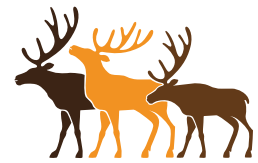




Gwich'in Council International

ANNUAL REPORT
2019-20



Letter from Co-Chairs Drin Gwinzii



Edward Alexander
Co-Chair, Alaska



Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm
Co-Chair, Canada

We are pleased to present the 2019-2020 Annual Report, and share our work of the past year.

This report highlights our contributions to the Arctic Council, its Working Groups and projects, and the activities undertaken to advance our mission. The relationships built, discussions engaged in, and work leveraged continue to affirm that the Gwich'in perspective is welcome and necessary to build a healthy, sustainable, and just future where our rights and sovereignty are recognized.

Gwich'in Council International brings the voices, interests, and perspectives of Gwich'in to the Arctic stage and international arena. We are guided by 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. Activities and decisions occur outside of our territory which impact us, and we need to be full participants in those discussions.

We know there is more work to do. This period saw changes to longtime Board and staff members, as we said goodbye to Ethel Blake and Grant Sullivan and welcomed Dana Tizya-Tramm, Sharla Greenland, and Devlin Fernandes. Iceland took on its two-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council, introducing an ambitious agenda including a focus on People and Communities of the Arctic. COVID-19 disrupted and threatened plans, communities, and activities, and shifted priorities and resources.

Gwich'in Council International will continue to advance our 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. Over the next year, we will grow and strengthen our Board; develop and reach out with an updated Strategic Plan; and engage in projects on renewable energy, food security, health and wellness, and wildland fires. Please join us.

Mahsi'

Edward Alexander
Co-Chair, Alaska

Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm
Co-Chair, Canada



About

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. Our mission is to amplify the voice of the Gwich'in Nation on sustainable development and the environment at the international level to support resilient and healthy communities.

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; and
- Importance of Indigenous voices in governance at the local, national, and international level, as an articulation of our rights.

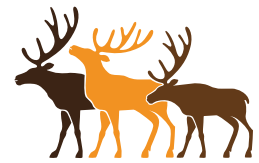
Our work in 2019-2020 was to:

- Strengthen and enhance the effective participation of GCI in the work of the Arctic Council;
- Engage with Arctic Council Working Groups and

other activities of the Council, to further GCI's Strategic Objectives;

- Continue to develop GCI's capacity to effectively contribute to the work of the Arctic Council and engage its membership in the process; and
- Enable the participation in parallel processes within Canada, including the Arctic Council Advisory Committee and ongoing efforts related to the Arctic Policy Framework, as well as engagement with policy makers in the USA.

Over the past year, GCI has contributed to the Arctic Council and its Working Groups, and under Iceland's Chairmanship, is poised to continue our cooperation and collaboration with other Permanent Participants, Member States, and Observers, as well as bring the work of the Arctic Council back to Gwich'in communities.



Activities and Achievements

Participation at the Arctic Council

GCI engaged in a number of events and meetings to bring issues that are important to Gwich'in to international forums, create partnerships, and learn what can be brought back to Gwich'in communities.

- Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Rovaniemi, Finland
- SAO Meeting in Reykjanesbær, Iceland
- CAFF Board Meeting in Stockholm, Sweden
- PAME workshop on the Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous Peoples in Marine Activities in Reykjavik, Iceland
- Conference hosted by Icelandic Chairmanship "Strengths, Well-being and Engagement of Youth in the Arctic" in Reykjavik, Iceland
- SDWG Executive and Plenary meetings in Reykjavik and Ísafjörður, Iceland
- Social, Economic, and Cultural Expert Group of the SDWG meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland
- Joint SAO-Arctic Economic Council meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland
- Indigenous Clean Energy Gathering, Ottawa, Canada & Presentation on Arctic Energy Toolkit
- Arctic Leaders Youth Summit
- SAO Executive & Plenary Meetings, Hveragerði, Iceland
- EPPR Working Group Meeting, Reykjavik, Iceland, including presentation on Circumpolar Fire project
- 25th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 25), Madrid, Spain
- Arctic Frontiers, Tromsø, Norway, and participation on two side panels: Arctic Resilience and Indigenous Leaders' Vision for the Future of the Arctic
- Arctic Council Strategic Thinking Session, Tromsø, Norway
- CAFF Board Meeting, Gallivare, Sweden, including presentation on Arctic FIRE project

GCI, along with the other five Permanent Participant organizations, is supported by the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat (IPS) and we participate in Board meetings, events, and discussions to advance the issues important to Indigenous peoples in the Arctic. In the past year, activities and accomplishments included:

- IPS Board Meeting, November 2019
- VI Arctic Indigenous Leaders Summit Declaration, including recognition of a climate change emergency in the Arctic
- Indigenous Peoples' Vision for the Arctic panel at Arctic Frontiers

"In respect and unity, this is a powerful document that has the power to echo through the halls, chambers, hearts, and more."
- Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm re: Arctic Leaders Summit Declaration



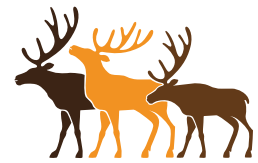
Working Groups & Projects At the Arctic Council & Beyond

GCI focuses its participation in the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), and Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (EPPR) working groups.

We are co-leading projects in each of those Working Groups, and continue to explore where we can participate and collaborate on other projects and in other Working Groups. We are especially interested in projects and activities

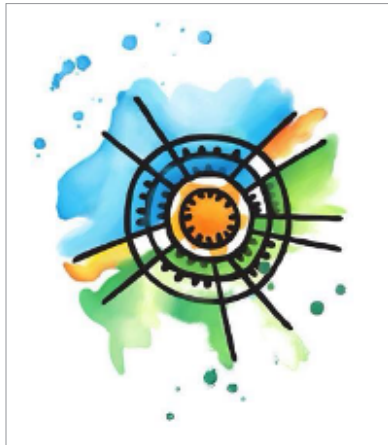
that focus on renewable energy, wellness, food security, and issues of concern to the Gwich'in. We monitor the activities and projects from the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), Protection of the Arctic Marine

Environment (PAME) and Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP) working groups, but do not have the capacity to engage more at this time.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP (SDWG)

ARENA-II – ARCTIC REMOTE ENERGY NETWORKS ACADEMY



In 2017, Gwich'in members participated in the Arctic Remote Energy Networks Academy (ARENA) and we are supporting a second cohort as project co-lead in collaboration with Canada, the United States, Iceland, the Russian Federation, and the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat. 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.

The focus of the past year was forming and working with a Steering Committee, participant recruitment and selection, and program design. The on-site sessions, planned to begin May 2020 in Nunavut, are being rescheduled due to COVID-19. More information found can be found here: <http://arena.alaska.edu/>

ARCTIC FOOD INNOVATION CLUSTER (AFIC)

This project is looking at food innovation, and what practices have been and are being used in the Arctic to enable and enhance food security in communities. From highlighting activities, to hosting exchanges, to knowledge sharing, this project will bring together those working in food production and harvesting. <https://sdwg.org/what-we-do/projects/arctic-food-innovation-cluster-afic/?it=arctic-food-innovation-cluster-afic/>

EALLU-II

This project builds on the Arctic Indigenous youth, food knowledge and Arctic change project (EALLU) and focuses on food security, food empowerment, and understand Indigenous peoples' food systems in the context of sustainable development. The first Arctic Indigenous Peoples Food Congress was planned for March 2020, and a key event was a Caribou-Reindeer Knowledge Exchange. Both events were postponed due to COVID-19.





ARCTIC COMMUNITY ENERGY PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

Led by GCI and released Summer 2019, this project supports Arctic, rural, and remote communities to advance their Community Energy Plans with local knowledge and leadership. The Toolkit was featured in a webinar by the Indigenous Clean Energy Network September 24, 2019, presented at the Indigenous Clean Energy Gathering in October 2019, and used for the ARENA program. Additional printing and distribution are planned to get it in the hands of more people. It is also available online: <https://gwichincouncil.com/arctic-sustainable-energy-toolkit>

ECONOR IV

This project will provide an updated ECONOR report “The Economy of the North 2020” with a circumpolar overview of the economy, socioeconomic conditions, and sustainability issues in the Arctic. We are looking forward to participating in this project as it gets underway in Spring/Summer 2020.

SECEG

The Social, Cultural, and Economic Expert Group provides guidance to SDWG projects as well as undertakes work, most recently around food security and the water-energy-food nexus. We have participated in in-person and online calls and contribute to shaping the committee as well as projects and work.

LOCAL2GLOBAL

GCI supported previous iterations of this project, including Rising Sun and Projects CREATEs, aimed at addressing youth suicide and support for mental health resources in communities. We are exploring how best to contribute to Local2Global and to date, have joined project calls and provided input to the committee on designing the study tour, sharing lessons learned from the ARENA program.

ONE HEALTH, ONE FUTURE

GCI was asked to coordinate participation from members of Canadian Permanent Participants to attend the One Health, One Future conference. The aim of the conference was to bring together scientists, healthcare



professionals, educators, students, policy makers, and community stakeholders to learn about the latest advances in One Health research. The conference was scheduled to take place on March 11-14, 2020, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, but was postponed due to COVID-19. The One Health, One Future Conference program included presentations, workshops and cultural exchanges discussing circumpolar North issues in a One Health context. More information can be found here:

www.uarctic.org/news/2019/9/one-health-one-future-conference-2020



Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF)

ARCTIC FIRE

GCI is leading this project, which aims to have: an improved understanding of fire impacts in Arctic States and to communities represented by Permanent Participants; an improved understanding of fire ecology; and reduce threats of catastrophic wildland fire. It is an ambitious scope, and a Steering Committee was established to guide the work. Expected deliverables are: mapping the extent and distribution of fires across the

Arctic; developing best practices of guidelines for Arctic fire ecology and forest management for carbon sequestration, analysis, and coordination of wildland fire activities taking into consideration Indigenous knowledge and expertise as well as Western science; and creating an annual digital Arctic Fire Monitoring Journal that includes relevant Arctic fire ecology and fire-related Traditional Knowledge.

GCI has been involved to a lesser degree in some other CAFF projects, including Biodiversity in Mining, Inspiring Arctic Voices, and the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI). Contributions include Steering Committee calls, feedback on project proposals and design, and facilitating connections with other key people and organizations. Moving forward, CAFF will be developing its Action Plan for Biodiversity and expect to contribute to that.

Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (EPPR)

CIRCUMPOLAR FIRE

GCI is leading this project, which was approved in January 2020. It aims to improve the coordinated response by Arctic States and Permanent Participants in response to catastrophic wildland fires in the Arctic Region, to promote the possibility of international cooperation and contracting of wildland fire resources across State boundaries, and coordinate trainings between relevant agencies so that emergency prevention,

preparedness, and response to wildland fire is effective and contemporary. As the frequency and intensity of fires in the Arctic increase, it is necessary to equip communities with the trained crews and opportunities for putting skills to use, and look at collaboration across the Arctic. The Steering Committee is being formed in Spring 2020, and it is the first project at the EPPR to be led by a Permanent Participant organization. As such, it was

featured during EPPR's update to the SAOs in November 2019 as an example of how the EPPR Working Group is incorporating People and Communities of the Arctic into its work.



Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)

GCI participated in the workshop on the Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous Peoples in Marine Activities, highlighting our work on Indigenous-led Environmental Impact Assessment as offering valuable insights for that project.

Future X Change

While not an Arctic Council project, FutureXChange was initiated by the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and the Gwich'in Tribal Council to empower youth from Gwich'in and southern Canadian communities, and provide them with the skills, tools, and mentorship to enable climate action. GCI sat on the Project Steering Committee, contributed to project design and delivery, and

presented on the work of GCI and engagement at the Arctic Council to the FutureXChange cohort in Inuvik, Northwest Territories. It was important to share the experience of a Permanent Participant organization and the different ways that actions can impact policy development and implementation.

Policy Contributions

Arctic Policy Framework and the SDWG Secretariat

A significant achievement realized in the past year was GCI's input to Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework. Released in September 2019, 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.

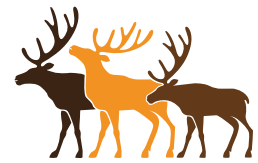
Notably, the International Chapter also includes the following:

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.

This demonstrates our ability to work at different levels – community, region, national, and international – to advance Gwich'in interests.

We continue to support Canada's work at the Arctic Council and particularly at the Sustainable Development Working Group. We have made multiple contributions to the creation and design of the SDWG Secretariat including a written submission. These contributions, at both policy and practical levels, bring great value that will lead to deeper collaborations, effective governance, and aligning priorities to leverage the resources available.



Governance & Staffing

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 Gwitchin 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.

Two new Board members were welcomed in April 2019: Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, appointed by the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) and taking on the role of GCI Co-Chair; and

Sharla Greenland, appointed by the Gwich'in Tribal Council. Two vacant spots are being advertised, to be filled by VGFN and the Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments. Long time Director Ethel Blake left the Board, with much gratitude for her years of service.

Grant Sullivan resigned as Executive Director, and Devlin Fernandes was confirmed as the successful applicant in August 2019. These personnel changes signify a time of change as information, processes, and relationships need to be transitioned, learned, and developed, and priorities and focus areas confirmed. The Board Handbook will be updated in the coming term to reflect these changes, and an evaluation of the 2017-2019 Strategic Plan will be undertaken in preparation for the development of a new one.

Board meetings were held in April, October, and November 2019, and January and February 2020.

The 2019-2020 Gwich'in Council International Board was:

- Edward Alexander, co-chair, USA
- Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, co-chair, Canada
- Jordan Peterson, Treasurer
- Sam Alexander
- Sharla Greenland
- Evon Peter



Communications and Engagement

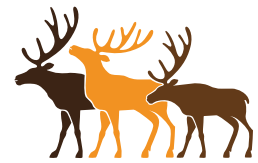
Sharing the work of the Arctic Council and engaging the Gwich'in membership was a priority identified in GCI's Strategic Plan.

A Quarterly Report was developed and distributed for the Gwich'in governments and organizations. Facebook was the primary tool used for updates to membership, and posts covered GCI news as well as updates from partners. The GCI website features projects and

reports, and efforts are ongoing to identify and test the best tools for communications and engagement.

GCI attended the Gwich'in Tribal Council Annual General Assembly in Tsiigehtchic in September 2019 to build relationships, listen to

concerns and opportunities, and network with others. We also plan to be at all biannual Gwich'in Gatherings, sharing GCI work and listening to the concerns and priorities of our membership.



Planned versus Actual Activities

We recognize the need to set a good plan, and also be adaptive to changing circumstances, life events, and unforeseen opportunities. Significantly, the worldwide coronavirus outbreak and ensuing COVID-19 pandemic impacted, and will continue to impact, planned activities.

The following activities did not have participation as planned:

- VI Arctic Leaders' Summit in Rovaniemi, Finland, November 2019 – due to an Elder's death in the community, travel could not be accommodated. GCI continued to participate in drafting the Declaration which came out of the Summit, and ongoing discussions about carrying events forward.
- One Health, One Future Conference in Fairbanks, Alaska, March 2020 – a call for applications was circulated in Canada, and a successful applicant was chosen. However, the event was cancelled two days before it was scheduled to begin due to COVID-19.
- EALLU event, Arctic Indigenous People's Food Congress and Caribou-Reindeer Knowledge Exchange, March 2020 – this event

received wide interest from the membership and the call for applications was circulated to Alaskan and Canadian Gwich'in. Partnership funding was confirmed to be able to offer support to four applicants, but the event was cancelled shortly before due to COVID-19. The interest affirmed that food security, caribou, learning from others, and intergenerational story sharing are important and will be incorporated into future events and activities.

- Arctic Council Advisory Committee, Ottawa, Canada, March 2020 – part of delegation was unable to attend due to events that arose in community.
- SECEG meeting, Akureyri, Iceland, March 2020 – postponed due to COVID-19.

- SDWG Executive and Plenary meetings, Akureyri, Iceland, March 2020 – postponed due to COVID-19. An Executive call was held March 16th 2020 to discuss options for moving forward.
- SAO Executive and Plenary meeting, including Marine Mechanism, Akureyri, Iceland, March 2020 – postponed due to COVID-19.

In addition, there were some events planned where a substitute representative has to attend. We recognize that Board members wear many "hats" and changes may occur at the last minute. However, we do our best to provide coverage and ensure there is a Gwich'in voice at the table. The GCI Board discusses interventions prior to Arctic Council meetings and events to adapt and ensure preparedness when circumstances change.

Reflections

GCI's mission is to amplify the voice of the Gwich'in Nation on issues of sustainable development and the environment in international fora, predominantly the Arctic Council.

This is done across international, state, and territorial jurisdictions, encompassing fifteen communities with varying levels of infrastructure and capacity, and serving a membership in English and two Gwich'in dialects.

We are not able to participate in all activities, but look for ways to facilitate connections and engagement, provide policy advice and guidance to projects, work directly in projects for beneficial outcomes, and enable collaboration

and cooperation. We receive feedback that our interventions and work are welcome and valued, but always more invitations to participate than we can manage.

Thank you to GCI for the intervention; those heartfelt interventions make a difference at the Arctic Council. - Norway's SAO, Nov 2019

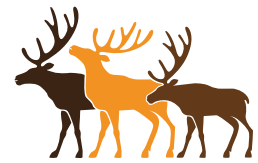
The volume of work associated with major meetings, including considering all materials and proposals and preparing appropriate responses, requires an understanding of past actions and interventions. Losing institutional capacity in the form of Board and staff members impacts this, and pushes us to develop tools and capacity within GCI as an organization for the future.

We are not able to engage with all Arctic Council Working Groups, and have had to weigh working deeply in some, including co-leading projects, or working at a high level across all. We look for where there is alignment

with Gwich'in priorities and the ability to contribute. Indigenous Knowledge, particularly the need for respectful inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge and translation of materials appropriate for communities, is recurring in project and Working Group discussions and will continue to be brought forward. Despite our limited capacity, we show up prepared, professional, and ready to contribute. We take on leadership roles within projects and are chairing three project committees. We give presentations and share experiences at Working Groups, reflecting well on the Gwich'in, Permanent Participants, and Canada.

Partnerships are essential to our work, including those with our membership organizations, other Permanent Participants, Arctic Council member countries, and other organizations. There is turnover in personnel with all partnerships, which requires ongoing relationship building. However, these partnerships enhance our capacity and ability to meet objectives, provide access to expertise, accrue greater benefits to the work.

I follow the most eloquent intervention of the meeting. - Canada's SAO, Nov 2019



Challenges & Lessons Learned

Communications is raised as a challenge in many discussions related to Arctic Council activities – people not knowing about the Arctic Council, understanding what it does, and caring about its activities.



We see similar issues, and it is a challenge for us in what, how, and when we communicate to our membership organizations and Gwich'in citizens. When we can relate Arctic Council activities to issues that are a priority for Gwich'in communities (e.g. caribou), there is greater uptake. Additionally, when we can feature Gwich'in members in activities, we can reach broader networks. 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. Another challenge is the desire and capacity to have great participation of youth, echoed as well by Working Groups and SAOs. The objective is to meaningfully engage youth in activities and

opportunities, but in order for participation to be meaningful, it must be supported, resources, appropriate, and targeted. This is a focus area moving forward; we cannot simply nominate youth and send them to events but must mentor and support their full participation at them. For youth traveling alone in the Arctic, it can be scary going to a different country with different languages, currencies, transportation systems, and cultures. There are different ways to address, through mentorship in person, e.g. having youth participate as part of a delegation; sending two youth together; and/or designing events specific for youth. In Alaska, there is Gwich'in youth participation as part of the Arctic Youth Ambassadors program, and there was participation at the Arctic Leaders Youth Summit. We debriefed post-Summit and gained valuable insights for future programs.

Funding & Support

We receive funding from a number of sources that enable us to participate in Arctic Council meetings, activities, and projects, including:

- Global Affairs Canada
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC)
- Natural Resources Canada
- United States Department of State
- Gwich'in Tribal Council
- Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

We receive services and in-kind support from the Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments, Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, and the volunteer Directors on our Board.

We are grateful to all of the Gwich'in members who participate in various ways, and especially to

Geraldine Blake, Kenneth Frank, and Geordie Hungerford for their time and contributions over the past year.

Conclusions & Recommendations

GCI participated in many Arctic Council meetings and activities over the past year, but there are areas to improve our engagement and in particular, how we report back and engage membership organizations and communities.

There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise within the Arctic Council network, but also incredible knowledge and wisdom within Gwich'in communities. Indeed, as the Arctic faces rapid and unprecedented change, Gwich'in and other Indigenous knowledge

systems contain the examples and pathways of resilience and living in harmony with ecosystems and all its inhabitants.

A common Gwich'in saying is to "do things in a good way" and we will continue to bring Gwich'in

beliefs, lessons, and wisdom to bear on issues facing the Arctic, and planet. We will work in harmony with governments at all levels, partners at the Arctic Council, and others to advance cooperation and collaboration.

The health, safety, and well-being of people and communities are paramount. This is a great reminder that the health of lands and animals that Indigenous peoples and other northerners depend upon for their health and ways of life is critical to protect. Sharing knowledge and stories, and continuing to work together, will be essential moving forward across the circumpolar north and world. Most smaller and remote Indigenous communities do not have access to adequate health infrastructure and services required during this pandemic. We must be especially aware of this and work immediately to take protective measures, as well as invest for sustained improvements. - Evon Peter, Gwich'in Council International Board Member

Contact Us

gciadmin@gwichin.nt.ca | gwichincouncil.com | Facebook [@GwichinCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/GwichinCouncil)

Devlin Fernandes, Executive Director: gci.executivedirector@gmail.com

Follow along

We aim to be an open and transparent organization and are committed to keeping you informed about what we're doing. We encourage you to follow our Facebook Page [@GwichinCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/GwichinCouncil) for regular updates. We thank you for taking the interest in GCI to learn more about our activities through reading this Annual Report.

Mahsi'

