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Grizzly Bear

Bridging the divide in Nunavut



Polar Bear

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Breaking the ice about the *Species at Risk Act*

Joanne Tuckwell knows how it feels to be lost in translation. She was teaching a course about the *Species at Risk Act* in Coral Harbour, Nunavut, when the two simultaneous interpreters she'd booked for the day failed to arrive. "One girl in the course volunteered to try it out. I would say one sentence in English; she would say one sentence in Inuktitut," said Tuckwell, the Species at Risk Coordinator for Parks Canada's Western Service Centre.



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The experience was a living illustration of the gap between the residents of Nunavut, known as Nunavummiut, and the federal government – a gap the *Nunavummiut and Species at Risk* course is trying to help bridge. The course aims to inform the Nunavummiut about the *Act*, the process and consequences of listing species, and the role that they can play. "They don't trust the *Species at Risk Act*. They don't understand it, and they don't trust it," Tuckwell said. "So we decided to do this course as a way to reach out to northern communities and to start speaking the same language when it comes to species at risk."

Species on thin ice

Coral Harbour is one of five Nunavummiut communities involved in managing *Ukkusiksalik National Park*, a 20,500 km² wilderness on the western shore of Hudson Bay. The park is home to at least three mammals that the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (*COSEWIC*) has recommended for listing under the *Act*: *Polar Bear*, *Grizzly Bear* and *Wolverine*. Although scientists who study these predators in the southern part of their range have noticed habitat loss and declining survival rates, Nunavummiut have different views, based on their experience on the land.



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Wolverine

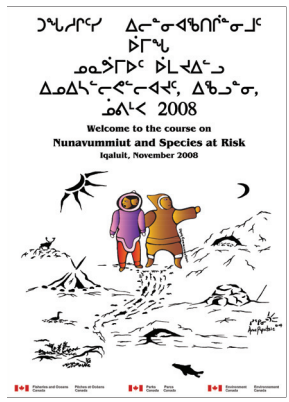
Under the Nunavut land claim agreement, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board sets the hunting quotas across the territory. The Board also has a mandated role to provide the Minister of the Environment with their decision on whether to list a species under the Act.

The suggestion of listing Polar Bears, Grizzlies and Wolverines was met with strong opposition on the part of the Management Board; and with suspicion and outrage on the part of the Nunavummiut. Among other things, they were concerned that listing the animals would interfere with their hunting rights.

"They still rely on hunting and fishing a lot," said Tuckwell. "Their knowledge about the animals on their land is amazing."

The tensions that arose surrounding the misunderstanding of the provisions of the Act convinced species at risk specialists from Parks Canada and their colleagues at Environment Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to develop the course in collaboration with Nunavut partners who would bring the Inuit perspective. For example, people did not understand that Aboriginal hunting rights can be protected, even if a species is listed.

Because of their lack of information about the Act, Inuit people were missing opportunities to contribute to knowledge about the species of the North, and to have their voices heard. For example, if a species is listed as Special Concern, the federal government must develop a management plan for it. Under such a plan, grants could be available for Inuit to conduct field research on the animals, or to interview elders and develop maps about their historic range.



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Quttinirpaaq, Sirmilik, Auyuittuq and Ukkusiksalik National Parks of Canada

Speaking the same language

Since its development in 2008, the course has been delivered several times. In evaluating the course, participants remarked that it was highly relevant, and that the format stimulated dialogue between participants and trainers. For Parks staff, the course has also provided an opportunity to learn about the concerns of Nunavummiut and gain respect for their knowledge of species at risk in Nunavut. One of the key lessons learned is the importance of good interpretation. The ideal situation is to have the same interpreter every time the course is given, plus an additional interpreter from each community. As well, it is best to have an elder chair the meetings, as they are the most respected members of the community.



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Tuckwell concluded that she's learned to have modest expectations. *"Is it helping to ease tensions on this whole thing? I hope so,"* she said. *"I feel like I've usually reached a couple of people each time. By 'reach,' I mean they have a better understanding and that they are now in a good position to be involved."* In the end, everyone is learning through the process, and Parks Canada's objective will be reached when Nunavummiut strongly contribute to the recovery of species at risk.

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