



Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission

Winter 2023 Newsletter

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How Many Bears are on the Land?



Left: Tamra Jones (Tazlina) navigating to a bear hair collection station along Paxson Lake.
Right: Petros Platis poses by a free-standing hair collection tripod.

AITRC's GMU13 bear hair collection project in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) finished their final year of data collection this past field season. The 2022 field season was a huge success! The project was able to cover more ground than ever before, covering 16 clusters that were 30 km² and collecting 1,500 samples. Samples have now been sent to the lab to be identified in order to get a population abundance of bears in GMU13.

Protecting Our Cultural Sites



Catharine McClellan photographing a wooden dish on a pile of cut logs, Chitina, July 6th, 1954. Photographed by Frederica de Laguna.

AITRC's Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) Project started because of gross negligence and encroachment on historic cultural sites near Chitina. Chitina Native Corporation, Native Village of Chitina, and Ahtna Incorporated created a task force to address these concerns. The Native Village of Chitina approached AITRC about creating a THPO to

inventory these important cultural sites and resources. This project is funded through the Administration for Native Americans.

AITRC's THPO Project Coordinator has been hard at work setting up a THPO in Chitina to preserve and protect Ahtna Hwt'aene cultural sites while building a strong relationship with state and federal agencies. AITRC has contracted an archaeological firm to conduct surveys and complete fieldwork in the summer of 2023. They will verify and document known cultural sites while adding sites that have not yet been recorded to our internal database.

Collaboration Across Borders

AITRC staff co-hosted the Northwest Boreal Partnership Transboundary gathering in Tonsina, Alaska. Attendees included the Bureau of Land Management, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, Alaska Conservation Fund, Copper River Watershed Project, the Natural Resource Conservation Service,



The attendees of the Northwest Boreal Partnership pose for a group photo!

Yukon Land Use Planning Council, Sahtu Renewable Resource Board members, and other Alaskan and Canadian Tribal citizens and partners. AITRC's Executive Director, Karen Linnell, participated on the panel and discussed transformative changes in land planning specifically touching on opportunities and models for incorporating indigenous, transboundary, and collaborative approaches.



The Klutina River Sonar Workstation where sonar data is reviewed and fish are counted.



Raven Northway (Cheesh'na) and Lauren Didio measure the salmon before identifying the sex and taking otolith and genetic samples.

Klutina Sonar Study

AITRC and the Native Village of Eyak (NVE) partnered on the Klutina River Sonar Project. The project is based on the Klutina River, because 33-54% of sockeye and 12% of Chinook returning to the Copper River spawn in the Klutina.

The season was a huge success! The ARIS sonar unit was deployed and monitored around the clock from June 16th to August 11th. They were able to capture the entire runtime. They counted for 20 minutes out of every hour. The count was ~28,000 salmon nearshore, when expanded that's over 80,000 salmon that passed by the sonar.

AITRC and NVE will be continuing this pilot project through 2024. We are looking for funding to continue the program for years to come, as well as acquire another sonar unit for the river's far shore to provide a more accurate escapement estimate. The plan is to have weekly counts that can inform in-season management decisions.

Otoliths & Scales

AITRC worked with ADF&G to collect otoliths ("ear bones") from sockeye salmon and scales from Chinook salmon which are used for aging. Sex, length, and genetic data were collected from both sockeye and Chinook. Gulkana Hatchery sockeye salmon otoliths are marked with strontium before being released into the Copper River. This marking is present throughout their lifetime and help scientists determine if they are hatchery or wild fish. The goal of this project was to quantify how many hatchery-raised sockeye return to the Copper River. Over 800 salmon were sampled in the subsistence fishery from Chitina to Chistochina during the 2022 summer field season. AITRC is grateful to all the fishwheel owners that let us collect samples from them.



Can you spot the two otoliths in the picture? The salmon we sample are caught for subsistence and then anglers and fishwheel owners are generous enough to let us collect samples from their harvest!

Indigenous Knowledge Influences AITRC's Research



An example of a sample kit from the Moose Health Monitoring Program. Kits can currently be picked up at AITRC.

AITRC's Moose Health Monitoring Program began after Elders and Tribal citizens raised concerns over abnormalities they've seen in moose over the years. To address these concerns, we created a project to identify any heavy metals in moose that may be harmful to human consumption. In the first year, we collected ten samples, that will be sent off for

analysis. We also received a grant through the Environmental Justice Defense Fund to continue this research through May 2025. This project is only possible if harvesters provide AITRC with small samples of the liver, kidney, hair, teeth, and fecal pellets from harvested moose. To find out more and get a detailed description of the samples needed visit our [website](#).

Remember you can turn in samples from salvage moose as well!!

Challenging Systematic Inequalities to Protect our Food Security



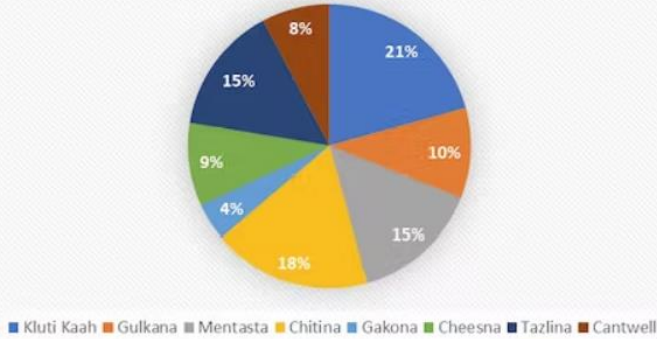
Robert Sequack (AITRC Board Member from the Native Village of Gakona), Karen Linnell (AITRC Executive Director), Donna Renard (AITRC Board Member from the Native Village of Tazlina).

Kelsey Stanbro (AITRC's Ecologist), Karen Linnell (AITRC's Executive Director), and Sterling Spilinek (AITRC's Wildlife Biologist).

In December AITRC staff and Board members attended the Intertribal Agricultural Conference (IAC). This year's conference highlighted the decades of resilience and grit needed in challenging the systemic inequalities and barriers that Tribes face while dealing with food security. The conference focused on how we can ensure that Native voices inform the policies that affect us most.

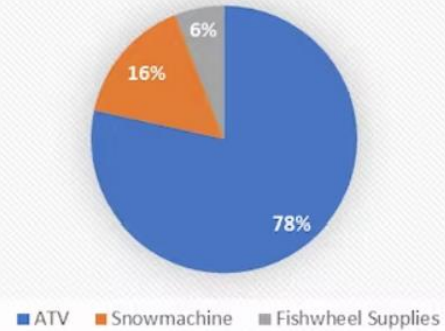
Creating Opportunities for Subsistence Activities

Applications per Villages



The percentage of applications AITRC received from each village.

Applications per Item



The percentage of applications AITRC received for the three different harvest tools.

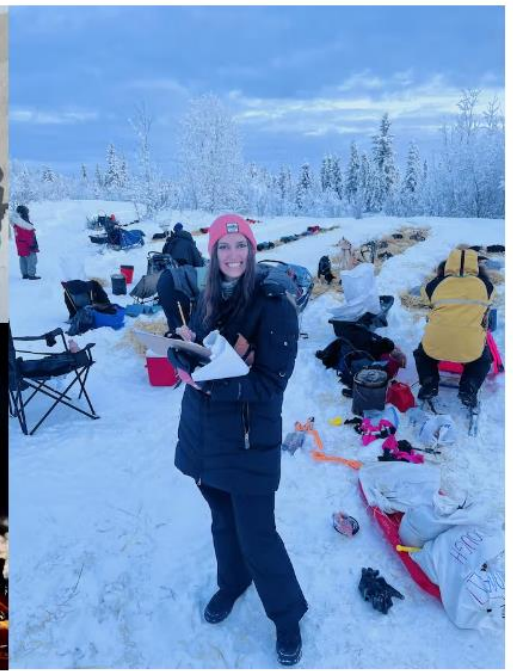
We were astonished at the overwhelming response to AITRC's Subsistence Harvest Tools Grant funded by the Native American Agricultural Fund. We received 116 applications from all eight of the Ahtna tribes. Applications were ranked and the top applicants were invited to round two. Where they have the opportunity to provide additional information to help AITRC's Board choose grant recipients.



From left to right: Tessa Wittman, Shirley Cain, Tamra Jones (Ahtna Inc.'s Deputy Trespass Enforcement Specialist), and Edward GreyBear (Ahtna Inc.'s Customary and Traditional Coordinator) wait for the last dog sled team to arrive at the Sourdough Checkpoint.



Top photo from left to right: Sterling Spillinek (AITRC's Wildlife Biologist), Nick Patterson (BLM's Recreation Technician/ Laborer), Tim Skeebea (BLM's Forester), and Bruce Cain (Ahtna Inc.'s Special Projects Manager) after setting up the Sourdough Checkpoint.



Kelsey Stanbro (AITRC's Ecologist) checks dog sled teams in and out at the Sourdough Checkpoint.

Bottom photo: The Northern lights over the Sourdough Checkpoint.

Teamwork at CB300

AITRC, Ahtna Inc., and the BLM Glennallen Field Office staff teamed up to run the Sourdough Checkpoint during the Copper Basin 300 this January. AITRC staff provided wall tents and staff volunteered to help set up and take down camp and check dog teams in and out of the checkpoint. During the CB300 Banquet dog sled teams raved about the Sourdough Checkpoint, calling it the best checkpoint of the race!

SAY HELLO TO AITRC'S NEWEST STAFF!



We are excited to announce two new additions to the AITRC staff!! Casey Cusick (left) will be AITRC's new GIS Specialist/ ISN Project Coordinator. Casey is coming to AITRC from Austin, Texas. He has an AAS degree in Commercial Music Management from Austin Community College and received two Bachelors degrees from Texas State University in Wildlife Biology and Resources & Environmental Studies. Casey obtained a GIS Certification in 2022 and is excited to further his GIS career at AITRC.

David Hooper (right) is AITRC's new Anthropologist. David attended the University of Montana, where he earned Bachelor's degrees in Wildlife Biology, and Botany, and a Doctorate in Anthropology. His graduate research was a study of the cultural and ecological factors influencing the practices used by Members of the Nisqually tribe to harvest plants from Mount Rainier National Park. David hopes his experiences will bring an ethnobiological perspective that benefits AITRC's many projects.



Important Dates

- **January 31-February 3:** Federal Subsistence Board meeting in Anchorage
- **February 6-10:** Alaska Forum on the Environment (AFE)
- **February 23-24:** Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Subsistence Resource Committee
- **March 1-2:** Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) meeting
- **March 16-17:** Southcentral RAC meeting in Kenai
- **March 17-21:** Southcentral region Board of Game in Soldotna
- **April 17-21:** Northwest Boreal Partnership meeting in Whitehorse, CA
- **April 28-29:** AITRC's Annual Meeting in TBD
- **May 8-12:** 2023 North American Caribou Workshop & Arctic Ungulate Conference in Anchorage
- **June 3:** Ahtna Inc. Annual Meeting in Glennallen

Employment Opportunities with AITRC

- Several temporary Local Research Assistants (LRAs) are needed from Mentasta and Chistochina. Work will take place between March 6-17th. LRAs will work with project staff to contact households, schedule interviews, and conduct subsistence surveys with other community members. They also provide additional logistical support and valuable community input. Contact AITRC for more information.
- Stay tuned for summer job opportunities for Fisheries and Wildlife Technicians.
- You may also send in a cover letter and resume to connect@ahtnatribal.org and we can keep it on file for future job openings.