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James Goldie/NNSL photo

Jean Polfus, left, of the University of Manitoba and one of her research partners, Frederick Andrew of Tulita, were at Aurora Research Institute on Nov. 19, presenting the findings of their recent study on caribou in the Sahtu region.

EMPLOYMENT, LEGAL NOTICES & TENDERS

Inuvialuit Water Board REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Inuvialuit Water Board (IWB), located in Inuvik, NT, is requesting proposals for:

Annual Financial Audit Services

The proposal should also include a Statement of Qualification to provide these services.

Proposals must be received by 4:00 pm, local time on December 18, 2015.

For a copy of the RFP including the scope of work, please contact:

Freda Wilson
Office Administrator
Inuvialuit Water Board
Ph: 867-678-2942
Email: wilsonf@nwtwb.com

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Genetic research meets Dene knowledge

New caribou study from the Sahtu region is presented in Inuvik

by James Goldie
Northern News Services

Traditional knowledge and DNA analysis have worked hand in hand to make new discoveries about caribou populations in the Northwest Territories.

Jean Polfus, a PhD candidate at the University of Manitoba's Natural Resources Institute, and her research partner, Frederick Andrew of Tulita, presented their study of caribou to several groups in Inuvik last week, including members of the general public, high school students and even a group of four-year-olds at the Children First Centre.

"We're trying to understand caribou variation by looking at caribou genetics as well as traditional knowledge through the traditional languages of Dene people," said Polfus at a public presentation at the Aurora Research Institute on Nov. 19.

"Language is important because it's how we categorize the variety, the diversity of life, the variety of plants and animals. And different language systems will do that in a different way. So by looking at multiple perspectives,

it allows us to kind of see where there are similarities and differences, and develop a broader understanding of the world."

Polfus' research, which began in 2013, involved collecting samples of caribou droppings from across the Sahtu region.

She described this method as a non-invasive approach that allows her and her team to collect a range of information (through DNA and hormones left behind in the scat samples) including sex, ancestral lineage, pregnancy and relationships between species.

But the work was not carried out exclusively in a laboratory.

Andrew opened the public presentation by sharing with the audience a phrase in Shúhtagot'ıne, a North Slavey dialect, which means collaboration.

"By working together we have a strong voice for our young generation coming up. It really doesn't matter where you're from, we should all work together," Andrew said.

"It's very important for me to say it in my own language, even if you guys don't

understand, because I feel honoured and I know that I honour my ancestors who went before me when I speak my own language."

Polfus asked community members throughout the Sahtu to help with the scat collection. After testing the samples in a lab, she brought her findings back to community groups to discuss and analyze. An advisory group with representatives from multiple communities in the Sahtu also provided input on the project.

Elders have different names for different types of caribou because they have different behavioural characteristics and require different hunting strategies in order to successfully hunt them.

Polfus' work studied the relationships between boreal woodland caribou, mountain caribou and barren-ground caribou. However, by making traditional knowledge a key component of the research, she said her team learned much more than they would have on their own.

"One interesting result was we found another type of caribou that we don't have a description for in scientific

knowledge," she said, referring to the ɬenat'áa ("the fast runners") – a type of quick-moving caribou with small bodies but large horns.

"It shows where language from aboriginal people has a more refined category for types of caribou, and this group might harbour important genetic diversity that might be important for ecosystem dynamics that we don't know much about yet."

While Polfus' time in Inuvik was quite busy, she said one of the highlights was taking time to speak with the young ones at the Children First Centre.

"We had them get dressed up in snow suits and then we put raisins out in little piles and had them pick up 'caribou poop.' And some of them didn't want to do it because they thought it was real," she said.

Then back inside again, they talked about the different types of caribou, did a colouring activity and taught them how to name the different caribou types in Shúhtagot'ıne.

"And they caught on. Little kids and language – it's amazing," she said.