



Nov. 29, 2012

“An Inuit Perspective On Food Security In The Alaska Arctic: Building A Framework On How To Assess Change In The Arctic.” The proposed project fits within ICC-AK’s 2010 Strategic plan, where food security is listed as a top priority.

SUMMARY: Inuit hold a unique understanding of food security within the Arctic; viewing food security to encompass both cultural and environmental systems; systems which interlink and support each other. While many changes are taking affect within Arctic ecosystems, primarily resulting from climate change and industrialization, food security is becoming a central topic of conversation. Research shows that food security definitions and assessment mechanisms do not necessarily match the Arctic ecosystem or cultures within. In response to the need to address food (in)/security of traditional food resources within a changing Arctic, the Inuit Circumpolar-Council Alaska (ICC-AK), has commenced building a framework on how to assess food security from an Inuit perspective.

STATEMENT OF NEED:

Arctic communities have developed a rich culture, shaped by the dynamic environment in which they live and centered on the harvesting of Arctic flora and fauna. Inuit traditional Arctic foods such as caribou, waterfowl, salmon, seal, salmonberries, and sura (diamond-leaf willow) provides food, fiber, shelter, medicines, energy, nutrients, and spirituality; all of which play a part in food security. ICC-AK recognizes food security to be inclusive of both cultural and environmental systems.

In an environment where food provides more than calories, issues surrounding food (in)/security become multi-faceted and may require the identification of food security vulnerabilities throughout the entire food web. Such an approach aims to combine various sources of knowledge and research, such as research addressing the impact of high fuel costs on hunting strategies, socio-ecological relationships, and cultural structures in addition to changes in species distribution, nutrient intake and quality of food.

While the world focuses its attention on the Arctic, industry, academic institutions, governments, etc. are conducting numerous assessments to better understand how far this unique environment can be pushed before reaching a tipping point. From an Inuit perspective, assessments take place through a food security lens, allowing one to see where the inter connections between systems lie. The finished framework will be a tool to enhance the ability of Inuit communities and scientists in working together to holistically understand changes occurring within the Arctic. As well as, provide an understanding for elected leaders and policy, makes the concept of food security in the Arctic, what the drivers are, and what will need to be monitored in order to create action plans.

ICC ALASKA

3003 Minnesota #204 • Anchorage, AK 99503 • Phone: (907) 274-9058 • Fax: (907) 274-3861 • www.iccalaska.org



Objectives and Outcomes

Through literature reviews, community meetings, semi-directive interviews and gathering of traditional knowledge this project will identify the baselines needed to assess the vulnerabilities of food security. The established baselines will identify what Inuit priorities are in assessing food (in)/security and where vulnerabilities lie. For example, baselines may include the need to have full understanding of ice coverage to understand food web dynamics; an increased utilization of traditional knowledge applied to under ice currents to gain a better understanding of salmon distribution; or for an increase effort to be applied to establishing food web models that move beyond one-dimensional energy transfers, incorporating abiotic vulnerabilities and/or the human dimension. The project will contribute to our understanding of the pressures to traditional food resources and communities that are resulting from climate changes and increased human presence and development in the Arctic.

Three objectives will be met within this project: 1) provide an understanding of Arctic food security, from an Inuit perspective; 2) provide a tool to assess food security across both cultural and environmental systems; 3) identify what will need to be monitored in order to create action plans. These objectives will be met through two phases. In the first phase Inuit perspectives and TK will be sought and developed through semi-directive interview, community meetings, information gained from previous projects and regional workshops. In the second phase, the developed framework will be shared with the Arctic Council with encouragement to conduct the assessment throughout the entire Arctic.

The project timeline began July 2012 and will finish in March 2015. Through this timeline the above objectives will be accomplished through multiple phases of data gathering, analysis and information sharing.

The first phase will consist of data gathering in which the community perspective and TK will be sought and developed through four tiers of information (listed in order of magnitude). To ensure community participation throughout the project ICC-AK will visit approximately 16 communities within the Yukon-Kuskokwim, Bering Strait, Northwest Arctic and North Slope regions, along the Bering, Chuckchi and Beaufort Seas. Tier one is information obtained from Inuit community members through semi-directive interviews and community meetings; tier two is information obtained from phone conversations with all tribal councils represented by ICC-AK; tier three is information obtained through raw data collected from past and on-going projects conducted by ICC-AK member organizations and organizations supported by regions; tier four is information obtained from past projects conducted by academic institutions, government agencies, industry and NGOs.

In the second phase, a regional workshop will be held in each region. Through the regional meeting representatives from communities will meet to discuss the preliminary outcome of the project and further inform on assessment techniques and needs. A meeting report and findings will be drafted and shared with all community participants.



We have currently sent out a summary of the project to the 95 tribal councils represented by ICC-AK, through our member organizations and are contacting each tribal council to answer any questions and document feedback. In August we began village visits within the Bering Straits region, followed by visits to villages within the North Slope Region and the Northwest Arctic Region. We will visit the remaining villages through January, February and March.