



# CLIMATE CHANGE &

# HEALTH PROJECT NEWS

July 2010

**WHAT OUR LOCAL  
RESEARCH REVEALS...**

Sponsored by Health Canada

# SFN Climate Change & Health Project



Aerial view of Moose Lake, Y.T.

## Is Climate Change Important?

Today many people have the sense that the world is changing all around us in ways we can see and even feel. Older people have gathered more experience from living most of the time, or some of the time, out on the land years ago. Those memories of the distant past here in the community, or out on the land, provide us with cultural knowledge of the environment that allows us to better understand change over many years. It is also knowledge that can help both the community and our First Nation government. Protecting the land and sustaining traditional culture requires the next generation and our First Nation government to know about Selkirk's land and history. In a future of growing uncertainty about the climate and environmental change, knowing your past is a real advantage.

### About The SFN Climate Change Project

The Climate Change and Health project is a Selkirk First Nation research initiative that has a broad objective to better understand community health determinants related to climate change. Last year, the First Nation managed a project to ask local people how the river basin landslides were related to past change. This year the project expanded the scope of research, recognizing that local people, and Elders in particular, have in-depth knowledge about the past and different places on the land.



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# The Project Met 7 Objectives Through a Series Of Initiatives And Workshops

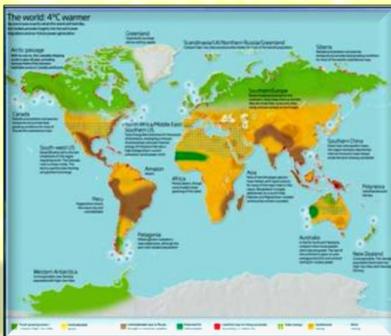
**FIRST OBJECTIVE:** *Engaging individuals and families through workshops, meetings and dialogues.*

Gaining meaningful participation throughout the community has been a large part of this project. That objective was achieved by various outreach initiatives and community events.

## 6 Initiatives/Workshops:

### 1. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AND ADAPTATION WORKSHOP

This 2-day community event presented experts from 5 environmental sciences talking about some of the most up to date information on climate change impacts in the Yukon; plus custom developed presentations on local permafrost conditions, adaptation strategies from the Dawson adaptation planning process and a session on building an agricultural production future.



### 2. CLIMATE CHANGE AWARENESS WORKSHOP

This day-long community event, facilitated by a visiting expert, presented the science and evidence of climate change on both global and regional scales.



### 3. MEDICINAL PLANTS AND PRACTICES WORKSHOPS

These 4 community learning and dialogue sessions, with visiting Elder medicinal plant practitioners, brought together a reliable group of women, and a few men, that wanted to gain this traditional knowledge and develop their own customary practices with medicinal plants.



### 4. TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE WORKSHOP

This alternative medicine workshop brought together all community members, over 3-days, to listen and watch a respected practitioner speak about and demonstrate this intact traditional medicine knowledge framework.



### 5. DIALOGUE SESSION ON LEARNING PROCESSES FOR MEDICINAL KNOWLEDGE

Discussion session with people interested in talking about their ideas, beliefs and customary practices on the topic of traditional medicine.

### 6. ELDER FOCUS GROUP ON MEDICINAL PLANT PROJECT

An afternoon with 2 Elders and First Nation heritage traditional knowledge staff to talk about the project, select places for summer experiential learning events and discuss traditional medicine customary practices.



## **SECOND OBJECTIVE:** *Eliza Van Bibber School -project partnership*

The school is the center of the community and was the place to get youth involved in the project. Through this partnership, training programs were implemented, and youth were involved in other aspects of the project where different learning events occurred.

### **3 Initiatives/Workshops**

#### **1. PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS WITH VIDEO CLUB & GRADES 3-6**

Working together with the Skills Coach, this program presented project film-making opportunities for the local Skills Canada Video Club/senior grades group, and organized a field trip picking rosehips and sage with the junior grades class.



#### **2. INTERVIEW COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING FOR STUDENTS**

This 2-day training session provided 5 young women with the knowledge and experience that were necessary to act as the foundations for communicating effectively with interview participants and completing surveys.

#### **3. ELDER PHOTO ALBUM CLASSROOM SESSIONS**

These two events brought together 2 Elders to share their photos and stories with students learning about their heritage firsthand. The sessions were also recorded with video/audio tape, by the Skills Canada Video Club/senior grades group.



## **THIRD OBJECTIVE:** *Community climate change survey/interviews*

Gaining perspectives on how people perceive climate change provides important feedback on public sentiment and social awareness. To develop this sense of the community a climate change survey was created and conducted through face-to-face interviews.

### **4 Initiatives/Workshops**

#### **1. SURVEY INTERVIEW COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

The survey process provided an opportunity for people to express their perspectives on changes in the climate and environment.

#### **2. LEARNING THROUGH INTERVIEW & DIALOGUE**

Many people, from teenagers to adults, conducted hours of interviews learning firsthand about traditional knowledge, past events and perspectives regarding changes in the environment today.



## **FOURTH OBJECTIVE: Wilderness climate change expedition to Moose Lake**

Getting onto the land to observe, record and learn about how climate change impacts the landscape and environment is the traditional way of learning. Going to where a warming climate would have the most severe impacts and taking back the Elders that remember this place, a lifetime ago, provided rare traditional knowledge perspectives.

### **4 Initiatives/Workshops**

#### **1. COLLECTING INFORMATION, DATA, IMAGES AND FILM**

Together the lake, river, wetlands, mountains and diverse ecosystems presented a complex research challenge that involved recording observations, taking images, establishing vegetation plots and documenting the living cultural landscape, as voiced by the Elders.

#### **2. BRINGING ELDERS BACK TO THEIR CHILDHOOD HOME**

These were Elders who had memories of Moose Lake from their childhood —a time when family groups moved around seasonally, harvesting their food, then gathering together again at chosen places.



#### **3. RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT TRADITIONAL LANDS AND CULTURE**

Going to or going back to this important, but often forgotten place, is important to people in the community who value this type of presence on the land, however short.

#### **4. LESSONS ON THE CHALLENGES IN REMOTE LOCATIONS**

Remote, rugged, dangerous and isolated —all features uncommon in the modern world, but they surround Moose Lake. The camp logistics, planning and operations provided many lessons on how to function in this natural environment.

## **FIFTH OBJECTIVE: Community newsletter article**

Community newsletters are a popular way to get messages out to local residents and members outside the community. An article was contributed to the community newsletter highlighting some of the project's major activities.

## **SIXTH OBJECTIVE: Climate change networking**

Yukon is a small place in terms of the climate change network of people, groups and government organizations. The project has helped facilitate communications, research and working relations with some of the key people in this emerging field of science, organization and policy. Now, the community is on the map in terms of climate change project developments in Yukon.

## **SEVENTH OBJECTIVE: First Nation organizational development**

The project supports further initiatives by Selkirk First Nation to manage the range of complex issues, emerging threats, possible opportunities and program development options presented by climate change. The First Nation is in a better position to move forward; having taken so many initial steps through this project. We developed project resources that include presentation materials, course outlines, agendas, survey materials and reports that will provide an organized reference resource for future projects. As well, the project's archive of video footage, images and audio tapes capture important information and lessons that will be transferable to other projects in the future.

# 2010 Summary of Climate Change Interviews & Surveys

**Summary points cover 7 Areas:** Temperature increase, Precipitation decline, Changing weather patterns, Ecological productivity declining, Nature of animals changing, Landscape changes, Human health –these personal quotes are derived from the surveys.

## Temperature increase

It's getting warmer and warmer every year.

## Precipitation decline

- People used to dig up moss and get water (to drink) under it. Wait for it to settle until it was clear. Now you can't it's too dry.
- Much dryer and not much rain and too warm, a lot of the rivers, creeks and lakes are drying up.
- In the summer time the water is too low, not enough rain.
- Some lake levels are a foot down.
- In the spring the run off seems to be only for a couple weeks, and then low water for the rest of the summer. Spring time went to go pick bear roots and it was all dry.



## Changing weather patterns

- If you want to go some place, the weather holds you back. Weather changes so quickly.
- February just about the same too, warm and cold, warm and cold. When you go fishing on the ice, you can just stay there for about ½ hour, because the wind is too cold.
- The sun is getting hotter and hotter.
- Even in the winter time we get rain now. That's unusual; we never did have that before. This winter in the last 2 years it would be cold and then all of a sudden it's warm. Sun's too hot, always dries the soil out. Changes over night little hot and snow gets soft, slippery rapid changes.



## Ecological productivity declining

- Used to set fishnet during summer and winter and catch lots of fish, not much now.
- Used to see lots of animals a long time ago and now today you're lucky if you see a few.
- Hardly any sign of moose anymore. When I used to go to the lakes used to see moose all the time. Grouse seem to move away, the moose have moved, doesn't seem to be much rabbits. The squirrels are smaller and hardly any left.

## Nature of animals changing

- Don't see hardly any around anymore. Some cow moose are bigger than the bulls.
- Lynx, Cougars, all the wild animals are starting to come into town.
- Moose-last couple years. Haven't noticed any big bull. Same with cows and calf. There's a thing about big Bull Moose, some people should just leave them. There's no sense in taking them, let them breed. Another thing I noticed there used to be lots of black/brown bears everywhere. Now there's a lot less. We have plenty of wolves though, that's for sure.
- More animals come in town we haven't seen before, used to never come to town, now they come.
- Not scared of humans
- The animals lost the fear of man. All the wolves getting hungry, and now they start coming into town.

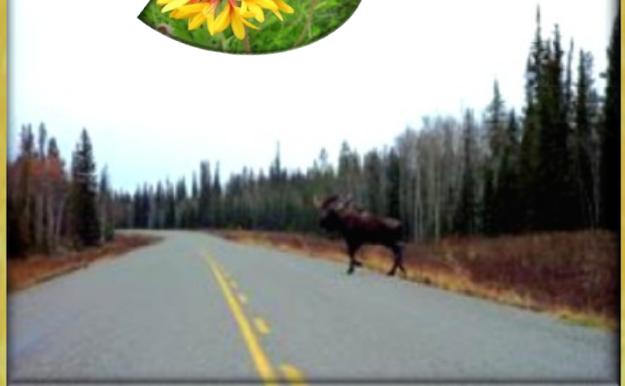


## Landscape changes

- There used to be trails along and to the mountains. Now all the trails are grown in. They used to follow the trees that they blaze. Now you can't even see the trees anymore because it's all grown in. Another reason why you can't see it anymore is because of the forest fire, and from all the dead fall falling. Can't find the trail anymore. Also from the poplar trees growing over the trails.
- Everything growing in. You have been there the year before and next it's a lot different.
- Quite a bit, it's hard to tell too. The places I used to go can't go there anymore. It looks a lot different. Everything is grown in.
- The rivers changes channels a lot. Maybe that's natural, I don't know. Were ever the channels change, we have to find a way to get through.
- Deep water channels have moved. Known channels are not the same (Yukon River). Where we have to find new ways to go around. Sloughs are not the same.
- Fort Selkirk and around Pelly areas are getting more bushier. This leads to more forest fires with migration of animals. Open water there seems to be more rotten ice than usual in a lot of different areas due to warm weather.

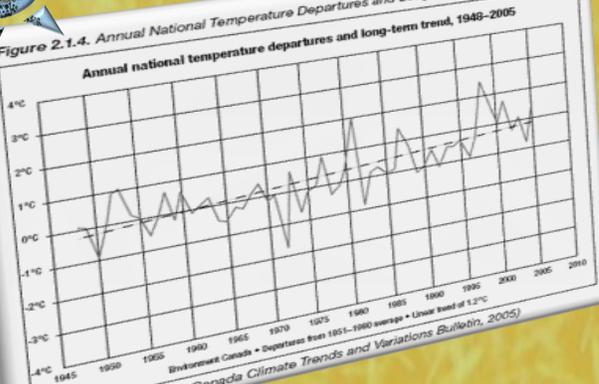
**Human health**

- Whole eco-system is important-traditional medicine.
- We need to get a lot of our people back out on the land. It's very important. You know when people used to love out on the land, 50, 60, 70 below they still survive, they're healthy too. I hear a bit of things what people don't think about. It's not the young people's fault. It's the Elders. I have been out there myself, help them build cabins, cut trails, go hunting for our own food —and in a week I noticed a lot of change. They a lot more stronger and healthy. Once they get started they know what they're doing, what's got to be done. They're really good people—all they need is someone to lead them off.
- There seems to be more insects, the bees are bigger and people are getting allergic.
- Traditional food source makes healthy land, healthy animal, healthy people.



**Increasing Temperatures**

Figure 2.1.4. Annual National Temperature Departures and Long-Term Trends, 1948–2005



Impacts of Climate Change in Yukon

*“The Climate Change and Health Project resulted in many positive community benefits and developmental outcomes.”*



- Bill Terrice, Coordinator

SFN CLIMATE CHANGE & HEALTH PROJECT



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