

Community drives environmental research

Climate change and country food adaptation project to answer Kakisa-centred questions

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Ka'a'gee Tu/Kakisa

A project is about to launch in Kakisa that will be tailored to address the community's specific questions and concerns about climate change.

Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation is collaborating with Ecology North, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's Cumulative Impacts Monitoring Program and Wilfrid Laurier University's Centre for Sustainable Food

Systems on a project to investigate climate change impacts on country food security and to develop strategies to address the opportunities and challenges.

It's well known that climate change is causing landscape

changes in the NWT, said lead researcher Andrew Spring, but how it may be affecting people and their ability to harvest food from the land is what the project is focusing on.

Spring, a PhD student at Wilfrid Laurier University, along with Blair Carter, a water specialist with Ecology North, plan to involve the community from the project's onset.

The project was supposed to launch on July 24 with a community barbecue, but it had to be delayed because of forest fires and road closures. When the event is held, community members will be shown aerial photos of Kakisa and the surrounding area from the 1960s to the present day. The photos show rapid and dramatic changes in some areas including near Tathlina Lake.

The goal is to get residents talking about changes they've noticed and whether their ability to harvest food from the land has been affected, said

Spring. The project is working toward creating adaptation strategies or a plan that Kakisa can use to overcome any present or future impacts to traditional harvesting practices and community health and well-being.

"We want the community to ask the questions and we're here to help the community answer the questions," said Spring.

The project will also result in a template model and toolkit that other aboriginal communities in Northern Canada, particularly those in the Deh Cho facing similar circumstances, can use to do their own planning for food sustainability amid climate change.

"The whole hope is we're not just going to be operating in silos," said Spring.

Climate change is affecting the local landscape through events such as permafrost thaw. Forest ecosystems are becoming wetter and harder to travel in, said Spring. Carter

expects that forest fires and how they affect harvesting will be a topic of interest.

Once the community identifies the topics they want to examine, the project will look at existing reports, documents and literature. Twenty elders and people from the community who use the land will also be interviewed in the fall to gather their traditional knowledge, including how climate change is affecting harvesting, as well as adaptations they are using or could be used. Melaine Simba, the First Nation's community environmental coordinator, will be conducting the interviews.

Both Spring and Carter said this project is a great opportunity they're excited to be part of.

"It's very partner-based," said Carter.

The project is scheduled to run for one year using \$60,000 from Health Canada's Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program.