



# **2015 Yukon North Slope Conference**

## ***Best Practices in the Use of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge in Resource Management***

September 29 – 30, 2015, Whitehorse, Yukon

## **Theme and Program Sessions**

### **Conference Theme**

The 2015 Conference Theme is “Best Practices in the Use of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge in Resource Management”. Modern day land claim agreements between state governments and aboriginal peoples and more recent case law have paid special attention to the role of indigenous traditional knowledge in environmental management and wildlife research. After several decades of discussions, research studies, policy papers and workshops and conferences, traditional knowledge (or “TK”) has arrived in mainstream conversations about the state of wildlife and the environment – at least in most regions of the circumpolar arctic.

TK has been represented as “aboriginal traditional knowledge (or “ATK”),” “traditional ecological knowledge (or “TEK”), “local ecological knowledge” (or LEK”) and “Inuit Qaujimagatunqangit” (or “IQ”) - to name but a few. Generally, these forms consider TK as a practical craft knowledge acquired through direct experience and by watching, listening to, travelling, and harvesting with experienced people on the land, ice, and water. TK and TK studies provide information about the surrounding environment, with or without reference to the role of humans in using and shaping that environment, associated cultural views and practices and the structure of knowledge and how it is accumulated, transmitted, and used by individuals and within a group.

The 2015 Yukon North Slope Conference is focused on assessing the current state of the art in the communication, collection, documentation and application of TK. These are important subjects and should be matters of central concern to anyone involved in wildlife management and research today. Although there are strong legal cases for the use of traditional knowledge in modern-day environmental management, strong institutional prejudices remain and assigning full weight to TK as body of knowledge and evidence has been challenging both in Canada and internationally.

At the same time, as greater weight is attached to the consideration of TK in wildlife decisions about resource development, environmental assessment and wildlife

population assessments, so TK has come under greater scrutiny. As with science-based research, the applied methods and the resulting research findings are examined with an increasingly critical eye. This is particularly true for high profile species, like polar bears, caribou, and whales, where international attention is focused on the management of these species in Canada and assessments about the health of these and other species.

In many cases, where the findings of science-based and TK-based research are at odds, there is little guidance for how conflicting multiple lines of evidence could and should be resolved, and better inform the decisions that result if they can't be.

The methods and technologies for documenting and communicating TK have never before provided such a wealth of possibilities for understanding TK and what it has to offer a wide range of audiences from young people to other TK holders to natural resource researchers, managers and decision-makers.

This conference is devoted to addressing the state of practice, means and methods for improvement and the "gold" standard to which TK researchers and users should strive in the collection, documentation, communication and application of TK. It's aim is to advance the practice of incorporating traditional knowledge into resource management decisions through an examination of challenges and case studies that look specifically at best practices and lessons learned in the course of undertaking traditional knowledge studies and advancing study results into decision making.

The results of this discussion should benefit individuals and organizations directly involved in the application of TK - knowledge-holders, "practitioners," and decision-makers from the Yukon North Slope to the Torngat of Labrador.

### **Conference Format**

The conference is organized in a "workshop" format to produce tangible guidance and direction for the development of protocols and standards that will contribute to defining best practices in the treatment of TK. The conference format is generally informal to promote dialogue. Several small panels of veteran observers will share their views to stimulate discussions in small break-out groups. The views from these small group discussions will be discussed in the larger conference plenary session and contribute to recommended best practices and standards.

The results of this conference depend heavily on the contributions of the participants. The approach is practical, collaborative and results-oriented. A conference report will be circulated to all participants and interested parties for their reference and use. We believe that all regions can learn from one another and benefit from informed and frank discussion.

## **Conference Discussion Sessions**

### **Session 1: Mobilizing Knowledge**

This session discusses aboriginal traditional knowledge and how we can learn from this knowledge and ways of knowing. It examines similarities and differences between TK and scientific knowledge and where they can complement one another and where they diverge. It explores how TK can contribute to our understanding of wildlife, ecology and climate and how TK is being communicated and transmitted in new and innovative ways.

### **Session 2: Best Practices and Documenting Traditional Knowledge**

As traditional knowledge studies come under increasing scrutiny, the methods employed and the resulting research findings will be tested for their rigor, reliability and associated credibility. This session will explore best practices in the documentation and treatment and of traditional knowledge.

### **Session 3: Management Decision-making: Resolving Differences and Addressing Disagreements Between TK and Science**

This session will address the institutional prejudices that continue to exist in the science-based research community and with management authorities towards TK-based knowledge and research findings. It will discuss approaches to overcoming these obstacles. It will also consider approaches for resource management decision-makers to consider in weighing multiple lines of evidence from disparate sources (such as TK and science), especially when their management implications disagree.