



Illustration: Heidi Marion

CARIBOU IN THE SCHOOLS

Final Report

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Rivers to Ridges

info@riverstoridges.org

www.riverstoridges.org

867.689.6351

Project Activities

Rivers to Ridges has been developing engaging activities to encourage students to connect deeply with the land, waters and caribou of the Southern Lakes. ‘What We Heard About Caribou’ provides an opportunity for Yukon First Nation Elders and Knowledge Holders to confirm and review what was shared at the Elder and Knowledge Holder interviews completed in March 2021, and conducted by Joe Copper Jack and Wren Nicolardi (Rivers to Ridges).

This document informed the creation of the new *Caribou in the Schools: A Southern Lakes Caribou Learning Resource*, which allows educators to engage students in the unique history and ongoing story of the Southern Lakes Caribou. These caribou range over the traditional territories of six First Nations (Taku River Tlingit First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Ta’an Kwäch’än Council, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations). This learning resource offers insight into ways caribou have been co-managed, and provide perspectives on how students may be drawn to learn more about caribou and perhaps become stewards in their personal and professional lives.

Original Objective	Activities to Meet Objective
<p>Host interviews with Elders and Knowledge Holders to gather stories, activities, and methodologies with the intent to develop a learning resource for students that recognizes and respects local First Nations Traditions while highlighting the importance of SLC.</p>	<p>In March of 2021 interviews were held where participants shared their relationship and their concerns with the SLC, including Traditional Knowledge connected to SLC through culture and language, and what actions are needed to steward the SLC. These interviews were recorded using audio, video and note-taking over the course of three days. During the interviews we listened and heard the participants speak and share their knowledge which have been categorized into five curriculum themes (listed below).</p>
<p>Develop <i>Caribou in the Schools: A Southern Lakes Caribou Learning Resource</i> that aligns with ‘What We Heard About Caribou’.</p>	<p>With the prior and informed consent and approval of the Elders and Knowledge Holders that participated, some of this gathered information has become a resource used in a variety of ways by educational and land management groups. Specifically, these interviews will inform and provide content and direction to the <i>Caribou in the Schools</i> curriculum development project. ‘What We Heard About Caribou’ is the document that houses an overview of these interviews.</p> <p>The five themes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ecological Integrity: Caribou within in the ecosystem ● Take Care of the Land: Sustainable resource management ● Land as Essential to Identity: Stewardship and respect for the land

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Worldviews: First Nations Traditional Ways of Knowing and Doing • Cultural Landscapes: Impact of change. <p>These themes and ‘<i>What We Heard About Caribou</i>’ informed the curriculum development process. Lessons were developed for Kindergarten, Grade 5 and Grade 11.</p>
<p>Offer a pilot study of the developed curriculum to evaluate and improve on the design of the program.</p>	<p>In March of 2021 the developed curriculum for K, Gr. 5 and Gr. 11 were piloted in Whitehorse classrooms. Educators were asked to complete a feedback form and facilitators noted the engagement of students based on the content created and put to use.</p>
<p>Through the pilot study, provide specialized experiences that expose program participants to the importance of the Southern Lakes Caribou for Yukon First Nations in relation to culture and language.</p>	<p>Due to COVID restrictions, we were unable to invite Local Elders and guests to support the experiential programs for our participants. If this had been possible, the Elders and Knowledge Holders would have been invited to share knowledge and stories about the seasons and migration, hunting and conservation. More stories shared would have touched on mammals, habitats, ethical harvesting, traditional ecological knowledge, the importance of sustainability and conservation.</p>

VARIATIONS

The majority of the funding was used for Elder and Knowledge Holder interviews, which were held over a 3 days period in March 2021. In total there were 14 interviews held where information was gathered and organized based on the five curriculum themes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. They were referenced and quoted within both the Community Booklets and Learning Resources created in the Fall/Winter of 2021-2022. The Community Booklets were developed to reflect each of the six communities that were involved in the creation of these resources. Each booklet is written in language that is accessible to students and shares the story of the SLC, human impacts on caribou, community-led management and stewardship, and quotes from all of the Elders who were interviewed.

In October 2021 the “What We Heard” gathering took place in gratitude for the Traditional Knowledge about the SLC that six Yukon First Nations shared and continue to share through storytelling and memories of the past, present and future. Also at this gathering were youth who spent time learning and observing with Elders, carrying these stories and the lessons they bring.

Also throughout the month of October, there were meetings held by the Working Group who reviewed what was shared earlier in March from the Elder interviews. “*What We Heard About Caribou*” was reviewed and discussed in detail between these members who offered feedback to our team as we began the process of creating further curriculum for the Caribou in the Schools Learning Resource and the Community Booklets.

OUTCOMES & EVALUATION

This project was made possible with the support of the YFWET as it allowed for meaningful engagement with Yukon First Nation Elders and Knowledge Holders. The land, water, plants and wildlife are all of our relations and therefore need to be sustained. The six Yukon First Nation communities involved in the creation of *'What We Heard About Caribou'* expressed their love of the land, the need to protect it alongside the caribou at risk and highlighted the importance of environmental stewardship. Creating connections with local Elders and Knowledge Holders is in line with our goals as an organization to continue our work in “establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

These interviews and funding both had a direct impact on the quality of our pilot programs. Students engaged through the hands-on experiences that were held indoor as well as out on the land. They made deep connections with the Southern Lakes Caribou, learning about the recovery efforts and the First Nation citizens who are working towards regaining their connections with these caribou. This exposure to local leaders and Knowledge Holders and action-oriented activities will create personalized connections that will encourage students to become stewards for the Southern Lakes Caribou for generations to come.

The quality of the pilot programs directly contributed to the ongoing work of developing the learning resource and community booklets which will be launched in the Spring of 2022.

Communications

We shared our work with members of the Working Group who offered feedback to our team. Youth witnesses took part in the conversation, as well as preparing thank you gifts for the Elders at the gatherings. We also shared our progress with our funding partners (Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resource Council, & Laberge Renewable Resource Council, Department of Education) as we went through the process of community outreach, the creation of the community booklets and the learning resource. The educational resource is a document that has lessons created for grades K- 12, and each lesson has many parts that make up their sum. These lessons have a breakdown of graphics for communicating the work with a designer who will create the final draft of the learning resource and community booklets.

There were many contributors to this project, which is why the scope of the plan has grown. The document *'What We Heard About Caribou'*, its review by the Working Group in October and the many voices that have been involved in the process have framed the work our team has put into the creation of the educational resources, which will be available to all students in the Yukon as well as offer training for Educators on implementing the curriculum in a meaningful way on the traditional territories of the six First Nations involved in the project.

The YFWET has been recognized in all meetings as a funding partner for this project.



OUR TEAM

All programs are designed and facilitated by Wren Nicolardi and Emily Payne, as well as a carefully selected group of educators and facilitators including Kelly Scott (Program Manager) and Lynsday Amato (Program Coordinator). Our team includes trained teachers and educators with extensive experience working with young people in the outdoors. More information on our team can be found online at www.riverstoridges.org (About - Our Team).

Mahsi for helping to fund these important initiatives for youth to connect with caribou!