



# September 2019 Update

## About GCI

Gwich'in Council International (GCI) represents 9,000 Gwich'in in the Northwest Territories (NWT), Yukon, and Alaska as a Permanent Participant in the Arctic Council; the only international organization to give Indigenous peoples a seat at the decision-making table alongside national governments. The Arctic Council is a forum for cooperation, collaboration, and interaction, and has six working groups advancing projects, partnerships, and networks.

GCI's membership consists of two representative bodies in Canada and one in the United States: Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC), who represents the beneficiaries of the *Gwich'in Land Claims Settlement Act* in NWT; the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation (VGFN), which is a self-governing First Nation in Old Crow, Yukon; and the Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments (CATG), for the eight Gwich'in communities in Alaska – Fort Yukon, Venetie, Arctic Village, Chalkyitsik, Birch Creek, Circle, Canyon Village, and Beaver. GCI is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, composed of four members from Canada and four from Alaska. Canada and Alaska each appoint a co-chair from its members.

GCI's mission is, "To amplify the voice of the Gwich'in nation on issues of sustainable development and the environment in international fora, predominately the Arctic Council" in support of the vision of "Vibrant, resilient, and prosperous Gwich'in communities throughout Alaska, Yukon, and Northwest Territories that stand together with one voice internationally to respond to shared challenges and opportunities".

The values that guide the Gwich'in Council International are a belief in the:

- Strength of working collaboratively as a Gwich'in nation across boundaries, as well as with other Indigenous peoples throughout the Circumpolar Arctic;
- Value of working through international fora like the Arctic Council to address factors occurring beyond our territory that impact us;
- Importance of Indigenous voices in governance at the local, national, and international level, as an articulation of our rights.

## Key Engagements and Activities

GCI participates in various working groups, Arctic Council events, and activities to advance our mission and work. We also lead projects, and see our work taken up by others. Recent highlights include:

### **Arctic and Northern Policy Framework & Budget released by Canada**

GCI, along with Indigenous organizations and governments, territorial governments and organizations, and others, contributed to Canada's new [Arctic and Northern Policy Framework](#). This will set the stage for Canada's strategy and activities, domestically and internationally. GCI, as one of the Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council, was deeply engaged and welcomes this release.



The Framework includes the following quotes from GCI:

"Supporting small business development across the Arctic is key to diversifying the economy, creating sustainable industries that are alternatives to extractive industries, and facilitating young people to stay within their communities rather than having to move for employment."

"As we see it, the barriers to feeling empowered and healthy are not neatly segmented into 'domestic' and 'international' boxes. As a nation which spans across territorial and international boundaries, the issues that concern Gwich'in are at the same time both local and international."

Notably, the [International Chapter](#), also includes the following:

Canada will ensure international cooperation is in place to effectively conserve Arctic biodiversity. We will ensure existing international agreements are implemented, honoured and remain effective in conserving Arctic biodiversity. **In particular, we will prioritize cooperation with the United States to ensure the protection and long-term survival of the Porcupine caribou, a species that is vital to Gwich'in culture and livelihood.** We will maintain an active and constructive role in efforts related to a new UN agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. **We will also ensure continued Indigenous representation in binational management boards, such as the Yukon River Panel and Porcupine Caribou Management Board.**

The Budget announcement includes commitments to continued support of Permanent Participants and the establishment of a Secretariat for the Sustainable Development Working Group. Discussions will occur fall-winter on what form, location, and functions the Secretariat takes on.

### **Arctic Community Energy Planning & Implementation Toolkit completed**

Led by GCI and released Summer 2019 by the Sustainable Development Working Group, this project supports Arctic, rural, and remote communities to advance their Community Energy Plans with local knowledge and leadership. The Toolkit will be featured in a webinar by the Indigenous Clean Energy Network September 24, 2019, and we are looking at ways to get it in the hands of more people.

### **Fire Knowledge, Ecology, and Cooperation projects in development**

GCI put forward two projects to the Arctic Council:

- Arctic FIRE in the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) Working Group, which will advance knowledge of arctic fire ecology and international mapping of Wildland Fire. It will produce circumpolar maps of the areas burned annually and coordinate fire ecologists from around the world on important questions on fire ecology in the north.
- Circumpolar FIRE, in the EPPR Working group, aims to increase circumpolar cooperation on Wildland firefighting, resource sharing and cooperation. It hopes to examine international fire



agreements and produce a model new agreement for circumpolar wildland fire response and cooperation.

### **Arctic Remote Energy Networks Academy (ARENA) Phase II beginning**

In 2017, Gwich'in members participated in ARENA and we are pleased to support a second cohort, in collaboration with Canada, the USA, and Iceland. The next cohort will begin in early 2020, and GCI is one of the project co-leads. ARENA aims to build knowledge and capacities for the development and integration of sustainable energy solutions for remote Arctic communities, through learning, community visits, and networking.

### **Youth Engagement continues to be prioritized**

Working Groups of the Arctic Council have raised the need to have greater participation of youth. An initiative is in development, "Inspiring Arctic Voices" that will encourage the participation of young Gwich'in in international Arctic issues, and a Youth Arctic Council is in early stages.

In September, a conference on "Strengths, Well Being, and Engagement of Youth in the Arctic" was held in Iceland. As part of it, a digital story created by Gwich'in youth [Jacey Firth-Hager](#) was shared, one of the stories coming out of Project CREATEs.

## Staffing Changes

Grant Sullivan stepped down as Executive Director for GCI in May 2019, with thanks for his years of service. Over the summer, the Board led a job competition and Devlin Fernandes was the successful candidate. Over the coming months, she will be establishing a GCI presence in Yellowknife, NT and looking for opportunities to visit communities and support GCI to advance Gwich'in interests. Devlin's bio is attached.

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