

Gwich'in Tribal Council Annual Report 2004 ~ 2005

Building Prosperity



Gwich'in Social & Cultural Report

The Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute (GSCI) conducts cultural and language research, provides language and educational programs, and performs heritage management. Its mandate is to document, preserve and promote Gwich'in language, culture, traditional knowledge and values.

In 2004-2005 the GSCI was involved in a number of initiatives, based on **Iindo Khehtok Tr'eedah (Moving Forward as One): Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute Five Year Plan 2003-2008.**

While GSCI staff work together on some projects, reporting is the responsibility of program managers. Projects are classified under the Gwich'in Language Plan, Gwich'in Language Centre, Heritage Research and Administration.

Gwich'in Language Plan:

One of our priorities was publication of the Gwich'in Dictionary's fifth edition. This dictionary of the Gwichya Gwich'in and Teetl'it Gwich'in dialects includes words and phrases collected over the past Fiscal Year in the four Gwich'in communities. It uses the same layout as the previous edition, which has proven useful to both speakers and non-speakers of the language.

The accompanying Gwich'in Grammar illustrates the structure of the Gwich'in language, using a universal phonetic system, and is designed to improve the understanding of both speakers and non-speakers.

As part of the Gwich'in Elders' biography project, GSCI staff interviewed Elders in all four GSA communities, conducting interviews in both English and Gwich'in and photographing many of the Elders as well. We will use the information for either a biographical booklet dedicated to Elders, or an Elders' calendar, documenting their lives and our history as a people.

Gwich'in Language Centre:

The Gwich'in Language Centre produces resource materials for teaching and training, with funding from the GTC, Dene Nation and Beaufort Delta Education Council. This year we hired a new Resource Coordinator, John Fisher, who has a background in education and the production of resource materials. Among other initiatives, he has begun establishing grade levels for existing resource materials, which will be an ongoing project.

In 2004-2005 we provided materials and assistance to Gwich'in Language Teachers and Instructors in all four GSA communities, as well as helping the Aboriginal Headstart Program's Gwich'in Language Instructor with materials for post pre-school students. We are currently working on a Second Language Curriculum, along with the Inuvialuit. Lesson Plans will be developed, approved and finalized under this project.

This year we will develop seventeen Animal Unit Compact Discs in the Gwichya Gwich'in dialect, similar to the set produced last year in the Teetl'it Gwich'in dialect. As of this writing, completion is scheduled for June 2005.

Building upon the Animal Units, we have selected six legends containing life lessons and morals. These legends in the Teetl'it dialect have been transcribed and translated into English. They will be compiled in a booklet, and an interactive game will be produced for each legend. We expect completion by June and distribution by August 2005.

One large-scale project has been the photographing and videotaping of fishing activity. This year we focused on seven kinds of fish that are harvested year-round. Interviews, still photography, and videotaping were done last July. Captions in English and Gwich'in will accompany still photos, and narration of the video will be prepared. Completion is expected in late May.

We continue to update materials that were produced prior to the standardization of the Gwich'in language, require reformatting for compatibility with more recent computers and software, or face physical deterioration (such as the older audio tapes damaged by the extreme heat in the Language Centre). In addition, we are redoing outdated materials, beginning with flashcards. Images of existing flashcards are being scanned into a computer and reformatted, with the insertion of standardized Gwich'in spelling. Artists have been contracted to provide new artwork, while the cards will be laminated to guard against wear and tear. Completion is expected by June.

The Language Centre continues to promote the Gwich'in language through its weekly radio programs and videotapes of community events, as well as stage an Open House and provide lunch intermittently throughout the year.

Heritage Research:

In April 2004, GSCI Research Director Ingrid Kritsch was invited to attend the Alaska Anthropological Association conference in Whitehorse and report on the GSCI's work. She also made a presentation to the Yukon First Nations Heritage Officers, who are developing heritage programs in their own communities and were interested to learn about the GSCI's work.

Last July, the GSCI worked with the Tetlit Gwich'in Council, Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation, and Yukon Heritage Branch to begin excavation of the Black City site north of Dawson City. Black City was a large village, inhabited through the Klondike Gold Rush and into the 1930s by the Teetl'it Gwich'in, Dagoo Gwich'in and Tr'ondek Hwech'in. Tetlit Gwich'in Elders Dorothy, Walter and Robert Alexie, Sr. and Tr'ondek Hwech'in Elders Alfred Semple and Percy Henry worked with oral history researchers Gladys Alexie and

Georgette McLeod, and archaeologist Chris Thomas. The Elders relayed stories about Black City and the surrounding area, and helped with the interpretation of artifacts and structures uncovered during the excavation, and the recording of graves in the area. As another part of the project, Bertha Francis and Gladys Alexie transcribed six taped interviews with Walter and Robert Alexie, Sr., Alfred Semple and Percy Henry, conducted in 2003.

In the Winter of 2004, the Tr'ondek Hwech'in approached the GSCI to work with the Inuvialuit, Vuntut Gwich'in and Nacho Nyak Dun on a brochure and fold-out map about the First Nations in the Dempster Highway area. The GSCI provided information and photos on the Gwich'in traditional area of use, encompassing the area north of Dawson to Inuvik.

The GNWT recently began a new funding program to help communities and organizations nominate sites to the NWT Historic Places Register. In September we received funding to nominate one or more sites in Teetl'it Gwich'in traditional lands. In December the Teetl'it Gwich'in Steering Committee met and agreed to support nomination of two sites: Nataiinlaih, and the Mouth of the Peel Village. Ingrid Kritsch and Melanie Fafard, a Ph.D. student in anthropology at the University of Alberta, conducted the necessary research and prepared the nominations, which were submitted at the end of March 2005.

In September 2004 the GSCI accessed funding from the NWT Cultural Places Initiative to complete the drafting and publication of a booklet about the Fort McPherson archaeological site. Ingrid Kritsch and Melanie Fafard are working on this project with Outcrop Ltd. and publication is scheduled for June.

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GSCI and Parks Canada staff met with the Fort McPherson Steering Committee in December to determine how to proceed with the Fort McPherson National Historic Site project. Text for a new plaque, acknowledging the contribution of the Teetl'it Gwich'in to the fur trade and the establishment of Fort McPherson will be drafted and the plaque will be installed on site within the year. We still need to determine the site's boundaries and obtain letters of support from all landowners.

We continue to work with Parks Canada towards finalizing the Commemorative Integrity Statement for the Nagwichoonjik National Historic Site, so that we can proceed to negotiation of a cost-sharing agreement and development of a management plan for the site.

During the Summer of 2004, Erin Suliak, an M.A. student in Library and Information Studies at McGill University, completed the key word index of the oral history tapes which she began the past Summer, inventoried the GSCI research materials in all offices, prepared a manual on digitizing tapes, and finalized her Archival Strategic Plan. This plan is designed to ensure the research materials we have created are maintained and preserved for future generations.

This Winter Heritage Researcher Alestine Andre conducted a cultural assessment and gap analysis of the headwaters of the Arctic Red River for the Gwich'in Land Use Planning Board. This research was identified in the Land Use Implementation Plan as necessary to help determine if the area's status should change from Special Management Zone to Gwich'in Heritage Conservation Zone or legislated protected area.

The report for this project includes an annotated bibliography of existing sources on the traditional use of the area and heritage

resources already identified, as well as identifying gaps and making recommendations for the next phase of research.

The GSCI contributed to the Arctic Red River Ten-Year Review under the Canadian Heritage River Management Plan. This report was prepared by Karen LeGresley-Hamre of Avens Associates Ltd. for RWED, in fulfillment of the Canadian Heritage River Board requirement that rivers designated under the CHR System be reviewed every ten years. It made a number of recommendations relating to research, tourism, traditional use, and the river's Heritage River status.

The GTC has asked the GSCI to represent it on a First Nations and Government Steering Committee to direct and oversee the work needed to nominate the Mackenzie as a Canadian Heritage River. The Committee has met several times and drafted a work plan that includes the creation of Working Groups in all regions along the river to help draft chapters of the Background Paper for the Canadian Heritage River Board.

The Gwich'in Cultural Working Group is working with the GSCI and a writer, Randy Freeman, on the drafting of the Gwich'in Cultural Chapter. As of this writing, we are waiting to hear from the Sahtu and Inuvialuit concerning their support for the project and selection of Steering Committee members. The GSCI proposes that the various Aboriginal names for the river be officially recognized alongside its English and French names.

In September, Ingrid Kritsch helped Executive Director Dolly Carmichael provide photographs and accompanying captions from the files of our Research Office in Yellowknife, for display in the Inuvik Capital Suites.

Under the Gwich'in Clothing Project, seamstresses in the GSA communities and Yellowknife worked on five replicas of a man's traditional 19th Century Gwich'in caribou skin outfit, from an original in the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Hull, Quebec. The GSCI then worked with the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC) to prepare exhibits of the outfits in each GSA community. The exhibits in Aklavik, Fort McPherson and Tsiigehtchic were formally unveiled in ceremonies from February 28 to March 2, 2005. Those in Aklavik and Fort McPherson are on display at the schools, while the Tsiigehtchic exhibit is displayed in the Band office boardroom. The unveiling ceremony for the Inuvik replica was delayed when the exhibit case was damaged in transit, but we hope to reschedule it early in the new Fiscal Year at the Inuvik Capital Suites once a new case is installed.

Ingrid Kritsch has been working with Judy Thompson of the CMC and Joanne Bird of the PWNHC on an exhibit of the project for the First Peoples' Hall at the CMC and the PWNHC. This will include the original garment from the CMC, life-size photos of the five replicas, additional photos, captions, and a video. Judy and Ingrid are also working on a book to accompany the exhibit. The exhibit will be displayed at the PWNHC in 2006 and the CMC in 2007, with smaller versions exhibited in the four Gwich'in communities.

The PWNHC's Director, Dr. Charles Arnold, has invited the GSCI to join a steering committee to guide development of a new gallery showcasing Gwich'in and Inuvialuit culture and heritage, using items from the PWNHC collections and GSCI research. We are currently developing two exhibits: a Mackenzie River fish camp exhibit based on Alestine Andre's camp in the Tree River area, and one based on the Fort McPherson archaeological site.

In the past year, the GSCI also worked on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Traditional Knowledge Project. This was funded through a negotiated contract with Imperial Oil, from February 1, 2004 to April 30, 2005, and had two phases. In Phase 1, our GIS analyst, Scott Higgins, established the computer-based mapping system and began entering traditional land use information into a linked database.

Kristi Benson, our Traditional Knowledge Coordinator, researched and reviewed past TK studies and constructed a database with this information, identifying the gaps in our knowledge. This allowed us to begin Phase 2, based on community interviews. A GIS/IT Assistant, John Edwards, joined us for this phase, and a Working Group representing the RRCs, Band Councils, Elders' Councils, GSCI, GRRB, MGP and MPEG was established to guide the work.

Upon her return from education leave in the late Summer of 2004, Alestine Andre worked with Kristi and three community researchers on the TK interviews. At time of writing, a report is being drafted for review by the communities prior to presentation to Imperial Oil. The report will be presented as part of the Environmental Assessment for the Mackenzie Gas Project. The GTC Board approved the GSCI's new Traditional Knowledge Policy at its meeting of June 22, 2004.

In recent months we have reviewed Land Use Permits related to the Mackenzie Gas Project and exploration for diamonds in the GSA. We expect the number of permit applications to increase significantly in the next few years and must ensure we have the funding required to continue our GIS position, which is critical to our ability to respond to them.

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The GSCI's new web site has been well-received, and we have received requests from organizations such as the NWT Literacy Council and the Arctic Circumpolar Route (Arctic Institute of North America) to link our respective web sites. Our site has had several thousand visitors from around the world.

Administration:

The GSCI hired a Material Developer Trainee, who began work early August of 2004 and resigned in mid-October. The Material Developer Coordinator also resigned, effective November 26, 2004. The job description for this position was revised to include skills necessary for the preparation of resource materials based on curriculum and grade levels, while the title was changed to Resource Coordinator. After advertisements and interviews, John Fisher was hired, beginning work in late March 2005.

Bertha Francis retired as Interpreter/Translator on March 11, 2005. The GSCI held a supper for her in Fort McPherson on March 30, followed by a presentation on March 31. We thank Bertha for her many contributions to the GSCI over the years.

Our Strategic Analysis and Five Year Business Plan was not finalized. After a review of the GSCI and determination of plans and funding commitments for the next five years, we can develop a new plan.

Dolly Carmichael
Executive Director

Ingrid Kritsch
Research Director

William George Firth
Language Manager

GSCI Staff:

Dolly Carmichael
Executive Director

Mavis Clark
Administrative Assistant

Ingrid Kritsch
Research Director

Alestine Andre
Heritage Researcher

Kristi Benson
Traditional Knowledge Coordinator

Scott Higgins
GIS Analyst

John Edwards
GIS/IT Assistant

William George Firth
Language Manager

Keith Kunnizzie
Linguist Trainee

John Fisher
Resource Coordinator

Elizabeth Vittrekwa
Material Developer Trainee (resigned October 19, 2004)

Betty Vittrekwa
Material Developer (resigned November 26, 2004)

Bertha Francis
Interpreter/Translator (retired March 11, 2005)

GSCI Board:

Mary Ann Ross: Chair

Anna May McLeod: Tsiigehtchic

Walter Alexie: Fort McPherson

Annie Jane Modeste: Fort McPherson

Renie Stewart: Aklavik

Catherine Mitchell: Aklavik

Sarah McLeod-Firth: Inuvik