



Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna

# Salmon Peoples of Arctic Rivers

April 2019

Progress Report 2017-2019



ARCTIC COUNCIL

# Acknowledgements

## **CAFF Designated Agencies:**

- Norwegian Environment Agency, Trondheim, Norway
- Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ottawa, Canada
- Museum of Natural History, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands (Kingdom of Denmark)
- Ministry of the Environment, Helsinki, Finland
- Icelandic Institute of Natural History, Reykjavik, Iceland
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Greenland
- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Moscow, Russia
- Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Stockholm, Sweden
- Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska

## **CAFF Permanent Participant Organisations:**

- Aleut International Association (AIA)
- Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)
- Gwich'in Council International (GCI)
- Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)
- Russian Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON)
- Saami Council

Cover photo: Mickey Stickman fishing on the Yukon. Photo by: Mickey Stickman

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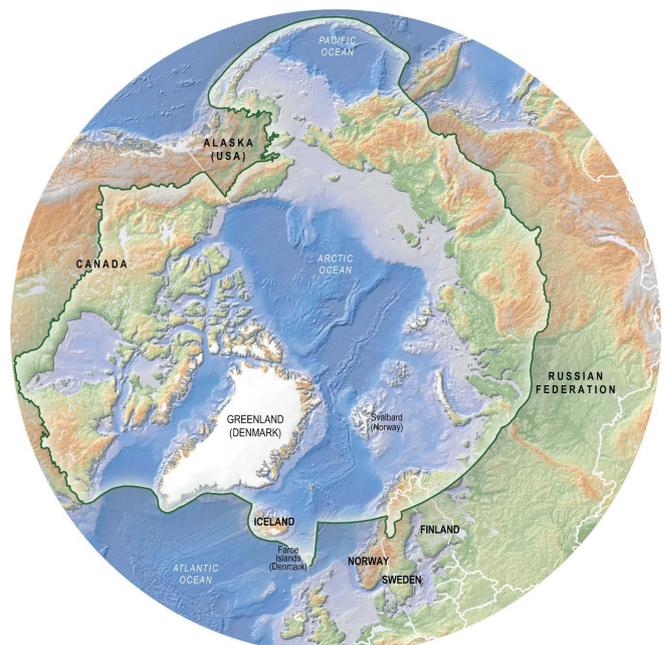
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## Progress report: 2017-2019

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*“It’s important for us to all have this conversation because... no matter what happens in Norway and in Finland, their salmon, the Kamchatka salmon, Yukon River salmon and the Kuskokwim River salmon. It’s all Arctic salmon, so you know so it’s important for us to have this conversation together, because we all have positions ...where we can actually make a difference by having this conversation. We can influence change. Not just for the fish but for also for ourselves and for the future of fish.”* —Chief Mickey Stickman, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Nulato, Alaska

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## 1. Salmon Peoples and a salmon social-ecological assessment

Arctic biodiversity is essential for the physical and spiritual well-being of Indigenous Peoples who have a unique relationship to their environment. The connection that Indigenous Peoples have to the Arctic environment is through their direct relationships to the fauna and flora of the places where they subsist. This relationship encompasses food security where food is collected, food is processed, and shared. The Arctic marine and Freshwater environments, and activities occurring there influence and play a large role for Indigenous communities along the coast, rivers, hundreds of miles inland, and across international borders. Salmon is one species that connects across all of these ecosystems and borders.

On September 12-13, 2018, the Arctic Council’s Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group (CAFF) convened a workshop of Indigenous salmon fishers in Fairbanks, Alaska. Indigenous representatives from the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), the Saami Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and the Aleut International Association (AIA) participated in the workshop. On the second day, representatives from a variety of government agencies and the University of Alaska-Fairbanks were also in attendance.

This interim progress report provides an update on progress, context for the project, and identifies some key themes from the first Salmon Peoples of Arctic Rivers workshop held in Fairbanks in September 2018, and outlines next steps.

## 2. What does it mean to be *Salmon Peoples*?

Arctic river systems, whose waters flow both to and from the Arctic Ocean, have and continue to be a source of food for Indigenous Peoples. As part of their food security, harvesting and activities related to salmon are part of Indigenous Peoples' identities: many Indigenous communities are "Salmon Peoples" of the Arctic, a term that recognizes the inextricable bond between human and non-human species in the Indigenous worldview. This was affirmed by workshop participants:

*"To salmon we are spiritually connected, we are historically connected but we are also culturally connected to the salmon."* Orville Lind, Chignik/Anchorage, Alaska, Aleutiiq

*"It's ingrained with our families, it's ingrained within our dance, it's ingrained within our songs, it is ingrained within our culture sharing. And I believe that largely describes our salmon-people. Or what it means to be a salmon-people."* Tim Andrews, Bethel, Alaska, Inupiaq

*"When I think of fish I think there's more than ...subsistence; there's a lot more to it. ...A fishing spirit I guess you'd call it. Like the same as a bear teaches its cubs to hunt, or a wolf teaches its cubs... Like you go out fishing with your dad or your mom or whoever. You get...the feeling that's an adrenaline rush, like you catch a fish and you're like, 'There it is!' And ... it's like a spirit. Like an animal, when the two bears, mama cub or the baby cub are eating the fish and they enjoyed it. There's like a relationship. A bond ... And if the fish aren't there then there's no meetings... no conversation. And you're taking away the memories that upbringing of adolescent youth that you know could possibly want to learn about fish ... So, if there's nobody there to talk about it, then there's no fish pretty much, I think. Or [ability] to protect fish."* Dennis Huntington, Galena/Fairbanks, Alaska, Athabaskan

The Arctic Council has recognized that the use of Traditional Knowledge (TK) is essential to a sustainable future in the Arctic (Kiruna Declaration 2013). The Permanent Participants<sup>1</sup> of the Arctic Council advocate the use of the term "Indigenous Knowledge" as the best way in which to encapsulate these ways of knowing. In response to these calls of inclusion, the *Salmon Peoples of Arctic Rivers* project was developed. The project is led by the AAC, Saami Council, RAIPON, and AIA. ICC is also on the project steering committee.

The project is multi-phased, involving TK holders, scientists from academia and government agencies. This project is designing an assessment of salmon social-ecological systems, drawing on those aspects of TK that are often referred to as "wisdom," which contributes to Indigenous conservation theory and practice. The design of this holistic assessment will focus on "Salmon peoples" as a measure of ecosystem health, and outline future data needs that could contribute to the resilience and adaptation of these peoples and the salmon populations upon which they depend.

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<sup>1</sup> Six Indigenous peoples' organizations have been granted Permanent Participants status in the Arctic Council (Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Saami Council). The Permanent Participants have full consultation rights in connection with the Council's negotiations and decisions.

### 3. Why and how? Knowledge co-production

This project will contribute to the implementation of recommendation 14 from the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA 2013), and seeks ways to enhance the integration of TK as well as encouraging a co-production of knowledge approach. The workshops planned for this project are helping to facilitate an interdisciplinary dialogue between TK holders and scientists, i.e. knowledge co-production.

*ABA #14: Recognize the value of traditional ecological knowledge and work to further integrate it into the assessment, planning and management of Arctic biodiversity. This includes involving Arctic peoples and their knowledge in the survey, monitoring and analysis of Arctic biodiversity.*

Many scholars advocate co-production approaches because current conceptual models about nature, environmental change, and humanity's role must be revised to develop more flexible social-ecological systems that can be resilient to change, that is, "absorb disturbance and still retain its basic function and structure" (Walker & Salt 2006, Arctic Resilience Report 2016). Resilience scholars argue, "It isn't just the amount of knowledge—details about species and ecosystems—it's also the kind of knowledge. It's the way we conceive of resource systems and people as part of them" (Walker and Salt 2006). The *Salmon Peoples of Arctic Rivers* project is therefore working to create a practice of "knowledge co-production" with Indigenous fishers and scientists, in order to bring new insights into environmental and social change in the Arctic and generate new research questions relevant to the Arctic.

### 4. Summary of first workshop

The first workshop focused on a place-based comparison of the:

- Yukon/Kuskokwim River system (flowing through the U.S. and Canada, the territories used by Athabaskan, Gwich'in, and Inuit (Yup'ik and Cup'ik) tribes);
- Kamchatka river system (flowing through the Siberian region of the Russian Federation, the territories used by Russian Indigenous peoples); and the
- Deatnu/Teno River system (flowing through the Lapland region of Finland and Finnmark County of Norway, the territories used by Saami).

Salmon on these river systems are undergoing changes that challenge the food security of the peoples who rely upon them.

The primary project deliverable for phase 1 will be a workshop report, outlining a procedure to complete an assessment, co-produced with the Indigenous co-leads as well as scientists from academia and government agencies. This report will evaluate the workshop and process thus far, including the importance of providing Indigenous foods at the workshop, and the significance of sharing food in concert with sharing ideas in a conversation. Analysis of the outcomes from this first workshop will summarize what we learned across these Indigenous regions:

- How to predict when salmon arrive;
- How different cultures thank the salmon for their arrival;
- Different techniques of harvesting and processing:
  - Variation (spatial) between inland and coastal systems; and
  - Variation (temporal) caused by climate and social changes.

- Species and activities affected by and affecting changes in salmon populations;
- Roles that salmon play in both subsistence/barter and market economies;
- What cultures have done when salmon have declined before (shifting harvests to other species and adopting different practices); and
- The importance of the intergenerational persistence of salmon peoples.

#### 4.1. Assessment scope

Participants have identified steps to take when designing the assessment, in terms of scope and assessment design. The geographic scope of rivers was also evaluated, and it was agreed that the CAFF boundaries is not large enough, and that there was a need to include the sub-Arctic—a difference from the boundaries used by the State of the Arctic Freshwater Biodiversity Report (CAFF 2019). Participants therefore proposed an enlarged scope for the assessment which would include fishing communities in Bristol Bay, the headwaters of the Yukon, and other coastal Inuit communities that live with salmon. To reflect these changes the project would be retitled to *Salmon Peoples of the Arctic*, since salmon occupy rivers as well as ocean and coastal ecosystems.

#### 4.2. Assessment design

Participants in the workshop and the project steering committee are currently undertaking the analysis of the final workshop transcript. A key element of continued success is the importance of including youth in future stages of the project. Thus far, those participating in analysis suggest that future stages convene smaller working groups for exploring the following issues:

- Using the ICC food security framework as a model, identify and articulate significant drivers of system change and methods used to cope with changes?
- Developing a model of the interactions between coastal-inland social-ecological systems
- Developing a timeline for the history of management and Indigenous participation in governance of wildlife
- Articulating an indigenous concept of research ethics with regard to salmon and salmon-peoples

### 5. Timeline and milestones

Development of project concept	2010-2015	Completed
Presentations to Arctic Council	2013-2014	Completed
Approval of “Salmon Peoples of Arctic Rivers” project as CAFF work plan item	2015	Completed
Funding secured from Alaska Conservation Foundation, Alaska Native Fund and the USFW	2015-2018	Completed
Project Steering committee formed: co-leads, CAFF Secretariat, ICC, the US and Tanana Chiefs Conference.	2018 March	Completed
First Workshop, Fairbanks Alaska	2018, Sept 12-13	Completed
Analysis of first workshop, drafting of report	Spring 2019	Ongoing
Report of first workshop delivered to CAFF	August 2019	Planned
Phase II-III of project to design assessment	2020-2022	Dependent upon funding

## 6. What is special about this project?

The *Salmon Peoples of Arctic River* project is distinct from most previous efforts to include TK in Arctic Council activities, and distinct from recent research on communities that rely upon salmon (e.g., Carothers et al 2012; Kolarctic Salmon Project 2013). Although research on individual case studies, fishing practices, and the specific TK and Local knowledge of salmon will be relevant to provide data for an assessment of “Salmon Peoples, and uniquely for an Arctic Council project ” this project starts with a focus on TK.

The project aims to organize information about salmon and people in ways that will be relevant to existing TK holders, leaders, and their communities—organizing information from all knowledge systems, guided by the wisdom of TK holders.

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