

Using Tłıchǫ Knowledge to Monitor Cumulative Impacts

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Contact information

Alice Legat
Research and Monitoring Coordinator
Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board
202-5103 51 Street
Yellowknife, NT
X1A 2P3
(867) 873-5741
(867) 873-5743
rmtk@wrrb.ca

Introduction

The overall goal of this project is to clarify the way in which the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) will access Tłıchǫ harvesters' and elders' knowledge for the purpose of i) monitoring and understanding cumulative impacts, and ii) wildlife management and decision-making. More specifically the project objectives are:

1. To thoroughly research the manner in which people residing within Wek'èezhìi wish to share their observations and knowledge.
2. To verify our findings at community meetings.
3. To use our findings to design a community based TK monitoring Program.

Why was this project undertaken? This research process was undertaken because the Tłıchǫ Agreement specifies that the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board shall acquire and use traditional knowledge as well as other types of scientific information. The Agreement, however, does not specify how the Tłıchǫ, who have this knowledge will share it. This project was designed to use TK methods to determine the manner in which harvesters and elders want to share their knowledge.

What we wanted to learn/achieve and why? WRRB wanted to discuss with community members how we could realistically access the knowledge of Tłıchǫ harvesters and elders for monitoring and management while respecting their way of sharing their own observations and knowledge associated with cumulative effects. We also wished to determine how future local TK researchers should be trained.

How will the information/results be used? This information will be used to design and oversee TK monitoring and research that is both respectful and rigorous. Once a report on ‘how to’ is completed, it can be used and adapted by other indigenous organizations when planning TK research and monitoring programs.

Personnel involved with the project. One staff and three consultants were involved in this phase of the project. Allice Legat, TK Research and Monitoring Coordinator, and Madelaine Chocolate, TK Research Practitioner and Language Specialist, both have extensive experience doing TK research. They shared the responsibility of training Camilla Nitsiza of Whatì, and Mary Adele Wetrade of Gametì. Dr. Legat did the analysis and wrote this report. Like Ms. Chocolate, Ms. Nitsiza has been involved in research in prior TK projects, while Ms. Nitsiza and Ms. Wetrade work with the Tłıchq language, and enjoy talking to elders about both current and past experiences.

Describe any other similar work that has been done, taking place or expected to take place in the future. This project is the initial step towards a larger multi-year TK monitoring program, which will be linked to the Tłıchq Government’s Marian River Watershed Monitoring and Management Plan. This project can also be linked to several other projects - past, present and future. The most similar is the *Dogrib Elders and Harvesters Workshop on Monitoring* (2000), funded by CEAM that focused on monitoring caribou in association with mine sites. Another project that complements our project is the *Traditional Knowledge and Cumulative Impact Monitoring Practitioners Workshop*, sponsored by the Yamózha Kúé Society, held February 2008 and again in March 2009.

Between 1996 and 2001, the West Kitikmeot Slave Study Society (WKSS) provided regional organizations and communities with significant funding to accumulate baseline data for the purpose of monitoring. Within Mq̄whì Gogha Dè Nttłèè, the Tłıchq Regional Elders’ Committee oversaw the documentation of Tłıchq knowledge on caribou, migration and distribution patterns, caribou habitat, and place names as indicators of bio-geographical knowledge. The baseline information from the WKSS will be utilized when our program, TK Research and Monitoring Cumulative Impacts – is underway in 2010.

Methods

To complete this project, appropriate TK research methodology was followed. By this we mean outlining the issue to be discussed and listening to the responses of those engaged in discussions. More specifically the researchers became knowledgeable of Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 16, Tłıchq Agreement that give authority to the WRRB. The team developed a list of research questions, which, during the course of explaining the WRRB’s mandate, were mentioned. These questions related to the importance of using TK to monitor and manage wildlife. Researchers later summarized their discussions.

Training. Ms. Chocolate's and Ms. Nitsiza's understanding of the Agreement and their ability to speak and express difficult concepts in both English and Tłıchq provided them with the skill to 'get at' the information needed. Both assisted Dr. Legat when training Ms. We trade in i) the process of providing Tłıchq citizens with the WRRB mandate and the need to use TK as well as scientific information; and ii) the process of capturing key points expressed during household visits.

Fieldwork. The aim of the project was to visit and discuss the mandate of the WRRB with a focus on the documentation and use of TK - with all households within the Wek'èezhii area. During discussion with household members, the community researchers focused on:

- What people thought about a TK program for monitoring wildlife;
- Whether an office in each of the four communities is a good idea; and
- Who should work on the program.

What methods were used?

The project used appropriate TK research methodology: i) outline the issue to be discussed; and ii) listen to individuals within households. Each conversation took approximately two to three hours. Since these discussions were not interviews, conversations were not taped. Rather the researchers noted the key points after the discussions were finished. Individuals were told that the next step in the process would be a community meeting to verify information heard and to once again go over the WRRB mandate. This will be followed by the establishment of an elders and harvesters committee to refine the program design, develop policy and a framework for using TK for monitoring.

Communities/organizations involvement. A community organization was not the lead on this project, rather the WRRB, which is a public board, established under the Tłıchq Agreement, oversaw the project. The Agreement also defined the project area.

Through the Wek'èezhii Forum, the WRRB works closely with Land Department, Tłıchq Government to ensure our role in monitoring and research is complementary of the work they are undertaking.

Results

This project supported both of CIMP's categories - "Monitoring and Research" and "Capacity Building and Training".

Capacity Building and Training. Sharing information on the roles and responsibilities of the WRRB while engaging Tłıchǫ citizens in discussions on how monitoring and training should take place provides individuals with information and a broader understanding of their role in tracking cumulative impacts. In addition, as people learn more about the WRRB, the harvesters and elders were open to discussing how their knowledge can be documented and shared in a respectful fashion.

Once policy is set, the Tłıchǫ citizens agreed that community researchers should be trained in accepted TK methodology as well as trained to observe and to understand oral narratives from the elders and harvesters. Once the TK monitoring program is established, the process of 'who will be formally trained' can be determined.

By focusing on the harvesters' and elders' perspective on how monitoring cumulative impacts should be documented when using TK, it became evident that the very process of facilitating the exchange of information between harvesters and elders about current and past observations, would be re- building key elements of the traditional monitoring system.

See Appendix – Training Manual for an outline of the training manual we hope to produce once the monitoring program is underway.

Research and Monitoring. Approximately half of the households in the three fly-in communities within the Wek'èezhìi area were contacted. In spite of a number of unexpected incidents, the project was successful. Currently people in these communities are thinking and talking about the importance of TK monitoring, the importance of conservation, and cumulative impacts. Most people talked about change, emphasizing their observations and the importance of using TK to understand the cause and the resulting impacts, and whether impacts were cumulative or not.

The results outlined here are preliminary. The final results should be available by the end of December 2009 when the household visits and community meetings are completed, and when the elders and harvesters have established a policy outlining the manner in which the documentation of TK can take place.

Thoughts on TK program for Monitoring Program

Although some young Tłıchǫ citizens did not think discussing a TK program was relevant to them because they felt they lacked knowledge, once the WRRB mandate was explained to them, they became more animated. All persons expressing this were young adults ranging from their early 20s to their mid 30. Young adults were also interested in the fact that the Agreement legislated the use of TK – as well as scientific information - for making wildlife management recommendations, if the TK was available. Young people understood very quickly the need for such a TK monitoring program in their community that could be run by them. Many in this age

group stated that a TK monitoring program could provide employment for those young people who cared for the land as their grandparents had taught them, and that they could learn from the harvesters and their elders. They felt they could learn something that would be tied to their own culture and be useful for conserving the environment for the future.

The elders – those over seventy – stated that the program would be good for everyone, but especially the young people who would learn by working with harvesters and elders. Several elders expressed that they wanted the knowledge of their own grandparents to be used to help with the monitoring as they had oral narratives from the past. The elderly women in Wekweeti stated that they ‘really’ wanted to share their knowledge with the youth of the community. As Mary Jane Simpson said, “The youth can gather information and learn from us.”

The harvesters talked mostly about what they have observed – both changes and consistency - and that they supported the idea of documenting what they see as staying the same and what has changed. They are interested in cumulative impacts - including what scientists can tell them about air and water pollution. They thought that a map with all the place names should be in the office so the researchers could comprehend the location of the place they are talking about, and also to demonstrate to the younger researchers the importance of place names as indicators of bio-geographical knowledge.¹

Thoughts on offices in each of the four communities

Everyone thought TK offices in all four communities would be a good idea, however, individuals had different reasons for wanting a TK program and an office. Most harvesters wanted an office so young people (youth and young adults) would have a place to ask questions to both the elders and to the researchers. They also thought the youth could visit the office and listen to already taped interviews or sit and listen while harvesters and elders were being interviewed.

The young adults and elders wanted a place where they could learn from the elders.

Thoughts on who should work on the program.

To date only the harvesters commented on who should work on the program. Their views ranged from one youth and one elder, to two young adults and all the elders in the community, to two or three young people working with all the harvesters and the elders. This will be discussed and decided in the next phase of the project.

Valued Components

Although we were not attempting to glean information on valued components (VCs) of Tłı̨chǫ citizens, as always it is apparent that they value all that comes from the ‘land’. During household discussions the following were mentioned: fish – especially trout and white fish - and caribou were mentioned by all men and women. Trees, especially birch and spruce, and small game – hare, ptarmigan - were mentioned by some men and women. Only women discussed plants in association with the need for traditional medicine, berries, moss and roots.

¹ See also the WKSS report, ‘Placenames as Indicators of Bio-geographical knowledge’ (Legat et al, 2000)

Water and the condition of ice and snow water for tea (used to assess the quality of water), was stressed by everyone as a necessity for all living entities to survive.

Discussion / Conclusions

Members of households wanted to hear about and discuss the mandate of the WRRB as well as cumulative impacts. They wished to express their views on using harvesters, elders and youth to monitor the land, and they agreed that TK, if documented correctly, would be useful in the decision-making and management process. Although not explicitly expressed the fact that women discussed plants more than men, demonstrates the importance of accessing the knowledge of both male and female harvesters and elders.

Most importantly this project has initiated an interest in the importance of monitoring cumulative impacts, and the continuing role Tłı̄chǫ citizens as stewards to the land.

It is difficult to discuss result and make concluding remarks as we are only in the first stage of a four-stage project. We have secured sufficient funding to take the project to the second and third stage: community meetings to verify our finding, and to initiate the elders and harvesters committee to develop policy. We are waiting to hear about funding for the final stage, which is to hold a regional meeting to finalize the design of the program, and establish a policy framework to carry out TK monitoring.

Budget

Table 1: Statement of Revenue and Expenditures

REVENUE		
NWT CIMP		\$20,000.00
WRRB (in-kind support)		39,000.00
		\$59,000.00
EXPENDITURES		
Project Activity	Total Project Cost	NWT CIMP Funding
Researchers/Coordinator	\$48,000.00	10,000.00
Travel and Accommodation	11,000.00	10,000.00
Total Expenditures	\$59,000.00²	\$20,000.00
SURPLUS (DEFICIT) OF NWT CIMP FUNDING		-\$39,000.00
AMOUNT PAYABLE TO INAC		\$00.00

² The final bills and invoices have not been submitted for this project. The final amounts may be slightly higher.