

Sahtú Environmental Research and Monitoring Forum

Terms of Reference

(last revised, April, 2016)

Background

Many environmental research and monitoring programs and projects are underway in the Sahtú Region. During a three-day meeting in November, 2013, representatives of Sahtú organisations, government and industry reached a consensus that such programs and projects should be well coordinated, with strong guidance from Sahtú communities. Community, regional, territorial and federal governments, as well as industry, require research that will target management decisions and support wise, evidence-based decision-making.

As a consequence, Sahtú organizations and the Government of the Northwest Territories (led by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources) agreed to create a Forum that will support research and monitoring proponents and Sahtú organisations in sharing priorities, plans and proposals, providing feedback and guidance, and coordinating objectives and activities. The aim is to more effectively address important issues in the Sahtú.

With climate change effects and potential cumulative impacts from future possible development scenarios, the need for this work is expanding. During a series of meetings in 2015-2016, Forum members agreed current low oil and commodity prices present an opportunity for coordinated planning and communications with the development of a strategic research and monitoring framework in preparation for possible development of the shale oil play in the Tulí'a District as well as other land uses in the region.

As Renewable Resource Councils in each Sahtú community have a special role in research in collaboration with the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board as mandated by the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, there is also a need to focus on supporting and resourcing Renewable Resource Councils as well as creating consistent opportunities for their collaboration.

Vision

Environmental monitoring and research programs and projects in the Sahtú are coordinated and conducted in ways that reflect regional and community priorities, engage communities, value both western science and traditional knowledge, and support wise decision-making.

Purpose

The Sahtú Environmental Research and Monitoring (ERM) Forum will take the lead in supporting environmental research and monitoring by providing a venue for discussing plans and accommodating the priorities and traditional knowledge of Sahtú communities.

Objectives

The Forum will address the following objectives in supporting environmental research and monitoring in the Sahtú Region:

- Identify regional priorities and research gaps
- Build cross-cultural understanding
- Respect, support and protect traditional knowledge processes
- Support regional and regulatory decision-making based on evidence from science and traditional knowledge
- Support youth leadership development
- Build local capacity in the Sahtú to collaborate in, coordinate and lead research
- Identify opportunities for: collaborative research involving communities; communication; information-sharing; and cross-cultural interpretation of research results.

Guiding Principles

The Forum is cross-cultural, and our processes are based on the following principles of mutual respect:

- All comments are important
- All members can openly share their opinions
- Decisions are made by consensus.
- Be open-minded/don't judge
- Information is plain language whether in Dene or English language, and shared with communities
- Stay focused on objectives
- Think past, present, and into the future

Forum Structure

The Forum is led by a Chairperson and supported by a Forum Resource Group.

Chairperson:

- The Forum is led by a Chairperson who is appointed by a consensus decision of the group.
- The appointment is reviewed annually.
- The Chairperson works with the Forum Support Group to set meeting agendas, and to facilitate meetings.

Forum Membership:

The Forum consists of representation from each of the five Renewable Resources Councils in

the Sahtú Region; youth representatives from each Sahtú community, the Sahtú Secretariat, the territorial and federal governments, industry, and the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board.

- The majority of the members are Sahtú beneficiaries.
- Alternates are delegated to ensure consistent membership and attendance.
- The Forum may identify additional delegates by consensus to participate as needed.

The membership should include people with a range of qualifications, including:

- Aboriginal harvesters
- Strong communicators
- Expertise in traditional knowledge and science
- Leadership abilities
- Action oriented
- Passionate

Forum Resource Group:

- The Forum Resource Group may consist of staff from the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) and Industry, Tourism and Investment, Government of Northwest Territories, and the Central Mackenzie Explorers Group (CMEG).
- The Forum Resource Group assists the Chair in planning and organizing Forum activities, recording meeting notes, securing funding, administrating finances and delivering plain language and technical documents and reports.

Roles of Forum Members

Forum members assist in achieving the objectives of the Forum in the following ways:

- Attend meetings or send an alternate.
- Be prepared – read background material before each meeting.
- Review and provide feedback on documents distributed by email.
- Provide guidance to the Forum.
- Report back to communities or organizations.

Forum Activities

The Forum will meet its objectives through activities that will include, but may not be limited to:

1. Development of a five-year Sahtú research and monitoring strategy
2. Consistent updates from researchers with proposed projects or activities in progress
3. Discussions of research license applications under consideration and review by Forum members
4. Assessments of progress on Forum objectives, and updated Terms of Reference.

Meeting Frequency and Procedures

- An in-person meeting at least twice per year.
- A cross-cultural on the land camp once per year.
- At least six additional meetings by teleconference, with a frequency to be determined according to workload. Teleconference agendas will be circulated at least a week in advance of meetings with notes circulated within a week following the meeting.
- Meeting locations will be determined by consensus of the Forum Membership with consideration of budget constraints.
- Plain language summaries of reports and important documents will be prepared.
- Summary documents will be used by Forum Members as support in their written and verbal communications back to the Organization that they represent.
- As required, representatives of Sahtú-based organisations will caucus by teleconference or in person, in order to develop inputs for consideration by the larger Forum, or to address Sahtú coordination and capacity building that is not directly applicable to other member organisations.

Reimbursement of Meeting Costs

Meeting costs including travel expenses and honoraria for Forum members, as required, will be reimbursed with administrative support from the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board as per the Government of the NWT funding guidelines.