

Brief communication

First Nations communications and support program

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The Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research (IEMR) was established in 1995 in response to a recommendation by an independent environmental assessment panel, appointed by the federal government to review an Environmental Impact Statement on military flight training based out of Goose-Bay (Labrador). These activities are available for countries that are part of NATO (North-Atlantic treaty Organization). IEMR's main objectives is to conduct multi-disciplinary scientific research on the Labrador and north-eastern Québec ecosystems affected by the military low-level flying program, an area of over 130 000 km² (Fig. 1).

Two of the IEMR mandates are to foster a trust amongst all native and non-native groups affected by the military training program and to implicate aboriginal communities in research. Through these mandates, the IEMR has created its communication program with the following objectives:

- To promote understanding of concerns expressed by the aboriginal communities and of traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) by IEMR researchers, non-

aboriginal members of the IEMR board members, and the IEMR's Scientific Review Committee (SRC), which is an advisory group of recognized scientists to the board members;

- To allow the incorporation of TEK into IEMR research work;
- To ensure information exchange and facilitation between the SRC, IEMR researchers and First Nations experts (mostly elders) and foster a prop-

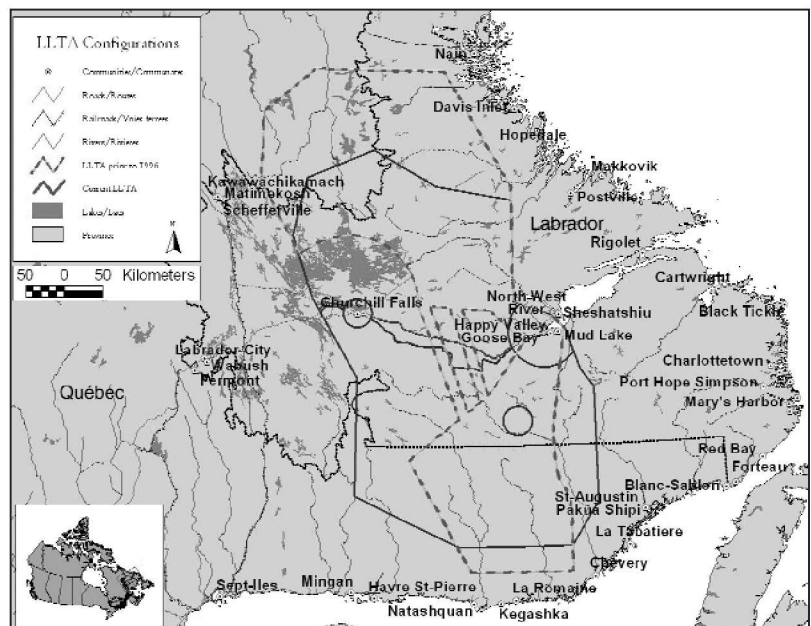


Fig. 1. Location showing military low-level training area and communities visited by the Institute of Environmental Monitoring and Research communication program

er understanding of research methodologies and the results obtained.

Through its communication program, which started in 1998, the IEMR has appointed a liaison officer to visit the communities that are situated in the surrounding of the military training area (Fig. 1). These communities are represented by the Innu Nation of Labrador and Mamit Innuat and by the Naskapi Nation of Québec. Visits are conducted in average two times per year. During each visit, the liaison officer meets with a committee of four native experts recognized for their knowledge of the territory and the wildlife. One

exception is the Naskapi Band of Kawawachikamach where the band council prefers the participation of eight experts within the same budget.

Topics of discussion include the presentation of current IEMR research, methodology used in research (radio-collaring, caribou capturing, etc.), aerial surveys of caribou and waterfowl and impact studies of military over flights on wildlife. During these discussions with native experts, the liaison officer records elements of native observations on several subjects such as caribou physical condition, migration patterns and habitat quality. An example of TEK that can be recorded is the map showing location of woodland caribou observation and good potential habitats to be consulted by the IEMR for future survey (Fig. 2). Meetings include regularly the participation of IEMR researchers, ensuring direct contact between researchers and aboriginal experts. The Institute also ensures participation of aboriginal human resources in field studies. These participants are, after the fieldwork, invited to share their experience and comments with the aboriginal experts at the next meetings with the liaison officer.

Concerns and suggestions brought up by experts during the meetings are later shared with members of SRC and non-aboriginal board members of the IEMR. Subsequent visits to the communities pro-

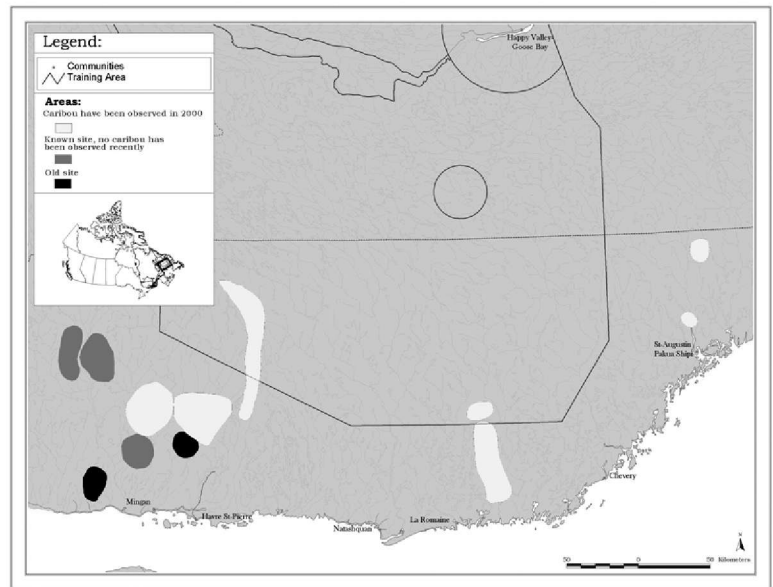


Fig. 2. Areas of high potential for the woodland caribou, identified by the experts committees of Mingan, La Romaine and Pakua-Shipi in fall 2000 (adapted from D'Astous, 2001).

vide a reply from the IEMR, thus assuring a proper flow of information.

Since the beginning of this communication program in 1998, the aboriginals have shared a great deal with the liaison officer and help change the perception that aboriginal and non-aboriginal have in regards to each other. It is now of primary importance to consolidate the communication process between the liaison officer, the Institute and the researchers it hires. In the opinion of the author, this communication program has reached a turning point. The Institute must henceforth require its scientists to demonstrate more openness in their work methods, particularly with regards to the handling of animals and the use of telemetric collars. As example, this can be realized in part by putting pressure on companies who are building the collars to improve them in regard of the animals comfort or by creating education program on environment for younger members of native community.

Literature cited

D'Astous, N. 2001. *First Nations Communication and Support Strategy: Second visit to the communities under the 2000-2001 program (October 19, 2000 to January 18, 2001)*. The Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research. Happy Valley-Goose Bay. 18 pp. + map.