



**“There were way more interviewers this year, and a lot more windy days.”**

**“No, I made these cookies. Why?”**

**“I don’t know. How do you keep a turkey in suspense?”**

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# 1. INTRODUCING ARCTIC BORDERLANDS TO PEOPLE

## Short Version:

Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Society began in 1994 as a partnership between arctic community councils, co-management groups, scientists and government agencies, to engage local experts in long-term ecosystem monitoring.

## Long Version:

### Background

- For a long time, northern communities have wanted the environmental knowledge of their elders and people who spend a lot of time on the land to be gathered. People want this information used to watch and measure changes in the environment.
- Local people also want to know and understand what scientific researchers do in their area.
- In 1994, Joan Eamer (Head, Ecosystem Health, Northern Conservation Division, Environment Canada) organized a meeting in Dawson with many different agencies and organizations to establish a new monitoring program, the North Yukon Ecological Knowledge Co-operative. This initiative was to be linked to the new national Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN). The program's geographic focus was defined as the range of the Porcupine caribou herd and includes regions of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Alaska.
- At the meeting, people identified the 3 main issues that should be the focus of Co-op's ecological monitoring: climate change, contaminants, and regional development. Participants also decided that an important part of the Co-op should be to bring together science and local/traditional knowledge.
- The meeting participants also created decision guidelines: go slow, keep it simple, be relevant, think long-term, and economize. The guidelines are still important as the Co-op grows.
- By 1999, the Co-op had expanded its programs into Alaska and changed its name to the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Society.
- Co-op members are representatives of co-management boards and councils, Inuvialuit and First Nation councils and government agencies, Canadian and U.S. federal and territorial government agencies, as well as academic and research institutions in Canada and the United States. Participating

communities include Arctic Village in Alaska, Old Crow in the Yukon, and Aklavik, Inuvik, Tsiigehtchic, and Fort McPherson in the NWT.

- Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Society is a non-profit organization incorporated in the Yukon. It is a society with national status as a charitable organization, and a Board of Directors, elected annually, manages its programming.

### **The Society has 4 parts:**

1. It tracks signs of change in the environment and shares this information with partners. It monitors 75 'indicators' that partners are interested in watching. Over half of these indicators have sets of information available. The data is on the website ([www.arcticborderlands.org/scientificindicators](http://www.arcticborderlands.org/scientificindicators)).
2. It is a Community Monitoring Program that records local knowledge about the environment. Each year, community researchers interview local experts about fish, berries, caribou, other animal sightings, weather and other things (not all interviewees are expert in all topics). The local researchers are trained, and they must complete a specific number of interviews each winter on each topic ([www.arcticborderlands.org/communitybasedmonitoring/](http://www.arcticborderlands.org/communitybasedmonitoring/)).
3. It develops and supports ecological monitoring projects. These projects and the indicators are reviewed at annual gatherings. The Co-op's first long-term project was the Old Crow Plant Monitoring Project. Another project has looked at the condition of burbot livers. Contact ABEKS to find out about new projects being developed.
4. It is a central place to find information. Partners want to be able to easily find information for a large area (northern Yukon, NWT and Alaska). A Database of Information Sources, as well as reports and research notes, are on the website ([www.arcticborderlands.org](http://www.arcticborderlands.org)).
5. Information is also shared among partners and communities at Arctic Borderlands' Annual Gatherings each February or March, following the interviews in January. People explain the results of programs and studies, and make decisions together about future programs and priorities. There is much talk about how to involve the community more. A major challenge is making sure that people in communities understand the purpose of the society. Many think it is a 'government' project.
6. Information in the rest of this summary details the Community Monitoring Program

## Methods

- There is an annual cycle for the Community Monitoring Program. An interviewer (Community Monitor) is hired in each community. In Canada this hiring is done with the assistance of the local Hunters and Trappers Committee or Renewable Resource Council. The Community Monitors are gathered together for training. Simulations are important.
- Community Monitors are paid in stages as outlined in their contract each year.
- The interview guide is about 15 to 20 pages, and changes a bit each year. One part is for berry experts, another is for caribou experts, and another is for fish experts. The community Monitor has to submit 20 completed sections for each part. This means they need to interview more than 20 people, depending on whether the experts they interview know about berries and caribou, or berries and fish, or other combinations. There are other parts of the interview form that deal with observations of unusual weather, other animals and travel patterns that everyone needs to answer. Community Monitors sometimes say that the people they interview find the interviews are too long and that some questions repeat. There have been small changes to the questions asked each year.
- People who are interviewed receive a gas voucher as an honorarium. Fuel is very expensive in these communities and a gas voucher was chosen as a way to support people to get out on the land.
- The information from the interview sheets is entered into a database. Even after more than 15 years, ideas on how best to summarize this information are still emerging. While some readers will want a species-specific summary, others may want to look through the list of quotes to check for anything unusual. Academic partners continue to discover new ways of presenting and using the data.
- Local interviewers prepare oral and written reports to be presented to their community after completing the interviews. Annual meetings occur usually a month or two after all of the data collection and uploading is finished. Each community is invited to attend so that people can ask questions about what is happening with the co-op and community monitors can reflect what they heard from the people they interviewed and ask for validation.
- It is interesting to look at unusual events that people see in the weather or distribution of animals, and to look over the science-based indicators to see if the events were detected, and the other way around. Some of the indicators are similar across this huge region (like winter ice thickness), and some vary even within a community (like berry crops).

## **Notes on collecting the information**

- Keeping the same Community Monitors in each community has been difficult. People do this interviewing because it is important. When there is a lot of money to be made in other jobs it is hard to find people. Every year there is a glitch in one of the community interview processes.
- Another approach for the community program is to have fewer people participate, but gather higher quality information. People who spend the most time on the land could be told ahead of time what to look for, and be paid for this information. Community Monitors sometimes ask for logbooks or calendars for experts to use to record ideas and what they see.
- Arctic Borderlands' success is partly because of long-term respect and friendships among partners. It is also managed in an informal way. It works well to have key community members explain the program and gain community support and interest. These people are important leaders at the annual gatherings.
- Agencies frequently contribute funds to cover data collection and participation at meetings. It has been harder to raise the funds to cover administration and analysis.

## **Notes on using the information**

- Community information gains value within the community when it can be compared to what has been seen that year in other communities. It also gains value after 5+ years when people can look to see patterns.
- The Co-op brings together many different kinds of information, ranging from scientific data to interview results. There are few scientists and community people who can work with both sets of information.
- Another challenge is making sure researchers report to communities about what they find.
- Slow Internet connections in some communities also make it hard to access website information on the website.

## Other outcomes

- People at the gatherings expect that government people there will do something about what is being reported to make situations better. Taking action to improve situations has been tough for Arctic Borderlands, as it is an information sharing tool rather than a problem-solving tool.
- There is much interest in applying the Arctic Borderlands example to other places in the north.

## Other resources

Please check out the documents page on our website at:

<https://www.arcticborderlands.org/documents>

Gary Kofinas and the communities of Aklavik, Arctic Village, Old Crow and Fort McPherson. 2002. *Community Contributions to Ecological Monitoring: Knowledge Co-production in the U.S.-Canada Arctic Borderlands*.

I. Krupnik and D. Jolly, (Eds.) *The Earth is Faster Now: Indigenous Observations of Arctic Environmental Change*. Fairbanks, Alaska; Arctic Research Consortium of the United States.

D. E. Russell, Svoboda M.Y. , Arokium J. , Cooley D. (2013) *Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Cooperative: can local knowledge inform caribou management?*

Rangifer (33) Special Issue No 21 71-78 Gary Kofinas and the communities of Aklavik, Arctic Village, Old Crow and Fort McPherson. 2002. *Community Contributions to Ecological Monitoring: Knowledge Co-production in the U.S.-Canada Arctic Borderlands*.

## 2. WHO TO INTERVIEW

### The Goal

Arctic Borderlands depends on the community to select local experts who have:

- been on the land in 2017 and previous years in this area *and*
- who are good observers *and*
- who know a lot about the land.

People who did not get out on the land much in 2017 are not suitable to interview because they will have had few opportunities to know how the berries, caribou or fish are doing.

Many elders who do not get out anymore are not the right people to interview, even though they know a lot.

People do not have to live on the land all the time.

### Your Plan

Here is an example of how to organize who to interview. Numbers say how much someone might know about a subject.

Name Phone	On land much last year? (scale – 1 low - 5 is lots)	Knows a lot about... 1 is low, 5 is lots				Dates, times available	Interview done date, and ID number
		weather	caribou	fish	berries		
<i>Edna (example)</i> -7895	3	4	2	5	5	<i>Most afternoons after the 15th</i>	<i>January 24</i>
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							

There are few people who are “experts” in everything every year. Make your list so you interview 10 berry experts, 10 caribou experts, 10 fish experts and do 20 total interviews. Since people are out of town a lot you probably need **more** than 20 names. Don’t wait too long for the best expert to come back to town!



Emphasis are on caribou experts since this information is most useful today. Also, we get a lot of feedback on who the HTC/ RRC/ or monitors chose. Please do not go to just one family so that people are happy with who was interviewed. You can't interview yourself.

Yes, you can interview your partner if s/he should be on the list of the best people to interview.

Yes, you can interview couples. If they go out on the land separately, then interview them separately. If they go out together, then interviewing them together is best. Regardless, if they want to be interviewed together, then do the interview with both of them. **Remember, only one gas coupon per completed set of interview sheets.**

## Records

The co-op wants to keep our promise that information will not be released or stored in a manner that allows an individual to be identified. **So: there should only be 3 copies of the sheet that shows the names and the interview ID numbers.**

## Who to consult

Before you start interviewing it is important to review your list of names with a leader of a hunting and trapping organization/renewable resources council and 1 or 2 individuals who people respect. Mention the goal and confirm that these people were active on the land this past year. They do not have to live on the land all year long.

Consulting people about your list helps you and Arctic Borderlands deal with any complaints from people who feel they should have been interviewed:

*“Sorry, maybe next year, I had several people go over the list...we really needed to find some people who had been on the land a lot in 2012 and knew about fish...Thanks for telling me about your concern, maybe we will interview you next year.”*

### 3. HOW TO ASK FOR AN INTERVIEW OVER THE TELEPHONE

#### Some words:

*Hi Henry, this is Lester Gray, Walter's son. I am phoning to ask you if I can interview you sometime in the next 3 weeks.*

*(pause). I will ask you about changes to caribou, fish, and berries you may have noticed this year. No you don't have to tell me now- I will come over to your house.*

*It is for the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Society. (pause) Your name will not go beside any comments in the report. There are no harvest questions.(pause)*

*The interview will take 2 hours and I will give you a gas coupon for your time.*

*Would this be OK? (pause) Can I come to your house Tuesday at 3:00? (pause). Ok, I will call just before I leave here.*

*Thanks a lot Henry.*

#### Your words:

(Every interviewer has their own style...)

### 4. WHAT TO TAKE TO THE INTERVIEW

Pens

Survey form

Consent form

Camera (optional)

Gas voucher thank-you coupon

Gas receipt

Animal identification names & picture

## 5. HOW TO START THE INTERVIEW

Leave the papers and stuff with your parka

Greet the person and family members and relax

Listen for any background noises like a TV, radio, or machine

After a while, ask *“is it ok to start”, “ will you sit here beside me so we can look at this together?”*

*“can we make the tv or radio quieter please”*

Clear some space on the table big enough for the map

Get your stuff and put it on the floor beside you

Get out the pens and put them on the table

Get out the papers and put them in a pile in front of you

*“are you comfortable, can you hear me clearly, do you want to get a glass of water / tea / coffee?”*

Check your outline, smile and explain what this is all about and how you appreciate their help

*“please stop me anytime if you have a question or concern”*

[get out the other stuff as you need it and put it on the floor when you are not using it]

do not rush- take the time you need.

## 6. HOW TO DO THE INFORMED CONSENT PART

Permission to interview is very important. People must agree to being interviewed, they need to know how their information will be used, and how their name will be handled in any reporting.

It is normal to feel nervous in this part of the interview, but take your time and help people understand what it is all about before handing them a pen and asking them to sign.

They sign two copies of the consent form. One they keep so they have a record of the interview in case they want to find out about it later. The other copy is for Arctic Borderlands. It will be stored in Whitehorse.

Let them know that the information they provide will be confidential. Their name will not be used in any reporting.

## 7. HOW TO END THE INTERVIEW IF IT IS NOT WORKING OR YOU DO NOT FEEL SAFE

Do not interview people who are rude, violent, or drinking. Pay attention to your safety.

*“I have a bad headache coming on...sorry...I'd better come back in a day or two..”*

*“I have to get back now and finish my notes- they need to go out tomorrow- thanks anyway”*

*“It seems like things are getting busy here...That's fine... We can finish this another day”*

*“Call me when you are sober”*

*“Just get to the point”*

## 8. TIPS FOR GREAT INTERVIEWING

Everyone has their own style and the Coop does not want to force a cookie-cutter style on everyone. But, if every interviewer asks questions in different ways, using different words, then the Coop gets information that is difficult to make sense of. We can tell when the question was not asked right. In one case all the questions about changes in moose were answered with the number seen “*oh I guess I saw about 39 moose this past year...*” **So, find your own style, but ask the questions as they are written down on the form.**

Previous interviewers recommended you have fun!

Have a good positive attitude about the work because the people will put more effort into the interview.

Tell them how important their information is and make sure they know they are important.

You do the writing on the form, not the person you are interviewing. *“I’m sorry, I have to do the writing in this interview, can I have the pen back please? It will take less time, I promise. I can read what I write down back to you if you want to make sure I wrote it down correctly.”*

Short breaks can help. *“Would you like to take a short break now?”* Do you need to take off a sweater? Has someone come into the room?

If the answer seems odd, then say what they said and then re read the question and pause. *“So I heard you say something about ants (pause)... Can you help me understand how this is about the differences in the berries this past year?”*

How to avoid leading people to answer in a certain way...

<b>BAD - Example of leading</b>	<b>Revised so it is not leading the person</b>
Few mosquitoes around this year, eh?	Were there more or less mosquitoes this year?
It was sure windy at my camp in the fall. Was it windy at your camp?	How was the wind this year down around your area? Strong, light, cold, hot?
With the late freeze up on the lakes did you notice that the black ducks stayed around longer?	Did the black ducks leave late or early? Why?

## 9. THINGS TO DO AFTER THE LAST QUESTION

Have a sheet that reminds you about these things that lies below your interview sheet.

Ask *“Are there any questions you would like me to go back to?”*

*“(Phew) We are done! Thank you so much! A couple more details and then I’ll be out of your hair”*

Fill out their name and the date on the gas coupon and ask them to sign a receipt that they received it for the coops financial records. Note that it is valid for 60 days.

Write down their address on a separate sheet so the coop can mail them a copy of the annual report from all the communities.

Flip through the pages to be sure you did every question.

Put all your papers into the envelope, your pens in your pocket

.  
Look at the table carefully to see you have everything.

## 10. THINGS TO DO WHEN YOU GET HOME

Staple the receipt for the gas coupon to the interview sheets.

Assemble your interview materials in the proper order with a new set of interview sheets so you are ready to go.

## 11. Tips for Entering Data

Entering the data can be intimidating if you’re not comfortable on a computer, but it’s pretty simple. The online form is the same as the questionnaire, just fill in the answers as you did when you did the interview.

1. At the beginning of the interview you will be given an online record number – **record this number on the front page of your interview below your name.**
2. Make sure you fill in an answer for every question you asked; if they answered “Don’t Know” then check DK. If there’s no answer we’ll assume you didn’t ask that question.
3. If you make a mistake record it and let the Program Coordinator know what the mistake was and which interview record number it was for – she will make sure it is corrected.

4. Enter the complete interview at once, you cannot come back to one that you've started.
5. If there is an interruption (like a break in internet service) start the interview again with a new record number – and send a note to the Program Coordinator with the incomplete record number to be deleted.
6. Don't stress – if you make a mistake it can always be fixed!

## **12. WHAT TO DO WITH THE COMPLETED SURVEYS**

If your contract is with ABEKS, mail all completed surveys to Heather. The address is already on the envelope, and the postage has been paid. You write your address on the return address part. The postmaster will give you a numbered piece of paper that you keep. This serial number is used to find the envelope if it gets lost in the mail.

If your contract is with your RRC or HTC, bring the completed surveys to your RRC/HTC contact person and they will mail them to Heather.

Bring everything else to the gathering. [the list of who is in any picture you take, your receipts, any left-over coupons, a copy of the list of names with the interview ID numbers and the people's mail addresses, your expenses].

## **13. How to do a great summary at the gathering**

Many people come to the gathering in March to hear interviewers' summaries of what people told them. Your summary will be in your own words, and you will speak along with the other interviewers. People will listen closely to what you say. Later, at a tea break, people may come and ask you a few questions.

In recent years, the gathering has been organized so that people will talk about weather, then caribou, then fish, then berries. So you may be asked to give short summaries of what you heard on one of these topics at the time it is being discussed.

If this is your first gathering you may be nervous and want to read out your summary. That is fine, and with experience you may be able to speak without reading, looking down every few seconds at some notes.

Since you are summarizing what you heard people tell you about change in the interviews, not just what you saw changing, it is helpful to keep some notes of the main points that people said on each topic during your interviews.

**It is important to read over the surveys and write down these notes before you mail the interview sheets back.**

You might set up your note taking so it looks like this, on a separate sheet of paper:

Topic	Main ideas in the first 5 interviews	Main ideas in the second 10 interviews	Main ideas in the last 5 interviews
Go thru survey form...			

If you set up your written report with paragraphs for each of these topics, it will be fast to write. There are lots of community reports on the website that you can read to see how other interviewers have done them in the past. The RRC or HTC should have a CD with the community reports as well. Your summary needs to be typed on a computer, and should be between 4 – 8 pages. If you prefer to handwrite your summary, please fax or scan and email it in to the Program Coordinator so they can type it before the gathering.

## **14. YOUR CONTRACT (WITH ABEKS OR YOUR RRC OR HTC)**

Your contract as a Community Monitor may be with ABEKS or it may be with your local RRC/HTC.

Make sure you understand who you are working for. If it is for ABEKS, you should contact the ABEKS administrative coordinator for any support you need. If it is with your RRC/HTC, your questions and concerns should be directed to the person identified in the contract you sign.

Read your contract carefully and keep it in your binder so you can refer to it when you have questions about contract details.

## **15. WHO TO PHONE FOR HELP**

Please see section 14.

ABEKS contact info:

P.o. box 33251

Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 6S1

[Arcticborderlands@gmail.com](mailto:Arcticborderlands@gmail.com)

[www.arcticborderlands.org](http://www.arcticborderlands.org)

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