

NORTHERN CONTAMINANTS PROGRAM (NCP)

NCP is a Federal Government national program on long range contaminants and impact on the environment and human health in Canada. NCP has regional committees in northern Canada to carry out their work. In recent years, the need to have NCP balanced support in the North for all aboriginal communities was raised in NWT RCC meetings.

Initial research into the connection between long range contaminants like mercury, PCBs etc. and consumption of traditional foods in northern communities, indicated high levels of contaminants in marine mammals. Some initial research was also done in the Mackenzie Valley, but for over 24 years until now, most of the research and communications funding, including funding for regional Inuit research assistants, has gone to Arctic Inuit communities.

Dene/Metis communities in the Mackenzie Valley have been neglected, although concerns over contaminants and consumption of traditional foods are just as valid and urgent for the survival of the people here.

Over the past few years, in the work of NWT RCC, Dene and Metis communities have advocated to refocus and do more NCP work in Mackenzie Valley communities, and that research funding and communication tools like regional research assistants be provided to each region.

CONTEXT

NCP was established as part of the green plan for the environment by the Liberal Government of Canada. Because the program was triggered by mercury poisoning in aboriginal communities in Northern Ontario, regional committees in the North were established to work with this Federal program to address long range contaminants and the impact on traditional food consumption. Contaminants like mercury, PCBs etc. from abroad were concerns, as the North increasingly became “the sink” for global contaminants from international industries. However, the Arctic Inuit communities became the place to fund from NCP. Now, it is time to give some attention and support to aboriginal communities in the Western NWT.

In recent years, upstream development of the Alberta oil sands and forestry pulp mills intensified; and as BC Hydro dams increased their operations, the Dene and Metis communities in the Mackenzie Valley are very concerned about impacts on traditional food and water. The documented climate change impacts

compounded this uncertainty. Aboriginal communities in the NWT have become alarmed at what they may be consuming in traditional foods & medicine from the water system along the Mackenzie river and lakes.

In the Sahtu region, Dr. Stern's long term burbot studies outside of Ft. Good Hope, downstream from Norman Wells Imperial Oil & gas operations confirmed increased mercury levels. On-going study on Great Bear Lake also indicated mercury increase in whitefish near a traditional spring harvest area. There are numerous lakes around Ft. Good Hope and other areas that have warning signs of water and fish consumption which have been neglected for years that need NCP involvement.

This year, there are two NCP research projects in the Sahtu region. One is the on-going Dr. Gary Stern burbot research project near Ft. Good Hope. The other one is a joint project with the Deh Cho region. Dr. Brian Laird from the University of Waterloo initiated the NCP project on human bio-monitoring research in Tulita and Deline.

Status

Although there are no major changes in NCP national operations, there are encouraging signs to address the main issues brought up by the Northern Aboriginal committee.

- The regional meeting originally sponsored by CIMP and NCP in Tulita created a collaborative research & monitoring forum called Sahtu Environmental Research and Monitoring Forum (Sahtu ERM). This forum is led by SRRB and strongly supported by Sahtu RCCs.
- Sahtu ERM forum is really active and continuing to grow with members from all Sahtu communities, all RCC's, the Universities, Government agencies, industry, youth and elders. There are teleconferences every month, increasing communications between community participants and researchers.
- There is now an annual cross-cultural camp with all members, exchanges on research & monitoring activities in the Sahtu region. This type of cross-cultural communications means a great deal in the region where aboriginal language is still the first language of the people.
- In the past 2 years, Dr. Brian Laird and his assistant from Waterloo University attended these forums and camps. This type of engagement has enhanced their good, hard working reputation with the communities and

raised the NCP profile at the same time. They are now continuing their work on a Human Bio-monitoring project in Sahtu Region.

- SSI representative Cindy Gilday met with the Human Bio-monitoring research team a few times and Dakota Erutse assisted the research team in Deline. There was significant participation in this project in Deline where 75 people registered. The team is now doing an analysis on the data, and will report back to Deline in the fall.
- The NCP Human Bio-monitoring project is also now recruiting a Sahtu regional coordinator to assist them in the next phase of this on-going work. The next phase will take place in Ft. Good Hope.

UPDATE: 2017-18

- As well as on-going activities described above, an annual update is provided at the SSI Assembly.
- SSI representatives attended, participated and contributed to the NCP Regional and National meeting in Yellowknife. This was the first time there was an opportunity to meet with Dr. Stern's Assistant Ashley Gaden. A dialogue regarding the Ft. Good Hope burbot study was much needed. She was new to this work and quite receptive.
- NCP has been supporting Dr. Stern's studies over 24 years. 5 years ago, an SSI representative made a strong recommendation to Dr. Stern's proposal that he engages and consults with the community of Ft. Good Hope. The NWT RCC was in full support of the recommendation and NCP staff was engaged to communicate and assist Dr. Stern's office. Ft. Good Hope leadership was informed so was the Dene Nation representative.
- Cindy Gilday and Dakota Erutse met with Ashley Gaden, and made a few recommendations to her on how to engage and communicate with Ft. Good Hope regarding Dr. Stern's studies. One recommendation was to visit Ft. Good Hope and meet with the RRC & Leaders. Dakota was willing to assist her. Another was to attend the Sahtu ER&M Forum cultural camp, but most of all to learn from Dr. Laird's success. Ms Gaden was introduced to Dr. Brian Laird since his Human Bio-monitoring project in the Sahtu region was excellent in community engagement and consultation. Dr.

Laird's Assistant Mylene Ratelle shared information and invited Ms Gaden to join the team in their next visit to the Sahtu region in February.

- SSI representative Cindy Gilday met Dr. Laird assistant Mylene Ratelle at the airport in Yellowknife in February. Three researchers were on their way to Deline to report back to the community on test results from last year. 75 people took part in that first testing last year.
- **April 10th 2018** telephone update on Human Bio-monitoring project in the Sahtu region with Mylene Ratelle, assistant to Dr. Brian Laird, University of Waterloo.

The communication of test results from last year for the community of Deline went very well. The teams' local co-ordinator was Marlene Kenny who really helped in organization and communications. It started with terminology workshop so all is translated to the community in North Slavey, the Deline dialect. There was no significant result of concern to report. But the community members kept bringing up their concerns around contaminants from the old uranium mine on Great Bear Lake, Port Radium.

The test results for Tulita are still being processed and will be communicated back to the community in a similar manner as the one done in Deline.

The meeting in Ft. Good Hope went very well even when they were warned that because of the winter road activity there may not be many people in the community. To their surprise, they had 79 people registered for testing across all age groups.

Norman Wells was invited to participate in the project but declined due to a lack of capacity at the organizational level.

Dr. Stern's Assistant Ashley Gaden was not able to join the team. In July, Ms Gaden left her job with Dr. Stern and his project in Ft. Good Hope.

Cindy Gilday, SSI Representative on NWT RRC, April 12th, 2018

