



FINAL REPORT:

TR'ONDEK HWECH'IN HARVEST MONITOR 2016



FINAL REPORT SUBMITTED MARCH 2017

Submitted by: Natasha Ayoub

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Goals and Objectives:

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in requested funding from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust to support the development of a TH Harvest Monitor. This program was proposed so that harvest data from the TH Traditional Territory could be collected and then provide insight into larger fish and wildlife management planning initiatives for subsistence harvesting needs and for the protection and conservation of wildlife; these species included moose and caribou (Porcupine Caribou Herd and Hart River Herd), as well as salmon.

Approach:

The foundation for our vision of TH Harvest Monitor was based on an assessment of the success of a past project. TH Fish and Wildlife branch employed a Habitat Steward in 2015 and this position was found to be extremely helpful to the department. Our Habitat Steward fulfilled the duties and tasks including:

- maintaining and providing records of harvest;
- distributing important educational materials to the community;
- relaying important conservation messages;
- answering questions from citizens and other YFNs;
- assisting YG biologists with aerial population surveys to ensure TH involvement in wildlife management initiatives;
- assisting with culture camps; and

The Habitat Steward was instrumental in harvesting Chum salmon for community distribution, which ensures the use and availability of healthy traditional foods for TH citizens. Additionally, TH citizen harvest data was collected and recorded for Chum salmon harvest, moose harvest, caribou harvest, as well as trapping.

In 2015, we experienced major harvesting pressure and an increase in licensed harvesters within our TT. A large migration of the Porcupine Caribou Herd into our Traditional Territory occurred, resulting in a migration along the Dempster Highway corridor that created a busy hunting season with licensed hunters, and increased the demands on our staff to monitor TH Settlement Lands. As always, moose and Chum salmon season remained busy for our staff. The on-the-land demand for our stewards resulted in acknowledgement of TH Fish and Wildlife Branch requiring additional assistance with the necessary and day-to-day operations. This has resulted in an additional position being funded within our Branch for 2017/ 2018.

During the interim, it was acknowledged that a Harvest Monitor would assist greatly with the effectiveness of TH Fish and Wildlife Branch being able to provide the required data to inform management and planning discussions. As noted below, harvest data submission is entirely

voluntary by our citizens and TH continues to face challenges with the collection of this data. We requested funding from YFWET to support this valuable initiative.

Project purpose:

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has experienced challenges with the collection of harvest data from our citizens; however the value of this data is recognized by all natural resource managers. It was our hope, through the development of this position that TH would be able to gather and collect all pertinent information relating to TH citizen harvest and harvesting experiences. This information will contribute to baseline data (in some cases), TH citizen harvest data and harvesting data trends, with the potential of contributing to our knowledge about increasing harvesting pressures within the TT. While we respect and understand that harvest data submission is entirely voluntary by our citizens, we also hope to communicate the significance and importance of the sharing and reporting of this data. We would like to have this data available to feed into known population estimates or harvesting pressure assessments within the TT to identify trends regarding land-based use of these resources.

Over the past decade, TH has seen an increased number of harvesters in the TH Traditional Territory. There are numerous accounts of increasing vehicle and boat traffic into traditionally significant areas of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in TT and there are concerns that these increased pressures will result in limiting TH harvesting rights guaranteed to citizens under the FA. This increased harvesting pressure is generally believed to be a cascading result of wildlife populations experiencing high harvesting pressure closer to the urban center of Whitehorse and inevitably, those populations are declining. This can be seen as more and more areas are closed to harvesting due to excessive harvesting pressures from licensed fishers and hunters. This in turn forces those harvesters further afield, placing increased pressure on resources traditionally relied upon. All harvesting within the TH TT, including that of TH citizens and licensed harvesters needs to be monitored and recorded so that an accurate account of pressure and use may be examined over time and incorporated into future wildlife management strategies and plans.

The Harvest Monitor performed duties directly related to harvest data collection: reporting and recording. It is extremely important to have a conduit between citizens and government in order to record information about harvesting (effort and success) so that TH may maintain accurate records of subsistence needs and uses. This information is used to support Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in with fulfilling their critical role in the management of fish and wildlife as outlined in the objectives of Chapter 16 of the TH Final Agreement. This knowledge is collected through recording harvested numbers of wildlife, but is importantly augmented by the survey component established to collect on-going TK about the land and TH citizen's experiences while out on the land. The following Chapter 16 objectives are realized through this project:

- ✓ S. 16.1.1.1 to ensure Conservation in the management of all Fish and Wildlife resources and their habitats;

- ✓ S. 16.1.1.2 to preserve and enhance the renewable resources economy;
- ✓ S. 16.1.1.4 to ensure the equal participation of Yukon First Nation People with other Yukon management processes and decisions;
- ✓ S. 16.1.1.5 to guarantee the rights of Yukon First Nation People to harvest and the rights of Yukon First Nations to manage renewable resources on Settlement Land;
- ✓ S. 16.1.1.7 to integrate the relevant knowledge and experience of both of Yukon First Nation People and of the scientific communities in order to achieve Conservation;
- ✓ S. 16.1.1.8 to develop responsibilities for renewable resource management at the community level;
- ✓ S. 16.1.1.9 to honour the harvesting and fish and wildlife management customs of Yukon Indian People and to provide for the Yukon Indian People's on-going needs for fish and wildlife;
- ✓ S. 16.1.1.11 to enhance and promote the full participation of Yukon First Nation People in renewable resources management.

This position was used as a main conductor of educational materials to the TH community and resource users and imparts valuable knowledge about wildlife management through conservation and stewardship of those natural resources. This position contributes to the education of youth at culture camps by sharing traditional knowledge and teaching safe, ethical and respectful harvesting practices to our young community members which instills a deep understanding of respectful harvesting practices, safe handling and processing of the meat, as well as sharing traditional ways of wildlife management that ensure healthy populations for future generations. The TH Harvest Monitor assisted with First Hunt and taught skills required to make healthy, positive lifestyle choices, along with an opportunity to learn about Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture, language and heritage.

Wildlife harvest by TH citizens, use of resources and access by licensed hunters into traditionally used sites, as well as landscape disturbance created by increased use must be quantified and recorded. Positions such as the TH Fish and Wildlife Harvest Monitor guarantee that TH has someone out on the land and in contact with the resources and harvesters, documenting issues that arise within the TH TT that have the potential of impacting TH rights guaranteed under Chapter 16 of the TH FA. All information collected by the TH Harvest Monitor will feed directly into fish and wildlife management goals, objectives and strategies of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, providing sound knowledge and understanding of the current pressures on the natural resources within Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Traditional Territory.

DISCUSSION

TH Fish and Wildlife (F&W) employed two TH students during the summer of 2016; our older student employee expressed an interest in continuing on with F&W as well as an interest in applying for the Harvest Monitor position when it was posted. While it was made clear to him that the job would be posted and made available for all TH citizens to apply on, we were

encouraged by his interest and decided to delay the posting from what was originally proposed (mid-July) until the beginning of September.

While assistance with late summer/ early fall programming would not occur due to the delayed hire, the delay in posting was thought to be conducive to the harvest data collection because the majority of harvest occurs mid-to-late September and the position could then be extended into winter and caribou season, if required.

Chase Everitt was our successful candidate and we were pleased to have him re-join our team. Unfortunately, Chase had unforeseen circumstances affect his availability for this position. He attempted to post-pone his contract with F&W, however he decided after the New Year, that he needed to focus on his personal life; he terminated his contract with us in early January.

During his short contract with TH Fish and Wildlife, the Harvest Monitor position contributed to our data collection initiative for Chum salmon and moose. He was able to connect with a number of TH citizens and gather harvest information, as well recording experiences on the land. This information contributed greatly to our branch's insight into licensed harvest within the TT and potential impacts to TH harvesting rights due to increased pressures from visiting hunters. The Harvest Monitor position also assisted the F&W office with organizing the TH trapping licenses and concessions. Spreadsheets were created and a data storage system was produced.

The TH Harvest Monitor assisted with First Hunt and taught skills to the youth who attended the camp. These skills are required to make healthy, positive lifestyle choices, and the camp provided an opportunity to learn about Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture, language and heritage. This position contributed to the education of youth at culture camps by sharing traditional knowledge and teaching safe, ethical and respectful harvesting practices to our young community members which instills a deep understanding of respectful harvesting practices, safe handling and processing of the meat, as well as sharing traditional ways of wildlife management that ensure healthy populations for future generations.

While the position of Harvest Monitor was not able to achieve all that we hoped this year and was unable to follow our proposed schedule of activities, we were grateful for Chase's efforts and felt that his short time with F&W was successful and productive.

COMMUNICATIONS

Due to the sensitive nature of the harvest data information gathered, I am unable to share with you spreadsheets that were created to collect and record this information. If this is of interest to the Trust, I would be able to provide you with a copy of a blank spreadsheet. Additionally, photos were not taken of the collection of the harvest data because this entailed the Harvest Monitor visiting TH citizens on a one-to-one basis. Photos have been included of First Hunt to demonstrate the success of this program and show appreciation for the additional help from our Harvest Monitor.



The results from this program are maintained within TH Fish and Wildlife Branch and are shared with the Director of Natural Resources, as well as TH Chief and Council, where appropriate. Discussions with the Regional Biologist, Mike Sutor, were better informed due to the information we received from the Harvest Monitor position and the data was able to feed into these discussions regarding future management actions.

As this position was of assistance at our First Hunt, TH publicly thanked Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust at our First Hunt feast. In addition to this, TH F&W has purchased an

advertisement in the Yukon News to thank YFWET for continued support and funding for our projects. The ad was included in the March 24th, 2017 edition of Yukon News.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Please see the attached document.