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Sahtu youth research impacts of climate change on land, livelihood through new network

by [Meagan Wohlberg](#)



Sahtu youth take part in an environmental monitoring course at Drum Lake in 2014.

Sahtu youth are starting up their snowmobiles and heading out on the land this winter to get a before-and-after picture that will illustrate how climate change is impacting the land and their way of life.

Members of the Sahtu Youth Network, a new organization composed of youth from communities across the region, are in the process of conducting their own research linking health and climate change adaptation that involves doing field work and talking to elders.

Though the network as a whole is working together as a unit, each community is carrying out its own branch of the research, according to youth network member Kristen Kodakin of Tulita, who is leading a project in her community along with research partner Joanne Krutko.

“Joanne and I are going to our grandmother’s cabin to record everything; what used to be a trail, what was happening back in the day – a before-and-after kind of deal,” Kodakin said.

Heading out to Old Fort Point – around two hours by snowmobile from Tulita – with cameras, the team hopes to document changes to the ecosystem, “and how it affects our cabins, or us, or the animals – anything specific to climate change,” Kodakin said. “Like there used to be a really good trail, but now you can’t really cross it because it’s all bushed in.”

Those findings will then be brought to elders to incorporate traditional knowledge into the analysis to see how much of a role climate change could be playing in the changes.

“We’re going to be recording elders’ stories and stuff like that,” Kodakin said, “to ask them how was the land before and then show them what we found and get their reaction to it and what they think it’s all about.”

Network opening doors for youth

The Sahtu Youth Network began forming early last year in order to ensure youth involvement in environmental, cultural and land-based research in the region.

Just last month, the network made its first presentation to the research community at a regional workshop featuring scientists and monitors from a number of agencies. Kodakin said being considered a peer at the event was a major milestone for the youth in terms of boosting their confidence and knowledge.

“It was so good just hearing what everybody has been working on all these years. It was mind-blowing,” Kodakin said. “They were really supportive. We got a lot of good feedback and comments and it was really successful, and I would love to do that again.”

Kodakin, who was hired last year as an intern at the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board office, said her experience with the youth network has opened up doors for her educationally, that are inspiring her to go further. After completing environmental monitoring training last year in the region, she recently applied for the Environment and Natural Resources Technology Program at Aurora College.

“It’s time for me that I did something positive and productive for my community and my youth members, and I want them to be able to see and realize that this group can help them in many ways,” she said of the network. “I just applied for school and I want to do that so I can benefit myself education-wise in my community for when I come back and tell them what I’ve been learning. This group, this could be their entrance into that. This could open their eyes.”

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