

Integrating Traditional Knowledge

A diversity of world views supports human adaptability and resilience. The Government of Canada recognizes and values the knowledge that Aboriginal communities have built over the millennia and is seeking new ways to apply this knowledge to the challenges of sustainable development. Traditional ecological knowledge can provide long-term and detailed data about wildlife resources and ecological processes on lands and waters. Such knowledge is increasingly being twinned with modern science to complement the perspectives of each. One example is the Inuit Knowledge Study in Canada's newest northern territory, Nunavut.

Inuit Bowhead Knowledge Study

Under terms of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board undertook a project from 1995 to 1999 to document Inuit knowledge of bowhead whales in the Nunavut Settlement Area. Through an extensive series of interviews and workshops with Inuit elders and hunters, information was gathered on the history of whaling in the area; the seasonal distribution, trends in abundance, ecology, and behaviour of bowhead whales; and the cultural and traditional importance of these whales to the Inuit.

Because the bowhead whale has been so important to the culture and survival of the Inuit until recent years, most Inuit would like to see the bowhead hunt resumed. They believe a renewed hunt would both revitalize Inuit culture, restoring old knowledge and traditions, and become an important component in a successful strategy for conservation of the bowhead in Nunavut. This study concluded that a limited and ongoing bowhead hunt is feasible using a regionally based management system.



Photo credit: Johnny Nowdlak.