

The muskox data was of particular interest. Participants noted that there is a general feeling that muskox are damaging important caribou habitat and should be removed from the landscape.

Participants noted that even though the fish data is not in great shape they wish to continue to collect information about fish.

Participants also noted that it might be better to administer the survey according to interest group (ie. 20 berry pickers, 20 caribou hunters, 20 fishers, etc.)

Fort McPherson – March 14, 2017



Present:

James Andre, ABEKC chair
 Gina Neyando RRC coordinator
 Larry Firth, Elder
 Frazer Andre, youth
 Bobbi Rose, youth
 Liz Vittrekwa, RRC member
 Andrew Koe, community member
 Richard j Blake, RRC member
 Verna Francis, Assistant executive director, Hamlet of F.M.
 Lillian Vanelsti, Hamlet of F.M staff

Discussion:

Fort McPherson participants were very engaged with the presentation, asked many questions and provided valuable insight into the value of the program to their community.

Fish data was of particular interest. Participants expressed a clear intent to keep gathering information about fish, noting that they are an important indicator of water quality. Two noted that erosion of the local river banks, as well as contamination from unknown sources, is affecting fish harvest and food security. The community is interested in using ABKES data to answer questions about water quality in future.

It was suggested that we organize a meat preparation workshop at the next gathering

Participants noted a distaste for muskox and have observed that they have a negative impact on caribou habitat. There is concern that this impact will eventually compromise caribou harvest.

Thank you to May Andre for the delicious meal!

Tuktoyaktuk – March 15, 2017



Present:

Richard Cockney, THTC member
Glenna Emaghok, THTC member
Lennie Emaghok, THTC member
David Cockney, community member
Richard Gruben, THTC member
Ada Cockney, THTC employee

Discussion:

There was strong representation from the Tuktoyaktuk HTC at this meeting. Participants noted that there were a couple of thousand caribou near Tuk this year – the first time in a while. There was general discussion about how the new all-season road would affect resident's ability to access traditional food sources, with a common sentiment that the road would improve access to cabins, traplines and fishing hotspots.

Participants were interested in the harmonization conversation and noted that the harvest survey is not going as well as it could because there are hunters that are not being surveyed. The general consensus was that the survey would not be successful or useful without increased participation. Members noted that people in Tuktoyaktuk are supportive of ABEKS and that the survey should also be completed by more people.

One HTC member noted that there is a 3-5 year study of white herring that will begin in Tuk harbour this summer. Residents feel that fish are important to gather data on and that ABEKS should continue to ask fish-related questions on the survey.

General consensus that Muskox are an invasive species.

Inuvik – March 15, 2017



Present:

Desmond Rogers
John Day
William? (all IHTC members)

Discussion:

We were happy to see the Inuvik HTC members and disappointed that the Inuvik RRC members did not show up to the presentation. The HTC members were particularly interested in the analysis of species related data and opened a general discussion about what questions could be answered in future. HTC members agreed that the ABEKS database is a valuable tool for climate change related studies and want to see the program continue. In particular, participants noted that communities would benefit from more fish and contaminant related studies.

Some sentiment that muskox are invasive and should be removed from the landscape with speculation about their value as a food source.

Members support for raising the profile of ABEKS and increasing access to the database. They provided direction to draft a letter of introduction for funders and academic institutions and distribute to institutions with a social science department. Members also suggested business cards for all board members and employees (including monitors) and distributing swag (mugs, t-shirts, etc.) at gatherings, meetings and conferences.

The Inuvik HTC expressed clear support for the continuation of ABEKS.

Aklavik – March 16, 2017



Present:

Eugene Pascale – Ehdiiat RRC Coordinator, Chair of the GRRB, Aklavik GTC Self Government Worker, Harvester
Robert Buckle – Executive Director of the Ehdiiat Gwich'in Council & Ehdiiat RRC Councillor, Harvester
Larry McGee – Resident of Aklavik – Part time Fisher
James Edwards – Ehdiiat RRC Councillor – Part Time Harvester
Eddie Greenland – Chief of the Aklavik Indian Band, President of the Ehdiiat RRC, EGC Councillor, entrepreneur
Gladys Edwards – Councillor for the Aklavik Indian Band, Ehdiiat RRC and EGC, Community Health Worker

Discussion:

The Inuvialuit Game Council was conducting their annual meetings in Aklavik on the same day as our meeting, which may have affected participation. Regardless, we had a good turn out in Aklavik and lots of feedback about the program. Conversation focused on how to improve program delivery to improve efficiency and uptake. The following are suggestions provided by various participants:

- We need to make our reports and publications more attractive and visually representative of the communities we are reporting to. This will improve communications directly with communities and possibly attract funding.
- Monitors could be given a disposable camera to take photos of all interviewees
- Support letters from all communities (RRCs and HTC) might help attain more funding
- Interviewees should always be well compensated for giving data
- Giving interviewees journals to keep year-round might strengthen quality of the data
- The survey could be broken into categories (berry pickers, hunters, fishers, etc) and 20 people interviewed for each category
- ABEKC should hire male and female monitors – Aklavik is missing key interviewees because they are not comfortable with the chosen monitor
- Need to build our social media profile and a FAQ page for new website visitors

Other discussions included:

- New study has found that Muskox arrived 180,000 years ago around Herschel
- A brief overview of the Arctic Salmon Project

Old Crow – March 24, 2017



Present:

Jason VanFleet(NYRRC), Stan Njootli. Jr, David Lord (NYRRC), Theona Lewis, Sally Nukon, Bertha Frost, Paul Josie (VG councilor), Bree Blottner (Yukon College), Brandon Kaye, Esau Schafer (VG councillor, NYRRC), Greg Charlie Paul Wysman, Wayne Ollett, Jordan Charlie, Shirley Kwakfi, Andrew Charlie, Maureen Charlie

Discussion:

Old Crow participants provided lots of valuable insight into the ABEKS program, future improvements and immediate need for a new governance structure. The following notes were taken by Maureen Charlie.

BIRDS REPORT

Stan – Expressed the need for more questions about spring river ice breakup.

Shirley - When survey is done, are the Inuvialuit people being surveyed? When caribou is on the Dempster, how much Inuvialuit input is there?

Heather – Notes that Inuvialuit input has been consistent.

Brandon - Are the records in time or memory? Is there money out there for record keeping? And how closely do you work with RRC?

Heather – explained the data management system and notes that the yearly nature of the survey leaves some vulnerability in terms of recall, especially for things like weather events.

Brandon - If we keep it strictly objective interviews, for instances ask when spring thaw is, the medium of the data collected will probably be the closest more accurate answer.

CARIBOU REPORT

Brandon - One thing we know is these herds are mixing together. There are 2 or 3 herds now mixing into one.

Jason - Caribou has been in Alaska for two years now, that's why people are reporting not having met their needs.

Bree - Each community should be surveyed. Alaska may be meeting their needs but not Canada. Does each community surveyed have access to the raw data?

Heather – responded that yes, communities own the data and have full access. General conversation about past uses of the data and the potential to answer many questions posed by communities and/or researchers.

Bree – commented that there may be a natural partnership with Yukon College (Old Crow campus) to do some analysis.

Brandon - So there is money out there! Make a proposal and use funds for data collections, using, reading and analyzing.

MUSKOX REPORT

No particular comments. General agreement that muskox are having a negative effect on caribou habitat.

FISH REPORT

Paul J- I participate in these interviews every year. I use a calendar because especially with fish it's hard to remember which fish species is showing up when. A log book, quarter yearly reminders will help keep track.

Brandon - I think a log book would really help. Structure the log book around as many interviews questions as possible.

Brandon - (log book) Have general observations on one side and interview questions on the other side.

Stan - Give them the interview questions along with the book.

CATHERINE GAGNON REPORT

Brandon - More snow means more caribou

Paul J- On what Stan said, Ice has been breaking up earlier and earlier every year, it could start affecting spring migration.

Brandon- Caribou herds have been getting smaller and smaller because of competing for food? They actually seem to be getting fatter because of it. Weather has been much, much warmer, and they don't need to be burning as much fat for energy.

General conversation about the need to be careful when interpreting data and the need to validate what is uploaded from the surveys with the community every year during the community meetings. Using the PCTC's request for ABEKS to analyze our own data every year as an example, we discussed the danger in giving any dataset to people who are not very familiar with the program, methodology and intent. Nguyen's statistics show a decline in body condition in recent years – it would be interesting to investigate this on a local scale. Generalizations using data from all communities may be masking local trends.

Brandon –“wisdom of the many” most likely scientists will start using community/group data instead of rejecting it.

STRATEGIC PLANNING REPORT

Brandon- At first it was a good idea to work with other data collecting structures, but it doesn't work well for us, it would be better to work with the RRC structure. It might be your best bet to take your methods and take it to RRC.

Brandon- RRC is making recommendations to the First Nations. Basically RRC collects the data, finds a way to analysis it and provide to First Nations. Feedback to YESAB! We will be making recommendations to YESAB and it will be over-looked, but we will have all this documented. This could be useful.

In conclusion

The community tour (and prepared presentation) was an effective way to communicate what is going on with the Co-op to meeting participants. RRC and HTC members are an integral 'vehicle' for transferring information to community members and providing guidance to the co-op for the coming year. Feedback from participants suggests that there is a growing understanding for what the co-op does and does not do and possibly a good lead into further conversation about future governance.