

# *Arctic Peoples Culture, Resilience and Caribou*

International Polar Year 2009-2011



Gwich'in Council  
International



# Partners

- **Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)**
- **Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN)**
- **Gwich'in Council International (GCI)**
- **Inuit Tapirit Kanatami (ITK)**
- **Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)**
- **Dene Nation (DN)**
- **Dr. Chris Furgal**  
Indigenous Environmental Studies Program, Trent University
- **Dr. Brenda Parlee**  
Faculty of Native Studies, Faculty of Agricultural Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Alberta

# ACRC Project

- Researching the connections between the Health of the Land and the Health of Communities (Social-Ecological Health)
  - *Social-Ecological Relations relating to Barren Ground Caribou*

# Resilience

- “Social-Ecological Resilience”:
  - *“The ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-organisation, and the capacity to adapt to stress and change” (p. 880).*

# Ecological Changes

- Many kinds of ecological change being experienced by northern communities:
  - Natural changes (e.g. variations in population of wildlife);
  - Contaminants in traditional foods;
  - Hazards associated with climate variability and change (e.g. forest fire, sea ice melt)
  - Mining and oil and gas exploration and development;

# Factors for Response

- Many factors influence the ability of individuals, households and communities to respond:
  - Social Networks (e.g. extended families, regional relations)

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  - Traditional knowledge and Cultural Resources (e.g. past knowledge about environmental change)

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  - Governance (e.g. co-management boards)



# Resilience

- “Resilience”, or the ability of communities to cope and adapt, will differ depending upon:
  - Resources and nature of ecological change;
    - (e.g. caribou population decline versus contaminants in fish population)
  - Community, Regional Setting
    - (e.g. past experiences with development; cultural histories);

# Approach

- Study will take place between 2009-2011
- Steering Committee of Representatives of Aboriginal organizations to direct the study;
- Research carried out by community researchers in cooperation with academic researchers from Trent University and the University of Alberta (Graduate Students of Furgal and Parlee);

# Approach

- Complimentary case studies in Nunavut, Yukon and the Northwest Territories;
- Community-Based and Regional Research ;
- Specific research activities with elders, adults, youth;
- Strong focus on Traditional Ecological Knowledge;
- Academically multidisciplinary (e.g. linking health and ecology)

# Implications

- Anticipate that both the research process and outcomes will have policy implications in the following areas:
  - “Traditional economy” versus “Wage Economy”
  - Planning and Management of Proposed Development Projects (e.g. environmental assessments);
  - Links between environmental management and health and well-being of northern communities;

# Final Comments

- We look forward to sharing and learning with and from the community of Aklavik and all of the Gwich'in communities in the NWT, Yukon and Alaska;
- This is a very exciting project and we can't wait to share the results;