Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Biological Sampling of Non-Salmon Fish Species in the Yukon Flats Region, Alaska

This project combines social scientific and biological methods to contribute to contemporary knowledge of non-salmon fish species in the communities of Fort Yukon, Circle, Central, Beaver, and Birch Creek. Centered in the Birch Creek area, these communities have long relied on non-salmon fish species for subsistence purposes. This project complements other projects funded by the Office of Subsistence Management to present a comprehensive picture of subsistence harvests of whitefish *Coregonus* and *Prosopium cylindraceum*, sheefish *Stenodus leucichthys*, northern pike *Esox lucius*, Arctic grayling *Thymallus arcticus*, longnose sucker *Catostomus catostomus*, burbot *Lota lota*, and Alaska blackfish *Dallia pectoralis* for a significant stretch of the Yukon, Koyukuk, and Tanana River drainages. Since the beginning of this study in April of 2006, 21 key respondent interviews were completed with 22 individuals, and all five study communities were surveyed for their non-salmon fish harvests.

This study revealed the highly variable use of whitefish and other non-salmon fish in the southern Yukon Flats. The importance of these resources in the past and to the present and the change in relative imporatance of specific species is now better undertood. Several themes emerged from the harvest surveys and key respondent interviews. For example, the use of specific non-salmon fish is based on a variety of factors, including the presence and influence of elders, the perceived need for food by those who cannot obtain wild foods on their own, the need to prepare for cultural events such as potlatches, and the perceived relative condition (i.e., health, taste, appearance, size) of the fish as compared to another species. Although the use of place-names is almost entirely in English, some elders recalled the Gwich'in names for certain land features that served to provide information about changing land and water conditions due to climate change.

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