What is the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG)?

The goal of the Arctic Council’s SDWG is to propose and adopt steps to be taken by Arctic States to advance sustainable development in the Arctic. This includes opportunities to protect and enhance the environment and the economies, culture and health of indigenous peoples and Arctic communities. The guiding tenet running throughout the work of the SDWG is to pursue initiatives that provide practical knowledge and contribute to building the capacity of indigenous peoples and Arctic communities to respond to the challenges and benefits from the opportunities in the Arctic region.

www.arctic-council.org/sdwg/

What is the Arctic Council?

In 1996, the Ottawa Declaration formally established the Arctic Council as a high-level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues; in particular, issue of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.

www.arctic-council.org/

Canada’s Arctic Council Chairmanship: Development for the People of the North

1. Responsible Arctic Resource Development
2. Safe Arctic Shipping
3. Sustainable Circumpolar Communities

SDWG Outreach Event – Traditional Knowledge in our Work
October 20, 2014
N’Dilo, NWT
Traditional Knowledge in Our Work
An Evening of Shared Learning

On Monday, October 20, 2014 the Arctic Council and its Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) were welcomed onto Dene traditional territory in N’Dilo, NWT to host a public outreach event, titled “Traditional Knowledge in Our Work.” A full house was treated to a stellar panel of local, national and international speakers who shared their perspectives on Traditional Knowledge (TK) and how it is being used in the Arctic Council and other organizations.

Jennifer Lam - Inviuilaut Game Council (IGC)

Jennifer Lam presented on how TK is applied in the wildlife co-management decision-making structure in the Inviuilaut Settlement Region (ISR) from the initial issue identification and research planning design stage through to the evaluation and subsequent application of research conclusions. She shared details on the Traditional Knowledge Guide developed by the Environmental Studies Research Fund for ISR’s impact assessments. She also shared information on the development of the Inviuilaut Traditional and Local Knowledge Database Project that will help to improve access and application of TK. This includes the ISR’s Traditional Knowledge Policy that will cover TK research methodological guidelines and protocols, policy regarding ownership, control, access and possession of TK, and integration of TK in decision-making and management.

George Lafferty – Consultations Officer, AANDC

George Lafferty, a Consultations Officer with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada in Yellowknife, gave an overview of his past involvement with the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) as a Northwest Territories Regional Contaminants Committee (NWTRCC) member. George discussed his work on the research and remediation process of abandoned mines as an example of how to best involve Elders in gathering valuable TK. He provided an overview of why TK is important and the significance of including TK for the duration of a project. This includes having Indigenous peoples as part of the decision-making process and on project teams. The Fish Collection and Analysis Study completed by George as the NWTRCC member, and highlighted in his presentation, provides a good example of TK being utilized effectively in practice. As the Department of Fisheries provided the results of the study in person, there was a better understanding of the project outcomes at the community level and more respect for researchers coming into the community.

George Lafferty with Comic, Chief and Dene Nation, Photo: Dene Nation

At the beginning and end of the event, participants and attendees were able to enjoy an energetic performance by the Tlicho and Dene First Nation drummers; a perfect way to bookend the interesting discussions of the evening.

Jennifer Lam and Gunn-Britt Retter with Moderator Jim Gamble

Left to right: Chief Bill Broma, Dene Nation, Jutta Wan, SDWG Chair, and Mohan Denello, AANDC Regional Director General

Ingrid Kritsch and Alesisne Andre – Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute (GSCI)

The GSCI is the cultural and heritage arm of the Gwich’in Tribal Council with a mandate to document, preserve and promote Gwich’in culture, language, TK, and values. Between 1992 and 2012, the GSCI undertook a project with elders that documented 900 place names, their meanings and associated stories, providing insight and understanding into Gwich’in culture and knowledge about people and the land.

The project brought together elders with youth, promoting an intergenerational exchange of language and knowledge, helping to ensure that culturally significant sites and places would be recognized, protected, and managed in accordance with Gwich’in values. A major success of the project has been the official recognition of Gwich’in place names by the Governments of the Northwest Territories and Yukon. Ongoing work on this project includes launching a place names and story atlas on GSCI’s website showcasing Gwich’in place names.

SAO Chair Vincent Rigby

The Tlicho Drummers and the Yellowknives Dene First Nation Drummers

Photo: Arctic Council Secretariat/Jesper Stig Andersen

Gunn-Britt Retter – Saami Council

Gunn-Britt presented on the use of TK by Saami reindeer herders. She first shared how TK is important to reindeer husbandry, and that for example, castration of male reindeer is critical for building herd resiliency by establishing biological diversity in the herd. The non-castrated reindeer can be difficult to manage while the castrated males are stronger and calmer and can, for example, break through layers of ice so that their mates and calves can access food in difficult conditions. Gunn-Britt further highlighted the advanced system of climate knowledge and understanding of snow, including 318 different terms for snow, which is held by reindeer herders. This knowledge helps the herders better understand environmental changes related to climate change which are affecting reindeer herds as well as the sustainability of herding.

SAD Chair Vincent Rigby

Photo: Jyoti Bhargava, AANDC

Left to right: Chief Bill Broma, Dene Nation, Jutta Wan, SDWG Chair, and Mohan Denello, AANDC Regional Director General

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