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Vuntut Gwitchin RIDING UPDATE



Fall 2009

inside:

- Yukon Legislative Assembly
- Porcupine Caribou Interim Conservation
- Congratulations
- In Memoriam

Dear Friends & Neighbours,

Once again I welcome this opportunity to report back to you.

The summer and fall has been obviously very busy for all of us and as a result we have many good news stories to be proud of ~ from our new infrastructure developments, the Olympic Torch relay celebration, the dedication of the Old Crow Airport to Alfred Charlie, the YTG's commitment to a Solid Waste Action Plan for the Old Crow dump the additional funds of \$42,000 towards the water well and \$140,000 for the road and drainage upgrading and of course a special mention to the estimated 30,000 caribou that graced us with their presence this fall.

It's part of my job to support the priorities of the community in any way I can and there is much work to do in accomplishing our community's 10 year capital plan targets and the effective delivery of government programs and services within the integrated community sustainability plan and together we will accomplish these goals.

All of us are concerned about the environment and I hope the red hand bags are proving useful. The environmentally friendly bags are my contribution to a plastic bag free community and if you didn't happen to receive one just let me know.

Ever since you entrusted me with the responsibility of serving as your MLA, representing your views, issues and concerns in and out of the Yukon Legislative Assembly has been, and continues to be, my primary concern.

Darius Elias
MLA Vuntut Gwitchin
Liberal Caucus Office



Erika Tizya - Tramm, Long-Distance Runner, 2010 Olympic Torch Relay bearer.



Martha Benjamin, 2010 Olympic Torch Relay bearer. Former Canadian women's cross country skiing champion and member of the Yukon Sports Hall of Fame.



2010 Olympic Torch Relay bearer Trey Charlie, excellent hockey player!



Allen Benjamin, World Champion Snowshoer, 2010 Olympic Torch Relay bearer.

In the Legislative Assembly



*Bringing Youth Towards Equality (b.y.t.e.)
Climate Change day of action on October 24th,
2009 outside the Yukon Legislative Assembly..*



*Jane Montgomery's Gwich'in class at the Chief
Zzeb Gittlit School.*



*On Friday October 23, 2009 the Old Crow
community airport was dedicated to respected
elder, Mr. Alfred Charlie, and will be renamed
the Alfred Charlie Old Crow Airport in
recognition of his achievements, vision and
dedication to his people and north Yukon.*

**Yukon Legislative Assembly,
Whitehorse, Yukon
- Monday, November 2, 2009**

MOTION

(Mr. Elias): I give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to formally recognize elder Stephen Frost Sr. of Old Crow, Yukon for his 37 years of service and dedication to the operation and maintenance of the Old Crow nursing station by renaming the “Old Crow Health Centre” the “Stephen Frost Sr. Health Centre”.

**The following is part of Darius's
speech in the Yukon Legislative
Assembly - Tuesday, November 3,
2009**

“Old Crow is the centre of my universe. It always has been and always will be. It is the place I was raised and learned all of life's important lessons. It's where our people, many of my constituents, and my heart live. It is the place where my mind goes when I'm faced with difficult decisions as the MLA.

There has never been a time when I didn't feel a sense of pride and gratitude welling up inside me when I spoke about my community of Old Crow. The community has always had very strong leaders, and many of them have taught me well. I feel so rich to be part of such a wonderful community and family and to represent such a wonderful riding.”

**The following is an excerpt from a CKRW radio news
story on the Olympic Torch Relay - Thursday November 5, 2009**

(Reporter - Steve MacArthur): “I'm just wondering how you're feeling Mr. Elias about being back in your home town here and this is the most northwestern route that the torch will travel and to see this community celebration, what's running through your mind and how are you feeling?”

(Elias): “Well, this is first of all such an exhilarating experience and our community has been preparing for this for months and I am so proud of our community and it's such a wonderful honour for our community to host the international symbol of peace and the Olympic torch and you know from the high priestess in Athens, Greece to the homelands of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation this is an honour and I am so proud that our community has put on such a wonderful show of our living culture and our living traditions here, as part of the Olympic torch relay.

To the athletes, to the Canadian athletes our little community of Old Crow is behind you 100 per cent. We will be cheering for you in 2010 when you enter the Olympic stadium until when the Games are finished and we wish all the athletes the best and that the Olympic torch coming to Old Crow will also and forever be in our hearts and you know I'm so - this is such a proud moment. It's a spine tingling moment and you know I can't say enough about our community that has put together such a wonderful show.”

“Ladies and Gentlemen, while our title is ‘the Official Opposition,’ I prefer to think of us as “Yukon's Official Advocates.” Because that is what we really are and what we do. We advocate for all Yukoners who want a better standard of living, a better Yukon, a fair and more just Yukon.”

Arthur Mitchell - Yukon Liberal Leader

Elias Praises Porcupine Caribou Interim Conservation

Out of the 13 arctic barren ground caribou herds in Canada 10 are in decline or experiencing decimated populations, two herds have unknown populations because of their remote isolation and only one herd is increasing in numbers.

These are some sobering facts. As far as I'm concerned, alarm bells should be going off.

The PCH has been in decline since 1992, some 17 years, and the fact that the Yukon Government is just getting around to doing something now says something.

In my opinion, none of the tools we currently have can quickly embrace and solve the problems the PCH is facing right now; except the clauses that exist in the UFA, Yukon Wildlife Act and the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement that permit the public government to occupy the field of "Conservation".

My loyalty to the processes in achieving a harvest management plan for the porcupine caribou herd in Canada has its limits.

In my opinion we are years away from the plan being adopted and implemented by ALL the parties to the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement and if we ever reach the point of "no return" for the population of the PCH, it will be because we did not act in time and PCH is rapidly running out of time.

The onus is on us to quickly control what we can control and not allow our harvesting behaviour to contribute to the population decline of the herd and one of the only proven management actions to be immediately successful is supported through laws and not through voluntary measures.

So, I agree that a legislated "bulls only" harvest with "mandatory reporting" is much less intrusive on subsistence harvesting rights than an outright harvest limit or restriction that dictates exactly how many caribou are allowed to be harvested.

It's what we don't know about the herd that's important and we need to understand what they are up against.

1. For eight years we have been without a crucial piece of information, a photo census or count of the caribou herd.
2. We don't know what the annual grand mortality of the herd is with regard to predation, wounded loss and accurate harvesting numbers in Canada & Alaska.
3. The evidence of the effects that climate change is having on the herd's population is strong. We are just beginning to understand the effects that early green up in the spring; early arrival of mosquitoes and early watershed breakup are having but information is limited. In May of 2004 the Porcupine River ice broke up three weeks early and I watched as 200 cows got swallowed up by the river and ice as they tried to swim across. "Wildlife managers say that a single cow will produce 23 caribou in a ten year period!"
4. Harvest data from the mid 1990's suggest that approximately 4000 caribou were harvested annually and 60% were cows.
5. Never before seen levels of hunting pressure are occurring on the Dempster.
6. The illegal commercialization and selling of caribou meat for profit threatens the herd.
7. The herd still faces the outstanding threat to the ANWR calving grounds.

These are enormous pressures on the herd.

So as stewards of the PCH, doing nothing in light of such compelling evidence could be viewed as a dereliction of duty, abdication of responsibility to the public trust and even negligence. To err on the side of caution and enact interim conservation measures is the best option we have until a complete and acceptable harvest management plan can be implemented.

The PCH is the lifeblood of our community of Old Crow and is much more than just food to us. Our cultural and spiritual survival depends on the herd. It's a belonging and connection that defy English words. The herd is all we have. If the PCH population is allowed to crash it will be the Vuntut Gwitchin and the community of Old Crow who will suffer the most.

"I sure don't want to see our kids, one or two hundred years from now, reading about the caribou in story books and about how we used to live."

- Late Johnny Abel

Educating myself on the Northern Cross exploration program on the Eagles Plains. Standing under a Drilling Rig at Km 325 on the Dempster Highway.



Visiting Florence Etzel at her traditional camp.



Dougie Charlie working for his dog team.



Respected Elder & Uncle Victor Peterson picking up his favourite coffee.



Congratulations!



Our own Cindy Dickson was one of five women from across Canada who received the 2009 National Aboriginal Women of Distinction Award.

Cindy was recognized for her work on climate change and her commitment to preserving and protecting the environment and the way of life in the north.

In Memoriam *May you rest in peace*

- **Mary Martha Elias-Kendi**
- August 4, 2009



Whitehorse 2010 Olympic Torch Relay bearer Jamie Tetlichl!



Old Crow 2010 Olympic Torch Relay fashion show models Michelle, Kecia, Neta, Shay Lynn, Kristen, Edna, Camisha and Kelly.